The Acts & Proceedings of the 189th Regular Session of the General Synod
Reformed Church in America

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Acts & Proceedings
Vol. LXXV
The Acts and Proceedings
of the General Synod

Appendix I—Directory and Financial Reports

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

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1994-1995

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1994-1995

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I. FORMATION OF THE SYNOD

OPENING OF SYNOD

The Synod opened on Saturday evening, June 10, 1995, with a service of worship led by the Rev. Harold Korver, president of General Synod and pastor of the Emmanuel Reformed Church in Paramount, California and the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, general secretary of the Reformed Church in America. The Rev. Dr. Charles Van Engen, associate professor of theology of mission at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, presided as worship leader for the daily worship services during the week of Synod (Monday-Friday, June 11-16, 1995).
WORSHIP

Saturday Evening
  Opening Worship Service—The Rev. Harold Korver
  The Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson
  Closing Prayer—The Rev. John Nyitray, Sr.

Sunday Afternoon
  Opening Prayer—Corresponding Delegate Melanie Opmeer
  Closing Prayer—The Rev. Paul Ruter

Monday Morning
  Daily Worship Service—The Rev. Dr. Charles Van Engen
  Closing Prayer—The Rev. Harold Brown

Tuesday Morning
  Daily Worship Service—The Rev. Dr. Charles Van Engen

Tuesday Afternoon
  Opening Prayer—Elder Gloria Philbert
  Closing Prayer—The Rev. Perry Raak

Wednesday Morning
  Daily Worship Service—The Rev. Dr. Charles Van Engen
  Closing Prayer—The Rev. Curry Pikkaart

Wednesday Afternoon
  Opening Prayer—The Rev. Amy Jo Van Es Hawley
  Closing Prayer—The Rev. Gary Hofmeyer

Wednesday Evening
  Opening Prayer—The Rev. Robert White
  Closing Prayer—Corresponding Delegate Heather Cherrey

Thursday Morning
  Daily Worship Service—The Rev. Dr. Charles Van Engen
  Closing Prayer—The Rev. Judith Marvel

Thursday Afternoon
  Opening Prayer—Corresponding Delegate Charlotte Ellison
  Closing Prayer—The Rev. Timothy Mulder

Friday Morning
  Daily Worship Service—The Rev. Dr. Charles Van Engen
  Closing Prayer—The Rev. Judith Gorsuch

Friday Afternoon
  Opening Prayer—The Rev. Gerald Vander Hart
  Closing Prayer—The Rev. Albert Terry

Friday Afternoon
  An installation service for the new officers of General Synod, an installation service for new General Synod professors of theology, and a communion service was held in the gymnasium in the Physical Education Building of Ramapo College in Mahwah, New Jersey.
ROLL CALL OF SYNOD

Regional Synod of Albany

Amy Jo Van Es Hawley, 17 Rockefeller Boulevard, Rensselaer, NY 12144

Classis of Albany

MINISTER

Mark Ennis, 16 Ten Eyck Avenue, Albany, NY 12209

ELDER

Laurie Hawley, 60 Fernbank Avenue, Delmar, NY 12054

Classis of Columbia-Greene

MINISTER

Allan Conover, 285 Mansion Street, Coxsackie, NY 12051

ELDER

Robert Muller, Box 177 RR 1, Coxsackie, NY 12051

Classis of Montgomery

MINISTER

James Foster, 830 State Highway 162, Sprakers, NY 12166

ELDER

Pauline Duck, RD 2 Box 204 Rockefeller Road, Auburn, NY 13021

Classis of Rochester

MINISTER

Stephen Wing, 1 Folkside Lane, Fairport, NY 14450

ELDER

Ramona Curtis, 47 Astor Drive, Rochester, NY 14610

Classis of Schenectady

MINISTERS

Gary Westra, 3662 Giffords Church Road, Duanesburg, NY 12056

Robert White, 8 North Church Street, Schenectady, NY 12305
ELDERS

Clara Lasselle, 124 Birchwood Drive, Schenectady, NY 12306
David Tubbs, 954 Francis Avenue, Schenectady, NY 12303

Classis of Schoharie

MINISTER

Steven Yon, PO Box 447, Prattville, NY 12468

ELDER

William Morehouse, 5636 Crooked Street, Broadalban, NY 12025

Regional Synod of Canada

John Kaptyn, 632 Lacrox Street, Chatham, ON N7M 2X4

Classis of British Columbia

MINISTER

William Hudson, 3815 Meares Drive, Port Alberni, BC V9Y 5H6

ELDER

William Ketcham, 14-450 Bay Avenue, Parksville, BC V9P 2K2

Classis of Canadian Prairies

MINISTER

Walter Opmeer, 13920 64th Street, Edmonton, AB T5A 1H1

ELDER

Frank Van Ee, Box 147, Fort Mcleod, AB T0L 020

Classis of Ontario

MINISTER

Jack Van Dyk, 266 High Street, London, ON N6C 4L4

ELDER

David Barney, Rural Route 2 Ariss, Guelph, ON N0B 1B0

Regional Synod of the Far West

Marvin Jacobs, 919 West Diamond, Tempe, AZ 85283
Classis of California

MINISTERS
Donald Brandt, 1717 Via Del Rio, Corona, CA 91720
Donald Collier, 4750 Challen Street, Riverside, CA 92503
Samuel Kwon, 18606 Alburnis Avenue, Artesia, CA 90701
Albert Terry, 344 West Florence Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90003
Warren Thompson, 11226 East Excelsior Drive, Norwalk, CA 90650

ELDERS
John Bos, 545 Via Codo, Fullerton, CA 92635
Kent Moorlach, 9303 Via Balboa, Buena Park, CA 90670
Larry Nahlen, 9349 Jasmine, Fountain Valley, CA 92708
William Van Leeuwen, 1300 Citrus Avenue, Corona, CA 91720
Jack Williams, 7119 Lanai Street, Long Beach, CA 90808

Classis of Cascades

MINISTER
Perry Raak, 3807 Reith Road, Kent, WA 98032

ELDER
Dell Wuebbenuhorst, 1537 East 4250 North, Buhl, ID 83316

Classis of Central California

MINISTER
Richard Evers, 7 Gaviota Way, San Francisco, CA 94127

ELDER
Louis Boer, 1167 North Hart, Modesto, CA 95358

Classis of Rocky Mountains

MINISTER
Eric Boon, 6650 West Mexico Place, Lakewood, CO 80232

ELDER
Linda De Jong, 4 Nome Way #B, Aurora, CO 80012

Classis of the Southwest

MINISTER
Judith Marvel, 5005 East Winsett Street, Tucson, AZ 85711
ELDER

June Denny, PO Box 233, Mescalero, NM 88340

Regional Synod of the Great Lakes

Curry Pikkart, 1465 Three Mile Road NW, Grand Rapids, MI 49504

Classis of Holland

MINISTERS

Daniel Gillet, 630 State Street, Holland, MI 49423
Alan Hofland, 435 Van Raalte Avenue, Holland, MI 49423
Robert Palma, 824 Creekridge Drive, Holland, MI 49423
Stanley Vugteveen, 712 Apple Avenue, Holland, MI 49423

ELDERS

Jay Follcert, 832 York Avenue, Holland, MI 49423
Roger Kleis, 120 West 39th Street, Holland, MI 49423
Jerry Lubbers, 795 Holly Creek Drive, Holland, MI 49423
Catherine Moes, 51 Birchwood Drive, Holland, MI 49423

Classis of Lake Erie

MINISTERS

George Magee, 174 West 15th Street, Holland, MI 49423
Mark Minegar, 3035 North Campbell Road, Royal Oak, MI 48073

ELDER

Ronald Bolenbaugh, 23171 Candace, Rockwood, MI 48173

Classis of Muskegon

MINISTERS

Mark Berndt, 423 West Randall Street, Coopersville, MI 49404
Michael Hooker, Fort Indiantown Gap, Post Chapel, Annville, PA 17003
Sherwin Weener, 4200 Apple Avenue, Muskegon, MI 49442

ELDERS

Howard Connell, 2260 Riverwood Drive, Twin Lake, MI 49457
Howard Veeneman, 1305 East Isabella Avenue, Muskegon, MI 49442

Classis of Northern Michigan

MINISTER

Larry Izenbart, 5709 Drake, Midland, MI 48640
ROLL OF GENERAL SYNOD

ELDER

Lee Pranger, 4670 1st Street Box 7, New Era, MI 49446

Classis of North Grand Rapids

MINISTER

Roger Grandia, 4890 Eleven Mile Road, Rockford, MI 49341
Mark Vanderson, 4025 Knapp NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49505

ELDERS

Robert De Groot, 0-376 Leonard Road NW, Grand Rapids, MI 49504
Theodore Huisman, 1345 Lamont NW, Grand Rapids, MI 49504

Classis of South Grand Rapids

MINISTERS

Robert Baird, 2010 Kalamazoo Avenue SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49507
Robert Charnin, 1300 East Beltline, Grand Rapids, MI 49456
Richard Heusinkveld, 3200 Delta River Drive, Lansing, MI 48906
Paul Hostetter, 2456 Orchard View Drive NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49505
Scott Summers, 2311 38th Street SW, Wyoming, MI 49509

ELDERS

Fred Burgess, 435 100th Street SE, Byron Center, MI 49315
John Nauta, 3958 Brookfield Drive SW, Hudsonville, MI 49426
Roger Shoemaker, 519 Barlow, Middleville, MI 49333
Marvin Staal, 2434 30th Street SW, Wyoming, MI 49509
Alvin Vander Kolk, 1716 Tecumseh River Drive, Lansing, MI 48906

Classis of Southwest Michigan

MINISTERS

Jonathan Brownson, 7743 South 5th Street, Mattawan, MI 49071
Kevin Kleinheksel, 3105 South Park Street, Kalamazoo, MI 49001
Norman Swier, 7905 South Westnedge Avenue, Portage, MI 49002

ELDERS

John Bennink, 1122 Vassar, Kalamazoo, MI 49001
Roy Kats, 5387 Hillsight, Kalamazoo, MI 49004
Gloria Philbert, 1518 North Drake Road, Kalamazoo, MI 49006

Classis of Zeeland

MINISTERS

David Brower, 4995 32nd Avenue, Hudsonville, MI 49426
John Nyitray, 6854 144th Avenue, Holland, MI 49424
Harris Verkaik, 6610 36th Avenue, Hudsonville, MI 49426
Ronald VerWys, 3787 140th Avenue, Hamilton, MI 49419
ELDERS

Albert Eaton, 9875 76th Avenue, Allegan, MI 49401
Mary Lou Koop, 4710 South Street, Hamilton, MI 49419
Albert Schut, 5953 115th Avenue, Fennville, MI 49408
John Smalligan, 9875 Barry Street, Zeeland, MI 49464

Regional Synod of the Heartland

Harold Brown, 4418 South 150th Street, Omaha, NE 68137

Classis of Central Iowa

MINISTERS

James Dykstra, 720 NE 52nd Avenue, Des Moines, IA 50313
DuWayne Hanke, 2306 South 3rd Avenue East, Newton, IA 50208
Anthony Vis, 4739 77th Street, Urbandale, IA 50322

ELDERS

Robert Aalbers, 115 10th Avenue NW, Altoona, IA 50009
William Gosselink, 608 East 2nd Street #226, Pella, IA 50219
Paul Simons, 1375 Highway 92, Oskaloosa, IA 52577

Classis of Central Plains

MINISTER

Donald Huitink, 9220 Lonstance Street, Lenexa, KS 66215

ELDER

Buford Van Loenen, Holland Street, Prairie View, KS 67664

Classis of Dakota

MINISTERS

Glen Blumer, 3300 South Greenwood, Sioux Falls, SD 57106
Stephen Hielkema, 500 West 14th Avenue, Mitchell, SD 57301

ELDERS

Norman Dykstra, 308 East 5th Street, PO Box 302, Lennox, SD 57039
Arthur Rave, 24584 478th Avenue, Dell Rapids, SD 57022

Classis of East Sioux

MINISTERS

David Loveall, 1631 North 2nd Street, Sheldon, IA 51201
Ervin Voogd, 565 6th Avenue NW, Sioux Center, IA 51250
ELDERS

Harold Van Der Weide, 505 East Heritage Court, Orange City, IA 51041
Gerrit Wiekamp, 701 Petrich Avenue, Sanborn, IA 51248

Classis of Minnesota

MINISTERS

John Boender, 130 Dakota Street, Box 68, Woodstock, MN 56186
Donald Hoaglander, Box 171, Chandler, MN 56122

ELDERS

John Hup, 704 Fireleaf Road, Luverne, MN 56156
Richard Uttenbogaard, Box 145, Hollandale, MN 56045

Classis of Pleasant Prairie

MINISTER

Richard Kuiper, 20979 150th Street, Holland, IA 50642

ELDER

Alvin Meyer, 904 3rd Avenue, Ackley, IA 50601

Classis of Red River

MINISTER

Thomas Stewart, 2211 West Sherwood, Stillwater, OK 74074

ELDER

Joseph Smith, 3600 Marwick, Plano, TX 75075

Classis of West Sioux

MINISTERS

Steven DeMers, 1309 7th Street, Rock Valley, IA 51247
Douglas Tensen, 2728 Willow Street, Sioux City, IA 51106
Robert Wallinga, 612 8th Street SE, Orange City, IA 51041

ELDERS

Mark De Kock, RR1 Box 212, Alcester, SD 57001
Howard Ruisch, 116 Orange Street Box 47, Maurice, IA 51036
Kenneth Kooima, 2027 12th Street, Rock Valley, IA 51247

Regional Synod of Mid-America

Hezekiah Brady, 13279 East 5000 South Road, St. Anne, IL 60964
Classis of Chicago

MINISTER

Philip Frens, 12606 South Massasoit Avenue, Palos Heights, IL 60463

ELDER

John Golds, 14325 State Street, Riverdale, IL 60627

Classis of Florida

MINISTER

Gary Hofmeyer, 6740 Park Street South, St. Petersburg, FL 33707

ELDER

Thomas Colvin, 1186 SW 12th Place, Davie, FL 33325

Classis of Illiana

MINISTERS

Wilfred Fict, 8232 Eaton Court, Indianapolis, IN 46239
Walter Pickup, 1951 Terrace, Homewood, IL 60430
Frank Shearer, 9951 West 1200 North, DeMotte, IN 46310

ELDERS

Mitchell Overgaard, 19137 Loomis Avenue, Homewood, IL 60430
Wayne Riggs, 9110 East Raymond Street, Indianapolis, IN 46239
Bruce Tammen, 37131 Essex Road, Wilmington, IL 60481

Classis of Illinois

MINISTERS

Henry Elgersma, 302 West Center Street, Baileyville, IL 61007
Eugene Poll, 4601 Utica Ridge Road, Davenport, IA 52807

ELDERS

Richard Buikema, 200 North 12th Street, Fulton, IL 61252
Vernon Newendyke, Route 1, Lanark, IL 61046

Classis of Wisconsin

MINISTERS

Gerald Dykstra, N3145 State Hwy 32, Sheboygan Falls, WI 53085
Daniel Jelsma, 420 Park Avenue, Waupun, WI 53963
Calvin Vande Zande, 112 Germania Street, Randolph, WI 53596
Paul Wernlund, 9450 North 60th Street, Brown Deer, WI 53223
ELDERS

Glenn Geurink, 306 Falk Street, Rothschild, WI 54474
Charlene Marlatt, 4840 Flambeau Drive, Racine, WI 53406
Paul Scholten, 4839 South 16th Street, Sheboygan, WI
Melvin VanderMeer, 1923 60th Street, Baldwin, WI 54002

Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics

Lynn Van Ek, 76 Parmalee Avenue, Hawthorn, NJ 07506

Classis of Greater Palisades

MINISTERS

Douglas Estella, 91 Burns Avenue, Lodi, NJ 07644
Paul Janssen, 39 Pascack Road, Park Ridge, NJ 07656

ELDERS

Victor Bock, 298 1st Place, Bogota, NJ 07603
William Simmons, 37 Kohring Circle, Harrington Park, NJ 07640

Classis of Passaic Valley

MINISTERS

Charles Bigelow, 61 Main Street, Little Falls, NJ 07424
Barbara Dickens, 82 Winona Trail, Lake Hopatcong, NJ 07849
Timothy Mulder, 131 Church Lane, Wayne, NJ 07470

ELDERS

Anita Daniel, 83 Mountain Avenue, Pompton Plains, NJ 07444
Dennis DuBois, 11 Waxberg Lane, Pine Brook, NJ 07058
Robert Glockler, 9 Concord Lane, Oakland, NJ 07436

Classis of New Brunswick

MINISTERS

James Esther, 100 College Avenue, New Brunswick, NJ 08901
Nancy Ryan, 125 Division Street, Keyport, NJ 07736

ELDERS

Georgiana Jagger, 36 Vail Street, Toms River, NJ 08757
Virginia Kressler, 5 Windsor Court, Whiting, NJ 08759

Classis of Delaware-Raritan

MINISTERS

Allen Buurma, 1 Amwell Road, Millstone, NJ 08876
Daniel Hoogheem, 581 Bridgewater Avenue, Bridgewater, NJ 08807
ELDERS

Rita Jordan, 11 Preston Drive, Somerville, NJ 08876
John Morrow, 1191 Evergreen Drive, Bridgewater, NJ 08807

Regional Synod of New York

Gordon Dragt, 50 East 7th Street, New York, NY 10003

Classis of Brooklyn

MINISTERS

Robert Robinson, 1155 East 93rd Street, Brooklyn, NY 11236
Dennis Westbrooks, 93B Schofield Circle, Fort Riley, KS 66442

ELDER

Sybil Wint, 664 East 53rd Street, Brooklyn, NY 11203

Classis of Mid-Hudson

MINISTERS

Scott Conrad, 1844 Rt 32, Saugerties, NY 12477
Helen McFadden, 2350 Lucas Turnpike, High Falls, NY 12440

ELDERS

Roger Myer, 975 Blue Mountain Road, Saugerties, NY 12477
Albertus Trevail, 7 Old High Falls Road, Catskill, NY 12414

Classis of Nassau-Suffolk

MINISTER

Wai Tan, 27 Candy Lane, Syosset, NY 11791

ELDER

Kenneth Ackley, 3 Adrienne Drive, Old Bethpage, NY 11804

Classis of New York

MINISTERS

Kenneth Gorsuch, 368 West End Avenue, New York, NY 10024
Irving Rivera, 96 Tappan Landing, Tarrytown, NY 10591

ELDERS

Elizabeth Kuhn, 105 Kell Avenue, Staten Island, NY 10314
Mary Bryant, 22 Davis Court, Staten Island, NY 10310

Classis of Orange
MINISTER
Paul Ruter, 1166 Hoogenburgh Road, Wallkill, NY 12589

ELDER
Stephen Schoonover, RR 1 Box 278, Bushkill, PA 18324

Classis of Queens

MINISTER
Judith Gorsuch, 229 West 78th Street, New York, NY 10024

ELDER
Arthur Klicpera, 42-50 Gleane Street, Elmhurst, NY 11373

Classis of Rockland-Westchester

MINISTER
Gerald Vander Hart, 42 North Broadway, Tarrytown, NY 10591

ELDER
Elinor Urstadt, 6 Beechwood Road, Bronxville, NY 10708

New Brunswick Theological Seminary

GENERAL SYNOD PROFESSORS OF THEOLOGY
Norman Kansfield, 17 Seminary Place, New Brunswick, NJ 08901
David Waanders, 17 Seminary Place, New Brunswick, NJ 08901

Western Theological Seminary

GENERAL SYNOD PROFESSORS OF THEOLOGY
Thomas Boogaart, 101 East 13th Street, Holland, MI 49423
James Cook, 101 East 13th Street, Holland, MI 49423
CORRESPONDING DELEGATES

COMMITTEE OF REFERENCE
Warren Burgess
Harry De Bruyn
Wesley Granberg-Michaelson
J. John Hesselink
Harold Korver
Nancy Miller
Stephen Norden
Phyllis Palsma
Betty Unger
Steven Vander Molen
Gerald Verbridge

BOARD OF PENSIONS
Kenneth Weller

NEW BRUNSWICK THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
Norman Kansfield

(students)
Heather Cherrey
David Hill

NEW BRUNSWICK THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY BOARD OF TRUSTEES
Charles Morris

WESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
Dennis Voskuil

(students)
Charlotte Ellison
Faith Link

WESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY BOARD OF TRUSTEES
Carol Wagner

THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION AGENCY
Cornelis Kors

(student)
Kathleen Edwards

THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION AGENCY BOARD OF TRUSTEES
Richard Koerselman

CENTRAL COLLEGE
William Wiebenga

HOPE COLLEGE
John Jacobson, Jr.
ROLL OF GENERAL SYNOD

NORTHWESTERN COLLEGE
James Bultman

THE CHURCH HERALD
Jeffrey Japinga
Michael Otte

REFORMED CHURCH WOMEN’S MINISTRIES
Marjorie Anderson
Doris Neese

AFRICAN-AMERICAN COUNCIL
Carol Gunter

AMERICAN INDIAN COUNCIL

COUNCIL FOR HISPANIC MINISTRIES
Antonio Lopez

COUNCIL FOR PACIFIC AND ASIAN AMERICAN MINISTRIES
Norman Chang

COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN ACTION
Steven Hoogerwerf

COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN UNITY
Daniel Meeter

COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN WORSHIP
Timothy Mulder

COMMISSION ON CHURCH ORDER
William Bouwer

COMMISSION ON HISTORY
John Coakley

COMMISSION ON JUDICIAL BUSINESS
Allan Janssen

COMMISSION ON NOMINATIONS
Audrey Den Herder

COMMISSION ON THEOLOGY
James Brownson

COMMISSION FOR WOMEN
Norman Schouten

REGIONAL SYNOD OF ALBANY

REGIONAL SYNOD OF CANADA
Melanie Opmeer
Martina Van Hoeve
REGIONAL SYNOD OF THE FAR WEST
Hilda De Does
Lisa Teague

REGIONAL SYNOD OF THE GREAT LAKES
Fran Baron
Sarah Smith

REGIONAL SYNOD OF THE HEARTLAND
Norma Miedema
Joyce Polly

REGIONAL SYNOD OF MID-AMERICA
Ruth De Young
Grace Scholten

REGIONAL SYNOD OF THE MID-ATLANTICS
Judy Broeker
Mary Brotherton

REGIONAL SYNOD OF NEW YORK
Margaret McCants
Barbara Neevel

GENERAL SECRETARY EMERITUS
Edwin Mulder

ECUMENICAL DELEGATES

CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
John Hoogland

EVANGELICAL COVENANT CHURCH
George Elia

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN TAIWAN
Chi Shu Yang

UNITING REFORMED CHURCH OF SOUTHERN AFRICA
Leonardo Appies
Samuel Buti
James Buys

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE PEOPLE

PARLIAMENTARIAN
Frederick Mold, Jr.

TASK FORCE ON REMEMBERING BAPTISM, PROFESSING FAITH, AND MEMBERSHIP TERMINOLOGY
Amy Jo Van Es Hawley

TASK FORCE ON SOUTH AFRICA
Raymond Timms
ROLL OF GENERAL SYNOD

GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL AD HOC COMMITTEE
TO STUDY ASSESSMENT ISSUES/
DENOMINATIONAL FUNDING
Louis Benes

OFFICIAL OBSERVERS

CENTRAL COLLEGE
Susan Eding
Timothy Ten Clay

HOPE COLLEGE
Jeffrey Hazard
Julie Wright

NORTHERN COLLEGE
Trygve Johnson
Abbie Vis

SOUTHERN NORMAL SCHOOL
Edward (Theodore) Easler

GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL MISSIONARIES
Abraham and Sayuri Kist-Okazaki
George and Joyce Magee
Rani Vande Berg
David and Joy Zomer

SEMINARIAN SEMINAR
Sharon Arendshorst (WTS)
Brian Andrews (TEA)
Heather Cherrey (NBTS)
Carson Culp (TEA)
Andrew De Braber (WTS)
E. J. de Waard (TEA)
Douglas Dobbie (TEA)
Charlotte Ellison (WTS)
Roberto Fois (NBTS)
Carla Glewen (WTS)
George Grevenstuk (WTS)
David Hill (NBTS)
Louis LaFazia (NBTS)
Faith Link (WTS)
Myung Woo Lee (NBTS)
Russell Ooms (TEA)
Clayton Smith, III (NBTS)
Brian Stone (TEA)
Beverly Barry Sullivant (NBTS)
Dean Ulmer (TEA)
Holly Vollink (NBTS)
Bonita Zobeck (WTS)

WORSHIP LEADER
Charles Van Engen
MINUTES AND JOURNAL

The Acts and Proceedings of the 188th regular session of the General Synod were read by title.

During the Thursday afternoon meeting, the General Synod approved the journal of actions for the meetings held on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday morning and afternoon, and authorized its officers to approve the journal of actions for the meetings held on Wednesday evening, Thursday, and Friday.

RULES OF ORDER

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

TELLERS

The following tellers were appointed:

Douglas Dobbie
Carla Glewen
George Grevenstuk
Louis LaFazia
Clayton Smith

Brian Stone
Dean Ulmer
Holly Vollink
Bonita Zobeck

AGENDA AND SCHEDULE


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

General Synod Theme—Saturday evening through Tuesday evening

The General Synod theme was "Evangelism in a Changing World." The Rev. John Perkins was the featured speaker on Sunday evening and Tuesday evening. He also participated in a panel discussion on Tuesday afternoon. Perkins is the founder and publisher of Urban Family magazine and the author of several books. He founded Mendenhall Ministries in Mendenhall, Mississippi; Harambee Christian Family Center in Northwest Pasadena, California; and the Christian Community Development Association. These organizations focus on issues of biblical justice and the economic development of the African-American community.

On Saturday evening, General Synod participants met in plenary session. This session began with an opening worship led by the Rev. Harold Korver, president of General Synod and pastor of the Emmanuel Reformed Church in Paramount, California and by the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, general secretary of the Reformed Church in America. The Rev. Harold Korver presented his report, "A Prescription for Leadership Recruitment in the RCA."
On Sunday morning, General Synod participants worshipped in RCA churches within the bounds of the Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics.

On Sunday afternoon, General Synod participants met in plenary session and the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson presented his report, "Vision For Our Future." At various times during the report, participants met in small groups to discuss questions accompanying the report.

On Sunday evening, General Synod participants worshipped at the North Reformed Church in Newark, New Jersey. The Rev. John Perkins gave the sermon, "Following Jesus: A Biblical Foundation for Urban Evangelism." Alfred Fedak, director of music at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Albany, New York was the organist. Harpist Jose Luis Fermin, the Joe Thomas Jazz Ensemble, and a children's choir and an adult choir from Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics churches provided special music. "The Joyful Joeys," a clowning ministry from Colonie Community Reformed Church in Albany, New York also participated in this service.

On Monday evening, a video, RCA Churches in the Context of a Changing World, was presented. In addition, the choir from the Fordham Manor Reformed Church, Bronx, New York, provided special music.

On Tuesday afternoon, there was a panel discussion on "Evangelism in A Changing World." Participants on the panel were the Rev. John Perkins, the Rev. Dr. George Hunsberger, professor of missiology at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan, the Rev. Charles Van Engen, associate professor of theology of mission at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, the Rev. Donald Baird, associate for congregational evangelism in the Reformed Church in America, the Rev. Mary Ann Wierks, pastor of the Monocacy Valley Church in Frederick, Maryland, the Rev. Arthur Hudak, pastor of the Woodlawn Reformed Church in Schenectady, New York, and the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, general secretary of the Reformed Church in America. The Rev. Bruce Laverner, director of evangelism and church development services in the Reformed Church in America, served as moderator.

On Tuesday evening, the Rev. John Perkins preached on the General Synod theme, "Evangelism in a Changing World." Perkins presented a summary of the theme and then challenged General Synod participants to do "Evangelism in a Changing World."

Ecumenical Greetings—Tuesday afternoon

The General Synod received greetings from the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa.

Ecumenical Breakfast—Wednesday morning

On Wednesday morning, delegates were provided information on the effect of the RCA to enter into full communion with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (USA), and the United Church of Christ. (This proposal for full communion is scheduled to be presented to the 1997 General Synod by the Commission on Christian Unity.) There was a panel discussion. Members of the panel were the Rev. Dr. J. Christian Quello of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Rev. Dr. Eugene March of the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Rev. Timothy Downs of the United Church of Christ, and the Rev. Dr. Paul Fries of the Reformed Church in America. Each panel member presented the perspective of his respective denomination.
Ecumenical Luncheon—Wednesday noon

On Wednesday noon, there was an ecumenical luncheon. The Rev. Dr. Chi Shu Yang, general secretary of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan was the featured speaker.

Synod delegates also had the opportunity to meet ecumenical delegates attending the 1995 General Synod meeting. In addition to the Rev. Dr. Chi Shu Yang, the other ecumenical delegates present were the Rev. John Hoogland of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, the Rev. Dr. George Elia of the Evangelical Covenant Church, and the Rev. Leonardo Appies, the Rev. Samuel Buti, and the Rev. James Buys of the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa.

Task Force on South Africa Celebration—Wednesday evening meeting

A celebration marking the end of the work of the Task Force on South Africa was conducted during plenary session. Raymond Timms, moderator of the Task Force on South Africa presided. A litany was read responsively. The Rev. Leonardo Appies of the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa presented a copy of the Charter of Unification of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Sendingkerk in Suid-Afrika (NGSK) and the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in Africa (NGKA) to the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, general secretary of the Reformed Church in America.

Introduction of Newly-Released Publication—Wednesday evening meeting

A newly-released publication in the *Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America*, was introduced to the General Synod by Commission on History member, the Rev. Douglas Estella: *Gathered At Albany: A History of a Classis*, by the Rev. Allan Janssen. The author was introduced and addressed the Synod.

Reception for Missionaries, New Church Development Pastor, and Author—Wednesday evening

Following the Wednesday evening meeting, a reception was held for missionaries, for new church development pastor, the Rev. Marlin Meendering, pastor of the newly organized RCA congregation, Road Home Church in Eden Prairie, Minnesota, and for the Rev. Allan Janssen, author of the newly-released publication in the *Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America*.

Picnic at Warwick Center—Thursday evening

Following the Thursday afternoon meeting, Synod delegates and guests attended a picnic at the Warwick Center in Warwick, New York. Entertainment from seven Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics churches was provided. There was also special music by Tony and Barb Waldowski.
ADVISORY COMMITTEES

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CHRISTIAN ACTION

Moderator: Laurie Hawley (Albany)
Vice-Moderator: Stanley Vugteveen (Holland)

Ministers:
- Rick Boon (Rocky Mountains)
- Hezekiah Brady (R S of Mid-America)
- David Brower (Zeeland)
- Gordon Dragt (R S of New York)
- Henry Elgersma (Illinois)
- Philip Frens (Chicago)
- Robert White (Schenectady)

Elders:
- Richard Buikema (Illinois)
- June Denny (Southwest)
- Robert Glockler (Passaic Valley)
- Theodore Huisman (North Grand Rapids)
- William Ketcham (British Columbia)
- Howard Ruisch (West Sioux)
- Stephen Schoonover (Orange)
- Marvin Staal (South Grand Rapids)

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AND DISCIPLESHIP

Moderator: Richard Heusinkveld (South Grand Rapids)
Vice-Moderator: Helen McFadden (Mid-Hudson)

Ministers:
- Gerald Dykstra (Wisconsin)
- Roger Grandia (North Grand Rapids)
- DuWayne Hanke (Central Iowa)
- Daniel Hoogheem (Delaware-Raritan)
- Scott Summers (South Grand Rapids)
- Norman Swier (Southwest Michigan)
- Amy Jo Van Es Hawley (R S of Albany)

Elders:
- David Barney (Ontario)
- Jay Folkert (Holland)
- Mary Lou Koop (Zeeland)
- Virginia Kressler (New Brunswick)
- Gloria Philbert (Southwest Michigan)
- Wayne Riggs (Illiana)
- Alvin Vander Kolk (South Grand Rapids)
- Gerrit Wickamp (East Sioux)

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CHRISTIAN HERITAGE AND COMMUNICATIONS

Moderator: Anthony Vis (Central Iowa)
Vice-Moderator: Elinor Urstadt (Rockland-Westchester)

Ministers:
- Harold Brown (R S of the Heartland)
- Daniel Gillet (Holland)
- John Kaptyn (R S of Canada)
- Judith Marvel (Southwest)
- Gary Westra (Schenectady)

Elders:
- Victor Bock (Greater Palisades)
- Howard Connell (Muskegon)
- Anita Daniel (Passaic Valley)
- Norman Dykstra (Dakota)
- Kenneth Kooima (West Sioux)
- Clara Lasselle (Schenectady)
- Charlene Marlatt (Wisconsin)
- Catherine Moes (Holland)
- Roger Myer (Mid-Hudson)
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CHRISTIAN UNITY

Moderator: Paul Janssen (Greater Palisades)
Vice-Moderator: Robert Palma (Holland)

Ministers:
- Thomas Boogaart (Western Theological Seminary)
- Donald Brandt (California)
- Michael Hooker (Muskegon)
- Walter Pickup (Illiana)
- Eugene Poll (Illinois)
- Albert Terry (California)
- Gerald Vander Hart (Rockland-Westchester)

Elders:
- Robert Aalbers (Central Iowa)
- Thomas Colvin (Florida)
- Dennis DuBois (Passaic Valley)
- Elizabeth Kuhn (New York)
- Albert Schut (Zeeland)
- Roger Shoemaker (South Grand Rapids)
- Buford Van Loenen (Central Plains)
- Dell Wuebbenhorst (Cascades)

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Moderator: James Esther (New Brunswick)
Vice-Moderator: Jonathan Brownson (Southwest Michigan)

Ministers:
- Robert Charnin (South Grand Rapids)
- Allan Conover (Columbia-Greene)
- Scott Conrad (Mid-Hudson)
- Larry Izenbart (Northern Michigan)
- Kevin Kleinheksel (Southwest Michigan)
- Timothy Mulder (Passaic Valley)
- Robert Robinson (Brooklyn)
- Paul Wernlund (Wisconsin)

Elders:
- Louis Boer (Central California)
- Rita Jordan (Delaware-Raritan)
- Roy Kats (Southwest Michigan)
- John Morrow (Delaware-Raritan)
- John Nauta (South Grand Rapids)
- Mitchell Overgaard (Illiana)
- Paul Scholten (Wisconsin)
- John Smallegan (Zeeland)
- William Van Leeuwen (California)

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CHURCH ORDER

Moderator: Sherwin Weener (Muskegon)
Vice-Moderator: James Foster (Montgomery)

Ministers:
- Robert Baird (South Grand Rapids)
- John Boender (Minnesota)
- Mark Ennis (Albany)
- Marvin Jacobs (RS of the Far West)
- Daniel Jelsma (Wisconsin)

Elders:
- Ronald Bolenbaugh (Lake Erie)
- Pauline Duck (Montgomery)
- Albert Eaton (Zeeland)
- Robert Muller (Columbia-Greene)
- Lee Pranger (Northern Michigan)
- Vernon Newendiye (Illinois)
- Arthur Rave (Dakota)
- William Simmons (Greater Palisades)
- Joseph Smith (Red River)
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CHURCH VOCATIONS

Moderator: Lynn Van Ek (R S of the Mid-Atlantics)
Vice-Moderator: Harold Van Der Weide (East Sioux)

Ministers:
- Mark Berndt (Muskegon)
- James Cook (Western Theological Seminary)
- Richard Evers (Central California)
- Norman Kansfield (New Brunswick Theological Seminary)
- Curry Pikkaart (R S of Michigan)
- Perry Raak (Cascades)
- Nancy Ryan (New Brunswick)
- Calvin Vande Zande (Wisconsin)
- Dennis Westbrooks (Brooklyn)

Elders:
- Fred Burgess (South Grand Rapids)
- Ramona Curtis (Rochester)
- Mark De Kock (West Sioux)
- Glenn Geurink (Wisconsin)
- Arthur Klicpera (Queens)
- Howard Veeneman (Muskegon)

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON EVANGELIZATION AND CHURCH GROWTH

Moderator: Donald Collier (California)
Vice-Moderator: Stephen Wing (Rochester)

Ministers:
- James Dykstra (Central Iowa)
- Steven Hielkema (Dakota)
- William Hudson (British Columbia)
- Donald Huitink (Central Plains)
- Mark Minegar (Lake Erie)
- Irving Rivera (New York)
- Frank Shearer (Illiana)
- Wai Tan (Nassau-Suffolk)
- Douglas Tensen (West Sioux)
- Warren Thompson (California)
- Mark Vanderson (North Grand Rapids)
- Robert Wallinga (West Sioux)

Elders:
- Roger Kleis (Holland)
- Alvin Meyer (Pleasant Prairie)
- Paul Simons (Central Iowa)

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Moderator: Allen Buurma (Delaware/Raritan)
Vice-Moderator: Steven DeMers (West Sioux)

Ministers:
- Charles Bigelow (Passaic Valley)
- Alan Hofland (Holland)
- Richard Kuiper (Pleasant Prairie)
- George Magee (Lake Erie)
- Ervin Voogd (East Sioux)
- Steven Yon (Schoharie)

Elders:
- John Bos (California)
- Mary Bryant (New York)
- Georgiana Jagger (New Brunswick)
- Jerry Lubbers (Holland)
- Larry Nahlen (California)
- Albertus Trevail (Mid-Hudson)
- David Tubbs (Schenectady)
- Jack Williams (California)
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THEOLOGY

Moderator: Douglas Estella (Greater Palisades)
Vice-Moderator: Samuel Kwon (California)

Ministers:
- Judith Gorsuch (Queens)
- Donald Hoaglander (Minnesota)
- Gary Hofmeyer (Florida)
- John Nyitray (Zeeland)
- Walter Opmeer (Canadian Prairies)
- Paul Ruter (Orange)
- Thomas Stewart (Red River)
- Harris Verkaik (Zeeland)
- David Waanders (New Brunswick Theological Seminary)

Elders:
- Kenneth Ackley (Nassau-Suffolk)
- John Bennink (Southwest Michigan)
- John Hup (Minnesota)
- Kent Moorlach (California)
- Frank Van Ee (Canadian Prairies)
- Melvin VanderMeer (Wisconsin)
- Sybil Wint (Brooklyn)

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON WORLD MISSION

Moderator: Wilfred Fiet (Illiana)
Vice-Moderator: Kenneth Gorsuch (New York)

Ministers:
- Glen Blumer (Dakota)
- Barbara Dickens (Passaic Valley)
- Paul Hostetter (South Grand Rapids)
- David Loveall (East Sioux)
- Jack Van Dyke (Ontario)
- Ronald VerWys (Zeeland)

Elders:
- Robert De Groot (North Grand Rapids)
- Linda De Jong (Rocky Mountain)
- John Golds (Chicago)
- William Gosselink (Central Iowa)
- William Morehouse (Schoharie)
- Bruce Tammen (Illiana)
- Richard Uttenbogaard (Minnesota)

II. AGENDA OF GENERAL SYNOD

DISPOSITION OF COMMUNICATIONS

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

PRESENTATION AND REFERRAL OF NEW BUSINESS

No items of new business were presented.
REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT

I extend a special thank-you and much appreciation to the leaders and the people of the Reformed Church in America for allowing me the privilege of serving God, the larger church, and specifically the denomination as president of General Synod during this past year. God has blessed me over and over again during this past year, and I am humbly grateful for how he has allowed me to serve and how he has sustained my family, my church (Emmanuel Reformed Church in Paramount, California), and myself over this past year. A heartfelt thank-you to God and all those who walked with me!

A PRESCRIPTION FOR LEADERSHIP RECRUITMENT IN THE RCA

INTRODUCTION


Research expert George Barna calls it the critical issue for today’s church.

The issue is a crisis in recruiting church leaders. Our response to it could stymie or unleash the kingdom work of many generations to come.

In his book *Today’s Pastors* (Regal Books, 1993), Barna distinguishes between the leader who knows mission and the leader who has vision. The Reformed Church in America has many pastors who can recite their church’s mission statement but cannot cast a vision for their ministry. It is the visionary leader that we need more of if the RCA is to equip and unleash laypeople with the power to impact their communities for the glory of God.

DEVELOPING AN RCA STRATEGY

How should the RCA respond to the crisis? A year ago I began to develop a process to identify, recruit, screen, prepare, and deploy visionary leaders. My goal was to enable us to attract and train the denomination’s best candidates for ordained ministry. The process would have to center on biblical mandates, our heritage and traditions, our theological education process, and the leaders currently rising out of local congregations.

I decided to hold meetings nationwide to obtain many points of view and to enable individuals to own the results of the project. Each meeting was opened with the reading of 1 Tim. 3:1-7 (NIV), which includes some of the qualities an overseer, or leader, might have:

> Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to much wine, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil’s trap.

Next, I worked with the Rev. Cornelis Kors, the RCA’s director of the Theological Education Agency (TEA). We outlined the experiences of Emmanuel Reformed Church in Paramount, California, where I have had the privilege to be senior pastor for the past twenty-four years.
Emmanuel has served for more than twenty years as a teaching church for prospective church leaders. Our intern program has involved about forty RCA men and women from Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California.

**DISCOVERIES FROM THE FIELD**

Our experiences have led to three crucial discoveries about RCA leadership development:

1. **The RCA has not clearly defined internal call vs. the call of the church at large.** Many of the candidates began pursuing ministry because they clearly felt God’s call in their lives. What wasn’t determined was a recognition and affirmation of that call by the church. The result: many non-tested persons have come into the ministry and into leadership positions in the church. These persons have tried to define for themselves—often incorrectly—their gifts for leadership and ministry. As a result, everyone suffers senselessly (there’s virtue in suffering, but not in senseless suffering). A better approach would be to identify those among us in the church who are markedly gifted and to encourage them to consider ministry.

2. **Leaders can be developed, but they can’t be created.** At Emmanuel we have had no success in creating leaders. A number of our interns are doing very well, but despite quality education and Emmanuel’s outpouring of energy and resources, others who entered the internship lacking leadership talent also left the three- to four-year process as nonleaders.

   The Gallup organization has pointed out that everyone has talent, but not everyone has talent for everything. We can’t create talent where it does not exist. We can manage weakness, but we can build on strengths only where they exist.

   Perhaps, as suggested in number 1 above, we have not been clear enough in the initial stages of ministry preparation to determine that individuals have the leadership potential necessary to make it in the ’90s. Perhaps the seminary and the church can join to create a leadership environment that will enhance people in their areas of giftedness.

3. **We haven’t been honest with ourselves in looking at our candidates and what they bring to the ministry.** It appears that people often choose ministry by a process of elimination: there was no other place where they felt they would be accepted. Conversely, many of the best candidates have not been choosing to enter the ministry.

   As church leaders, we have often been guilty of directing our healthiest, most talented people into what we consider the lucrative/prestigious vocations—engineering, law, medicine, and social work, to name a few.

   For many years at Emmanuel we also made the mistake of believing that no pain or wound in a person’s past was too great to overcome. Reality has shown that those with great needs and dysfunctions should not come into ministry in hopes that this will be the haven in which healing can be found. Although ministry offers many joys and rewards, we have learned that one needs a certain amount of resiliency and toughness to make a go of it.

These three discoveries suggest that the RCA process of developing church leaders is flawed at its start—when identification, screening, and preparation of candidates take place.

We’re not alone. The Rev. Roy Oswald writes of this trend in his publication entitled *Finding Leaders for Tomorrow’s Churches: The Growing Crisis in Clergy Recruitment* (Alban Institute, 1988). He quotes the findings of social scientist Sister Katarina Schuth, who
suggests that today’s seminarians are academically mediocre. Oswald also quotes Dean James Annand of Berkeley Divinity School at Yale, who in a statement to the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church observed that “in many cases it seems that we are unwittingly producing exactly the kind of personalities that we do not wish to attract into the ministry—passive, dependent, cynical people who learn deception, political manipulation, repressed anger, and grim perseverance” (pp. 59-60).

A major survey conducted by the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada concluded, “We need to prepare [clergy] more effectively [and] choose them more effectively.” One thirty-seven-year-old respondent observed, “As I think back, I am awed by how little of my formal theological education really equipped me to minister today” (“Who Shepherds the Shepherd?”, Faith Today, January/February 1995, p. 24). We hear that time and time again from RCA pastors, too.

Oswald, in Finding Leaders for Tomorrow’s Churches, gives some sound advice, which just so happens to agree with the recommendations of the RCA Task Force on Procedural Steps Toward Ordination, adopted by the 1993 General Synod (MGS 1993, R-18, p. 326). Oswald states: “The most critical element in the screening process is actual performance in the field....I would support encouraging, not mandating, field work prior to seminary” (p. 59).

In other words, he recommends a trial run to screen candidates for ordained ministry before beginning a costly preparation program of seminary and classis procedures. I would also strongly advocate this approach for the Reformed Church in America.

A SEARCH FOR LEADERSHIP QUALITIES

With this in mind, the Rev. Cornelis Kors and I began our search for the qualities of a good leader, a successful candidate for ordained ministry in the RCA. At our meetings throughout the continent, many lists were generated, with the emphasis on three main themes—the cognitive, competence, and character. According to those who participated in our research, the area of character far outweighed the others in importance. Successful candidates for the ministry, said our sources, should be:

- **Faith-filled**—always expecting God to do a new thing.
- **Servant-hearted**—having a heart for ministry and love for others.
- **Future-orientated**—able to cast and recast vision.
- **Agents of change**—always ready and able to negotiate change.
- **Possessors of the “Issachar factor”** (see 1 Chronicles 12:32)—able to read and clearly interpret the signs of the times.
- **Builders of leaders**—capable of “followship,” which builds and empowers new leaders.
- **Loyal**—creators of committed community through a combination of belonging, destiny, and purpose.
- **Hope-filled**—constantly developing God-inspired “movements,” not “monuments.”
- **Resilient**—able to find identity and strength in God through Scripture and prayer.
- **Focused**—able to pay attention to biblical priorities and how time is used to accomplish the vision.
In many ways these qualities begin a shift in paradigm: a new manner of understanding church leadership where the traditional components no longer exist. We are in the process of moving through tradition into a new mission that will radically challenge us as a denomination. According to Doug Murren in his book *Leadershift* (Regal Books, 1994), this will force us to change the rules of how we do church.

**LEADERSHIP FORMATION FOR THE FUTURE RCA**

The Rev. Dr. Charles Van Engen, an RCA ordained minister and professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, calls for a radical shift in the paradigm of leadership formation as we know it. In a paper summarized in *Perspectives* (October, 1994, pp. 15-17), he writes of changing from the *preparation of professionals* to the *forming of leaders.* "Leadership," he observes, "happens as a corporate event when the believing community allows certain members to act as its leader-catalysts, inspiring it toward greater exercise of the whole range of spiritual gifts distributed through the members. Leaders, then, become the creative, motivational, visionary, enthusiastic, positive, and forward-looking catalysts to mobilize the people of God in mission in the world."

An extremely helpful resource has been the M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust's *Review of Graduate Theological Education in the Pacific Northwest* (September, 1994). It has identified leadership as the new priority in ministry formation. It recommends that we are now responsible to prepare leaders "who can cast vision, create a ministry team for their church, and create a climate for the spiritual growth of each person in their flock." Van Engen provides the basis for a new paradigm for ministry formation that is quoted in the M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust paper, "A 21st Century Seminary Faculty Model." He suggests the following:

- **Change** as a constant church reality.
- **Relationships** [and character] as the major factor for a successful church.
- **Leadership** by example, not exposition.
- **Lifelong learning** for pastors, professors, and laypersons.

I will be the first to acknowledge that it is going to be difficult for the RCA to step into the new paradigm as it is being suggested. But we have a crisis on our hands. We must be willing to confront change, even in our most established institutions, or we ourselves will be stampeded from behind by the need of today's world for strong, relevant, spiritual leadership. A crucial and sincere emphasis on my part is to open up new avenues for ordained leadership in the RCA. It is my desire to do this without having to be resisted and obstructed by the competitiveness and defensiveness that so often arises between the four main RCA institutions and agencies who are invested in this—the academies, teaching churches, classes, and regional synods. I hope that with God's help we can embrace the new models within a womb of grace. In order to accomplish this, we must cooperate and collaborate as we establish how we will influence the future ordained leadership of the RCA.

We have observed a high burnout rate among recent seminary graduates. A study at Fuller Theological Seminary discovered that seven out of ten M.Div. graduates left the pastoral ministry before ten years were completed, some leaving the church totally as broken individuals.

A survey at Denver Seminary discovered a similar burnout. That survey revealed that a tremendously high number of pastors who had earned high grades during seminary and were skilled preachers lasted less than five years in ministry.

IN TERMS OF MINISTRY COMPETENCY, THOSE STEPPING INTO THEIR FIRST MINISTRY POSITIONS AFTER COMPLETING SEMINARY IN TODAY’S SOCIETY NEED TO BE FOUR OR FIVE YEARS AHEAD OF WHERE SOMEONE NEEDED TO BE WHEN I ENTERED MINISTRY FORTY YEARS AGO. PEOPLE USED TO STAY ROOTED, AND CONGREGATIONS WERE LARGELY HOMOGENEOUS, SO LOCAL CHURCHES COULD “GROW” PASTORS. WE NO LONGER HAVE THAT LUXURY. TODAY THE CHURCH CHANGES TOO QUICKLY FOR THE LOCAL CONGREGATION TO BE ABLE TO “GROW AND DEVELOP A PASTOR.” IT IS FOR THAT REASON THAT WE NEED TO LOOK MUCH MORE SERIOUSLY AT PARISH-BASED TRAINING AND AT BUILDING THE CONCEPT OF THE “TEACHING CHURCH” IN THE REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA.

REFLECTIONS AND PROPOSALS

IT IS MY PREMISE THAT WE NEED TO ANSWER A RESOUNDING “YES” TO THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

1. IS THE RCA READY TO RECRUIT AND DEVELOP VISIONARY, SERVANT-HEARTED TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY LEADERSHIP?

2. ARE THE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARIES AND AGENCIES, THE CLASSES, THE TEACHING CHURCHES, AND THOSE AT THE TWO SYNODICAL LEVELS OF THE RCA READY TO JOIN HANDS TO IDENTIFY, EQUIP, AND UNLEASH SUCH LEADERSHIP?

GIVEN A POSITIVE ANSWER TO THE ABOVE TWO QUESTIONS BRINGS ME TO THE POINT OF ACTUALLY DOING SOMETHING TO ADDRESS THE LEADERSHIP CRISIS IN THE RCA. OUR MEETINGS AND CONSULTATIONS HAVE GENERATED MANY PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS. SPECIFIC SOLUTIONS CHOSEN AS PROPOSALS FOR THE 1995 GENERAL SYNOD MEETING INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

P-1.
TO ADD AN ADDITIONAL “CONSTITUTIONAL INQUIRY” QUESTION IN THE BOOK OF CHURCH ORDER (BCO) FOR THE IDENTIFICATION OF LEADERS IN THE CONGREGATION; AND FURTHER,

TO ADOPT THE FOLLOWING REVISION OF THE BCO CHAPTER 1, PART II, ARTICLE 7, SECTION 1 (ADDITION IS UNDERLINED):

NEW SECTION D. (EXISTING SECTION D AND SUBSEQUENT SECTIONS TO BE RENUMBERED E-J)

D. HAS THE CONSTITORY TAKEN TIME TO REVIEW PERSONS WITHIN THE CONGREGATION, ESPECIALLY THE YOUNG PEOPLE, IN ORDER TO IDENTIFY FOR THEM THEIR GIFTS FOR ORDAINED MINISTRY; TO ENCOURAGE THOSE GIFTS IDENTIFIED; AND TO PRAY FOR THOSE INDIVIDUALS ON A REGULAR BASIS?**

P-2.
TO INSTRUCT THE COUNCIL OF FIELD SECRETARIES (COFS), THE RCA SEMINARIES AND THE THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION AGENCY (TEA), AND THE APPROPRIATE GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL UNIT/COMMITTEE TO IDENTIFY, ESTABLISH, AND EQUIP “TEACHING CHURCHES” THROUGHOUT THE DENOMINATION.**
These churches, once equipped, can serve as training and testing grounds for potential ministry candidates, thus giving them a four- to five-year head start on those of us who started ministry forty years ago. The GSC unit/committee should establish a listing of opportunities in teaching churches and develop procedures and resources that will assist the churches in providing a good experience for candidates who will serve in those churches.

The teaching churches should represent a broad sampling of the kind of churches that we have in the RCA and include urban, rural, and small churches, as well as larger, multistaffed churches. The pastors on staff must be positive role models with the ability to mentor and supervise candidates for ministry.

P-3.
To instruct the General Synod Council to approve a fund-raising campaign that will solicit funds from various sources other than congregations so ordained leadership candidates can participate in the teaching church program while at the same time obtaining a seminary education.**

I hope that a large endowment fund can be created so scholarships and grant programs can be offered to eligible candidates and to churches who will serve as teaching churches.

P-4.
To direct the general secretary to designate a denominational volunteer who will assist in educating pastors, youth leaders, Christian educators, camp directors, college chaplains, and others on how to identify and encourage persons who have potential for pastoral leadership.**

This person would utilize the research material and resulting processes that would be developed by the Reformed Church in America.

We should recognize that there are basically two pools from which we will be recruiting our leadership of the future: 1) seven-to-twenty-two-year-olds and 2) older individuals who tend to rise or percolate out of the local congregation as they serve in ministry. It is these groups that the designated person of the denomination could focus on and educate others about.

P-5.
To urge the classes to use the RCA Leadership Profile process developed by the Gallup organization as one of the methods for determining whether or not to receive an applicant under care as a candidate for ministry; and further,

to direct the Office of Ministry and Personnel Services to encourage and monitor the use of the RCA Leadership Profile by the classes and report on its use to the 1998 General Synod.**

It is crucial that we do objective discernment at the front end of the ministry formation process in order to save individuals and churches unnecessary heartache and pain. The Gallup instrument has shown itself to be an excellent discernment tool which is objective and uniquely tailored to the RCA and its specific needs.

The General Synod Council has been willing to invest in the creation of this tool, and RCA individuals throughout the denomination have welcomed this timely introduction of something for which we have expressed a need for a very long time. The Classis of California has decided to require the administration of this instrument upon application to be taken under
care; the Regional Synod of the Far West has endorsed the Gallup Leadership Profile for its immediate use by all the classes within its jurisdiction; and the Board of Trustees of the Theological Education Agency is requiring it of all its applicants before admitting them to the Fitness for Ministry process.

CONCLUSION

I ask all members of the RCA to pray that the Lord of the harvest will raise up people with the spiritual giftedness for pastoral leadership. We need to pray that the God who has given these leaders Spirit-inspired abilities will also give them a deep call so they will have a “burning in the bones and a fire in the belly” to share the gospel; to help recruit, equip, and train lay ministers; and to be servant leaders into the twenty-first century.

***Upon recommendation of the Committee of Reference, P-1 was referred to the Advisory Committee on Church Order, P-2 and P-5 were referred to the Advisory Committee on Church Vocations; P-3 was referred to the Advisory Committee on Financial Support; and P-4 was referred to the Committee of Reference.
REPORT OF THE GENERAL SECRETARY

INTRODUCTION

When the General Synod Council (GSC) questioned me before approving my nomination as general secretary last year, one of the GSC members asked if God had given me a vision for the future ministry of the Reformed Church in America. My reply was that such a vision could be discovered through a common process of listening, waiting, and discernment throughout the life of our church. My primary goal during the first year would be to lead such a process and bring to this General Synod a report of what I have heard and discerned.

This report today is the result. It comes from intentional times of reflection throughout the Reformed Church in America during the past year. From this I want to share a vision for our future.

Let me be specific about opportunities for reflection during the past year. Last November all executive staff from the denomination, including staff from regional synods, shared retreat days at Warwick Conference Center, in Warwick, New York, focusing on the issues facing the Reformed Church in America as we look to the future. Then, the General Synod Council—the sixty-member body which "administers the affairs of the Reformed Church in America between the sessions of the General Synod (BCO, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 6a)—went on retreat January 24-26, 1995. In preparation for the retreat, each GSC member read the book of Acts. We shared together, in worship and in small group discussion, the meaning of personal renewal and corporate (denominational) renewal.

Each classis is requested to "report annually to the regional and General Synods upon the state of religion within the bounds of the classis" (BCO, Chapter I, Part II, Article 15, Section 1). But this year I asked each classis to reflect not simply on the condition of their congregations, but rather, to provide a "fresh, missiological reflection on the actual state of religious faith and practice today...looking at future trends shaping life within the bounds of each classis." Those reports, which I received this spring, have been rich in insight and perspective.

Further, I have had the privilege of traveling to almost every region of North America this past year to meet with pastors and other leaders in the Reformed Church in America. We shared times of free and open discussion, hearing together concerns, experiences, questions, and dreams. By far, such encounters have been the most formative and enriching times for me personally among the various duties during this first year of service as your general secretary.

We have also experienced important events in our denomination's life together since our 1994 General Synod. Several regional synods have been considering, or have launched, new and creative directions in their ministries. The Consultation on Metropolitan Ministries for the Twenty-first Century—the first time in fifteen years that the RCA has gathered a group to consider the future of urban ministry—brought forth rich and promising challenges. (This consultation met in Newark, New Jersey, April 20-22, 1995, and a report on this consultation is included in the Evangelization and Church Growth section.) In addition, important work is underway to examine the RCA's process for identifying, training, nurturing, and equipping those called to the pastoral ministry.

Finally, I have had opportunities to share with colleagues from other denominations and also parachurch organizations—evangelical, mainline Protestant, Orthodox, and Pentecostal. Together, we compared the challenges and issues which we see as central to the future vitality of the whole body of Christ—the church catholic. Such ecumenical encounters are a crucial forum for insight into the prompting of God's Spirit throughout the church.
VISION FOR OUR FUTURE—MISSION

So these are the places where I have been listening, and the ways in which we in the Reformed Church in America have been reflecting together, wanting to hear where God is calling us as we approach ministry in the twenty-first century. The Book of Church Order states that the “General Synod shall have a general secretary whose duty shall be to present at each General Synod meeting a report articulating a vision for the church, including recommendations for the future” (BCO Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 5, Section 3).

Yes, I do have a vision for our future—a vision shaped and sharpened over the past year. Let me cast it before you, for my firm conviction is that the Reformed Church in America, and each of our congregations, must be led by vision rather than driven by survival.

Radically and Rapidly Changing Culture

The 957 congregations of the Reformed Church in America are living out their life in ministry in a culture that is radically and rapidly changing. North American culture, as we look to the twenty-first century, is characterized by these features:

1. It is thoroughly secularized.
2. It is dramatically, richly, and irreversibly pluralistic.
3. It is comprised of subcultures defined by generations as well as by ethnicity.
4. It is shaped by and saturated with electronic information.
5. It is spiritually hungry, curious, and open.

All this means that the church is living in a time of fundamental social and cultural change, which affects the life of every congregation. Listen to what the state of religion reports from our classes are saying.

From the Classis of Illinois: “A changing world demands a changing church....Our parents' world is gone.”

From the Classis of New Brunswick: “Vast cultural and social changes in North America place the Christian church in a radically different position from the one it occupied even a generation or two ago.”

From the Classis of Red River in Texas and Oklahoma: “Different cultures will and should impact the composition of our churches....The Korean community expects a large influx of people from their culture.”

From the Classis of British Columbia: “Our culture is now post-Christian...After two thousand years we seem to have come full circle again—Christians as a small minority in an overwhelmingly hostile culture that is at the same time hungry for spiritual reality.”

From the Classis of Passaic Valley in New Jersey: “Our churches are located in one of the most religiously diverse areas on this planet....If Paul was somewhat surprised by the many forms of worship evident among the Athenians (Acts 17), he would be overwhelmed by the people living among us with their diverse religious affiliations.”

From the Classis of California: “Young adults under twenty-one cannot remember life without homes with multiple TVs and VCRs, video rental, cable TV, CD players, etc.”
Many high school and college students cannot imagine that it would be possible to write a paper without the help of a PC....The information age...may be creating a whole generation which expects communication to be instant, impersonal, and flawless.

From the Classis of Albany: "We in the church, at least in the Northeast, are the ‘counter culture.’"

From the Classis of Southwest Michigan: "The church of Jesus Christ, which has always been in the business of changing hearts, finds itself in the middle of a changing culture....Without change, the church will die."

From the Classis of Queens: "We are missionaries in a pagan, secular society....Our Korean churches are a great source of power in that no other churches pray as fervently....Many of our African-American churches are being revitalized through the power of Spirit-filled worship and preaching."

And from Classis of Delaware-Raritan in New Jersey: "In most of our communities the church is no longer the center of activity....The school’s athletic and cultural events get bigger crowds and are the places where those who want to be active in local affairs need to be seen."

The shape of society, and the place of the church within the culture, is fundamentally shifting. Those churches that are radically attentive to their social setting understand this. Here is the common denominator: the 957 congregations in the RCA are living in a missionary relationship to North American society. As the Classis of Lake Erie said of its congregations, "We are a group of diverse, dedicated mission stations."

This changes much for all of us. It means, for instance, that today we must earn the right to be heard. That comes through expressing God’s loving presence within the heart of the society where we are placed. It comes through modeling to others what it means to belong to a community living together by the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ. And earning the right to be heard necessitates that we learn how to communicate the gospel in ways that connect—in language, style, and form—to subcultures in our neighborhoods that are living in worlds quite different from our own.

Roots of the Church’s Identity

This takes us back to the roots of the church’s identity. A few weeks before he died, the Rev. Arie Brouwer, the RCA’s general secretary from 1977-83, sent me a tape recording in response to a letter and article which I had written. Since he was too weak at that point to write, he recorded his thoughts. Brouwer reminded me that the sending of God’s only Son into the world—God’s preeminent mission—is what called the church into existence. God’s mission created the church, and God’s mission keeps calling forth the church and renewing the church through the Spirit. The Holy Spirit, sent by God, gathers us as the church, and sends us, as Christ’s body, into the world, extending God’s loving, beckoning, transforming presence, in the face of indifference, evil, sin, and suffering.

Many years ago a famous theologian, Emil Brunner, stated: "The church exists by mission as fire exists by burning." In our heritage as the Reformed Church in America, we have lived out that reality in the stories and lives of mission pioneers like the Rev. David Abeel, beginning a mission to China that became the oldest Protestant church in that land; Dr. Ida Scudder, whose vision and compassion has brought God’s healing touch to hundreds of thousands in South India; and the Rev. Samuel Zwemer, who understood long before the discovery of oil the urgency of sharing the gospel and establishing dialogue in the midst of Arab cultures. The legacies of these RCA missionaries and those of many others continue to this day.
Cultural Diversity is Transforming Mission

What we mean by mission is being transformed before our eyes. One morning last month I had breakfast with an RCA pastor of a congregation in a highly affluent, well-known suburban community here in Bergen County, New Jersey. He told me that his young daughter’s elementary school was planning a float for a fourth of July parade, whose theme was “Celebrating America.” The children decided to decorate the float with flags of nationalities represented by the boys and girls in that small elementary school. They had to find forty-seven flags!

Recently, researchers studying a Chicago high school discovered that sixty-three nations were represented in the school and that one-half of the student body had been born outside North America. Today, the United States includes a black, or African-American, population equivalent to the second largest nation in Africa. The United States includes the third largest Spanish-speaking population of any country in the world; only in Mexico and Spain is it larger.

For many years the United States has been home to a larger Jewish population than Israel. But by the end of the century, more Arabs will live in North America than Jews. Today, 600,000 Arabs make their home in metropolitan New York alone.

Canada has understood the realities of cultural, ethnic, and linguistic pluralism even more vividly than the United States. Last fall I spoke at the building dedication for the Fujian Evangelical Church in Vancouver, British Columbia. Three hundred to four hundred people gather each Sunday for worship and study in a magnificent building. This is a vibrant, growing RCA congregation begun just a few years ago among those Chinese in Vancouver, who speak the Fujian dialect. They joined the Reformed Church in America because they remembered the mission of David Abeel and others to their ancestral home in Amoy, in the Fujian province of China. Hundreds of thousands of other Chinese now make their homes, find their work, and build their communities in Vancouver, as part of fifty million Chinese today who live outside of China and Taiwan.

A century ago mission was defined by geography. Being a missionary meant crossing oceans, entering jungles, trekking through deserts. Today mission still means traveling cultural distances. But those cultures, increasingly, are geographically present among us.

This is becoming true everywhere. A few weeks ago I traveled to Sheldon, Iowa, to speak to the Regional Synod of the Heartland as they launched a creative effort to start new churches. My plane landed in Sioux City, Iowa; I got a car and started driving toward Sheldon, in the heart of historic, Dutch-settled, northwest Iowa. I stopped at a gas station/food mart to buy a map. Two young men shopping next to me were speaking Spanish.

I grew up in the suburbs of Chicago. When I was a young boy I learned in my evangelical church about people of the Moslem faith who lived in the Middle East and Asia. Today there are seventy-three mosques in the Chicago area.

The Rev. Dr. Raymond Bakke, the leader in urban mission who spoke to the RCA’s Metropolitan Ministries Consultation in April 1995, put it this way: “The southern hemisphere is moving north; the east is moving west. North America used to face Europe, with New York as its front door. Today North America faces Asia, and New York is the back door.”

This cultural diversity in our midst is the gift of God. North American society is coming more and more to reflect and hold the world’s cultures. For the church, this means that every congregation will find itself in a cross-cultural setting, and every neighborhood will hold the
challenges of mission and social reconciliation. As one pastor said in a classis state of religion report: “The world is now at our doorstep.”

Generational Subcultures

This diversity of subcultures is defined not only by growing ethnic pluralism. Different generations today, more than ever before, comprise separate subcultures. Are you noticing how advertisements on TV seem to be changing? Are there some that you barely understand? Those commercials are the ones targeted to the new, younger generation—some call it the “X Generation”—which responds to cues, styles, forms, images, and language quite different from things which get my attention. The people who make successful commercials understand this. They are communicating to a different culture.

If you take many of those young persons and place them in the pews of our churches, they will simply change the channel and tune out. The forms, style, music, and language of most RCA worship services are in a different cultural world than their own. An African-American pastor with a long ministry among teens told me that today this younger generation subculture—the X Generation—forms a bond which does not distinguish between ethnic groups; rather it bundles Hispanic, Asian, African-American, and white kids together. And, as a group, they face sharp, alienating barriers between them and older generations of all ethnic backgrounds. In other words, today’s generational subcultures may even be stronger than ethnic subcultures.

Unchurched Society

An even more important reality faces the church today. We are in a time when being unchurched is the norm for our society. Gallup and other researchers estimate that those classified as “unchurched” in North America range from 60 percent to 75 percent of the population. Many of these people were raised in the church but have since left it, often alienated and wounded, simply too busy trying to make money and have fun. Millions of others simply lack any experience of church. We live in a time when, as one writer put it, the church is simply off the radar screen for millions of people. This phenomenon is not necessarily because of things that the institutionalized church has done wrong, but has come about even in the face of faithful and effective ministry. Yet, the pace and force of social change has overwhelmed us. It is now shaping the culture far more than is the presence of churches.

Spiritual Curiosity and Hunger

In the midst of a society where two-thirds of the population is “unchurched,” an incredible spiritual curiosity and hunger seems to abound. The state of religion report from the Classis of British Columbia explained it this way:

The gods of secularism—science, technological advance, materialism, etc.—have been found wanting as well. There is a general dissatisfaction with life without the dimension of the sacred, the transcendent....We discern the first signs of a hunger for spiritual meaning....A secular culture is like an empty house....Shut off from what is sacred, people find that they are shut up to triviality. They won’t put up for long with living in a “world without windows.”

Anyone can see the evidence of this in the astounding array of books, tapes, centers, movements, and music available today which reflect a smorgasbord of spiritualities. This is even more pronounced in geographical areas where church attendance is the lowest—in Marin County, California, for instance, where only 5 percent of the population regularly attend church.
Embracing a New Vision for Mission

The Reformed Church in America needs to embrace a new vision for its call to mission. We shall discover God’s ongoing mission, already ahead of us, calling us to follow. This mission is rooted in each of our congregations. It is mission which recognizes that we are called through our tradition into a fresh encounter between the gospel and our culture. We seek mission that learns how to communicate the radical message of God’s grace in Jesus Christ to the radically changing society in which we live. To embrace such mission means that we will not remain the same. For mission always reshapes, challenges, and renews the church.

This has been the church’s history from the start. And it has been our own story as well. The Acts of the Apostles describes the growing life of the early church, in a minority position within the culture, facing fundamental questions concerning how the gospel of Jesus Christ relates to cultural traditions, and building up itself through its missionary presence in the society. Consistently in the book of Acts, the church is surprised by its missionary and global setting, transcending cultural, social, and economic barriers.

Seeking Renewal

We seek renewal not for our own sake. The Reformed Church in America’s goal is not for one old and distinguished denomination to flourish in the future. Rather, we seek to be a part of God’s work of renewal, calling the church into the world which is sustained only by God’s love. Responding to the Spirit means that we, as the Reformed Church in America, and in fellowship with the whole body of Christ, will recover a fresh commitment to mission as we face ministry in the twenty-first century. If we do, we will discover anew the ancient biblical truth: the church, as the gathered and called people of God, does not “have” a mission; rather, the life of the church is mission.

Evangelism in a Changing World

The Classis of New Brunswick’s state of religion report asked clearly the question which we face: “How do we live out a passionate missionary vision of confident witness shaped by the gospel at the core of our common life as God’s own people?” We can begin answering that question during this General Synod as we address the theme, “Evangelism in a Changing World.” We have designed this General Synod so that today, tomorrow, and Tuesday, we will have specific opportunities to address these challenges and to respond.

Two Fundamental Points of Focus

In this search let us keep two fundamental points of focus before us. The church exists, first of all, as the church local. There is no question that congregations, one by one, are at the core of ministry, witness, and mission. All our words, ideas, and commitments ultimately are tested—and, hopefully, made real—within the lives of 957 congregations and their members.

But in the New Testament the “local church” means more than just individual congregations. We find worshiping groups constituting the “church” in a local setting, like Corinth, Antioch, Jerusalem, and Ephesus. The “local church” meant those congregations in a specific geographical region. The early church had no patience for congregations who thought they could live as a law unto themselves, severed from the rest of the body.

The Reformed tradition takes this seriously and gives clear intentionality to relationships of mutual support for the church local. That is why congregations in a local place are linked together, in a classis, which provides the necessary oversight, nurture, and accountability that is needed beyond the individual congregation.
The classis exists to enable wider mission, to plant new churches, to oversee congregations facing difficulties, and to ordain, support, and hold accountable our pastors. We do not always do these tasks well. I am convinced that strengthening and equipping our classes is key to implementing a fresh calling to mission within North America.

The other focus for the identity of the church is its global reality. The church exists also as the church global. Beyond the church in its local setting, the New Testament insists that the church is global—a body connected together, unbreakable, across barriers of race, culture, economics, geography, gender, and social tradition. Much of the witness of the New Testament is focused on the need for linking together the churches in each local place with each other, as part of the church global. This is the root of the word “ecumenical,” which comes from the Greek word oikos, meaning household. The church in each local place lives as part of the global “household of God...with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together” (Eph. 2:19-21a).

Paul’s missionary journeys, his collection of money to send from one part of the church to another, the pastoral concerns reflected in the New Testament letters, and the Council at Jerusalem (Acts 15) are all concrete examples of connecting together the church in each local place as part of the one body of Christ throughout the world. There is no choice about this in the mind of the New Testament. Christians live out their lives only in relationship to others, as part of a worshipping, witnessing body of believers. Congregations cannot be faithful apart from being related to other congregations as the church local. And together they belong to the wider body of Christ that overcomes all the dividing lines and is called to live as one global household of God.

A denomination like the Reformed Church in America, then, should never exist simply unto itself. That is ultimately the path of defensive protection of power and prerogatives. Our energies become focused inwardly on maintenance, regulation, and bureaucratic control. Rather, the denomination exists simply as a vehicle to enable, support, and encourage congregations in their local expression of the church, and then, to connect the church local to the church global.

RCA Mission

Historically, the world mission of the Reformed Church in America has attempted to protect us from the dangers of parochialism. We have brought concrete parts of the world church into the life of the RCA and enabled our denomination to bear witness to the gospel of Christ across the globe in ways that have forced us to transcend the narrow cultural boundaries of our heritage. That calling must ever be central to our life.

Moreover, the world mission commitment of the Reformed Church in America has brought rich learnings regarding cross-cultural communication and interfaith dialogue. Wars rage around the globe today, and many are fueled by deadly conflicts between religions. Devotion to faith is manipulated by cynical powers into a motive for killing and persecution. We need to offer to this broken world the truths we have discovered about faith as the path to peace and as the means for building rather than destroying community.

The changing realities of our time will surely mean that the strategy, style, and practice of “world mission” will be redesigned. But the purpose will remain constant: resources of people, funds, ideas, and relationships, shared together through the denomination, will enable congregations to live out their life as mission, both locally and globally.

Mission is one. An RCA African-American congregation in the midst of a Hispanic neighborhood in the Bronx is struggling to live as mission. And twelve congregations joining to support a young couple working with the Reformed churches in Malawi are expressing
their life as mission. In the same way, the pastor in Iowa City, Iowa, building a new church among those who haven’t before known life in Christ, is living out a commitment to mission.

But our mental images, the bureaucratic division of our programs, and our inattention to the changing realities in our society have prevented us from grasping this basic truth. We can take a step simply by enabling parts of the denomination’s program, who typically have worked in isolation from one another, to work together in common mission. Specifically, the Mission Services Unit, the Evangelism and Church Development Unit, and our four racial/ethnic councils should now build new patterns of cooperation for our future.

I therefore propose:

P.1.
To instruct the General Synod Council Mission Services Committee/Unit and the General Synod Council Evangelism and Church Development Services Committee/Unit, along with the African-American Council, the American Indian Council, the Council for Hispanic Ministries, and the Council for Pacific and Asian American Ministries, to establish specific projects and cooperative efforts in order to help strengthen Reformed Church in America congregations in living out new models of mission and evangelism within the changing realities of North American culture.**

$9.8 by '98

Such a step will also help in the implementation of certain programs in the $9.8 by '98 fund drive. This effort is now in its final few months of securing commitments and pledges. Between now and the turn of the century this campaign will provide the resources to undergird our denomination’s commitment to evangelism and new church development. $9.8 by ’98 is a clear opportunity for the RCA to match our verbal support for new church growth and evangelism with the financial resources needed to make this a reality.

VISION FOR OUR FUTURE—REVITALIZED WORSHIP

In the RCA today, how we worship is receiving fresh creativity and generating controversy. Our changing culture, our generational divisions, the information revolution, and the commitment to communicate the gospel freshly to those no longer interested in the church, all are dramatically affecting our practice of worship.

Our forms of worship are evolving, and that has always been the case. Today that process is simply more rapid and dramatic. This also creates tensions and some dangers.

A variety of music, liturgy, and expressions of worship will surely be increasingly essential as cultural diversity accelerates. Often that variety will be found even within single congregations who are attentive to this diversity. But in this process, certain questions also must be raised.

Worship was revolutionized by the Reformation. The Reformers rebelled against the model of worship centered on a single person—a priest—who people watched almost like spectators. Instead, worship became the activity of the whole congregation. Liturgy—which means, literally, “the work of the people”—was returned to the people, the priesthood of all believers.

Thus, Reformed worship has always held central the involvement of the whole worshiping community. Today this is again one of the points of tension. Should worship be centered
essentially on "entertainment" which the congregation watches? Or does our worship, in whatever style, offer to all the opportunity to participate as a worshiping, celebrating community?

Other questions are important as well. Does the basic foundation of Reformed worship—approaching God, hearing the Word of God, and responding to God—hold true regardless of forms, styles, music, and cultural adaptations? What in the Reformed tradition of worship is non-negotiable? How can creative innovation be nurtured and fresh resources made available, so that God's Spirit can use the rich variety of gifts and forms within our diverse cultures to draw all people into the praise and glory of God? How should worship be expressed in the culture of today's youth, as well as among those who come with little or no prior experience of the church?

We need not wrestle with these questions alone. Here, ecumenical relationships within the Reformed community can play a vital role.

I therefore propose:

P-2. To direct the General Synod Council staff, in cooperation with the Commission on Christian Worship, to begin plans to call a joint consultation on the contemporary practice of worship within the Reformed tradition in the midst of contemporary culture, together with other denominations in the Reformed/Presbyterian tradition.**

VISION FOR OUR FUTURE—BUILDING COMMUNITY

A fresh sense of mission and revitalized worship are signs of renewal within the life of any church. But these are incomplete, and eventually will not be sustained, unless they are rooted in a deep experience of community within the local congregation. Churches need to be centers of beckoning, believing, and belonging.

Deepening community within our congregations and throughout the denomination was a central theme which emerged from the General Synod Council's retreat in January 1995. One group from that retreat put it simply: "To renew the church we must build community."

People today are longing to belong. Forty percent of Americans belong to some kind of a small group. In response to the pressures and pace of contemporary society, people are searching for places of acceptance, nurture, caring, and accountability to values other than materialism. The wounds inflicted by society's deep injustices, as well as from damaging relationships, create deep cries for communities of healing.

Those called into the life of Jesus Christ are promised a community that lives by the dynamic of loving and forgiving one another, as Christ has forgiven us. Our congregations do not always fulfill this promise. But in some reports from classis, I read of a growing emphasis in congregations on small groups, for nurture, sharing, Bible study, discipling, teaching, and healing.

A fresh commitment to mission which invites others into our midst must be rooted in a life together which shares, accepts, heals, and upholds one another. People are searching for this life. What we can offer is a community which tries to live with one another in the same love that has redeemed us through Jesus Christ.
VISION FOR OUR FUTURE—CALLING FORTH GIFTS OF THE LAITY

When the church seeks to live as such a community of faith, it also become a place that calls forth people’s gifts, and in particular, the gifts of the laity. Our former president of General Synod, Dr. Beth Marcus, challenged the Reformed Church in America to develop the gifts of the laity at the 1993 General Synod (*MGS 1993*, pp. 30-35). We have begun to see some fruit of this emphasis, especially in the new training program for deacons. Their gifts are being evoked in exciting new ways. A similar program for elders is now being developed.

But far more needs to be done. Renewal is sustained through evoking the gifts given by God’s Spirit to each person in the body of Christ. This requires ongoing learning and growth for us all.

**Spiritual Formation**

In recent years the RCA has given fruitful attention to Christian education and faith formation for children in our congregations. The *Children in Worship* ministry is growing as fast as a young child and is transforming young children’s experience of worshiping God. Further, the new LiFE (Living in Faith Everyday) curriculum for use with children in preschool through grade six, in its first year, is being embraced with enthusiasm by teachers and children alike.

But how are our adults learning and growing in their faith? How are they being encouraged in the discovering and exercising of their gifts? Here we face a huge vacuum, which diminishes our ability to respond as churches to God’s mission. The truth is that less than one-third of adults participate in ongoing learning experiences in the church.

Spiritual formation, which means growing into the fullness of our life in Christ and becoming the person whom we are intended to be by God, is a lifelong task. When our faith atrophies and stops growing, the waters of our baptism become stagnant. The Spirit of God, given to us at our baptism, is sent to teach us all things and to fill us continually with new life, gifts, and strength. As adults, we need to learn and to grow in faith just as much as our children do.

The 1993 General Synod recommended that we “develop resources and programs to equip laity for full involvement in the ministries of the church” (*MGS 1993*, P-1, p. 35 and *MGS 1993*, R-1, pp. 152-53). The work has begun, but this commitment needs to be underscored.

I therefore propose:

**P-3.**

To instruct the General Synod Council Congregational Services Unit to expand programs for equipping the laity in the ministries of the Reformed Church in America; and further,

**to give a new central emphasis on adult Christian education and spiritual formation.**

**CONCLUSION**

I have shared with you in this report directions that are central to the future ministry of the Reformed Church in America as we face sweeping cultural changes and approach the advent of a new millennium. A fresh vision of mission, revitalized worship, a deeper experience of community, and calling forth the gifts of the laity are all part of renewal. But this also brings changes and transitions which are not always easy.
One young pastor, who has been trying to lead a congregation into new and experimental paths of ministry, outreach, and evangelism, told me of the resistance to change from some of his members. A prominent and long-time stalwart of the consistory wrote him a letter stating, "I want you to know that this church would still be here doing things the way it always has even if God didn't exist!"

That's exactly the problem. Are we ready to ask how our life as a church is open to change and to a promising future because God is already ahead of us, beckoning us into mission and renewal? How much in our life—in our congregations, our classes, our regional synods, the programs of the General Synod Council, and the General Synod—do we do simply because we've always done it that way? Don't mistake me. Past traditions contain much wisdom. But being true to the heart of the tradition of the Protestant Reformation always directs us toward the new work of God's Spirit, calling the church to fresh faithfulness in our present time.

I am convinced in my heart that the Reformed Church in America is at a crucial point in its long and grace-filled history. This is a moment filled with promise and potential, a time when the Spirit is freshly blowing, a period where the soil is being prepared with hope of a new and fruitful harvest.

To respond, we begin by listening freshly for the prompting of God's Spirit, reminding ourselves once more that this is where our life together begins. How should our life, our ministry, our structures, our programs, our pastoral training, be reshaped for the future precisely because God exists, and because God's Spirit is continuing to gather a faithful people into community and mission for the future?

Renewal is not something that can be programmed or controlled by a General Synod, or a general secretary, or a pastor. In the end, we remember that the Spirit blows where it will, and we never exactly know why. That is part of God's providence.

But we can create space and room for the Spirit to freely act, and for the Word to be freshly heard. That begins in our personal lives. It extends to our gathered meetings—our consistories, our classes, our regional synods, our General Synod Council, our various conferences, and even here, in our General Synod.

This means recovering the rhythm of Sabbath in our lives—times of intentional retreat, rest, reflection, and replenishment. This is why we are inviting all RCA clergy to gather in April 1996 for a weekend that is called a "Spring Sabbath." We will come together as clergy, not to formulate policies or to hear programs promoted, but rather, to nurture and support one another, seeking new strength and vision for our ministry.

In our meetings and structures, we are learning how to make more space, so that we are not merely dominated by the pressure of pressing business, but also open to hear promptings and directions that can shape our future. In this way we can grasp the vision being set before us; and—more importantly—we can seek its implementation throughout the life of the Reformed Church in America.

So let us take heart. God's Spirit is active. God's grace abounds. God's reign is being established. God's love endures. And God's call beckons us forth into mission—as the very bearers of God's loving presence through Jesus Christ in this world and in the world to come.

** Upon recommendation of the Committee of Reference, P-1 was referred to the Advisory Committee on Evangelization and Church Growth and the Advisory Committee on World Mission; P-2 was referred to the Advisory Committee on Christian Worship; and P-3 was referred to the Advisory Committee on Christian Education and Discipleship.
The General Synod Council (GSC) has served the Reformed Church in America since July 1, 1993. The Book of Church Order (BCO) states:

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

Specific responsibilities for GSC are defined in The Bylaws of the General Synod (Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 6). To carry out these responsibilities, the GSC held stated meetings on October 18-20, 1994, January 24-26, 1995, and March 28-30, 1995; thus fulfilling the requirement of three stated meetings prescribed in The Bylaws of the General Synod, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 5.

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

The GSC report is presented in two ways. First, matters of general nature to be heard and acted upon directly by the General Synod are reported here. They are identified by # in the outline below. Second, other matters of the seven General Synod Council committees are reported through appropriate advisory committees as indicated by the parenthetical note following the title of the item in the outline below. Referrals from the General Synod of 1994 are dealt with throughout the report.

Ad Interim Administration

# Regional Synod Minutes

# Ad Interim Appointments

# Debt Reporting

# Revisions of Consistorial Report Form

General Synod Meeting

# Referral of Business

# Communion Offering

# Seating of Delegates

# Dates and Sites

# Amendments to the Book of Church Order and Proposed Order to the Liturgy

# Amendments to The Bylaws of the General Synod and Special Rules of Order of the General Synod
# Indexing *Minutes of the General Synod*

# Publish Annually Church Addresses and Telephone Numbers in *Directory of the General Synod*

**Budget**

# 1996 General Synod Operational Budget

# Other 1996 General Synod Assessments

# Total 1996 General Synod Assessments

**Supervision**

# Personnel and Evaluation Committee

**Other**

# Classes and Regional Synod Stated Clerks Consultation

# Staff Consulting Group

# Council of Unit Representatives and Regional Synod Executives (C.O.U.R.S.E.)

# 1994 Statistical Report of the RCA

# Appointment of General Synod Treasurer and Assistant Secretary

**Report of the Board of Directors**

# 1994 Annual Report

**From the General Synod Council Committees**

1. **GSC Congregational Services Committee**

   Office of Social Witness (Christian Action)

   Office of Hunger Education (Christian Action)

   Office of Congregational Services (Christian Education and Discipleship)

   Office of Diaconal Ministries (Christian Education and Discipleship)

   Office of Christian Worship (Christian Worship)

   Task Force on Remembering Baptism, Professing Faith, and Membership Terminology (Christian Education and Discipleship, Christian Worship, and Church Order)

2. **GSC Evangelism and Church Development Services**

   Reformed Church in America Building and Extension Fund
Office of Evangelism and Church Development Services, City Congregational Ministries, Small Membership Churches, and New Church Development (Evangelization and Church Growth)

1995 General Synod Theme (Evangelization and Church Growth)

General Synod Themes (Evangelization and Church Growth)

3. GSC Finance Services Committee

1996 Income Projections Based on Askings Developed by Participants in General Synod Mission Programs (Financial Support)

Martha Antoinette Quick Fund (Financial Support)

Special Appeals (Financial Support)

4. GSC Ministry and Personnel Services Committee

Office of Ministry and Personnel Services (Church Vocations)

Code of Sexual Ethics (Church Vocations)

Task Force on Standards for the Preparation for the Professional Ministry (Church Vocations)

5. GSC Mission Services Committee

Office of Mission Services (World Mission)

Missionary List (World Mission)

Task Force on South Africa (Christian Action and World Mission)

6. GSC Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee

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

Necrology (Christian Heritage and Communications)

Review of Commissions (Church Order)

Appointment of Task Force to Revise Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures (Church Order)

Denominational Direction for the 1990s (Evangelization and Church Growth)

Ad Hoc Committee to Study Assessments/Denominational Funding (Financial Support)

Payment of Canadian Assessment in U.S. Dollars (Financial Support)
7. GSC Stewardship and Communication Services Committee

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

*Perspectives* (Christian Heritage and Communications)

RCA Foundation (Church Order)

**Committee of Reference**

- # Referrals
- # Overtures
- # General Synod Assessment
- # Leaves of Absence
- # Resolutions

**AD INTERIM ADMINISTRATION**

**Regional Synod Minutes**

The GSC received and found to be in good order the 1994 minutes of the regional synods of Albany, the Far West, the Great Lakes, the Heartland, Mid-America, the Mid-Atlantic, and New York.

**Ad Interim Appointments**

To the General Synod Council:


- Elmer Van Drunen, representing the Classis of Illiana, to fill the unexpired term of the Rev. Richard Plass, Class of 1997.

- The Rev. Kathleen Hart Brumm, representing the Classis of Orange, to fill the unexpired term of Mary Ann Hoffman, Class of 1996.

- The Rev. Shari Brink, at-large representative, to fill the unexpired term of the Rev. Luis Perez, Class of 1996.

- The Rev. Nancy Ryan, representing the Classis of New Brunswick, to fill the unexpired term of Christine Conover, Class of 1996.

- The Rev. Richard Bates, representing the Classis of North Grand Rapids, to fill the unexpired term of Bruce Neckers, Class of 1996.

To the Commission on Christian Action:

- Moira Poppen Gargano, to fill the vacancy, Class of 1997.
To the Commission on Nominations:


To the Commission for Women:

Nancy Cooper, to fill the unexpired term of Jennifer Skelly, Class of 1995.

To the New Brunswick Theological Seminary Board of Trustees:

Beverly Bell Winslow, representing the Regional Synod of New York, to fill the unexpired term of Ching-Tse Lee, Class of 1995.


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

Debt Reporting

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Indebtedness reports were received from thirty-four classes. Of these, eleven reported churches that are delinquent in their financial obligations. In all cases it appears that church indebtedness is being adequately monitored.
Reports were not received from the classes of California, Central California, Canadian Prairies, Chicago, Florida, Holland, New Brunswick, New York, Passaic Valley, Queens, Schenectady, and Schoharie.

Revisions of Consistorial Report Form

Because of the restructure of the RCA, effective July 1, 1993, extensive revisions for the financial stewardship section of the Consistorial Report Form (items #18-22) were required. After consultation with the classis stated clerks of the regional synods of the Great Lakes and the Mid-Atlantics and consultation with the director of Stewardship and Communication Services, GSC approved these revisions at its April 1994 meeting. The revisions were presented to the 1994 General Synod for information (MGS 1994, pp. 47-8). The revisions were incorporated into the 1994 Consistorial Report Form, and the overall response to the revisions from classes and congregations this past year is very positive.

GENERAL SYNOD MEETING

Referral of Business

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

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

Communion Offering

Upon recommendation of the president of General Synod, GSC designated the General Synod communion offering for the $9.8 by '98 denominational fund drive.

The Seating of Delegates

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

The general secretary reported on classes payments of 1994 assessments.

Dates and Sites

1995 General Synod

Upon recommendation of the General Synod Executive Committee (GSEC), the General Synod in 1993 accepted the invitation of the Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics to host the 1995 meeting of the General Synod on the campus of Montclair State University in Upper Montclair, New Jersey. The 1993 General Synod also set the dates of June 10-16 for the 1995 meeting of the General Synod (MGS 1993, R-3, P. 55).

Denominational staff reported in January 1995 to the GSC Coordinating Committee and the GSC Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee that RCA staff had encountered several problems with the Montclair State University site, including contract difficulties and changes in space allocations. In response, the GSC Coordinating Committee and the GSC Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee encouraged RCA staff to find a suitable alternative meeting site for the 1995 General Synod.
Contacts were made with several colleges and universities in the State of New Jersey. Ramapo College in Mahwah, New Jersey, was available for the dates of June 10-16, 1995. On February 15, 1995, confirmation from the college was received to hold the 1995 General Synod meeting on the Ramapo College campus.

1996 General Synod

Upon recommendation of GSEC, the General Synod also in 1993 accepted the invitation of Northwestern College in Orange City, Iowa, to host the 1996 meeting of the General Synod on its campus. The 1993 General Synod also set the dates of June 8-14 for the 1996 meeting of the General Synod (MGS 1993, R-4, p. 55).

1997 General Synod

At its October 1994 meeting, GSC received an invitation from the Classis of Wisconsin to host the 1997 meeting of the General Synod within the bounds of its classis. The classis looks forward to this opportunity to host the 1997 General Synod as a celebration of 150 years of Reformed Church in America ministry in the State of Wisconsin.

R-3.
To accept the invitation of the Classis of Wisconsin to host the 1997 General Synod; and further,

to hold the meeting of the 1997 General Synod on the campus of the University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee campus; and further,

to set the dates of June 14-20 for the 1997 General Synod meeting. (ADOPTED)

1998 General Synod

The 1992 General Synod voted:

To instruct the General Synod Executive Committee or General Synod Council to schedule General Synod meetings so that every other meeting will be held on an RCA college campus (MGS 1992, R-13, p. 61).

The 1991 General Synod meeting was at Hope College and Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan. The 1994 General Synod meeting was at Central College in Pella, Iowa.

At its March 1995 meeting GSC received an invitation from Hope College and Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan, to host the 1998 General Synod meeting.

R-4.
To accept the invitation of Hope College and Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan, to host the 1998 General Synod; and further,

to set the dates of June 6-12 for the 1998 General Synod meeting. (ADOPTED)
General Synod Meeting Sites at RCA Colleges

At its April 1989 meeting, the General Synod Executive Committee voted:

- to explore with the RCA colleges the possibility of General Synod meeting on an RCA college campus every three years, rotating among the three.

The 1990 General Synod voted:

- To approve future General Synod meeting sites on an RCA college campus once every three years on a rotating basis; and further,
  - to begin the rotation cycle in 1991 when General Synod meets at Hope College and Western Theological Seminary; and further,
  - to adjust the rotation schedule as might become necessary for special denominational anniversaries or activities (MGS 1990, R-4, p. 38).

In response to a recommendation presented to the 1992 General Synod by the GSC Ad Hoc Committee on Services, Structures, and Funding, the 1992 General Synod voted:

- To . . . schedule General Synod meetings so that every other meeting will be held on an RCA college campus (MGS 1992., R-13, p. 61).

In January 1995 the GSC Coordinating Committee and the GSC Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee requested the GSC to consider, at its March 1995 meeting, scheduling all General Synod meetings at RCA colleges or increasing the rotation cycle to hold General Synod meetings every year at a different RCA college and the fourth year to hold the General Synod meeting in a particular region of the RCA. The rationale for this request was: 1) economy of costs, 2) visibility for the RCA colleges, and 3) excellent cooperation and understanding by the RCA colleges for hosting General Synod.

At its March 1995 meeting the GSC voted to recommend to General Synod for adoption the scheduling of General Synod meetings at RCA colleges three out of every four years.

R-5.
To schedule General Synod meetings at RCA colleges three out of every four years; and further,

- to schedule General Synod meetings every fourth year in a region of the Reformed Church in America not in geographical proximity to an RCA college; and further,
  - to adjust the rotation schedule as might become necessary for special denominational anniversaries or activities. (ADOPTED)

(Overtures from the Classis of California and the Classis of Muskegon to schedule General Synod meetings exclusively at RCA colleges were sent to this General Synod. These overtures were referred to the Committee of Reference and the committee prepared recommendations in response to these overtures that were presented to the General Synod on Friday, June 16, 1995. See Report of the Committee of Reference, pp. 412-13.)
Amendments to the *Book of Church Order* and *Liturgy*

The *Government*

The General Synod in 1994 adopted and referred to the classes for approval four amendments to the *Book of Church Order* and two proposed orders to the *Liturgy*. The amendments and proposed orders are recorded in the *1994 Minutes of General Synod*, pp. 192-205, 218-22, 249-50.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposed Amendments</th>
<th>approved*</th>
<th>disapproved*</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Temporary Classis Membership of Clergy from Other Denominations</strong> <em>(MGS 1994, pp. 218-19)(BCO, Chap. 1, Part I, Article 13, Sec. 15)</em></td>
<td>44</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Written Responses from All Parties be Distributed with Commission on Judicial Reports <em>(MGS 1994, pp. 221-22)(BCO, Chap. 2, Part II, Article 3, Sec. 5)</em></td>
<td>44</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>4. Increase Membership Size of General Synod</strong> <em>(MGS 1994, pp. 249-50)(BCO, Chap. 1, Part IV, Article 1)</em></td>
<td>33</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The *Liturgy*

| Order for the Sacrament of Baptism *(MGS 1994, pp. 192-200)(Liturgy)* | 35 | 10 |
| Orders for Preparatory Services I and II, Before the Celebration of the Lord’s Supper *(MGS 1994, pp. 200-05)(Liturgy)* | 43 | 2 |

R-6. To declare amendments 2-4 to have been approved by the classes for incorporation into the 1995 edition of the *Book of Church Order*; and further, to declare orders 5 and 6 to have been approved by the classes for incorporation into the *Liturgy*. (ADOPTED)

*A report was not received from the Classis of the Canadian Prairies.*

**The proposed amendment (#1) allowing for ministers from other denominations to hold temporary membership in a classis, but not be allowed to vote or participate in judicial sessions, is in conflict with another section of the *Book of Church Order*. The *BCO*, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 7 (Union Churches), Section 2k and 2s states:
k. The minister/s of the united church shall be full and responsible members of each assembly (judicatory) of immediate jurisdiction and shall be subject to discipline as provided below in subsection s.

s. The minister/s shall be subject to the discipline of the classes (the presbytery and the classis) provided that when either shall begin an action, it shall invite a committee from the others to join the commissioner, prosecutor, or prosecuting committee in formulating and pressing the charges. In the event of appeal the case shall be finally decided by the highest court to which the appeal is taken in the church which commenced the action, and that decision shall be equally binding on the classes (both presbytery and the classis).

At its February 1995 meeting the Commission on Church Order requested the 1995 General Synod refer this proposed amendment (#1) to the commission for further study and report to the 1996 General Synod. The Committee of Reference prepared a recommendation on amendment (#1) that was presented to the General Synod on Friday June 16, 1995. (See Report of the Committee of Reference, R-1, p. 412.)

*** Proposed amendment (#4) had a cost effect on the General Synod Operational Budget. (See Report of the Committee of Reference, p. 415.)

Amendments to The Bylaws of the General Synod and Special Rules of Order of the General Synod

The 1994 General Synod approved in first reading for recommendation to the 1995 General Synod the following revisions to The Bylaws of the General Synod and Special Rules of Order of the General Synod:

1. Editorial Revision to also Include Judicial as well as Disciplinary Responsibilities for the Commission on Judicial Business—BCO, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 6b (MGS 1994, R-3, p. 221).

2. General Synod to Include as Corresponding Delegates Moderators or Members of Seminary and Theological Education Agency Boards of Trustees—BCO, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 8, Section 10 (MGS 1994, p. 225).


5. General Synod to Include as Corresponding Delegate President of the Board of Pensions—BCO, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 13 (MGS 1994, R-11, p. 231).

R-7.
To declare the above amendments approved by the 1994 General Synod in first reading to be incorporated into the 1995 edition of The Bylaws of the General Synod. (ADOPTED)

Indexing Minutes of the General Synod

The Minutes of the General Synod are regularly consulted by a variety of groups and individuals seeking to gain an understanding on how and why the RCA arrived at particular positions. The minutes are also consulted to obtain information and background on many other subjects.
The Minutes of the General Synod were first indexed by Edward T. Corwin in 1906. Mildred Schuppert, former librarian of Western Theological Seminary, undertook the work of indexing the Minutes of the General Synod through 1977. Since 1977 the Minutes of the General Synod have not been indexed.

GSEC, at its October 1991 meeting, instructed the Office of Historical Services to index the Minutes of the General Synod through the year 1992 and to continue to index annually (beginning in 1993 and the years following) the Minutes of the General Synod. This project began in September 1992, and the Minutes of the General Synod for 1978-87 are now completed. It is anticipated to complete the indexing of the Minutes of General Synod by January 1, 1996.

Publish Annually Church Addresses and Telephone Numbers in Directory of the General Synod

The 1978 General Synod directed that the entire list of church addresses and telephone numbers be printed only once every three years in the RCA Directory of the General Synod (MGS 1978, R-11, p. 46).

Although the list does not change extensively, the status of newly organized RCA churches is delayed. In addition, each year there are quite a few changes in addresses and telephone numbers (especially area code changes recently). Also, the Office of the General Synod receives monthly requests from RCA ministers and staff employed by local congregations to publish this list annually since it is difficult to remember the specific year the church address and telephone number list is included in the Directory of the General Synod.

The increased costs are minimal for annual publication of church addresses and telephone numbers. The gathering of church addresses and telephone numbers annually is already in place. All RCA congregations are required to submit annually a Consistory Report Form that provides this information. Also, annual publication precludes time-consuming and extensive review of procedures used three years previously for printing the list. In other words, preparation of the list annually is more cost-efficient than preparation every three years.

R-8. To authorize the annual publication of RCA church addresses and telephone numbers in the Directory of the General Synod, beginning in 1995. (ADOPTED)

BUDGET

1996 General Synod Operational Budget

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

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

At its March 1995 meeting, GSC reviewed requests for the 1996 General Synod Operational Budget totaling $3,860,900.
During the General Synod meeting, several items calling for additions to the operational budget were presented. One specific item reflected the classes approval to increase the membership size of General Synod (see R-6, p. 51). Three other items calling for additions to the operational budget were also approved by General Synod (see Report of the Committee of Reference, p. 415 for a listing of all four items). After making the necessary adjustments in the proposed 1996 General Synod Operational Budget, R-9, R-10, and R-11 were presented to the General Synod for adoption. (See pp. 56-57.)

### 1996 GENERAL SYNOD OPERATIONAL BUDGET

#### I. General Synod Meeting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tr>
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#### II. Staffing Costs (General Synod Council Units)

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<tr>
<td>Wages and Salaries</td>
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<td>Depreciation</td>
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#### III. Committees/Commissions/Task Forces

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<td>General Synod Council Meetings</td>
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<td>Christian Unity</td>
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<td>Christian Worship</td>
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<td>Theology</td>
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<td>Women</td>
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<td>TF-Standards for Ministry</td>
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<td>Classes Stated Clerks Meeting</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<td><strong>286,835</strong></td>
<td><strong>270,500</strong></td>
<td><strong>278,500</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### IV. Publications

- **Church Herald**
  - 1994: $909,022
  - 1995: $913,000
  - Request: $963,000
  - Recommended: $963,000

- **Pioneer Mailing**
  - 1994: $0
  - 1995: $12,200
  - Request: $12,200
  - Recommended: $12,200

- **Book of Church Order (BCO)**
  - 1994: $0
  - 1995: $8,000
  - Request: $8,000
  - Recommended: $8,000

- **BCO Spanish Translation**
  - 1994: $0
  - 1995: $0
  - Request: $0
  - Recommended: $4,000

- **Directory to Widows/Widowers**
  - 1994: $0
  - 1995: $6,600
  - Request: $0
  - Recommended: $0

- **Perspectives**
  - 1994: $0
  - 1995: $6,000
  - Request: $6,000
  - Recommended: $6,000

- **Homosexuality Study**
  - 1994: $0
  - 1995: $0
  - Request: $0
  - Recommended: $0

- **Loose-leaf Liturgy (Reprint)**
  - 1994: $2,135
  - 1995: $5,000
  - Request: $5,000
  - Recommended: $5,000

- **Reprints (Miscellaneous)**
  - 1994: $0
  - 1995: $0
  - Request: $0
  - Recommended: $0

**Total for Publications**: $919,157

### V. Ecumenical Delegations & Agencies

- **NCC Governing Board**
  - 1994: $753
  - 1995: $4,000
  - Request: $4,000
  - Recommended: $4,000

- **Lutheran/Reformed Studies**
  - 1994: 1,348
  - 1995: 3,000
  - Request: 2,500
  - Recommended: 2,500

- **Christian Reformed Church**
  - 1994: $0
  - 1995: 500
  - Request: 200
  - Recommended: 200

- **Travel of Ecumenical Appointees**
  - 1994: 5,044
  - 1995: 11,000
  - Request: 13,000
  - Recommended: 13,000

- **Interpretive Speaking**
  - 1994: $0
  - 1995: 2,000
  - Request: 2,000
  - Recommended: 2,000

- **URCSA Delegate Travel**
  - 1994: $0
  - 1995: 3,000
  - Request: 0
  - Recommended: 0

- **WCC Central Committee Meeting**
  - 1994: $0
  - 1995: 5,000
  - Request: 0
  - Recommended: 0

- **WCC Church Relations**
  - 1994: $0
  - 1995: 0
  - Request: 2,000
  - Recommended: 2,000

- **WCC Assembly**
  - 1994: $0
  - 1995: 0
  - Request: 5,000
  - Recommended: 5,000

- **Ecumenical Contingency**
  - 1994: 6,704
  - 1995: 2,000
  - Request: 2,000
  - Recommended: 2,000

- **World Alliance of Reformed Churches**
  - 1994: 12,075
  - 1995: 12,075
  - Request: 12,650
  - Recommended: 12,650

- **Canada Council of Churches**
  - 1994: 941
  - 1995: 1,880
  - Request: 1,950
  - Recommended: 1,950

**Total for Ecumenical Delegations & Agencies**: $26,865

### VI. Other

- **Presidential Expenses**
  - 1994: $6,646
  - 1995: 15,000
  - Request: 10,000
  - Recommended: 10,000

- **Pastoral Coverage**
  - 1994: 1,079
  - 1995: 2,595
  - Request: 0
  - Recommended: 0

- **Theo. Ed. Bd. Travel (Reg. Synods)**
  - 1994: 42,294
  - 1995: 31,200
  - Request: 20,800
  - Recommended: 20,800

- **Seminarian Seminar**
  - 1994: 14,528
  - 1995: 17,500
  - Request: 15,000
  - Recommended: 15,000

- **Archival Program**
  - 1994: 46,303
  - 1995: 46,100
  - Request: 47,500
  - Recommended: 47,500

- **Assessment Contingency**
  - 1994: 9,270
  - 1995: 10,000
  - Request: 25,000
  - Recommended: 25,000

- **Pastor to Pastors**
  - 1994: 0
  - 1995: 0
  - Request: 30,000
  - Recommended: 30,000

- **Chaplains Conference**
  - 1994: 0
  - 1995: 0
  - Request: 17,500
  - Recommended: 17,500

- **Women in Ministry Events**
  - 1994: 0
  - 1995: 0
  - Request: 0
  - Recommended: 6,000

- **General Contingency**
  - 1994: 29,702
  - 1995: 14,000
  - Request: 10,000
  - Recommended: 10,000

- **Basic Service Costs**
  - 1994: 415,900
  - 1995: 495,300
  - Request: 497,900
  - Recommended: 509,580

**Total for Other**: $565,722

**Sub-totals**: $3,532,326, $3,829,945, $3,910,900, $3,995,580

**Less: Refund of Prior Year Surplus**: -108,500, -50,000, -50,000

**TOTAL**: $3,532,326, $3,721,445, $3,860,900, $3,945,580
*The 1996 Basic Service Costs of $509,580 represent contributions towards the operations of the following offices:

- Office of Finance: $174,100
- Office of Information Systems: 85,600
- Personnel Office: 28,300
- Stewardship and Communications: 221,580

NOTE: ASKINGS

1. It is important to note that the assessment amount requested does not meet all funding requirement needs for the denomination. The assessment amount covers primarily administrative and operational costs. The assessment does not cover the General Synod mission program. Please refer to the Financial Support section for a recommendation to approve 1996 income projections based on askings developed by participants in the General Synod mission program.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NCC</td>
<td>$29,750</td>
<td>$31,238</td>
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<td>WCC</td>
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<td>$26,618</td>
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R-9.
To approve the 1996 General Synod Operational Budget of $3,945,580, and further,

1. to set the 1996 per-active-confirmed member assessment for the General Synod Operational Budget at $20.85.* (ADOPTED)

*Based on 1994 active-confirmed membership of 189,338.

(The 1995 General Synod Operational Budget assessment was $19.31 per active-confirmed member.)

(A motion was made and supported “to set the 1996 per-active-confirmed member assessment for the General Synod Operational Budget at $20.00.” The motion LOST.)

Other 1996 General Synod Assessments

In addition to the General Synod Operational Budget, the General Synod has authorized other assessments to insure adequate funding for denominational concerns. In 1996 the preliminary amounts (based on 1993 active-confirmed membership of 192,750) pending the final total for 1994 active-confirmed membership is:

- $1.50 to provide sufficient retirement income for clergy who retired prior to 1973 (no increase)
- $3.00 to provide unified funding for the administration of theological education ($2.91 in 1994)
- $4.50 TOTAL
R-10.
To fix the budget for the other General Synod assessments (sufficient retirement income and theological education administration) per active-confirmed member assessment for 1996 at $4.50. (ADOPTED)

(The 1995 General Synod assessment amount for the above two items per-active-confirmed member was $4.41.)

Total 1996 General Synod Assessments

The total assessment for General Synod concerns in 1996 is $25.35 ($20.85 plus $4.50) per active-confirmed member. This is an approximate increase of 6.9 percent over the 1995 total of $23.72 ($19.31 plus $4.41) per active-confirmed member.

R-11.
To fix the total General Synod assessment budget per active-confirmed member assessment for 1996 at $25.35. (ADOPTED)

SUPERVISION

Personnel and Evaluation Committee

As of July 1, 1993, the Liaison Committee was replaced by the Personnel and Evaluation Committee. This committee is comprised of four members from the General Synod Council. The present members are Harry De Bruyn, chair; the Rev. Gregg Mast; Nancy Miller; and the Rev. John Elliott, Jr.

The committee has four principal accountabilities:

1. Oversight and evaluation of the general secretary.
2. Review and recommendation to GSC of personnel policies, including salary ranges and benefits for denominational staff.
3. Review and recommendation to GSC of salary ranges and benefits for missionaries.
4. Review and approval of salaries as provided in IV-4.c of the GSC Handbook.

The Personnel and Evaluation Committee functions within the policies approved by GSC. Among these policies are salary classifications which reflect the degree of responsibility carried by staff members filling the respective positions. Information concerning the classification of specific positions is available from the Office of Ministry and Personnel Services. A broad sketch of the classifications with salary ranges (including housing allowances) in effect in April of the current year appears below:

<table>
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<th>CLASSIFICATION</th>
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<th>mid-point</th>
<th>high</th>
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<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>$63,520</td>
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<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>57,170</td>
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<td>Professional Associates</td>
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<td>Secretarial and Office Staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>VIB</td>
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</tr>
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</table>

NOTE: Special circumstances may warrant hiring below the sixth range.
Classis and Regional Synod Stated Clerks Consultation

The role of the stated clerks in the Reformed Church in America is complex. The duties of a stated clerk extend far beyond clerical duties. Some of the varied roles of stated clerks are:

- Pivotal sources of information within the classis and regional synod on denominational matters.
- Conflict managers between churches and pastors.
- "Gatekeepers" for what ecclesiastical business matters will be placed on the agenda of a classis or regional synod meeting.
- Ecumenical officers.
- Pastor to pastors.
- Gatherers of denominational statistics.
- Processors of paperwork for the supervision of seminary students.
- Maintainers of all records, correspondence, and paperwork required by the denomination.
- Book of Church Order experts.

In September 1991 a letter and questionnaire was sent to stated clerks focusing on the role and duties of stated clerks and asking if there might be a need for an annual national stated clerks’ meeting. (Several national and regional meetings of stated clerks were held in the 1970s and early 1980s.)

In their responses the stated clerks clearly stated that a national meeting would be helpful in providing additional training in a variety of areas. They also indicated that a meeting would 1) provide an opportunity to reflect on the variety of leadership styles used in the different classes and regional synods by the stated clerks, 2) be a time to build community with colleagues, and 3) allow stated clerks to exchange other information on a formal and informal basis.

The stated clerks suggested that the meeting immediately prior to General Synod at the General Synod meeting site would be best for all concerned. At this meeting, stated clerks would be 1) alerted to particular issues coming before the General Synod, 2) provided additional background information and details on proposed amendments to the Book of Church Order, and 3) given the opportunity to discuss as a group directly with people from the General Synod office ways to facilitate further cooperation and communication between the General Synod, classes, and regional synods.

GSEC, at its January 1992 and October 1992 meetings, authorized the secretary for General Synod operations to annually bring together the stated clerks of classes and regional synods. Gatherings of stated clerks from classes and regional synods were then held June 3-5, 1993, in Vancouver, British Columbia, at the University of British Columbia, and June 2-4, 1994, in Pella, Iowa, on the campus of Central College.

Funding for this annual stated clerks’ meeting is provided by the General Synod operational budget, with the understanding that transportation expenses for this meeting are provided by the classes and regional synods. A gathering of stated clerks was held June 8-10, 1995, in Mahwah, New Jersey.

Staff Consulting Group

The Staff Consulting Group was organized at the Consultation on Funding in 1973 and approved by the General Synod in that same year. The membership consists of the general secretary, the directors of the seven GSC committees, the regional synod executives, the
RCA seminary and RCA college presidents, the director of the Theological Education Agency, the executive director of Reformed Church Women's Ministries, and the editor of the *Church Herald*. The president of General Synod is invited to participate as an observer.

The Staff Consulting Group met on March 21, 1995, in Chicago, Illinois. A report on the work of the Task Force on Standards for the Preparation for Professional Ministry was presented (see Report of the Task Force on Standards for the Preparation for Professional Ministry in the Church Vocations section). There was also discussion on the relationship of the RCA and RCA colleges as expressed in the “Covenant of Mutual Responsibilities” adopted by the 1969 General Synod (*MGS 1969*, pp. 64-70) and reaffirmed by the 1990 General Synod (*MGS 1990*, pp. 138-42).

**Council of Unit Representatives and Regional Synod Executives (C.O.U.R.S.E.)**

The Council of Unit Representatives and Regional Synod Executives (C.O.U.R.S.E.) was organized in 1993. The membership consists of the general secretary, the regional synod executives, and the directors of the seven GSC committees.

C.O.U.R.S.E. met on June 20, 1994, in Chicago, Illinois; January 16, 1995, in Mahwah, New Jersey; and March 21-22, 1995, in Chicago, Illinois. Discussed during the past year at these meetings was the relationship of the regional synods to classes and the denomination and the status of the regional synods under the new structure of the RCA, effective July 1, 1993.

**1994 Statistical Report of the RCA**

**SUMMARY OF THE STATISTICAL REPORT OF THE REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA FOR THE YEAR ENDING 12/31/1994**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>1992</th>
<th>1993</th>
<th>1994</th>
<th>Increase or Decrease</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Churches</td>
<td>970</td>
<td>966</td>
<td>956</td>
<td>(10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Church Households</td>
<td>134,408</td>
<td>132,345</td>
<td>124,334</td>
<td>(8,011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Active-Confirmed Members</td>
<td>194,528</td>
<td>192,730</td>
<td>189,338</td>
<td>(3,392)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Inactive Members</td>
<td>47,068</td>
<td>44,478</td>
<td>43,634</td>
<td>(844)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Unconfirmed-Baptized members</td>
<td>86,251</td>
<td>86,047</td>
<td>83,154</td>
<td>(2,893)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Total Membership</td>
<td>327,847</td>
<td>323,255</td>
<td>316,126</td>
<td>(7,129)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Adherents</td>
<td>39,777</td>
<td>41,316</td>
<td>43,517</td>
<td>2,201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Average Worship Attendance</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Received on Confession</td>
<td>8,463</td>
<td>8,283</td>
<td>8,112</td>
<td>(171)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Received on Certificate</td>
<td>5,049</td>
<td>4,806</td>
<td>4,903</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Transferred</td>
<td>4,314</td>
<td>4,125</td>
<td>4,080</td>
<td>(45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Deceased</td>
<td>3,013</td>
<td>2,990</td>
<td>2,953</td>
<td>(37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Other Removals from Roll</td>
<td>8,380</td>
<td>9,278</td>
<td>6,842</td>
<td>(2,436)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Adults Baptized</td>
<td>1,143</td>
<td>1,150</td>
<td>1,132</td>
<td>(18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Sunday Church School</td>
<td>99,634</td>
<td>97,938</td>
<td>98,189</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. New Membership Classes</td>
<td>12,252</td>
<td>11,664</td>
<td>11,769</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Other Educational Programs</td>
<td>88,531</td>
<td>90,498</td>
<td>89,607</td>
<td>(891)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*19a. RCA Assessments* $1,993,475 $2,100,303 $7,957,511 $5,857,208

*19b. RCA Contributions* $8,249,110 $7,975,984 $12,223,851 $4,247,867

1993-1994 Increase or Decrease


**GENERAL SYNOD/JUNE 1995**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>1992</th>
<th>1993</th>
<th>1994</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20. Other Contributions</td>
<td>$10,226,361</td>
<td>$10,307,516</td>
<td>$8,479,849 (Decrease $1,827,667)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Regional Synod and Classical Assessments/Mission</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Denominational Fund Drives</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>$179,477,116</td>
<td>$190,677,287</td>
<td>$185,496,616 (Decrease $5,180,671)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Items 19-23 were revised in the 1994 version of the Consistorial Report Form.
** 1994 amount included in 19a.
*** 1994 amount included in 19b.

**Organized**

Desert Winds Community Church, Palmdale, California (1/94)
Road Home Church, Eden Prairie, Minnesota (10/94)

**Disbanded**

Bedminster Reformed Church, Bedminster, New Jersey (1/94)
Ebenezer Reformed Church, Woodstock, Ontario (3/94)
Christ Community Reformed Church, Farmington Hills, Michigan (7/94)
Anchor Christian Church, Mobile, Alabama (10/94)
Open Door Community Church, Ontario, California (11/94)
Christ Community Church, Peoria, Illinois (12/94)
Neighborhood Reformed Church, Ridgefield Park, New Jersey (12/94)
Mission Emmanuel, Norwalk, California (12/94)

**Merged**

Fairview Reformed Church and Bethany Reformed Church became Orchard Hill Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan (9/94)
Peace Reformed Church and Lao Community Reformed Church became Peace Reformed Church, Eagan, Minnesota (9/94)

**Transferred to Another Denomination**

New Life Community Church, Surrey, British Columbia (4/94)
Hawthorn Community Church, Vernon Hills, Illinois (9/94)

**Appointment of General Synod Treasurer and Assistant Secretary**

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

R-12.
To appoint Andrew Lee treasurer of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America. (ADOPTED)
In accordance with its corporate bylaws, the General Synod may elect or appoint such other officers as the needs of the corporation may from time to time require (Corporate Bylaws of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, Article V, Section 5.01). In order for the Rev. David Schreuder, acting director of Policy, Planning, and Administration Services and secretary for General Synod operations, to continue to have authority to sign legal documents for the corporation of the General Synod, it is necessary to approve the following recommendation.

R-13.
To appoint the Rev. David Schreuder assistant secretary of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America. (ADOPTED)
REPORT OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The Board of Directors hereby submits its annual report for the calendar year 1994. This is the 175th year since the incorporation of General Synod by a Special Act of the Legislature of the State of New York in 1819.

As with any organization, the Reformed Church in America depends heavily on the services provided by its financial and computer offices to keep operations running efficiently and on track. The Office of Finance, together with the Office of Information Services (OIS), is committed to providing quality accounting, investment, recording, data processing, and other assorted administrative services to support the operations of the General Synod Council, Reformed Church Women's Ministries, the Board of Pensions, the RCA Building and Extension Fund, and the RCA Foundation. Selected financial and advisory services are also offered to other denominational agencies and institutions, including the regional synods, the classes, the seminaries, and individual congregations.

Dedicated personnel carry out the daily tasks that are so essential in assisting the RCA to further the work of mission and ministry. The treasurer is charged with the primary responsibility for the oversight of all activities related to the Office of Finance and to the Office of Information Systems. (Beginning September 1, 1995, the director of Policy, Planning, and Administration Services will be responsible for the oversight of the Office of Information Systems.)

Within the Office of Finance, individuals handle a wide range of tasks, including: 1) the proper recording of contributions and other income, 2) the payment of all bills, including the program expenditures that make up the RCA’s total mission worldwide, 3) the exercising of necessary budget and cash controls, 4) the preparation of loan documentation, 5) the preparation of payroll for RCA staff and missionaries, and 6) other activities essential to the day-to-day functioning of the church.

During 1994 there were numerous changes incorporated into the financial reporting structure of the RCA. The first change occurred because the General Program Council (GPC) ceased to exist July 1, 1993. The GPC and General Synod Executive Committee were consolidated into one organization called the General Synod Council (GSC), effective July 1, 1993 (MGS 1992, R-6, p. 51). The seven committees/units within the GSC were also new, although they somewhat paralleled the previous three GPC divisions.

The second major change will occur with the formation of the RCA Foundation (see Bylaws of RCA Foundation in the Church Order section.) All endowments, legacies, trusts, and life income gifts will be grouped together in the RCA Foundation, rather than being fragmented into many different areas of responsibility.

The third important change occurred when approval was granted by the 1994 General Synod to consolidate the Church Building Fund and the RCA Extension Foundation (MGS 1994, R-13, p. 233). Although these two loan funds remain distinct and unique, they are now incorporated under one name, namely the RCA Building and Extension Fund, Inc.

The above changes necessitated significant modification to the RCA account structure. In fact, the modifications were extensive enough to warrant the implementation of a new software accounting package (American Fundware) in January 1994. This transition to a new accounting package could have caused serious disruption in services. However, to the credit of RCA staff, the transition occurred with little noticeable degradation in service.
Although many items dealing with the fiscal operations of the Reformed Church in America will be reported elsewhere to the General Synod, a concentrated overview of the areas of responsibility for both the Office of Finance and the Office of Information Systems is presented here for information.

FINANCIAL SUMMARY - 1994

In an attempt to provide some idea of the annual activity by the various agencies serviced by the Office of Finance, listed below is a summary of the total revenue and expenses for the calendar year 1994.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fund/Program</th>
<th>Revenue</th>
<th>Expenses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>General Synod Council</strong></td>
<td><strong>1994</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operating Fund</td>
<td>$12,263,762</td>
<td>$12,450,777</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribution Center Fund</td>
<td>1,560,541</td>
<td>1,709,095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Development Fund</td>
<td>33,960</td>
<td>5,550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPIM Fund Drive</td>
<td>135,171</td>
<td>354,934</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$9.8 by '98 Fund Drive</td>
<td>546,190</td>
<td>462,801</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grand Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>$14,539,624</strong></td>
<td><strong>$14,983,157</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reformed Church Women's Ministries</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Fund</td>
<td>$213,903</td>
<td>$213,207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assembly Funds</td>
<td>5,492</td>
<td>44,332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth Marcus Scholarship Fund</td>
<td>4,160</td>
<td>2,199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grand Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>$223,555</strong></td>
<td><strong>$259,738</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Board of Pensions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Fund</td>
<td>$1,573,497</td>
<td>$1,586,449</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annuity Fund</td>
<td>13,303,893</td>
<td>14,278,728</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insurance Fund</td>
<td>9,307,498</td>
<td>8,105,213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grand Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>$24,184,888</strong></td>
<td><strong>$23,970,390</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RCA Foundation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legacy Fund</td>
<td>$314,221</td>
<td>$314,221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endowment and Trust Fund</td>
<td>959,714</td>
<td>950,875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey Fund</td>
<td>23,966</td>
<td>21,956</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gift Annuity Fund</td>
<td>65,805</td>
<td>96,707</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revocable Gift Fund</td>
<td>14,081</td>
<td>13,218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grand Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>$1,377,787</strong></td>
<td><strong>$1,396,977</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RCA Building and Extension Fund, Inc.</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extension Foundation Fund</td>
<td>$978,756</td>
<td>$914,496</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church Building Fund</td>
<td>1,179,119</td>
<td>231,762</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grand Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>$2,157,875</strong></td>
<td><strong>$1,146,258</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RCA Cash Program</strong></td>
<td><strong>$1,803,777</strong></td>
<td><strong>$1,803,777</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grand Totals                                      | $44,287,506  | $43,560,297  |
RCA CASH PROGRAM

The Trustees of the General Program Council designed the Cash Program in 1979, primarily as a means of providing capital for the RCA Extension Foundation. In addition to raising new capital for the building of churches, the program makes it possible for the local congregations, classes, agencies, and regional synods to receive a relatively high yield for the short-term investment of surplus funds.

Up to 40 percent of the monies received into the Cash Program are deposited with the Extension Foundation. The actual percentage varies, based on the immediate cash needs of the foundation. In 1994 the foundation had few demands on its cash. As a result, the percentage of funds deposited with the Extension Foundation was only 6 percent in 1994.

The balance of monies on deposit in the Cash Program (94 percent) is invested in outside markets. These investments are restricted to debt securities, money market funds, certificates of deposit, U.S. Government obligations, prime commercial paper/bonds of high quality, and options and futures.

The minimum investment in the program is $1,000. The fund operates like a money market fund, with net earnings distributed to individual participants on a quarterly basis.

Over the past several years, and again in 1994, the Cash Program has exceeded the rate of return offered in the marketplace for similar types of investment vehicles. The effect this has had on the fund is that entities tend to get into the program and stay there. The amount of outside deposits in the fund grew from $161 million in 1993 to $18 million in 1994.

Despite the influx of new cash during the year, the rate of return remained constant. The net return for outside investors during 1994 was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quarter</th>
<th>Rate (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st Quarter</td>
<td>6.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Quarter</td>
<td>5.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Quarter</td>
<td>6.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th Quarter</td>
<td>6.29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since the hiring of a managing director of investments in 1992, increasing amounts of the Cash Program portfolio were allotted to in-house management. As of December 1994 all investments in the RCA Cash Program (a total of $27 million) are under direct management of the RCA’s managing director of investments.

During the past year a conservative approach was taken in establishing a $400,000 reserve to allow for asset value fluctuation. Although this dollar amount does not encompass the entire difference created by a market-to-cost comparison at December 31, 1994, it is believed by both the RCA managing director of investments and the independent auditors that the assets have not been permanently impaired.

Overall, the RCA Cash Program continues to provide for the cash needs of the Extension Foundation; and, at the same time, the RCA Cash Program has been able to provide an attractive rate of return for its participants.

REFORMED CHURCH INVESTMENT PROGRAM

In 1994 the Reformed Church in America integrated the management of its permanent investment funds (endowment funds) in the newly formed RCA Foundation. Participation in the Reformed Church Investment Program is open to any organization or group affiliated with the Reformed Church in America. Investments in, or withdrawals from, the program can be made at the end of each calendar quarter. Each participating organization must agree to the principles and practices of the program.
There are currently three investment advisors serving the Reformed Church Investment Program. They are the Old Kent Bank & Trust Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan; Scudder, Stevens & Clark, New York, New York; and National Westminster (NatWest) Bank, Jersey City, New Jersey. The portfolio managed by Old Kent is largely comprised of fixed-income securities; Scudder, on the other hand, manages a balanced portfolio consisting of both equity and debt securities. NatWest holds a small portfolio for endowments that are legally restricted to remain in a New Jersey banking institution. The total market value of assets at December 31, 1994 are listed below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Investment Advisor</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Old Kent Bank &amp; Trust Co.</td>
<td>$3,026,125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scudder, Stevens &amp; Clark</td>
<td>7,536,928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Westminster Bank</td>
<td>483,998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interchurch Center Bonds</td>
<td>675,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mortgages</td>
<td>113,294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCA Cash Program</td>
<td>93,794</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$11,929,139</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The program has enjoyed double digit rates of return over the past several years. In 1994, however, it appears that the fund yielded approximately 8.25 percent. Annually, each October, the General Synod Council establishes a rate of payout to be used for the subsequent year. During 1994 the established rate of payout was 8.00 percent. This payout was paid in four equal quarterly installments.

The Security National Bank in Sioux City, Iowa, provides accounting and custodial services for the securities held in the RCA’s various endowment accounts. Appointed investment advisors execute trades through Security National. Security National was also the recipient of all dividends and interest earnings from endowment fund portfolios.

**ANNUAL AUDIT**

The 1994 financial statements of the Reformed Church in America are examined and certified by Lambrides, Lamos, Moulthrop & Co., Certified Public Accountants, and are presented in person by the auditors at the spring meeting of the General Synod Council. Copies of the annual audit are reprinted in the Minutes of General Synod and are also available to members of the Reformed Church in America by calling the Office of Finance at (800) 722-9977 or (212) 870-2754.

**BOARD OF PENSIONS INVESTMENTS**

At December 31, 1994, the Board of Pensions’ asset base totaled over $214 million. These assets represent four separate funds within the Board of Pensions. The first and largest of the four funds is the Contributory Annuity Fund (CAF). About one-third of the assets of the CAF is invested in Guaranteed Investment Contracts (GICs) with nine insurance companies and one Bank Investment Contract (BIC). GICs are backed by the assets of the issuing carrier and provide for both a guaranteed rate of return while the contract is in effect and for the repayment of the full principal plus accumulated earnings at maturity. Many of the Board of Pensions contracts were negotiated in the late 1980s and have been providing very attractive rates of return between 9 and 10 percent.

Supplementing GICs, the CAF has a broad range of fixed-income holdings, such as U.S. Treasuries, Government-backed Obligations, and Corporate Bonds. Since hiring a managing director of investments in 1992, the RCA has begun to manage a share of its funds in-house. When outside investments reach maturity, they are turned over to the RCA managing director of investments, who in turn invests the funds in instruments offered by the marketplace.
The Canadian portion of CAF operates under a group annuity contract with the Laurentian/Imperial Insurance Company in Toronto, Ontario. The contract was formerly maintained with the Canadian affiliate of Travelers Insurance Company, which sold out its interests to Laurentian/Imperial about six years ago. The yield on this fund varies monthly with market conditions.

The second fund within the Board of Pensions is the Annuity Bond Fund (ABF). This fund was established in 1981 (BOP 81-16) and was designed to provide a member of CAF with an alternative other than purchasing an annuity with the accumulation in his or her account at the time of retirement. In the 1980s the relatively high interest rates available made it possible for a retiree, during the period between retirement and the time when he or she reached the age of seventy, to invest his or her funds in a fixed-return security, such as a treasury note, at a much higher yield than could be realized at that time from an annuity purchased from an insurance company. At age seventy, when the security matured, the principal was then to be used to purchase an annuity, which because of the individual’s shorter life expectancy, would provide a greater monthly income than one purchased at age sixty-five.

Recent changes in federal regulations and interest rates have led to a decrease in the number of those investing in ABF. The more popular choice is to remain in CAF until mandatory requirements force participants reaching the age of seventy-and-one-half to purchase an instrument of annuitized value.

An additional adaptation came into effect when the Board of Pensions and the General Synod approved the inauguration of the Support/Investment Plan in 1985 (MGS 1985, R-12, p. 182). This approval created both the third and fourth funds within the Board of Pensions. Under the terms of the plan, the retiree, upon reaching the age of seventy-and-one-half, has the option of leaving his or her money in an RCA-managed fund rather than automatically using his or her account balance to purchase an annuity contract with an outside firm.

The Pension Support Fund (PSF) is one component of the Support/Investment Plan. Amounts in this fund accumulate earnings; and payments to participants are paid in equal installments for a period determined by his or her actuarially determined life expectancy utilizing an average interest rate of 8 percent. Both the interest and principal are amortized over the actuarial life span of the participant so as to achieve equal quarterly payments. In other words, this instrument acts similar to the purchase of an annuity contract. The advantage to investing in the PSF, instead of purchasing an annuity in the outside market, is that upon death the residual book value of the annuity is paid to the estate, not consumed by the issuer of the annuity.

The Pension Investment Fund (PIF) is the other component of the Support/Investment Plan. Amounts in this fund also accumulate earnings, but payments to participants are based on the actual earnings in the fund. These funds are typically invested in “growth” type investments, while at the same time, a conservative distribution is made to the retirees on a quarterly basis. In 1994 the distribution payments were made using a 7.75 percent rate of return. Similar to the Pension Support Fund, at the time of death the value of the investment (original book value in this case) is paid to the estate of the retiree, thus leaving behind a financial legacy.

MISSION INVESTMENTS

In 1970 the General Synod Executive Committee (GSEC) established a mission investment policy which directed the General Program Council (GPC) to make “available for mission investment purposes 10 percent of the appropriated and unappropriated operating reserve” (GSBC 70-50). The main operating criteria for this policy was to assist projects owned and/
or controlled by “minority” individuals, groups, or local organizations whose goal was to assist in building economic participation or growth in the community. Maximum returns on investments are not the main objective of mission investments.

At present, mission investments in seventeen banks, credit unions, and other organizations total $421,837. Recipients of mission investment monies include firms such as the South Shore Bank located in an African-American section of Chicago; the Lumbee Bank of Pembroke, North Carolina, which serves a population primarily made up of members of the Lumbee Indian Nation; and the ecumenical coalition called the Brooklyn Ecumenical Cooperative/Credit Union Mustard Seed Fund located in Brooklyn, New York, whose primary goal is the economic development and empowerment of the primarily African-American and Hispanic communities in this area through development of low and moderate income housing.

ASSESSMENTS

Ninety-six percent of the General Synod assessment giving for 1994 was collected by the due date of December 31, 1994. Of the outstanding 4 percent, all but 1 percent was received early in January 1995. The total assessment for 1994 was $22.98 per active-confirmed member. Of this amount, $18.66 was designated for the General Synod Operational Budget, $1.50 was designated for the Board of Pensions General Fund, and $2.82 was designated for the administration of theological education. The general secretary reported on classes payments of 1994 assessments.

IRS GROUP TAX EXEMPTION

As the denomination’s parent organization, the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America was granted a group tax exemption by the commissioner of the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) on January 17, 1986. The exemption covers all participating congregations, agencies, and educational institutions within the RCA that have asked to be included.

As one of its conditions, the commissioner of the IRS requires the RCA to file an annual update listing churches and/or agencies that fall under the 501(c)(3) designation of the IRS code. A complete listing is supplied to the IRS incorporating any additions, terminations, or revisions under the RCA group exemption umbrella. The ninth such report, filed with the commission in August 1994, listed five newly formed churches to be added, five name/address changes, and three churches to be removed from the roster.

During recent years the IRS has directed increased attention to its review of church activities and related filing requirements. As a result, the Office of Finance has experienced steadily growing requests, not only for advisory assistance in dealing with tax-related matters, but also for documentary evidence attesting to a church’s/agency’s tax exempt status under section 501(c)(3) of the IRS code.

OFFICE OF INFORMATION SYSTEMS

Beginning with a $350,000 proposal in October 1992 to the General Synod Executive Committee, the Office of Information Systems (OIS) embarked on a total revamp of the RCA’s computer systems. The revamp sought to overhaul the financial accounting system, RCA Distribution Center software, TRAVARCA media reservation process, and the RCA pledge accounting and database tracking systems.

After two and one-half years, significant progress has been made in almost all of the above named areas. The RCA Distribution Center and TRAVARCA are running well on a day-to-day operational basis. (TRAVARCA, however, has a number of other outstanding issues
which the RCA and the software vendor remain committed to resolving to everyone’s satisfaction.) In addition, OIS has completely overhauled its hardware plant, placing local area networks and personal computers at the disposal of nearly every RCA staff member. The introduction of Novell’s Local Area Networks (LANs) has made OIS less dependent on a single software and hardware vendor and better able to take advantage of newer technologies.

The ambitious scope of the revamp project, however, made it necessary to expand significantly the original implementation time estimate. While it was originally thought a two-year implementation plan would be adequate, it now appears that the entire revamping will not be completed until the end of 1995. Most of 1994 was spent installing new hardware and bringing the new fund accounting system online for the Office of Finance. The disbursement aspect of the new fund accounting system has worked well almost from the beginning. In addition, the integration of the RCA’s cash program processing with the new system has been completed. The final task is to integrate the contribution processing system, which is not yet complete, with the fund accounting system. Because the contribution and pledge-tracking functions are so important and fundamental, the total revamping project implementation schedule remains far short of its original and ambitious goal.

Due to financial stress, the loss of the pledge accounting software vendor, Application Systems Group (ASG), was the most significant blow to the OIS revamping project in 1994. For those unfamiliar with software and its support, having the vendor of OIS’s commercial software package go out of business is rather like a parent dying before the child has been raised to adulthood. The child is left as an orphan. However, in negotiating the contract, the RCA had the foresight to insert a source code acquisition clause that enabled OIS to acquire the human readable code from which the system programs are created. Possessing the source code allows OIS to enhance and modify the system even without vendor support. In addition, ASG has also provided OIS with software support for the remainder of 1995. It is hoped that this will be enough time to work through all of the serious bugs in the revamping program.

The other significant challenge remaining is to clean the RCA name and address database now that it has moved into a new format. Unfortunately, the only truly effective way to clean the list is to have RCA staff go through all of the records and perform the required fix-up. Since the RCA list has approximately 186,000 records, this is no trivial task. Also, the Church Herald uses about 120,000 records of the total record base for mailing the magazine, and the resulting mailing list quality has fallen short of the magazine’s expectations. This has caused disappointment and tension. The Office of Information Systems is currently working to resolve the problems and hopes that the Church Herald mailing list quality will be up to expectations by its May 1995 mailing.

In summary, while much has been done, there is much yet to do. Because the implementation of a new computer system involves hardware, software, and the modification of human processes, every new system is, in fact, an original. Patience, industry, and tenacity are the salient characteristics necessary to achieve the desired ends. The Office of Information Systems remains committed to the goals of the revamping project. With the continued support of the RCA, OIS expects to produce the desired results by the end of 1995.
REPORTS ON CHRISTIAN ACTION

Report of the Commission on Christian Action

The Commission on Christian Action met in two stated sessions on October 21 and 22, 1994, at the Alma Mathews House in New York City; and March 3 and 4, 1995, at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan.

RESPONSES TO THE "PHYSICIAN ASSISTED SUICIDE" STUDY PAPER

The Christian Action Commission appreciates the thoughtful consideration given to the study paper entitled "A Christian Response to Physician Assisted Suicide" (MGS 1994, pp. 70-77). Several persons or groups responded with brief letters or longer, detailed arguments and suggestions for changes or improvements. The process affirms the commission's sense that position papers like this can be productively developed through a process of conversation and dialogue with the denomination. As a result of this dialogical process, the commission expects the final product will be a paper that is more useful and that more accurately represents the moral stance of the church.

Summary of Responses

There were a variety of responses that the commission could not begin to summarize with any completeness. The commission notes the responders pull in different directions:

Some responders said the paper is not sufficiently unambiguous in its disapproval of physician assisted suicide, and called for absolute condemnation. Responses along these lines often called for additional biblical reflections and additional theological considerations to make it even clearer that Christians can never condone physician assisted suicide. Respondents taking this position also often advocated the legislation of this moral position as an act of moral courage in a society of moral chaos. Finally, many argued assisted suicide is a start down a slippery slope toward "inevitable" consequences that ought rightly to be feared.

Others said the paper's clear condemnation of physician assisted suicide overlooks important reasons and Christians should hesitate to make a blanket condemnation. They claimed the paper treated death as an evil rather than as a transition to eternal life with God. Others claimed the paper failed to give adequate consideration to the uniqueness of individual experience. Some said the paper took the easy way out by emphasizing guilt over grace, and some said the paper ignores God's concern for the quality of one's life.

Reading this broad range of perspectives leaves the commission with a challenging task. It is obvious that the respondents would disagree with each other over a number of fundamental issues and would debate the facts and logic of each other's positions. While some respondents wanted the paper to be more ambiguous, others were uncomfortable with the ambiguity they saw in the paper. Obviously, the paper could not be revised in a way that would please every respondent. Of course, that is not the commission's task. The commission's task is to formulate a statement for General Synod consideration that states the position in a way faithful to Christian moral convictions and to do so in light of the wisdom gained from the commission's conversation with the larger church.

The commission was troubled by the spirit of some responses. There was obviously much to disagree with in the paper, as would be the case when any moral issue is discussed at length. For this reason the commission believed it was important to say to the church, "You may not
agree with this. If not, please tell us and explain why.” Such a process reflected the
commission’s genuine interest in listening to voices other than its own. So the commission
was a bit surprised and troubled by some descriptions of the paper. For example, the
commission was accused of showing a “failure of nerve” and engaging in a “compromise of
the worst sort.” The paper was described as a “weak, compromising, and incomplete report.”
It was implied that in writing this paper the commission was joining ranks with “abortionists,
homosexualists, AIDS and safe sex advocates, and others who advocate sexually promiscuous
lifestyles.” When engaged in a process of serious moral discernment, the commission urges
members of the RCA to treat brothers and sisters in Christ with whom one disagrees in ways
that show a deep respect not only for what they believe is the truth, but for people who are
seeking to live faithfully by it.

Next Steps

One respondent suggested the commission replace the paper with the following two-
sentence position statement: “The Reformed Church in America believes in the sanctity of
God’s word as given to us in the Holy Bible. All human life is God-given, therefore to assist
in or support physician assisted suicide is clearly against God’s will and is a sin.”

Why wouldn’t the Commission on Christian Action come back to the General Synod with
such a recommendation, even if it might reflect the thinking of a majority? The commission
writes papers because its members believe the church and its social witness are best served
when the commission members work together to articulate the biblically grounded reasons
that led to the commission’s conclusions and recommendations. The commission believes
its commitments need to be explained in a clear and compelling manner, and that it needs to
be able to explain and defend them in the public square. That is why the Commission on
Christian Action needs a careful articulation of the reasons for its moral commitments about
assisted suicide, and not simply a statement of the conclusions others have reached by a
process that remains hidden.

For this reason the commission seeks to continue the process of revising the paper on assisted
suicide in response to the suggestions received. The commission believes that to do so
underscores the importance of a community of faith grappling together with issues of
significance confronting church and society.

➢ The advisory committee recommended to amend R-1:

R-1.
To invite RCA congregations, consistories, classes, and other groups
of RCA members to continue to give thoughtful consideration to the
study paper “A Christian Response to Physician-Assisted Suicide”
(MGS 1994, pp. 70-77); and further,

to submit responses to the Commission on Christian Action before
January 1, 1996; and further,

to instruct the Commission on Christian Action to revise the paper, “A
Christian Response to Physician-Assisted Suicide,” for presentation to
the 1996 General Synod, giving particular attention to making a clear
and compelling statement that reflects the paper’s opposition to physician-
assisted suicide on the basis of biblical and theological rationale.
(ADOPTED AS AMENDED)∗

∗Addition is in light-face type.
Reasons:

1. While the paper in its present form has been helpful in encouraging discussion of the issue, there is now a need for a clear statement of the RCA's opposition to physician-assisted suicide.

2. The Commission on Christian Action needs time to formulate a carefully articulated biblical and theological rationale for the RCA's opposition to physician-assisted suicide.

WELFARE REFORM

Introduction

Among the hotly debated topics on the United States' national agenda is welfare reform. Some of the primary reasons for the desire to reform the system of assisting the needy are the burgeoning number of out-of-wedlock pregnancies, the rise in the number of people receiving public assistance, and concern that the welfare system entraps and harms the poor more than it helps. There is a rising tide of indignation based on the assumption that people would rather receive assistance from the government than work to support themselves.

From 1950 to 1991, the percentage of out-of-wedlock births rose from less than 5 percent of all births to nearly 30 percent. Fully one-half of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) goes to support families started by teenaged mothers. In the mid-1960s, 4.2 million people in the U.S. were on AFDC. In 1994, 14 million people in the U.S. received AFDC.

It is clear from the statistics that the U.S. faces an enormous and ever-growing problem. Many voices are being raised from all quarters that something is terribly wrong. Most agree that the system of welfare is failing. As proposals seem to come every day to solve the problem, the church needs to listen carefully to the debate and to make its voice heard.

The church's role in the public debate is to be an advocate of the poor, as exemplified by the prophets of old, like Amos. Governments today have responsibilities similar to Israel's kings. The psalmist prays, "May he [the king] defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor" (Ps. 72:4). While it may or may not be true that the current welfare system is actually doing more harm than good, the church must stand for justice as the nation seeks its future course in aiding those in poverty.

Whose fault is it?

Stentorian voices are blaming the "liberal social policies" of the past for the problem. Citing such failures as subsidized housing that dumps the poor all together in housing projects, welfare policies that enable young single mothers to start their own households, and subsidies that seem to favor single head of household families over married heads of households, these voices blame the very programs that were designed to assist the poor. According to this perspective, welfare not only robs people of the incentive to work, but actually encourages people to seek out the aid of the state, leading to dependency.

The fact is that an individual who grew up on welfare is four times more likely than the general population to receive welfare in adulthood. However, 75 percent of people who grew up on welfare do not go on welfare as adults. Parents who grew up in homes which received welfare at some point are more likely to receive welfare as adults than those who were never on welfare, but at about the same rate as parents who grew up in poor homes without welfare.
Other people blame the U.S. economic system of capitalism. They contend the system leads inevitably to injustice and certain poverty for the disenfranchised. Some of the reasons for being excluded from the “American Dream” and consigned to poverty and hence welfare include: racism, growing up in poverty, lack of education, dearth of marketable skills, mental illness, physical impairments, and lack of opportunity.

The fact is that African-Americans on average still earn only 70 percent of the wages of white people. The minimum wage is at its lowest level in purchasing power since 1967. A family of four which depends on a minimum wage earner for its income falls well below the poverty line.

Finally, some people blame the poor themselves. Declining morality gets the blame for the number of out-of-wedlock births. Irresponsibility and laziness get the blame for the dramatic increase in the number of people receiving AFDC. In the eyes of many people, the poor prefer the relaxed lifestyle of waiting each month for the welfare check to arrive so that they can be idle.

The fact is that a very small minority of those on welfare are long-term dependents on the system. Most receive benefits for a period of less than three years. Thus, the welfare system primarily works as the safety net it was intended to be, by helping families over a transition period of time when family and job disruptions have lowered their incomes below the poverty line. Furthermore, only a minority of those whose incomes make them eligible for welfare actually sign up to apply for benefits. (In 1992 only 37.3 percent of those eligible for cash public assistance actually applied for and received benefits. When non-cash benefits are included, the figure rises to 63 percent.)

"Always . . . the poor" (Matt. 26:11; Deut. 15:11)

The Scriptures are clearly concerned about poverty and the poor. The Anchor Bible Dictionary notes:

Poverty is a decisive issue in the prophetic and legal institutions [of the Old Testament]. It is here we are brought face-to-face with the harsh living conditions of the poor: hunger and thirst, homelessness, economic exploitation, legal injustices, lack of sufficient farm land.¹

The Old Testament Scriptures bring Christians face to face with the poor in the U.S. as well. See for example Amos’ denunciation of those who want to get on with doing business at the expense of caring for the poor (Amos 8:4-6).

Passages in the New Testament also are reminders of the presence of the poor and a Christian’s obligation to them. For example, James 2:1-7 takes the church seriously to task for making distinctions between people on the basis of their economic condition and denounces the exploitation of the poor in no uncertain terms.

Three of the Gospels tell the interesting story of Jesus and the jar of costly perfume (Matt. 26, Mark 14, and John 12). As Matthew tells it, Jesus was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper when a woman came in with an alabaster jar of very expensive ointment and poured it on Jesus’ head. The disciples were indignant, and asked, "Why this waste?" They reasoned it would be a better thing to sell the precious ointment and give the cash to the poor. After saying the woman had done a beautiful thing, Jesus told the disciples, "For you will always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me" (Matt. 26:11).

"Always . . . the poor." Whatever inflection (frustration, resignation, sadness, or anger) our Lord had in his voice when he said "you will always have the poor with you," will never be
known. But this is known: his grim prediction has been unfailingly true. Even in a society as fabulously wealthy as the U.S., still there are the “haves” and the “have-nots.” Every society is plagued by poverty.

One may discuss at length the causes of poverty, but whether or not one reaches a consensus, the poor are with us today and, it seems, always shall be. So whatever poverty’s cause we, like every generation in every society, must decide our response to it.

Although the principal part of Jesus’ exchange at Simon’s house was not to articulate a Christian position on poverty, it is important to note that he was quoting a famous passage of the Law which did deal with the responsibility of God’s people for aiding the poor (Deut. 15:1-11). The Deuteronomy passage begins with a promise that if Israel obeys the Law, “there will be no one in need among you.” However, the passage goes on to say the poor shall never cease from the land. Therefore, “open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land” (Deut. 15:11). Thus, far from giving an excuse for throwing our hands up in the air over perpetual problems of poverty, the Scriptures insist the presence of poor people in one’s midst is always a challenge to Christian mercy and a test of social justice. Whatever economic, social, psychological, or natural causes may bring poverty to some, its ubiquitous nature is the result of human sinfulness (“always... the poor”).

Who cares?

The problem of poverty is complex and almost overwhelming. One must care deeply to have the will to address it. If any nation ever had the financial resources to eradicate poverty, it is the United States of America. Yet even in this land, a significant portion of the population lives in poverty. In 1993 (the latest year for which figures are available) 15.1 percent of the U.S. population, or 39.3 million people, were living in poverty.

In the past, churches and government have made significant efforts to reduce poverty. Important voices in the church have advocated for effective public policies to reduce poverty and have designed their own creative approaches to meet the needs of people in their own communities. An example of the United States’ commitment to eradicate poverty is the Social Security system. Created in response to the suffering of the Great Depression, Social Security was designed to lift the elderly out of poverty, and it has made an important contribution toward that goal. In 1935, 75 percent of the nation’s elderly were poor. Today only 15 percent of the elderly live below the poverty level. Fifteen percent is still a large number (“always...the poor”), but lifting 60 percent of a portion of the population out of poverty is a laudable accomplishment.

Nevertheless, those who suffer the most today are children. What is troubling about children in poverty is that children have no voice in decision making and no power to affect their own well-being. Children are completely dependent upon their families and ultimately the society in which they live. If they are to have adequate food, clothing, shelter, medical care, and education, someone must provide for them. Children have no means to provide any of these things for themselves. If a child comes from a poor family, the family cannot meet all these needs and must look to others for assistance in providing for their child’s basic needs. If a society makes no deliberate commitment to meet the needs of its poor children, those needs will go unmet. While the number of elderly poor in U.S. society has radically declined, the number of children living in poverty has risen dramatically. In 1973 one in seven children in the U.S. was living in poverty. Today more than one in five children are in poverty in the U.S.

The resolution to the poverty of the elderly was a mandatory payroll tax for the government’s pension program, Social Security. The current level of that tax is 15.3 percent of earnings. It is clear that people in the U.S. have been willing to take substantial measures to reduce
poverty among the aged, including a mandatory payroll tax. In fact, Social Security is the largest single item in the federal budget.

All who remain in poverty are among those for whom the church cares deeply. This is so because anyone who knows God knows God cares for the poor. God has a special concern for the poor and oppressed of the earth. Throughout the Old Testament, in the books of the prophets, the Psalms, the Law, and in the wisdom literature, one reads of God’s commands to assist the needy. One also reads of how God hears the cries of the distressed, and of God’s anger when justice is not done. For example, Isaiah records God’s passion in these words:

When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue is parched with thirst, I the Lord will answer them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them (Isa. 41:17).

The New Testament continually teaches us to see the poor not as burden but as those to whom compassion must be shown (cf. Matt. 25:31-46; James 2:15; John 21:15-19 TEV). In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus says:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed and announce that the time has come when the Lord will save his people (Luke 4:18-19 TEV).

The 1984 report to General Synod, “Biblical Faith and Our Economic Life,” (MGS 1984, pp. 51-67) said:

When Jesus says that it is harder for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God than for a camel to go through the eye of the needle, he is merely summarizing a widespread biblical teaching. It is this teaching, no doubt, which underlies another widespread biblical theme: the special bond, in both directions, between God and the poor. It is not that the poor are sinless or that poverty is glamorous. It is just that the poor are unencumbered by what in the biblical view is apparently the most serious hindrance to a proper love of God and neighbor (MGS 1984, p. 57).

The RCA, when it is true to its Reformation heritage, faithfully reflects in its life and work the Word of God in Scripture. The Bible calls for justice for the poor.

The church can be counted on to care about the poor, whether anyone else cares or not. The church in this society will make its voice heard in the defense of the poor. The church stands for the dignity and rights of all human beings. It does all these things in response to what Jesus Christ has done.

An enlightening passage about how people respond to the poor after encountering Jesus is Luke 19:1-10. Luke records how Zacchaeus is utterly transformed by his encounter with Jesus. His amazing response to Jesus is an economic one: “Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much” (v.8). Jesus responds in an outburst of joy: “Today salvation has come to this house” (v.9).

The Center for Public Justice in its document, “A New Vision for Welfare Reform,” calls for a biblical perspective on caring in the following way:

A dependable vision of human life in society comes most clearly into focus from a biblical point of view. Human beings are created in God’s image with many talents and vocations. Every task, including government’s calling to do justice, has the character of a response to the Creator. God’s love for this world, which is now radically marred
by evil, is being revealed in ways that expose our sin and misery and offer healing to our brokenness.  

**Does the government have a role in helping the poor?**

Governments rule under the authority of God. All who exercise power must acknowledge that they are answerable to God (Romans 13:1-7).

One purpose of government is to provide justice in society, particularly in its defense of the poor:

> Give the king your justice, O God,  
> and your righteousness to a king's son.  
> May he judge your people with righteousness,  
> and your poor with justice.  
> May the mountains yield prosperity for the people,  
> and the hills, in righteousness.  
> May he defend the cause of the poor of the people,  
> give deliverance to the needy,  
> and crush the oppressor (Ps. 72:1-4).

This idea is also reflected in the statement, “A New Vision for Welfare Reform,” prepared by the Center for Public Justice:

> Governments are called to establish and enforce public justice by (a) upholding a just social order, (b) assisting with relief in emergencies, and (c) acting to bring about fundamental reforms where patterns of injustice exist. Public policies should not serve to legitimize irresponsibility. Instead, government should call people and institutions to healthy patterns of life in society.  

It is important to note that the above three functions of government must be held in balance. Government does not exist only to restrain evil, to keep order, and to respond to emergencies. A biblical vision of government’s role is to remind people that it also exists to enable a social community to act together on behalf of human well-being. When government abdicates this responsibility in the name of lower taxes, less regulation, or simply in frustration, its God-given role becomes impoverished. This does not mean that everything government does for people is useful or effective. It does mean that governmental responsibility from a biblical perspective legitimately includes the task of enhancing the lives of all persons in the social community.

Government does have a responsibility to help the poor. The commission notes a plethora of institutions and interests already receive help from the government in the form of direct benefits, tax breaks, and loan guarantees. From colleges and universities, to hospitals and clinics, to farmers, to major corporations, all manner of businesses, institutions, and individuals receive help from the government. For example, consider tuition assistance from the government and the mortgage interest deduction on federal income taxes (49 billion dollars per year) alone which touch and benefit the lives of a majority of RCA people. Also, after only four and one-half years of receiving Social Security, the payments exceed what a worker paid in. In the “welfare” debate, it is critical to recognize and understand the range and scope of people who benefit from government policies. Just about every person receives some direct financial benefit from the government. It is horribly cruel to speak of solving the U.S. government’s fiscal problem and growing deficits as if the fault lies with the poor of the land (the total federal outlay for the poor is about $140 billion per year), while ignoring the immense benefits middle class and rich citizens alike receive from government policies and programs.
Not only is the government responsible under God for the just care of its weakest citizens, but it is clear from the growth of such programs as AFDC and Social Security that concern for the poor has traditionally been accepted as a government obligation. Noteworthy in this context is the New York State Constitution which holds that the government is responsible for the poor: "The aid, care, and support of the needy are public concerns and shall be provided." John Mason of Gordon College argues that "the sheer number of and moral weight assigned to provisions for assisting the poor in the Bible, compel us to conclude that some kind of systematized response is warranted." 6

However, both inside and outside the government, many agree that the current system is failing. As welfare rolls increase, as more and more children grow up in fragmented families, as more and more children slip below the poverty line, it is clear that some action must be taken if the weakest members of society are to be helped. Some current ideas for solving the problem are constructive, but others seem downright cruel and inhuman. The church is not a united voice on reform of the welfare system either. No one can seem to produce the mechanics for the most just, fair, and practical means to help the poor. What the church can offer however, are certain principles to put to work when proposing solutions and making decisions.

**Welfare reform**

Though the household is the most basic unit in the economy, that is not all it is. That is to say, a family is more than an economic building block. Likewise a person is more than a part of the economy. Only the most materialistic society would reduce human life to its value in economic terms only.

Human beings are made in the image of God. Men, women, and children are all part of the human family, created by God for a unique relationship with the Creator. The Scriptures say that "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (John 3:16). No one would think for a minute that God had in mind primarily economic units for which he sent his Son. The value of human beings to God is something far more than silver and gold.

In approaching the problem of welfare reform, the church reminds society that human beings are more than rich people, middle class people, or poor people. All are called to be God's children, "children of the light," called to a loving response to the God who created, sustains, and redeems them.

So when we look at welfare and welfare reform, we are talking about more than economics. An acceptable welfare program must result in lifting people out of poverty, not merely in reducing welfare rolls. 7

The causes of poverty are manifold. While some of the poor may be destitute because they are lazy, still others are poor because of illness, because of lack of opportunity (consider the rural poor), or because of racial prejudice. (Worthy of note, African-American churches are not crying out loudly for welfare reform, though they constantly preach personal responsibility.) 8 Finally, there are many other reasons for poverty which are beyond the control of the person.

What is coming to be understood is that the way to help the poor is not just to give them money, although that is probably the cheapest solution of all! Instead of just monetary aid, the poor need a more broadly based and multifaceted network of support. Any government program that is successful will support persons and families and not just dispense checks.

One of the greatest problems in the U.S. is the fragmentation of the home. Many children grow up without a father, and over one-half of the children in the U.S. will spend a part of
their childhood without a father. The implications of this are devastating. Studies found the following:

1. The most important indicator of childhood problems—from poor health to behavioral problems—is whether a child grows up in a two-parent or single-parent or no-parent household.

2. Children in single-parent families are nearly six times as likely to be poor as children in two-parent families.

Clearly government’s efforts to get “deadbeat dads” to ante up for child support are a correct step, but even if all that support were collected, the problem would not be solved. Jesus asked, “Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake?” (Matt. 7:9-10). The problem is not only that huge numbers of fathers aren’t giving their sons and daughters bread and fish; but even more, they aren’t giving the most valuable thing of all—themselves.

The solution to this problem is more than a financial one. AFDC will not put a loving, caring, supportive father in the home to support and discipline his children. Families need support of many kinds so that tomorrow’s children will not be handicapped by an unstable childhood.

Proposed government efforts to reduce welfare benefits to teenage mothers will not solve the problem, nor will they significantly reduce the welfare rolls. Unwed teenage mothers represent only 8.9 percent of all welfare mothers. Such cuts are certainly unfair, since the victims would be children.

So what can be done to support families? Some reasonable proposals include increasing the dependent exemption to federal income taxes. Currently the exemption is a little over two thousand dollars per child. If this exemption had kept pace with inflation, it would be worth in excess of six thousand dollars today. An increase in this exemption would be an enormous economic help to the working poor.

Proposed solutions to the welfare problem also include “workfare,” forcing those who receive benefits to find a job within two years or lose their welfare. This sounds sensible until the minimum wage is considered, and the fact that a person might lose the medical benefits of welfare and housing assistance. As a result, persons who reenter the work force might actually be more impoverished, though toiling long hard hours to support themselves. The National Council of Churches of Christ “Statement of Shared Principles” addresses this concern. It states:

Welfare reform efforts designed to move people into the work force must create jobs that pay a livable wage and do not displace present workers. Programs should eliminate barriers to employment and provide training and education necessary for inexperienced and young workers to get and hold jobs. Such programs should provide child care, transportation, and other ancillary services that will make participation both possible and reasonable... Disincentives to work should be removed by allowing welfare recipients to retain a larger portion of wage earnings and assets before losing cash, housing, health, and child-care or other benefits.

A family is more than money. The government should support those programs and reforms which support the family as they move from dependence to independence. Medical care, high quality child care, job skills training, and parenting skills are all needed by families seeking to escape welfare. What is being discovered is that all of this support is more expensive than simply sending out the check. More than just a check is needed. There is more to being human than a subsistence level income. John Mason says:
In efforts to address dependency and workfare, the foremost goal of welfare policy must be to establish and maintain strong families. If we are to err in the risks taken with public policy, let it be to overload incentives toward strengthening the family.\(^\text{13}\)

The government can lend its support to those programs which are already successfully helping people. There are programs to motivate fathers to be more caring. There are programs which have linked local government and businesses to work as a team to help people.

**Helping the poor is most effective when the whole community helps out.** That is the biblical model. The farmer leaves enough wheat in the field during the harvest for the poor to glean. The elders at the gate are enjoined to be sure the poor receive the same justice as the well-to-do. Bob Goudzwaard of the Free University of Amsterdam states:

> If we regard [the poor], rightfully . . . what is needed instead are multiple-purpose programs with a community-building dimension, in which the poor are full participants, and which encourage good functioning by institutions such as families, schools, churches, government agencies, labor unions and businesses.\(^\text{14}\)

In addition to financial assistance, people need time and help from others. Children need good role models. Fatherless children need a positive male influence in their lives. Single parents need help with the enormous pressures of daily work, especially if they work full-time while raising children. Absentee fathers need someone to show them their responsibilities as parents.

It is here the church can be most effective. Part of the church’s mission is support of families. Even in an era of decline in membership in mainline churches, most people still come to the church to be married. The church needs to tell those desiring to be married that marriage is about commitment. The promises made with one another in marriage are powerful. The church needs to explain what marriage means.

Chains can also reinforce the family lives of members and can seek ways to reach out into the community to help families. Churches can offer to children the kind of love and nurture that may be lacking in their homes.

Church members have a wealth of opportunities to change lives. God works miracles in lives when God’s people are inviting, welcoming, warm, and caring. The Reformed Church in America affirms the church’s responsibility for the whole person in a powerful way in the very beginning of the *Book of Church Order* (*BCO*): “The purpose of the Reformed Church in America, together with all other churches of Christ, is to minister to the total life of all people by preaching, teaching, and proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and by all Christian good works” (*BCO*, Preamble, p. 1). Note that the ministry of the RCA recognizes the wholeness of the person and the community. The church ministers to the “total life of all people.”

Unfortunately, the RCA has been part of the problem of urban poverty. Being a church of the relatively affluent and educated, RCA congregations have followed the exodus from the city that has been ongoing since World War II. While the RCA still has a presence in some metropolitan areas, it is a mere shadow of what its presence once was in urban areas. Although many RCA congregations are well-positioned to reach out and help the rural poor, to a large degree, the RCA’s witness in needy inner cities of the U.S. is lacking.

Energy can be put into forming partnerships between suburban RCA congregations, with their wealth of people and resources, and inner-city RCA congregations. To be successful, such partnerships cannot be “big brother” programs. Participating congregations must
recognize that each of the partner congregations has gifts to offer and to receive from one another. The more wealthy suburbanites are not better than their inner-city counterparts, but the partner congregations work as equals. Each has gifts of service to offer the people of their respective communities.

RCA congregations have responded increasingly to the needs of their surrounding communities. Most congregations participate in some kind of emergency relief program for the poor; this may be a food pantry, soup kitchen, shelter, or housing program. This generosity is laudable and should continue where there is need.

However, since most people need personal support as well as money, Christians must be willing to offer their time. Lawrence Mead of Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government states:

The Christian ideal is to combine communities, including churches, where the poor can be integrated at a personal level, with a more impersonal order stemming from government. The poor must become our neighbors, but also fellow citizens who discharge the obligations, as well as claim the rights, of a common citizenship.15

Christ has called us, each with our special gifts, to the fields of harvest in his kingdom. While that call includes giving money, we must be just as willing to give ourselves. In Philippians it says:

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness (Phil. 2:5-7).

In the incarnation, Jesus came among us, taking our form to bring us good news. We can help people if we are willing to have contact with them, to give them our time, ourselves, as well as the financial resources they may need.

The church calls society and individuals to moral responsibility. Interestingly, one of the most effective tools for fighting poverty is evangelizing. When people are drawn to the church of Jesus Christ, they view their lives in a completely different way and discover their responsibility to God and their neighbor. For those who have enough, it means accountability and sharing with the less fortunate. For those who have not enough, it means help from the church and accountability for their own lives and for utilizing their own gifts. As Paul writes,

I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. As it is written, “The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little” (2 Cor. 8:13-15).

Let it not escape the church that in fulfilling Christ’s command to go and make disciples, we will in effect be waging a war on poverty at the personal level and with society as a whole.

Conclusion

The church has numerous responsibilities in helping the poor.

First, the church has a responsibility to support individuals and families, including a call to moral responsibility. The church’s task is to make disciples. When people are called into the church and receive God’s grace, they enter a community of care, and their responsibilities to God and neighbor unfold. They are cared for and learn to care for others. Life in that
community supports responsible parenthood, faithful commitment in marriage, and the need to work and exercise gifts and talents.

Second, the church has a role to play in its community. The church can and often does reach out in various ways to address the needs of the poor in its neighborhoods. The most precious gift the church has to offer to the needy in the community is the people of Jesus Christ. Christians must be willing to touch the lives of others in a caring and supportive way that will meet human needs in the name of Jesus Christ.

Third, the church must raise God's concern for justice in the current welfare debate. The church reminds the state that it is under obligation to God and among its tasks is ensuring justice for the poor and providing support for the weakest members of society. Every society must answer to God for its treatment of the poor. The church must speak out and support those programs which provide emergency relief, help those in poverty to improve their lot, help children to have every opportunity for growth and healthy development, and recognize the value of all people as citizens in this society. The church must speak out against efforts to trim welfare rolls in any way that causes harm or additional hardship to those currently receiving benefits. Always the goal of reform must be to aid those who need help, not simply to save money.

The church, recognizing that there will always be the poor, will be vigilant in making heard the voice of those too powerless to be heard.

Notes:


3 Ibid. Thesis IV, p. 29.


5 Ibid.


8 James Shropshire, Sr. of Wesley Seminary writes: "Approximately four-fifths of the African-American population is now located in cities. Black people in the urban context are the last and the least in the socioeconomic structure. Because of the intervening variable of racism, Black people are poorer and proportionately (though not numerically) more involved with the tax-supported welfare system." The Center for Public Justice, National Conference on Public Justice and Welfare Reform, Synopses of Commissioned Papers, "Black Churches, Welfare Reform and the Experiences of African-American and Other People in the Urban Context."


R-2.
To invite each congregation in the RCA to include the concerns noted in this paper, “Welfare Reform,” in its Christian education programs over the next year; and further,

to instruct the Office of Social Witness to make available resources upon request which will assist in this educational effort; and further,

to instruct the Office of Social Witness to provide a list of speakers able to guide discussion of this paper to RCA congregations. (ADOPTED)

R-3.
To request the Diaconal Ministries Team to consider the issues raised in the paper, “Welfare Reform,” in their development of programs and resources for equipping the diaconal ministries of RCA congregations. (ADOPTED)

R-4.
To instruct the Office of Social Witness to keep the concerns and issues raised in the paper, “Welfare Reform,” before the Reformed Church in America through inclusions of these concerns and issues in publications such as *The City Gate* and *Action Alert*. (ADOPTED)

R-5.
To instruct the general secretary to write executive and legislative leaders in the United States and Canada in order to call attention to the principles elaborated in the paper, “Welfare Reform”; and further,

to call upon the executive and legislative leaders in the United States and Canada to support legislation and policies consistent with those principles. (ADOPTED)
WORK IN PROGRESS

The Commission on Christian Action continues to work on a number of issues of concern to the church and to society. It anticipates presenting papers on marriage and family and on the stewardship of creation to the 1996 General Synod.

Report of the African-American Council

The twenty-sixth annual meeting of the African-American Caucus of the Reformed Church in America, held at the Holiday Inn, Newark, New Jersey, featured workshops on ministries to youth moderated by RCA young adults holding key positions in their congregations. Their presentations on creative approaches to African-American youth were well received, and faith in the gifted resources within RCA ranks was reaffirmed. A workshop on effective city ministries, moderated by James Seawood, dean of students at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, featured presentations by outstanding RCA practitioners of urban ministry who shared their cutting-edge programs currently in operation in African-American churches across the country. The feature workshop was led by the Rev. Dr. Paul Smith, a Presbyterian pastor, a professor of spiritual disciplines at New York Theological Seminary, and an expert on mediation methods and the uses of the "spiritual journal." His workshops were invariably awe-inspiring and provided the caucus theme: "The Search for Spirituality as the Key to Rebuilding the Community."

The Rev. Dr. James Forbes, senior minister of New York City's Riverside Church, summed up much of what the council seeks to accomplish in his B. Moses James Colloquium lecture titled "Turning the Hood into a Neighborhood." His memorable address, along with workshops on African-American spirituality, youth work, and innovative projects in the churches, provided important learnings and offset the isolation some African-American Council (AAC) members experience as solitary African-Americans in local classes.

The African-American family of churches within the RCA continues to encourage and facilitate leadership development within its four regions. Each region is expected to offer leadership development opportunities during regional gatherings. These sessions are normally—and will continue to be—Bible study, consistorial training, revitalizing the Sunday school, upgrading finances, etc. Increasingly, in light of growing unemployment brought on by plant closings and other structural dislocations, leadership development must now be viewed more broadly.

Few within the African-American community begrudge the current wave of political activism within Congress and in state legislatures, as each age is entitled to its own social vision. We believe each age must inevitably answer for the character and quality of its preeminent visions. AAC is in accord with the president of Bread for the World, the Rev. David Beckman, who has expressed concern over the quality of vision among those intent on balancing state and national budgets by cuts aimed at safety net programs which assist the poor and minorities. Beckman claims that the $60 billion in proposed cuts would require America's 350,000 churches to each add $170,000 annually to minister effectively to the needy if the proposed cuts are made.
While conventional wisdom applauds proposals to limit welfare benefits, those closer to the realities of poor communities affirm the findings of a Pennsylvania study that 63.5 percent of those presumed "employable" will still lack employment years after their welfare benefits end. Similarly, a recent New York Times article confirms that of some 92,000 "employable adults" targeted for separation from the welfare rolls in New York City, "over half never finished high school, 20 percent are not fluent in English, 21 percent are illiterate, and nearly 50 percent report major health problems."

Our emphasis upon leadership development is not a luxury. Rather, it is an antidote necessary if we are to allay—if not avoid—the worst social and political consequences of a crisis far beyond the communities of the "disadvantaged."

In addition, Congregational Services and Ministry and Personnel Services have served to broker the African-American Council's input into RCA colleges and seminaries. AAC has been invited to meet with the Task Force on Standards in Preparation for Ministry and has communicated through that task force with RCA seminaries. AAC has rejoiced in the spirit of openness and inquiry with which RCA colleges and seminaries have responded to recommendations for faculty development seminars in multiculturalism in cooperation with RCA racial-ethnic councils (MGS 1994, p. 83). The council continues to affirm this emphasis as essential for sound teaching and learning in a pluralistic society.

During this past year, the council lifted arms in prayer for the ministry and lives of dear colleagues within the African-American Caucus family of churches. The council remembered, among others, the Rev. Nevon Newell of Nardin Park Reformed Church in Detroit, Michigan; African-American Council Members Henry Baker of North Dade Community Church in Miami, Florida; and Virginia Hankerson of United Reformed Church of Jersey City, New Jersey. Their contributions to the caucus family over the years is now part of AAC’s enduring legacy. The council also notes losses through the retirement of the Rev. Dr. James Thomas, who now joins the Rev. Wilbur Washington in honorable retirement. Despite these losses, there is an upsurge in interest in RCA ministry among African-Americans, and several outstanding seminarians have inquired about ministry possibilities in the RCA.

The African-American Council rejoiced when the black and coloured churches joined to form the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA), a denomination with over a million members. Their uniting served as a prelude to the historic elections which led to Nelson Mandela’s election to the presidency of that emerging nation. The RCA is learning from South African colleagues the significant impact of cultural contact for enhancing and enriching mutual theological enterprise.

AAC has cooperated with Evangelism and Church Development Services in expanding the validity of an inventory for selecting new church development pastors through inclusion of African-American pastors. In addition, AAC has been privileged to work with Evangelism and Church Development Services in carrying out a recommendation to General Synod regarding a consultation on metropolitan ministries (MGS 1994, p. 83). The Consultation on Metropolitan Mission for the 21st Century, led by the Rev. Dr. Ray Bakke, was held in Newark, New Jersey, April 20-22, 1995. It is the council’s earnest hope that the theme “Celebrating City Ministries” will continue to revitalize efforts in church development throughout metropolitan regions of the denomination.

AAC asks the RCA to continue to pray for the work at Southern Normal School (SNS) as it seeks to extend its educational ministry to a wider segment of the U.S. student population. In addition to identifying future students for SNS, the school’s most recent request has been for books to add to its library.
R-6. To urge RCA congregations to join with the African-American Council in sending appropriate books to the library of Southern Normal School. (ADOPTED)

AAC has been encouraged by an offer from the director of an RCA conference center to use the camp’s facilities to plan ways for central city youth to utilize the conference center more than they do at present. The African-American Council respectfully offers the following recommendation in order that other regions might benefit from similar planning opportunities.

R-7. To encourage RCA camps and conference centers, in cooperation with Congregational Services, to explore opportunities for fuller use of RCA camp and conference facilities by racial/ethnic young people in their respective RCA regional synods. (ADOPTED)

(A motion was made and supported to amend R-7 by deleting the word “young” after the words “racial/ethnic.” The motion LOST.)

Report of the Council for Pacific and Asian American Ministries

In February 1995 the Council for Pacific and Asian American Ministries (CPAAM) completed fifteen years of ministry among Pacific and Asian Americans (PAA) in the RCA. This fifteenth anniversary provided opportunity for the council to review the mandate received from its constituents and approved by the 1981 General Synod. This review affirmed the council’s purpose and challenged the council to find new ways to carry out its mandate. The mandate includes the following:

To identify, communicate, and interpret Pacific and Asian American concerns, needs, and gifts.

To advocate on behalf of Pacific and Asian Americans before the judicatories of the RCA.

To empower Pacific and Asian Americans within the RCA so that they can become full participants in the design and implementation of the denomination’s mission.

To advise the RCA on ways Pacific and Asian Americans can enrich the worship and enhance the witness of the denomination (MGS 1981, R-11, pp. 203-04).

During the current year the executive committee of the council is reviewing the priorities for ministry for the next five years. The current ministry priorities are as follows:

- Ministries with youth
- Evangelism
- Promoting cross-cultural interchange
- Ministries with elderly
- Ministries with women
Stewardship
Discipleship training for lay leaders
Recruitment, training, and support of clergy
Church planning and development

WORK RELATED TO THE CURRENT DENOMINATIONAL PRIORITY

“Building the Church for the 21st Century,” the directional statement for the Reformed Church in America, provides a framework for the report of the council’s work.

We will seek the Lord for renewal.

Prayer, the foundation of a strong spiritual life, continues to undergird all the ministries of PAA congregations. Daily morning prayer meetings are common in a significant number of PAA congregations. Revivals in PAA congregations provide opportunities for outreach, prayer, and nurture. Several PAA pastors practice the spiritual discipline of fasting and prayer, and they report that the Holy Spirit’s renewing power provides new energy and vision for their ministries.

Celebration services have marked seasons of PAA congregational and CPAAM life. At its August 1994 Consultation, CPAAM celebrated its anniversary with a worship service at Bowne Street Community Church in Flushing, New York. CPAAM invited the Rev. Dr. Arthur O. Van Eck, the first RCA staff liaison to CPAAM, to be the preacher. The newly installed RCA general secretary, the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, brought greetings. Choirs from three Queens, New York, congregations—Bowne Street Community, Siloam, and Taiwan Union Christian—provided rich musical offerings to enhance the worship celebration.

There have been several celebration services marking special anniversary years of church organizations and celebrations of thanksgiving and dedication of new church buildings. Lunar new year, the Moon Festival, and other cultural festivals have been occasions for PAA Christians to give thanks to God for abundant blessings received.

In the area of youth ministry, General Synod Council mission funds supported Jesus ‘94, an annual retreat for Korean youth. Over two hundred RCA participants representing nine PAA congregations attended this event. New Creation ‘94, a summer camp for elementary school children, was held at the Pocono Retreat Center in Pennsylvania. Thirty children participated. The Eden Reformed Church in Buena Park, California, held a six-week all-day camp for children from the community. This day camp was intended for children of working parents.

In March 1995 Korean church leaders attended a revival held at Nakwon Reformed Church in Sunnyside, New York. This revival featured prayer, instruction, and meditation. It also provided opportunities for fellowship.

Older adults of the RCA Taiwanese congregations in the New York metropolitan area continue to gather weekly in Flushing, New York, for worship and fellowship. The Golden Eagle Academy, established in the fall of 1991 as an education institute for older adults, enjoyed another year of instruction.

A seminar addressing the generation gap drew over one hundred persons. This seminar was organized by a representative from the council’s executive committee, Dr. Amy Kuo. Increasingly, immigrant congregations are expressing a concern about ministry to the next generation, communications between the generations, and spiritual leaders for the next-generation church.
As a follow-up to a new church development event of a few years ago, Hispanic and Korean pastors in the Classis of California met for an overnight retreat in November 1994. This event provided opportunities for pastors and spouses to share concerns related to their ministries, to pray, to learn, and to be in fellowship. These California pastors and their spouses plan to meet again.

We will become more and more a church reformed, catholic, and apostolic.

The council continues to learn from its ecumenical partners in the world, especially from the greater Reformed and Presbyterian congregations in Asia. As partner church leaders visit the U.S., CPAAM constituents seek to learn from brothers and sisters in the wider church. The visit of the Rev. Dr. Yang, general secretary of the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan, to the 1995 General Synod is in reciprocity to CPAAM's staff visit to Taiwan in June 1993. Dr. Yang's visit provides an opportunity for CPAAM to learn more about the issues with which the people of Taiwan struggle, and to seek ways to stand in solidarity with Christians in Taiwan.

CPAAM works ecumenically in North America primarily in the following three groups:

1. The Pacific Asian Center for Theology and Strategies (PACTS) is an ecumenical center for research, resourcing, recruiting, and consciousness-raising, with foci on the Pacific and Asian American constituencies, to promote the fulfillment of God's mission through the ministries of the congregations and the service of community groups. Members of CPAAM have attended seminars and forums sponsored by PACTS. Information gathered by PACTS on the Pacific Islands has enriched CPAAM's understanding about the concerns of Pacific Islanders.

2. The Ecumenical Working Group of Asian Pacific Americans and Canadians (EWGAPAC) focuses its work on racial justice. The resource Beyond the Crucible: Responding to Anti-Asian Hate Crimes, was published by EWGAPAC in early 1995. It provides case studies of a range of communities, in a variety of settings and contexts, that have responded with positive actions to anti-Asian racism and violence.

3. The Pacific Asian American Canadian Christian Education Ministries (PAACCE) focuses on effective Christian education for congregations. PAACCE board members are reorganizing to more effectively produce education resources for its constituent congregations. Future plans call for regional gatherings of PAA clergy, an ecumenical youth gathering in 1996 for West Coast youth, and workshops for church school teachers and church leaders.

A continental conference was held in January 1995 at the Marconi Conference Center in Marshall, California. This "Christ, Culture, and Community" conference focused on the influences of culture and community on North American Christians. The project was supported by the Louisville Institute for the Study of Protestantism and American Culture. Funding was provided by the Lilly Endowment and the Marin Community Foundation. At this continental conference the first draft of a resource book was introduced, containing stories of how Asian North American Christians identify themselves and are shaped by their rich Asian religious and cultural heritage.

Within CPAAM, Parts I and II of Chapter One of the Book of Church Order were translated into Korean. This translation is available to Korean church leaders and other Korean persons expressing an interest in affiliating with the Reformed Church in America.

CPAAM staff continue to meet regularly with the Korean pastors in Southern California and with classis and regional synod representatives in order to strengthen relationships. As the
pastors are drawn together in prayer, discussion, work, and fellowship, a greater sense of identity, significance, and belonging is emerging.

Serving the gracious reign of Christ for the sake of justice, peace, freedom, and the care of God’s creation.

CPAAM continues to monitor and review violence against Pacific and Asian Americans in response to the request of the 1984 and 1986 General Synods (MGS, 1984, R-16, p. 85, and MGS 1986, R-15, p. 84). CPAAM cooperated ecumenically in addressing racial violence and racism through EWGAPAC. CPAAM, through its annual report, presents justice issues to the General Synod for deliberation and action.

CPAAM staff is consulting with RCA education ministry staff to identify resources to learn more about multiculturalism for use in the church. Work also continues in the development of a study resource addressing multiculturalism and the inclusive church.

At the 1994 Annual Consultation of CPAAM, the minister for social witness conducted a workshop on issues related to the care of God’s creation. Asian Americans were challenged to think about caring for the environment.

Adding to the church a great company of believers in Jesus Christ.

CPAAM staff has consulted with individuals and groups responsible for new church development in various parts of the U.S. and Canada. Through CPAAM staff participation on the Council of Field Secretaries, CPAAM is involved in developing strategies for new PAA churches.

In the Classis of California, a new Korean ministry was initiated, targeting the 1.5 million (people born in Asia who came to the U.S. by the age of eleven and are fairly well acculturated in Western influences of language and culture) and second generation Korean-Americans. As inquiries from other congregations and pastors expressing interest in joining the RCA continue to be received, CPAAM assists classes in working with these congregations and assists classes in interviewing candidates and checking references in order to make appropriate recommendations to classes.

TIBET

CPAAM recently obtained a copy of On This Spot, An Unconventional Map and Guide to Lhasa. This publication is inspired in part by stories told by Tibetans in Tibet and by those living in exile. These Tibetans recount stories of massive labor camps around Lhasa during the early years of Chinese occupation. (Chinese occupation began nearly forty years ago.) In addition, the map locates prison sites of current Tibetan prisoners of conscience.

Very little of the human rights struggles of the Tibetan people is known by the peoples of the western world. Centuries of Lhasa’s way of life, its culture and identity, are being annihilated with the destruction of monasteries and temples, beautiful buildings, and entire neighborhoods.

The executive committee of CPAAM received a recommendation at its 1994 Annual Consultation to study the situation in Tibet and to make appropriate recommendations to the 1995 General Synod. Because so little information is readily available, the executive committee has not been able to complete its study in time for this 1995 General Synod report. CPAAM hopes to bring recommendations to the 1996 General Synod.
UNITED NATIONS MEMBERSHIP FOR TAIWAN

In 1971 the twenty-sixth United Nations General Assembly passed Resolution 2758, "Restoring the Rights of the People's Republic of China." This caused the unseating of the Republic of China from the United Nations. Ever since then, the Taiwanese people believe their country has been reduced to the status of an "international orphan."

Although Taiwan is one hundred twentieth in size and forty-first in population in the world community, it is twenty-fifth in per capital income, thirteenth in world trade, and the second largest holder of foreign reserves. Twenty-one million people live in Taiwan.

As a result of the Sino-Japanese War in 1895, Taiwan was ceded by China to Japan "in perpetuity" under the Treaty of Shimonoseki. Taiwan would have then terminated national ties with China permanently; but with the defeat of Japan in World War II, the Chinese leader Chiang Kai-Shek was commanded to represent the Allied Forces in accepting the surrender of Japan in Taiwan. Although the Chiang Kai-Shek regime fled from China to Taiwan in 1949, the People's Republic of China never governed Taiwan.

The Presbyterian Church of Taiwan (PCT) believes the issue of the recognition of Taiwan as an international community separate from the People's Republic of China is a matter of dignity and human rights for the twenty-one million Taiwanese. In a response paper to a statement made by the China Christian Council, the PCT states:

We not only seek to solidarize Taiwan people to protect Taiwan, we ask that the Taiwan/China problem be settled without force. A peaceful settlement should be reached through the process of dialogue and coordination. If we do this, then we can promote the welfare of the lives of the people in both countries and promote peace in the world.¹

The advisory committee recommended to amend R-8:

R-8.
To stand in solidarity as the one hundred eighty-ninth regular session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in June 1995, with the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan and its country's efforts to be recognized as a member of the United Nations; and further,

to call on the Reformed Church in America, its members, consistories, congregations, and assemblies to stand in solidarity with the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan and its country's efforts to be recognized as a member of the United Nations; and further,

to instruct the general secretary and the minister for social witness to write to the president of the United States, the prime minister of Canada, and other key legislative leaders of committees on foreign affairs expressing the Reformed Church in America's support of Taiwan's membership into the United Nations; and further,

to instruct the general secretary of the Reformed Church in America to write an official letter to the general secretary of the United Nations to express the care and concern of the Reformed Church in America for the nation of Taiwan and to encourage the general secretary of the United Nations to seek ways for the reinstatement of Taiwan to full membership in the United Nations. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)*

Reason: The amendment strengthens R-8. <

*Addition is in light-face type.
RIGHTS OF IMMIGRANTS

The U.S. Congress is currently debating whether or not to exclude “legal aliens” from receiving public benefits. California’s Proposition 187 excludes “illegal aliens” from entering public schools and receiving government services. In the so-called Republican Party’s “Contract with America,” there is a proposed Personal Responsibility Act. This act would deny legal immigrants access to public housing, Medicaid, school lunches, meals for seniors, vaccinations, and student loans—the basic rights received by U.S. citizens. The contradiction is that legal immigrants must pay taxes like U.S. citizens do, but would be denied the benefits covered by taxes.

Each year immigrants pay $90 billion in taxes and receive only $5 billion in welfare. Eight out of ten immigrants who enter the United States each year enter legally. Of these, 75 percent are admitted to be reunited with close family members, and 10 percent are refugees. For example, in California, only 3.8 percent of its long-term immigrants receive welfare, social security, or other types of assistance, compared with 4.1 percent of native households.

While many believe immigrants take jobs from “native” workers, in fact, in the most comprehensive study to date, the U.S. Department of Labor has concluded that immigrants keep U.S. industries competitive, increase employment through higher rates of self-employment, and increase wages and mobility opportunities for many groups of U.S. workers.

The 1993 General Synod received the paper of the Commission on Christian Action, “Welcoming the Strangers in our Midst” (MGS 1993, pp. 86-97). This paper draws on the powerful scriptural theme of God’s special love for the “strangers within the gates.” In 1983 the General Synod voted to oppose the Simpson-Mazzoli Immigration Bill (MGS 1983, R-1, p. 62) and in 1984 the General Synod supported the Immigration Reform Act of 1984—HR 4909 (MGS 1984, R-14, pp. 83-4).

The U.S. and Canada are nations of immigrants. Yet, in 1993 a nationwide poll revealed that 60 percent of Americans believed immigration was bad for the country. A troubled economy, the end of the Cold War, and racial fears are contributing to a resurgence of anti-immigration sentiment. This “nativist” mentality is not new. Throughout U.S. and Canadian history, those who were already in the U.S. or Canada, feared new arrivals might threaten their jobs, security, and safety. Scapegoating immigrants for either country’s economic and other social woes detracts from devising real solutions and obscures the real contributions immigrants have made and are making to the nations of the U.S. and Canada. Persons of faith are challenged to live out the biblical injunction of welcoming the sojourner or stranger in their midst and to raise questions of justice and righteousness.

An old rabbi once asked his pupils how they could tell when the night had ended and the day had begun.

“Could it be,” asked one student, “when you can see an animal in the distance and tell whether it’s a sheep or a dog?”

“No,” answered the rabbi.

Another asked, “Is it when you can look at a tree in the distance and tell whether it’s a fig tree or a peach tree?”

“No,” answered the rabbi.

“Then when is it?” the pupils demanded.
"It is when you can look on the face of any woman or man and see that it is your sister or brother. Because if you cannot see this, it is still night." 7

Notes:

1 Quoted from "The Presbyterian Church in Taiwan's Response to the China Christian Council's Statement," December 1994.


R-9.
To instruct the general secretary and the minister for social witness to communicate to the president of the United States and appropriate legislative leaders expressing the Reformed Church in America's support for the protection of legal immigrant rights to public services. (ADOPTED)

Report of the American Indian Council

The American Indian Council (AIC) has increased in size with two urban congregations. One congregation is in Omaha, Nebraska, and the other is in Lincoln, Nebraska. At its twenty-third annual American Indian Council Conference in Phoenix, Arizona, AIC resolved to accept the membership of both these congregations into the council. Membership in AIC entitles these congregations to voting privileges and calls for the responsibility of living and professing the gospel of Jesus Christ.

RCA Native Americans are grateful to the RCA for the excellent quality of RCA missionaries sent to the American Indian mission fields for the past eighty plus years. If it were not for the RCA's commitment to this mission program, it might not have been possible for the two urban congregations in Omaha and Lincoln to become part of AIC. The American Indian Council cherishes the prayers of the RCA and the support committed by the RCA to the life of AIC and its two newest congregations. AIC looks forward to the day when these congregations in Omaha and Lincoln have their own sanctuaries.
This past year AIC published its first newsletter, which is published quarterly. To be placed on the mailing list for this newsletter, contact either the Rev. George Montanari or Regina Bannock at the Apache Reformed Church, Apache, Oklahoma. AIC also published its first brochure this past year. This brochure highlights the history of the indigenous people of the U.S. who have been a part of the RCA for more than ninety years.

The 1994 Indian Youth Conference was hosted by the Jicarilla Apache Reformed Church in Dulce, New Mexico. Approximately forty-five young people and eight chaperons spent the week high in the mountains of New Mexico, participating in discussions and activities centered on the meaning of multiculturalism, the theme of this conference. The 1995 Youth Conference, hosted by Mescalero Reformed Church in Mescalero, New Mexico, appears to have all the makings for one of the best conferences ever.

Most AIC congregations have reported an increase in youth activities. This may well be a direct result of the youth camps. At its annual conference, AIC discussed the possibility of exploring the use of camp facilities rather than church facilities in the future. It is difficult to accommodate forty or more young people for a week in a church. A camp environment provides an excellent opportunity to meet in a more retreat-like setting.

Two new pastors of AIC congregations were installed since the 1994 General Synod: the Rev. William De Boer at Jicarilla Apache Reformed Church in Dulce, New Mexico; and the Rev. Darrell Dalman at Winnebago Reformed Church in Winnebago, Nebraska. AIC appreciated the ministries of the Rev. John Bandt, who is now retired, and the Rev. David Crump, who is pursuing a doctor of ministry degree in cross-cultural ministry. Both pastors were worthy ambassadors of the RCA and dedicated servants of the Lord. Another worthy RCA servant, the Rev. Christine Dyke, resigned as pastor of Umo'ho' Reformed Church of Macy, Nebraska. While the search for a new pastor in Macy begins, Thurman Cook, the new chairman of AIC, will serve as the lay pastor of the Macy congregation.

The goals for the future of AIC congregations and for AIC continue to be:

To seek to develop and train local people for leadership roles of the church, including lay and professional ministry;

To become a more inclusive body of the RCA by way of representation and more active roles;

To seek to revive the life of AIC congregations by increasing membership and financial commitments; and

To seek to bring the color, culture, and diversity of indigenous people to the life of the RCA.

The Native American members of the RCA wish to welcome the new RCA general secretary, the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson. AIC knows he is no stranger to indigenous people and is sensitive to many, if not most of the issues, facing Native American people. It is the prayer of AIC that the RCA will share with its new general secretary the love the RCA has always shared with Native American members of the RCA. AIC congregations extend to the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson a standing invitation to participate in one or more of the Native American RCA worship services.
Report of the Council for Hispanic Ministries

INTRODUCTION

As the 189th regular session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America convenes at Ramapo College, in Mahwah, New Jersey, the Council for Hispanic Ministries (CHM) enters its twenty-first year of existence. The Council for Hispanic Ministries was organized in 1974 as an agency of the General Synod. The purpose statement of the council is:

The Council for Hispanic Ministries shall be the agent of the General Synod to express collectively the desire and will of Hispanics in the Reformed Church; to coordinate and advocate for programs and resources that may strengthen and edify Hispanic churches; and to be a prophetic voice to the church and the world regarding the spiritual, social, political, and economic needs of Hispanic people here and in Latin America.

Another desire of the council is to expand an understanding of the richness and fullness of Reformed theology.

The Lord has blessed the council and Hispanic congregations of the RCA with growth, stability, and greater commitment to the calling of God. On January 15, 1995, the Regional Synod of Albany, through its New Church Unit and in cooperation with the Classis of Rochester, began a new Hispanic ministry. This ministry model was designed by the Rev. Johnny Alicea-Baez as an outreach ministry of First Reformed Church in Rochester, New York. Currently other locations are under review for possible church starts at regional synod and classis levels.

POPULATION STATISTICS AND LANGUAGE

The growth of Hispanics in the U.S. is increasing yearly. Contrary to popular opinion, most Hispanics in the U.S. are U.S. citizens. Many Hispanics can trace their ancestors back to the first Spanish colonizers who settled in the Southwest and Florida. The 1990 census indicated the Hispanic population in the U.S. was 20.1 million. This is an increase of 39 percent since 1980, and this growth provides many more opportunities for the proclamation of the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Hispanic ministries are appearing in multiforms. The Reformed Church in America has various Hispanic congregations that can be classified as: a) dominant in the Spanish language, b) bilingual, and c) dominant in the English language with a Hispanic cultural formation. The question is: “Will there be a time when all congregations can be converted to English speaking?” The answer is no; not in this generation, nor in immediate generations to come. A uniqueness to both mainland and immigrating Hispanics is the preservation of language and cultural tradition.

CUBA AND HERMANDAD

The 1994 General Synod approved the Hermandad program (MGS 1994, R-14, p. 94), a sister-church relationship program between congregations of La Iglesia Reformada en Cuba (the Christian Reformed Church in Cuba), the RCA, and the Christian Reformed Church in North America. The 1994 General Synod also instructed the Council for Hispanic Ministries to implement the Hermandad program (MGS 1994, R-14, p. 94). On October 17, 1994, the Rev. Antonio Lopez and the Rev. Luis Perez met with the Rev. Erelio Martinez Garcia, president of the National Council of Churches in Cuba, and the Rev. David Lee Chang, treasurer of the National Council of Churches in Cuba, to discuss various issues relating to the Hermandad program.
The Cuban church has asked that the Hermandad program be limited only to the one currently participating church, First Church in Albany, New York. The Cuban church is concerned about maintaining the integrity of the Hermandad program. The Cuban church does not want its congregations to abuse the program by requesting favors and benefits not implied or suggested in the program. The council will honor this request and hopes and trusts that this program can be expanded to other RCA churches at a future time.

The Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in Cuba is grateful for its relationship with the Council for Hispanic Ministries since 1990. Hispanic RCA pastors have visited Cuba each year since 1990 for two weeks as resource persons for seminars and evangelistic campaigns. Reports received from Hispanic RCA pastors are enthusiastic, and the council hopes to maintain the relationship with the CRC in Cuba. In 1994 CHM’s trip was canceled due to political tension and public demonstrations in Cuba.

The Christian Reformed Church in North America contributes through its mission budget to the CRC in Cuba. The CRC in North America is interested in participating in CHM’s seminars and evangelistic mission trips to Cuba. In response to this request from the CRC in North America and the CRC in Cuba, the next visit to Cuba—scheduled for November or early December 1995—will include two CRC in North America pastors and two RCA pastors instead of four Hispanic RCA pastors as in past trips.

A TIME OF TRANSITION

1994 was a year of transition for the council. After ten years of service, the Rev. Johnny Alicea-Baez resigned in July 1994 to accept a call to Hope Community Reformed Church in Orlando, Florida. On November 1, 1995, the Rev. Luis Pérez was named the new secretary for Hispanic ministries. The selection process for a secretary for Hispanic ministries consisted of a search committee, interviews by the executive committee of the council, and a concurrence by three members of the Administrative Council. The search committee included representatives from the East, Midwest, Far West, and Canada (areas with Hispanic churches). The search committee reviewed resumes and recommended finalists to the executive committee of CHM. The executive committee selected a finalist and then presented its finalist to three members of the administrative staff—the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, the Rev. Kenneth Bradsell, and the Rev. Alvin Poppen—for further interviews and final approval.

The responsibilities of the executive secretary of CHM are to attend meetings, to be the collective voice of Hispanics for the expression of Hispanic needs, and to coordinate and advocate programs and resources that strengthen and edify Hispanic churches. The council’s desire is to express spiritual, social, political, and economic concerns and needs for all Hispanics, not only in the U.S., but throughout the world. This is a task that involves CHM working with all General Synod Council committees/units, General Synod agencies and commissions, RCA seminaries and the Theological Education Agency (TEA), the Council of Field Secretaries, regional synods, and classes. CHM is gratified for the confidence and recognition given by these assemblies and agencies. CHM prays that its contributions to these groups will be helpful and valuable in maintaining the ministry, focus, and vision of the RCA.

SMOKE-FREE CHURCHES

Many Hispanic RCA churches are located within inner cities. Many youth and children have a difficult time in the inner city. Inner city life is a daily struggle, and peer pressure is real and very intense. CHM thanks the Lord that most of its youth and children handle difficult issues very well, including the ability to stay away from smoking and chemical substances.
Their parents are aware of the drug problems encountered at school and in neighborhoods. It is a continual parental responsibility to watch and admonish their youth and children and to help them avoid chemical substances.

Adults, too, have a difficult time in the inner city. Some adults in Hispanic RCA congregations come from families with weak structures and unstable backgrounds. Such backgrounds can contribute to chain smoking and substance abuse. However, for some of these adults, receiving Jesus Christ as Savior has changed their lives; long-term unhealthy and dangerous habits have ended. Powerful testimonies about changed lives are common in RCA Hispanic congregations. Nevertheless, a conflicting message is communicated by churches that allow smoking.

Alcoholic Anonymous (AA) programs currently take place in a number of RCA congregations. These AA programs need to continue. However, a number of these AA programs in RCA churches allow smoking during the meetings. RCA Hispanic churches strongly believe that adopting a smoke-free environment posture during these AA meetings will not hamper these programs. Perhaps this issue requires rethinking and retraining people to refrain from smoking for an hour or two while meeting in church buildings.

The U.S. surgeon general has declared that smoking is a major cause of lung cancer. Consequently, all government buildings are smoke-free environments. Airlines and many other private industries have also declared smoke-free environments. If industries and government agencies can declare their public spaces smoke-free, why can't the Reformed Church in America do the same in its buildings?

R-10.
To direct the general secretary to urge RCA congregations, seminaries, and offices to declare all RCA buildings and places of gathering as “smoke-free environments.”

Upon a motion from the floor to amend R-10, the Synod

VOTED: To direct the general secretary to urge RCA congregations, seminaries, and offices to declare all RCA buildings and places of gathering as “smoke-free environments.”*<

(The advisory committee had recommended the adoption of R-10.)

RESOURCES AND TRANSLATIONS

The council continues to work with the CRC in North America on the joint bilingual publication, Puentes. This publication shares resources with both the RCA and the CRC. The quarterly publication is available from the Office of the Council for Hispanic Ministries. The council also continues to translate the news publication, RCA Today, under the Spanish title, Hoy!. Translations provide exposure of RCA printed materials to those for whom Spanish is a primary language. Thus, the council plans to continue the work of translating Puentes and Hoy! and to expand this service to include other resources and materials.

Language is the window to inner feelings. Through spoken and written language, people express joy and sadness, love and hate. Without question, a characteristic that distinguishes a culture is the language. Yet, many ethnic groups have lost their original language. In Hispanic communities, language has been something that Hispanics have managed to retain from generation to generation. More than 50 percent of Hispanic-Americans are bilingual.

*Deletion is enclosed in brackets.
The language of origin is the language of the soul by which people can best express themselves. Therefore, the language of origin is important in ministry. A spiritual truth becomes more meaningful when it is spoken or written in the native tongue of the person receiving or expressing communication. As a consequence, for Hispanics to clearly understand and receive distinct, well-defined, and concise communication, translations are required. Explicit communication in the language of origin leads to deeper thought processes.

The blessing of being bilingual and multilingual is enhanced with translation. The circles of knowledge and the sharing of God's blessings and gifts are amplified as basic tools of worship, liturgy, and church polity are translated and provided to those embracing the faith.

There is an abundant treasure of knowledge for those who can speak more than one language. Learning English is not the issue. Most Hispanics, and others, want to learn English and are doing so. However, because Spanish is here to stay, necessary tools for effective ministry, written in the vernacular of the people, must be provided.

The advisory committee recommended to amend R-11:

R-11.
To urge the General Synod Council Stewardship and Communication Services Unit, in [cooperation] consultation with the Council for Hispanic Ministries, to pursue the Spanish translation of resources and materials important to the life of Hispanics in the Reformed Church in America on a case-by-case basis; and further,

to fund $4,640 from the General Synod Operational Budget for the Spanish translation of the 1996 edition of the Book of Church Order.*

(OUT ADOPTED)

Reason: The amendment to R-11 specifies a resource to be translated.<

R-11.
[To urge the General Synod Council Stewardship and Communication Services Unit in cooperation with the Council for Hispanic Ministries, to pursue the Spanish translation of resources and materials important to the life of Hispanics in the Reformed Church in America.]*

Upon a motion from the floor, the following was substituted for R-11:

To fund $4,640 from the General Synod Operational Budget for the Spanish translation of the 1996 edition of the Book of Church Order.

(ADOPTED)

(The above substitute for R-11 had a cost effect on the General Synod Operational Budget. See Report of the Committee of Reference, p. 415.)

LiFE (Living in Faith Everyday) curriculum is a source of excellent Reformed theology. LiFE is a tremendous resource for many Hispanic RCA congregations. The council believes there are many Hispanic non-RCA or CRC congregations searching for good Sunday school resources, and that this Hispanic market should be explored. The council believes that such a resource places Reformed theology and the RCA in the forefront for Hispanics in the Americas and other Spanish-speaking areas of the world.

*Additions are in light-face type; deletions are enclosed in brackets.
R-12.
To request the General Synod Council Congregational Services Unit, in cooperation with the General Synod Council Stewardship and Communication Services Unit, to investigate the feasibility and cost of translating LiFE curriculum into the Spanish language, for implementation by 1998. (ADOPTED)

HISPANIC YOUTH MINISTRIES

It is with joy and gratification that the council reports the monies designated by PPIM are sufficient to continue the work of Hispanic youth ministries. In January 1995 the council added a youth minister on the West Coast. This increases the total of Hispanic youth ministers to three and divides the U.S. into three regions. Local Hispanic RCA church support and those participating in the youth programs provide the additional funding needed to continue the Hispanic youth ministry program.

From the Report of the General Synod Council’s Congregational Services Committee

OFFICE OF SOCIAL WITNESS

Social Witness and Evangelism in a Changing World

All too often social witness and evangelism are seen, not as interdependent aspects of the one ministry of the church of Jesus Christ, but as separate or even competing programs. Evangelism is concerned with gaining individual commitment; social witness with building a just society. Evangelists devote their energies toward meeting spiritual needs; social activists work at meeting material needs. Evangelists want to change hearts; social activists want to change society. People with a passion for winning lost souls represent the “conservative” wing of the church; people with a passion for righting society’s wrongs are the “liberals.”

Such caricatures must be overcome. There were no such distinctions in Jesus’ ministry. Jesus came proclaiming the good news of the coming kingdom of God (Mark 1:14). God’s coming reign includes a claim on the individual human heart (recall Jesus’ conversations with Nicodemus and with the woman at the well); the eventual defeat of all powers that hurt or destroy life (Jesus fed the hungry, healed the sick, and cast out demons); and the final triumph of God over all those forces, structures, and powers that would thwart God’s intention for creation (Jesus’ castigation of the Pharisees, his defiance of Pilate and Herod, and his defeat of death by death). In the cross and resurrection Jesus “disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them” (Col. 2:15).

The tasks of evangelization and social witness are parts of the one ministry of witnessing to the reign of God in every outpost of creation.
The hackneyed business about a dichotomy between “evangelism” and “social action” is fundamentally misguided. It will not do to divide the issue in this way. It is a false issue without foundation in the Bible, fashioned by people who refuse to think about evangelism theologically. On the one hand, if we take only “evangelism” as this dichotomy has it, we are left with the question, “News for what?” The answer is, news for alternative obedience in the world. That is what the news of the evangel is all about, and any evangelism which does not go toward this radical lived appropriation is fraudulent.

On the other hand, if we take “social action” as it is featured in this dichotomy, we are left with the question, “Social action from what source and for what end?” The answer is social action comes from the radical news of God’s new governance over the world, and social action is witness and praise to the new governor. And social action which is not rooted in this news and aimed at the new ruler has no claim upon biblical warrants.

Our work is to overcome this dichotomy. To do that we need both. Both what? Both the news and the appropriation. We cannot have announcement without appropriation or appropriation without announcement. If the gospel concerns changed governance, then that changed governance concerns all of life, for the victory of God over death is not a victory in some selected zones of life, but over all of creation and against every threat of chaos. Thus our appropriation of the news concerns civil rights and sexuality, birth and death, national defense and family nurture. The church now has the hard work of finding language to override the seductive dichotomy which permits ideology to fence off zones of life from evangelical impact.

It is primarily through the ministry of congregations that the good news of the reign of God is both announced and appropriated. There the good news of Jesus Christ, who justifies sinners and who brings justice to the sinned against, is proclaimed. There the Spirit of Jesus shapes the life of the community where sinners forgive one another and where the sinned against receive justice. Much of the ministry of the Office of Social Witness is aimed at helping to equip local congregations in their ministry so that no zone of life is “fenced off” from the impact of the gospel.

Caring for Creation

In the past year the Office of Social Witness has continued to cooperate with the National Religious Partnership on the Environment, especially the Evangelical Environmental Network and the National Council of Churches of Christ Eco-Justice Working Group, in developing and distributing resources to assist congregations in caring for creation. God’s Earth Our Home, a twelve-session study guide, is available through the RCA Distribution Center. Let the Earth Be Glad, an introductory resource packet, was mailed to every RCA congregation. More than eighty RCA congregations have requested follow-up packets from the Evangelical Environmental Network. This spring the Office of Social Witness cooperated with sister denominations in producing additional resources and in conducting a survey of congregational activity. Approximately two hundred RCA congregations were invited to participate in the survey. Also available to RCA members is Green Cross, a new Christian environmental quarterly.

In October 1994 the Office of Social Witness cooperated with the Regional Synod of Albany in a two-day “Creation Celebration.” The event included worship, a keynote address by Dr. Loren Wilkinson of Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia, an environmental fair, and a variety of workshops. The Office of Social Witness has conducted additional “Caring for Creation” workshops for RCA congregations, classes, and diaconal ministry groups in the regional synods of New York, Mid-Atlantics, Great Lakes, and Mid-America.
Resources and Programs on Critical Issues

The Office of Social Witness is often called upon to prepare resources and programs to help Christians think critically and respond faithfully to current social and ethical issues. At the direction of the 1994 General Synod, the Office of Social Witness prepared a study guide to accompany the Christian Action Commission paper, "A Christian Response to Physician-Assisted Suicide" (MGS 1994, pp. 70-77). A study guide has also been developed for the paper, "Welcoming the Strangers in Our Midst" (MGS 1993, pp. 86-97), and another guide has been developed on abortion and the church’s ministry to women who have undergone abortions and those who are at risk of abortion.

Recent calls in some state legislatures for the reinstitution of the death penalty have provided another opportunity for ethical reflection and public witness for the church. The Office of Social Witness provided congregations with resources based on the 1962 General Synod statement on capital punishment, which held that such a practice was "incompatible with the spirit of Christ and the ethic of love" (MGS 1965, p. 212). The minister for social witness also participated in a forum on capital punishment in Albany, New York.

The Office of Social Witness also serves RCA congregations through its newsletter, The City Gate, and through the resources provided in the annual Peace Packet. In the past year The City Gate has included articles on the situation in Chiapas, Mexico, the issue of violence, caring for creation, and elections in El Salvador and South Africa, and has reported on the Office of Social Witness travel seminar to South Africa. As a follow-up to the South Africa travel seminar, the Office of Social Witness helped arrange a meeting between pastors from the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa and representatives from the RCA. The 1994 Peace Packet included worship and Bible study resources on building community, understanding diversity, and peacemaking for children. This packet also offered information and resources related to “Children’s Sabbath.” A number of RCA congregations observed the Children’s Sabbath or utilized these resources in other ways to engage Christians in the ministry of advocacy for children.

Christian Witness in the Public Square

In addition to serving congregations, the Office of Social Witness also facilitates the denomination’s witness in the “public square.” That witness becomes more important in a time when the mood of society is calling for "less government." The church can remind leaders and citizens that the deeper concern is neither less government nor more government, but a more just society, and that the Bible understands one of the primary purposes of government is to serve as the defender of the poor and the weak in society. The voice of the church, though of limited political influence, still carries some moral weight. Statements on political issues by the General Synod or by the Office of Social Witness acting as the Synod’s agent, sometimes opens the door to dialogue with leaders in government and business; a dialogue that provides the church an opportunity to bear witness to God’s concern for justice and peace in society.

The Office of Social Witness facilitated the participation of RCA members in the Bread for the World Lobby Day and in the National Interfaith Impact Briefing. Both events are opportunities for people of faith to deepen their understanding of key issues, to work together to influence public policy, and to meet with their elected officials. In addition, the Office of Social Witness sends out periodic issues of Action Alert to a mailing list of RCA members who have agreed to write their elected officials on a variety of public policy issues.

The Office of Social Witness also represents the RCA in a number of ecumenical groups which provide additional opportunities for the church’s public witness in North America and in other parts of the world. Among these are the National Council of Churches (NCCC)
Human Rights Committee, the NCCC National Ministries Unit, and the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR). This year through its involvement with ICCR, the RCA hopes to initiate dialogue with the Texaco Corporation about that company's involvement in countries where there is a continuing and systematic pattern of human rights violations.

In these and other ways, the Office of Social Witness helps to equip the RCA for its witness in society. Biblical scholar J. Christiaan Beker has called the church "the blueprint and beachhead of the kingdom of God" and also says:

the church is not an elite body, separated from a doomed world, but a community placed in the midst of the cosmic community of creation; its task is not merely to win souls but to bear the burdens of a creation, to which it not only belongs but to which it must also bear witness.

The word "witness" is important. The church's task is not to save the world or to reform society or to build the kingdom of God, but to bear faithful witness to the God whose final triumph has already been made known to us in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

With an urgency born of this hope the church applies itself to present tasks and strives for a better world. It does not identify limited progress with the Kingdom of God on earth, nor does it despair in the face of disappointment and defeat. In steadfast hope the church looks beyond all partial achievement to the final triumph of God.

Notes:


**OFFICE OF HUNGER EDUCATION**

**Introduction**

This has been another year filled with human-initiated and natural disasters. Images of human tragedy in eastern Europe and Rwanda have been mixed with pictures of natural disasters of earthquakes in Japan and floods in the Netherlands. All of this is in addition to continued famine crisis conditions in the greater Horn of Africa and the recent news that 26 percent of all children under age six in the U.S. now live in poverty. It has been a year when RCA members might be tempted to throw up their hands in despair. But we are a resurrection people—a people of hope—called by God to continue to plant seeds of hope in this hungry world. The RCA continues to do so in a number of ways.
Reformed Church World Service

Reformed Church World Service (RCWS) and Church World Service were started in 1946 in the aftermath of the destruction caused by World War II. RCWS continues to be involved in relief, rehabilitation, development, and advocacy. Money given to RCWS is channeled through various agencies which are operational in an area of need. For instance, in Rwanda, most RCWS money has been sent through a consortium of U.S. and European denominational and independent agencies working in partnership together. This money has been used to purchase emergency food in the form of biscuits and unif-mix; and to purchase supplies such as plastic sheeting, blankets, and tents. This money has also been used to facilitate counseling, to find clean water, to provide medical care, and to encourage conflict resolution.

One Great Hour of Sharing

In addition to individual gifts for the support of Reformed Church World Service, many RCA congregations use the One Great Hour of Sharing materials to help raise awareness and to channel monetary gifts to the needy. A new packet of materials was sent in February 1995 to RCA congregations desiring to use the materials during Lent; another packet will be sent to RCA congregations in August 1995, in combination with a hunger packet to use on World Communion Sunday or World Hunger Sunday. The RCA coordinator for hunger education continues to serve as the RCA representative on the One Great Hour of Sharing Committee, a group of ecumenical partners who collaborate on the production of One Great Hour of Sharing materials.

Bread for the World

The RCA continues to support the efforts of Bread of the World, an organization which seeks to influence government policies that directly affect hungry people. The RCA does this through an annual grant and by encouraging individual memberships and covenant church participation in Bread for the World. The RCA coordinator for hunger education serves on the board of directors for this organization.

Bread for the World played a critical role in 1995 in urging the U.S. Congress not to cut domestic hunger and nutrition programs, which have proven to be very beneficial to children. If congregations were to pick up the cost of these programs (as suggested by some members of Congress), the cost for every congregation in the U.S. would be $170,000.

Two of the most effective of these programs are the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and the school lunch program. WIC in particular has been shown to reduce infant mortality, low birth weight, and anemia. It is estimated that for every dollar spent in the WIC program, three to four dollars are saved in later medical costs. Bread for the World and the RCA have in the past supported full funding for WIC. (Currently three million women, infants, and children who are eligible for the program are not being served because WIC has not been fully funded by Congress.) Shifting the WIC program to block grants to the states would seriously jeopardize the goal of fully funding WIC. It would also eliminate uniform national nutritional standards, leading to inequity among the states. Block grants would also eliminate federal nutritional standards for school lunch programs and would end their entitlement status, making these programs less able to respond to increased need in time of recession or economic difficulty.

R-13.
To encourage RCA members in the U.S. to write their elected officials urging them to oppose cuts in the Women’s, Infants’, and Children’s feeding programs (WIC), and cuts in school lunch programs; and further,
to oppose efforts to replace these programs with block grants to the states. (ADOPTED)

(A motion was made and supported to amend R-13 by inserting the words “further, to encourage RCA members in the U.S. to write their elected officials urging them to oppose” after the abbreviation and word “(WIC), and.” The motion LOST.)

(Another motion was made and supported to amend R-13 by deleting the word “oppose” after the words “urging them to” and inserting the word “support.” The motion LOST.)

Currently the United States spends less than one percent of its federal budget on foreign aid. Over the past decade, according to the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID), U.S. foreign aid has been cut by one-third. Current AID budget for humanitarian and development programs is $6.5 billion, or one-half of one percent of the federal budget. In terms of the percentage of gross national product allocated for foreign aid, the U.S. ranks last among twenty-one industrialized nations. In 1994, $784 million was dispersed through the Development Fund for Africa (less than one-tenth of 1 percent of the federal budget). The funds are used to aid local and regional organizations engaged in conflict resolution, sustainable development projects, and debt relief.

Bread for the World also has been working on behalf of the hungry in Africa through its 1995 Offering of Letters. Citizens of the U.S. are urged to write members of Congress requesting them to maintain the Development Fund for Africa. This fund helps reduce hunger and poverty by supporting people’s efforts to meet their own basic needs.

R-14.
To encourage RCA congregations in the U.S. to conduct an Offering of Letters, urging members of Congress to maintain funding for the Development Fund for Africa. (ADOPTED)

Other Opportunities for Education and Awareness

The RCA coordinator for hunger education continues to raise the awareness of hunger issues throughout the denomination by writing and speaking. A new educational kit, *Africa, from Bad News to Good News*, is available now from the RCA Distribution Center. This kit was developed for children in cooperation with the Bread for the World Institute and the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee.

From the Report of the Task Force on South Africa

R-15.
To request the General Synod Council Congregational Services Committee, through its Office for Social Witness in consultation with the African-American Council, to keep before the RCA the specific issues of justice and reconciliation that concern both North America and Southern Africa. (ADOPTED)
Reasons:

1. Although the legal scaffolding of apartheid is now dismantled, the old attitudes, habits, personnel, and structures remain.

2. Apartheid was not only a political and economic system; it also had far-reaching cultural consequences for the society and region.

3. The American experience suggests that although legal segregation has ended, *de facto* segregation remains. School desegregation ended in American cities in 1954, yet some schools are more racially isolated in 1994 than they were in 1954.

R-16.
To request the General Synod Council Congregational Services Committee, through its Office for Education, in cooperation with the Commission on Theology, to prepare and make available to RCA congregations a study guide on the *Belhar Confession*. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. The *Belhar Confession* represents an addition to *Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa Standards* from the perspective of oppressed Christian men and women.

2. Careful study of the *Belhar Confession* may shed light on RCA social witness efforts in North America.

Overtures

Membership in United Nations for Taiwan

1. The Classis of New York overtures General Synod to write an official letter of affirmation to the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, indicating the moral support and care the Reformed Church in America shares with them for the reinstatement of Taiwan as a full member in the United Nations; and further,

   to send the general secretary of the Reformed Church in America, or other RCA representatives, to visit Taiwan and other Asian churches to show visible, moral support; and further,

   to instruct the general secretary of the Reformed Church in America to write an official letter to the general secretary of the United Nations to express the care and concern of the Reformed Church in America for the nation of Taiwan and to encourage the general secretary of the United Nations to seek ways for the reinstatement of Taiwan to full membership in the United Nations; and further,
to instruct the general secretary of the Reformed Church in America to write to the president of the United States to express the care and concern of the Reformed Church in America about the lack of status and recognition for Taiwan as a nation and to encourage the president of the United States to seek ways for reinstatement of Taiwan to full membership in the United Nations.

Reasons:

1. Taiwan (also known as Formosa, an old name given by Portuguese sailors in 1590, meaning “beautiful island”) is located in the South China Sea, between Japan and the Philippine Islands. The country is about the size of New Jersey (13,885 square miles). The island population of twenty-one million consists of three groups of people: aboriginal, Taiwanese, and Chinese.

2. Taiwan became an independent country geographically, politically, and economically after World War II. Taiwan has not had any direct political connection whatsoever with China for more than a century. Today Taiwan is recognized worldwide as Asia’s second strongest nation economically, right after Japan.

3. The People’s Republic of China has always claimed that Taiwan is part of its territory. If necessary, China will take Taiwan over by military force.

4. The people of Taiwan are under the shadow of China’s violent military pressure and under the fire of Communist China’s threat.

5. Currently, the People’s Republic of China has a very unstable communist regime. Nobody likes to be controlled or dominated under such a regime. Deng Xiaoping, China’s highest-ranking communist leader, is dying. After his death, no one can predict what disturbances may occur.

6. The Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, the oldest and strongest denomination in Taiwan (a little larger than the RCA in terms of congregations and members), and a long-time friend and partner of the RCA in the ministry for the kingdom of God, has always actively identified with the suffering of the local people. For the 125 years of her existence, the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan has also been active in political issues. Recently, the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan has made a strong appeal to the United Nations and all churches worldwide (including the Reformed Church in America) to support the reinstatement of Taiwan as an official member of the United Nations.

7. The Presbyterian Church (USA), at its 1994 General Assembly, approved support of the appeal of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan.

The advisory committee recommended:

R-17.
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The substance of Overture 1 is addressed in R-8 above. The General Synod adopted R-8 as amended. (See p. 88.)

Oppose Legalization of Physician-Assisted Suicide

2. The Classis of South Grand Rapids overtures General Synod to amend the Commission on Christian Action paper, “A Christian Response to Physician-Assisted Suicide” (MGS 1994, pp. 70-7) to include a clear statement calling RCA
members and congregations to actively oppose the legalization of physician-assisted suicide.

Reasons:

1. Assisted suicide is confused in the paper with suicide. No distinction is made between taking one's life, and having one's life taken. It is assumed that one needs only be concerned with voluntary assisted suicides. On the principle "it doesn't harm anyone else," the paper says Christians should let others (non-Christians or "moral cowards") kill themselves if they want to. That is at least debatable, but the real specter that ought to haunt Christians is the possibility that people will kill another human being because that person has no "life" worth living, or because he or she and the person's pain have become a burden to society. When Dr. Jack Kevorkian says that quadriplegics, people with multiple sclerosis, and those with severe arthritis are the kinds of people who "need" his services, one should at least consider the possibility that this society is on the brink of a "slippery slope" to the legalized murder of the insane, depressed, aged, handicapped, and others who are an affront to this society's sensibilities, finances, or health care system. The paper blithely ignores such a possibility, as if one could never move from voluntary assisted suicide to involuntary euthanasia. The RCA ought to consider more carefully what other evil people may choose to do with this newfound freedom to choose death, before the RCA says such a freedom will be harmless to society. The laudable goal of easing suffering is not well-served by the immoral and drastic means of active euthanasia.

2. The paper's conclusion in effect says that clear biblical teaching on this issue is not enough to compel Christians to any overt action. Biblical authority is rendered impotent by the paper's premature concession of victory to those who want assisted suicide to be a personal "right" enshrined in law. It astoundingly says Christians should be content to just maintain their freedom to not choose suicide for themselves personally, while perhaps humbly sharing the reasons for that choice with those who disagree. On the latter point it even voices uncertainty over whether Christians ought to join the public debate! If that's the case in this life-and-death matter, when can Christians get involved? If assisted suicide is wrong, Christians ought to have the courage of their convictions and work hard to see that this practice remains illegal as well as immoral. The Commission on Christian Action paper says that any public conversation should emphasize a concern for the health and well-being of society. The chilling addition to this practical advice, though, is the assertion that since there is no universal agreement that assisted suicide is "detrimental to society," Christians should stand back and let it happen. The spiritual chill here comes with the rhetorical question in the last paragraph (with "no" apparently being the expected answer):

   Whether or not you agree with the fundamental moral convictions of Christians, would allowing assisted suicide change the character of the U.S. and Canada and their health care systems in ways that would be detrimental to all citizens" (MGS 1994, p.75)?

Change the words "assisted suicide" to (for example) "the euthanasia of a few quadriplegics" or "the insane," and the chill becomes an icy gale. To take a "narrow focus" that ignores such possibilities and advocates doing nothing more than "sharing our own unique perspectives" is either naive or insidious in the extreme. One might easily call it moral cowardice. Even if all others say there is no "harm" in putting some people to sleep as well as old, sick dogs, Christians should translate their commitments to the contrary into personal, social, political, and legal action. The suggestion that such political activism might "compromise our freedom to live by our distinctive moral commitments" is but a sophisticated equivalent to "don't make waves or we may be
next.” That is not the way Christians should respond to injustice and evil, even in a pluralistic society!

The biblical goal of letting one’s light shine in the world is not well-served by Christians quietly getting out of the way of those who demand the freedom to use their killing machines—even if the masses salute them and their lethal “compassions.”

Note:

Dr. Jack Kevorkian’s comments about those in need of his services are quoted by Peter J. Bernardi in a Christianity Today article, August 15, 1994, from a Kevorkian address to the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. (October 27, 1992).

➢The advisory committee recommended:

R-18.
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. The concerns expressed in Overture 2 are addressed in R-1 above. The General Synod adopted R-1 as amended. (See p. 70.)

2. The concerns of the Classis of South Grand Rapids were communicated to the Commission on Christian Action and the commission will consider those concerns in its revising of the paper, “A Christian Response to Physician-Assisted Suicide.”<
Report of Central College

In 1916, the year Central College was transferred from the Baptists to the Reformed Church in America, one of the departing Baptist administrators wrote in the college catalog:

This college will play a large part in the life of the Reformed Church. It will be a recruiting ground for young men and women for the various tasks of the Kingdom of God. The immediate community will continue to be greatly enriched by the presence of the college, while no boundaries can be set to the influences for good that will reach the ends of the earth.

This statement may long ago have been forgotten, but for the Central College community the proclamations remain very real. With the assistance of many generous acts of support and prayer by the members of the RCA, Central continues to prepare young people for active service, to enhance the community of believers, and to expand the boundaries for achieving good in the world in which we all live.

Central College strongly affirms its historic roots with the RCA as acknowledged in the Covenant of Mutual Responsibilities (MGS 1969, pp. 68-70 and MGS 1990, pp. 138-42). The college considers it a privilege to share this annual report with the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America.

ACADEMIC PROGRAM

The Central College academic program continues to be well-received regionally and nationally. Several annual college ranking publications (Peterson’s Competitive Colleges, U.S. News & World Report, Barron’s Best Buys in College Education) honored Central this year by rating it as one of the top colleges in the U.S. For 1994-95 Money Magazine recognized the education offered at Central College as one of the one hundred best buys in college education.

Motivated by this level of recognition, the faculty has actively been preparing the new core curriculum and academic calendar, scheduled to take effect in the fall of 1996. Under the leadership of the new vice-president of academic affairs and dean of the college, Dr. Virginia Coombs, the faculty is developing course offerings which will place strong emphasis on preparing students to achieve highly developed skills in writing, oral communication, quantitative reasoning, computing, and foreign languages.

One of the more interesting features of the new core will be the number of options available for the students to achieve these skills. The course work is being prepared in such a way that the skills emphasis will cut across the entire curriculum—at all levels and through every discipline, thus affording each student optimum skill development opportunities. In addition to the emphasis placed on acquiring skills, the new core will increase the level of student contact and understanding of other cultures, including two units of experiential education related to another culture.

This year a service-learning grant provided the occasion for five faculty members to develop and plan course work that includes service to the community. Service-learning is designed to encourage students to give to the community. The course work provides a basis of expertise for the students; then the students share that expertise with the community.
One example of service-learning was in Dr. Jan Curry-Roper’s Environmental Studies senior seminar. For this course students took on a real-life project of working with the unincorporated community of Otley, Iowa, to study the effects of septic tank use (rather than sanitary sewer) and the lack of regulations associated with that use. Students researched laws, investigated land use, met with local residents, and compiled a significant amount of data and information on the community’s behalf.

**CAMPUS LIFE**

Last year Central College established several programs to better equip students for campus living. This year those programs attained a level of maturity with particular emphasis placed on residence hall governance, career services, and counseling for first and second year students, and increased student involvement in the planning of student activities.

Since the arrival of Eric Jones, interim director of residence life, over one hundred residence hall special events have taken place to enhance the residence hall community experience, especially for underclass students. These events have ranged from social times to educational discussions to community service opportunities.

In 1994-95 residence hall directors participated in extensive training to sharpen their student empowerment skills in order to encourage individual student development and retention. One of the outcomes of this training has been that students have assumed greater responsibility for dormitory governance, both socially and judicially.

A new honors housing program for juniors and seniors expands the emphasis on exercising personal responsibility by allowing students to live in a setting with no resident advisors. Nearly all Central College students begin their residential experience in a residence hall with considerable supervision. The honors housing program assigns students to smaller living units, where they become more accountable for the formation of personal living skills.

The Office for Multicultural Student Support, under the tutelage of Pamela Thomas Frost, coordinator for multicultural student support, has completed steps to offer a broader range of programming and support services for Central’s multi-ethnic and international students. Activities included in this year’s programming were a multicultural fair; a multi-ethnic alumni forum; celebration of African-American, Latino-Hispanic, and Asian and Pacific months respectively; and orientation receptions.

**CO-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES**

The Central College A Cappella Choir and the Symphonic Wind Ensemble made extensive tours throughout the eastern United States with performances in concert halls and RCA churches. For added enjoyment at the RCA concerts, the Symphonic Wind Ensemble attempted to address the uniqueness of each setting. At the Middle Collegiate Church in New York City, for example, small ensembles performed in the late afternoon on the street outside the church. The wind ensemble’s tour concluded with a concert in the renowned Lincoln Center in New York City.

Central College’s men’s and women’s athletic teams continue to experience success on the field of competition and in the classroom. The football team, the men’s and women’s basketball teams, the wrestling team, and the men’s cross country team either won conference titles or were represented in national rankings for 1994-95. Seniors Emilie Hanson from Cannon Falls, Minnesota, and Jason Sanders from Humboldt, Iowa, received NCAA Division III Academic All-American honors. Hanson was also named Division III national player of the year in basketball as the top-scoring player in the division for the second consecutive year.
ALUMNI AND CHURCH RELATIONS

In continuing efforts to build upon constituent relations, new initiatives were taken to better meet the needs and desires of the college alumni population. Under the direction of the new director of alumni relations, Steve Muller, alumni volunteers across the U.S. have been meeting to establish area alumni chapters. These local chapters, with self-autonomy as the goal, have been established to date in seven locations, including Western Michigan; Denver, Colorado; Chicago, Illinois; Minneapolis, Minnesota; Phoenix, Arizona; and Cedar Rapids and Des Moines, Iowa. For the first year most chapters will be sponsoring a new student send-off in the fall, a summer picnic, and an area alumni registry for career development and networking. In order to facilitate the formation of local chapter leadership, fifteen alumni receptions in various parts of the country were held in 1994-95.

Last year Central College expanded its endeavors to strengthen the relationship the college enjoys with the congregations of the RCA. In 1994-95 those endeavors took many forms and included the following: on-campus continuing education conferences for pastors and laity; the development of a church ambassadors network to support communication between the college and the RCA; an informational newsletter, The Central Journal, for pastors and individual church members; and faculty and staff travel to various RCA congregations.

COLLEGE DEVELOPMENT AND ADVANCEMENT

Central College continues to benefit from the loyal financial support of its constituencies. With the launching of a more conventional approach to fund raising in 1994, the college is making significant strides in procuring the gifts needed to advance its mission into the twenty-first century and was successful in identifying a larger pool of potential prospects for future gift support. As a result of the new program, the college has raised nearly a quarter of a million dollars in “new money” alone, that is, funds from new donors.

Financial commitments made to the college for 1994-95 resulted in the Board of Trustees approving a major renovation of Vermeer Science Center and construction of a much-needed new dining hall near the Maytag Student Center. The existing dining hall and kitchen was built to accommodate only 300 students; currently the college serves nearly 1,200 students a day. The new construction will also include the development of a formal entrance to the college and completion of the lower level of the Maytag Student Center.

CAMPUS MINISTRY

Central College’s spiritual climate is sustained through a number of campus ministry programs. Organized by a student volunteer board and the chaplains of the college, opportunities for ministry abound.

Carry-over from last year’s notable increase in student interest for Christian ministry provided occasion for several new programs. A gospel choir, Unified Voices, spawned from an expressed desire of some of the college’s multi-ethnic students, was formed. This choir participates in worship services on and off campus.

Students continue to participate in outreach ministries, which in 1994 included workdays in Des Moines, Iowa, with the poor and the homeless; weekly excursions to senior care facilities; the Kinship program, which pairs a disadvantaged local youth with a responsible college adult; and the local food pantry.

This year’s Staley Distinguished Christian Scholar Lecture Series featured Dr. Toinette M. Eugene, associate professor of Christian social ethics at Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois. The two-day program centered on her area of expertise related to concerns for the African-American family and its cultural and religious development.
Central College annually provides continuing education conferences for area pastors. This year's conference was facilitated by the Rev. Dr. Dennis Voskuil, president of Western Theological Seminary. He spoke on the subject, “The Church in Transition: American Christianity on the Eve of the 21st Century.”

ENROLLMENT

Following Central College's inclusion in several of the national college rating publications and its excellent reputation for international studies, interest in the college has reached new levels. Applications for admittance are well ahead of last year, and, if matriculation percentages hold true, the college expects an increase for the fall of 1995 incoming class. In 1994 the college had one of its smaller entering classes. Hoping to attract students to its international programs, the college expanded its out-of-state recruiting, targeting metropolitan and urban areas. As a result, out-of-state applications are up nearly 25 percent, with the majority of those applications indicating interest in the international offerings. With the implementation of the new core curriculum in the fall of 1996, which increases cross-cultural requirements for all students, expectations are running high that out-of-state interest will continue to grow.

Central College continues to attract a highly qualified pool of applicants, with the majority of the admitted students coming from the state of Iowa. The fall 1994 freshmen class median grade point average approached 3.5 on a 4.0 scale, with ACT scores averaging nearly 24. In February 1995 faculty and administrators interviewed well over two hundred high school students competing for Distinguished Scholarships, which are awarded to recognize outstanding academic achievement.

CONCLUSION

Central College is grateful for its accomplishments and stands ready to meet new challenges. Those challenges for a church-related, liberal arts college become more demanding each year. This year was no exception, with renewed talk in the U.S. Congress for major rescission of federal student financial aid and the extreme competition among colleges like Central to attract qualified students, the college and the RCA will need to form a strong partnership to ensure future success. The college covets this partnership and requests of the RCA its favor, its financial support, its capable and bright students, and—above all—its prayers.

Report of Hope College

INTRODUCTION

When Albertus Van Raalte, with his brave band of Dutch Calvinist pilgrims, arrived in America in 1847 he found a ready welcome and generous assistance from clergy and members of the Reformed Church in America. After the settlement of Holland, Michigan, Van Raalte traveled east to inquire further into the doctrinal positions and ecclesiastical standards of the Reformed Church in America. Returning home he assured his followers that it was fitting for them to join with the RCA, the denomination that had grown out of the Dutch migration to America in the seventeenth century. Soon thereafter Van Raalte founded an academy and then a college. Because of the decision of the Dutch immigrants of the 1840s
to join with the Reformed Church in America, Van Raalte's college, Hope College, has been tied closely to the Reformed Church in America from that day to this. Today Hope is an independent college which enjoys a covenant relationship with the Reformed Church in America (see MGS 1969, pp. 68-70, and MGS 1990, pp. 138-42). The covenant is written on paper, but the reality of the covenant rests in the many personal relationships that tie the people of the RCA to the people of Hope College.

1995 APPLICATIONS AND ENROLLMENT

The Hope College admissions staff has been working diligently to recruit an academically talented and diverse student body for the 1995-96 year. As of the end of February 1995, Hope College had received a total of 1,652 freshman applications. That is ninety-six more than the college received as of that same date last year and seventy-nine more than the college received as of that same date two years ago. The quality of the applicant pool continues to be good, and interest in Hope is strong. The college is optimistic about reaching its freshman enrollment goal for the fall of 1995.

Because of the origin and nature of Hope College, the college is especially eager to recruit able young people with RCA backgrounds. As the college has grown, the absolute number of young people from the RCA has slightly increased; but as a percentage RCA enrollment has declined. While the college welcomes all young people who desire what Hope has to offer, Hope College earnestly requests RCA congregations to urge their young people to give serious consideration to attending Hope College. It is encouraging that there is an increase in applications from RCA students this year.

THE CHAPEL PROGRAM

Like most U.S. colleges, Hope at one time required all students to attend chapel services. As happened at many other colleges as well, Hope abolished mandatory chapel attendance in the 1960s. Since that time Hope has maintained an active, voluntary chapel program on campus. As a result of funds raised in a recently concluded major fund drive, Hope was able to initiate a much more ambitious chapel program in the fall of 1994. The chapel program is headed by the Rev. Benjamin Patterson, dean of the chapel. Working with Patterson are two chaplains, the Rev. Paul Boersma and the Rev. Dolores Nasrallah. Dwight Beal serves as musician and worship leader.

The chapel staff have put together a very attractive program of weekday and Sunday evening worship services as well as an effective relational ministry. Weekday chapel services draw between eight hundred and one thousand students and the Sunday evening services are well attended, too.

Fifty students joined in forming the Samuel Zwemer Fellowship to honor the memory of a Hope College graduate who was a leader in world missions in the early years of this century. These students are actively concerned with world missions. In addition, the summer of 1995 will see the initiation of the Summer of Service (SOS), a program which combines Christian discipling with outreach in the local community. There is a sense of spiritual excitement that runs throughout these activities, and that enthusiasm has become quite evident on the campus.

RHODES AND MARSHALL SCHOLARSHIPS

Hope's mission is to achieve academic excellence in the context of the Christian faith. One of the generally accepted indicators of academic quality in U.S. colleges is the number of graduates who receive the most prestigious awards, which are the Rhodes and Marshall Scholarships. This year graduating senior Ryan Bennink received a Marshall Scholarship.
This brings to three the number of Marshalls that Hope graduates have received since 1990. Since 1986 only one college has received more Rhodes and Marshalls than Hope.

DE WITT TENNIS CENTER, COOK RESIDENCE HALL, HAWORTH CONFERENCE CENTER

Having completed a rather intense period of campus construction in the late 1980s, Hope has continued to add to its campus facilities, but at a slower rate. Hope opened the De Witt Tennis Center in the summer of 1994. This is a six-court indoor tennis facility. In May 1995, the college started site preparation for Cook Residence Hall, an up-to-date, spacious, and comfortable dormitory which will house 270 students. Soon thereafter work began on the Haworth Conference Center. These projects will completely transform the block that currently separates the main campus from downtown Holland. The conference center will allow Hope College to host meetings and conferences year-round. In the summertime the lodging space of Cook Residence Hall will be available to the conference center to allow for the accommodation of even larger conferences on campus. Hope looks forward to the opportunity of hosting future meetings of the RCA and other groups in these new facilities. Cook Residence Hall is scheduled to open for use in August 1996 and the Haworth Conference Center is scheduled to open during the fall of 1996.

HOPE COLLEGE AND HOLLAND, MICHIGAN

Since the time of Albertus Van Raalte, the lives of Hope College and Holland, Michigan, have been thoroughly intertwined. In recent years Holland, Michigan, and its surrounding area has grown rapidly as a result of the success of local industry. This has created opportunities for Hope and also challenges. Hope has been proud to participate with groups and individuals who are active in the rejuvenation of downtown Holland and the neighborhoods surrounding the campus. In recognition of success to date and the promise of continuing success, Holland recently received a federal Weed and Seed grant which is being used, in part, to fortify the health of neighborhoods near the college. It is a pleasure to be part of a community like Holland, that is resolved to address challenges and opportunities directly and creatively.

RECOGNITION OF FACULTY FOR PUBLICATIONS

At the college’s annual faculty recognition luncheon in January 1995, Hope recognized its faculty for many different achievements. Prominent among them was a group of fourteen faculty who had published books during the past year. These ranged from books on religion to textbooks on programming languages and psychology to books on renaissance writers, athletic training administration, and detective fiction.

HOPE COLLEGE STATISTICS

This is my eighth report to General Synod since assuming the presidency of Hope College. It occurred to me that many may not have a clear idea of the size or scope of Hope College. Accordingly, some key statistics that characterize Hope College follow:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year in which college-level instruction was first offered</th>
<th>1862</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of students enrolled</td>
<td>2,825</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of full-time equivalent students</td>
<td>2,657</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of full-time equivalent faculty</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of majors offered</td>
<td>39</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total assets</td>
<td>$153,041,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of endowment</td>
<td>$ 56,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operating Budget, 1994-95</td>
<td>$ 50,935,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Value of financial aid from all sources awarded to Hope students $23,000,000

Cost for 1995-96:
- Tuition: $13,234
- Room: $2,060
- Board: $2,456
- RCA student representation: 20%

CONCLUSION

Many colleges that started as church-related institutions have lost or abandoned their Christian character. Hope College is committed to maintaining its Christian character even as it continues to improve and develop academically. Those who serve Hope College are grateful to the Reformed Church in America for the spiritual context it provides for Hope’s institutional life. Delegates to the 1995 General Synod are urged to pause and reflect on the great asset the RCA has in its colleges.

Notes:

1 As of the fall term 1994.

2 This is the largest single denominational group. Other well-represented groups include the Roman Catholic, Christian Reformed, Presbyterian, and Methodist denominations. Also, many students come from independent congregations.

Report of Northwestern College

It is a pleasure to submit this annual report to the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America. Northwestern College cherishes its more than century-old relationship with the denomination and looks forward to a vital and fruitful affiliation in the future. Amidst the many distinctives of Northwestern, it is the intentionally Christian dimension which is most appreciated and most unusual among institutions of higher education. For the support and affirmation of its mission by the RCA constituency, the college community is continually grateful.

ENROLLMENT

There is a rather unprecedented interest in a Northwestern College education. The fall 1994 enrollment was at an all-time high of 1,107 full-time equivalent (FTE) students. Applications and deposits for fall 1995 are currently running ahead of last year’s record pace. In order to have a critical mass of ideas and expertise in given departments, while still maintaining the intimate and relational dimension so characteristic of a Northwestern College education, the college is planning for a future enrollment of 1,200 FTE students. This number will optimally utilize all college facilities.

The admissions program is under the very capable direction of Ronald De Jong, who next year enters his twenty-fifth year at the college. His leadership is exceptional.
ACADEMICS

To those people who are a daily part of the Northwestern College community, the most obvious change in the last half-dozen years is the increased rigor of the academic program. Expectations for students and faculty are simply greater than was true heretofore. Both are responding with more diligent efforts, resulting in significant achievements. Three recent student examples are indicative. Robin Pals Rylaarsdam is currently in her third year at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, the recipient of a prestigious five-year, $125,000 Howard Hughes Medical Fellowship in molecular biology. Susan Huitink is currently studying philosophy at Syracuse University in Syracuse, New York, with the financial assistance of a competitive Pew Younger Scholars Fellowship. Susan Boote, a current junior at Northwestern, is a finalist in the Truman Scholarship Competition. All three are recipients of Northwestern’s Norman Vincent Peale academic scholarships.

The academic program at Northwestern is under the superb leadership of Dr. Robert Zwier, who is completing his seventh year in this capacity. His clear and appropriate emphasis is on effective classroom teaching. Annual evaluations of faculty include, importantly, the ability to permeate instruction with Christian perspective, scholarship, and service.

Northwestern was reaccredited this past year by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) for the maximum period through 1998. The standards for NCATE accreditation are very high, and this is, therefore, a major accomplishment.

Of special significance this past year was the symphonic band tour in Ukraine under the direction of professor Timothy McGarvey. Performing before “standing room only” audiences, the symphonic band brought joy and hope to a country undergoing major transition. The band’s goal of sharing the gospel through music and personal testimony was realized in marvelous ways.

RESIDENCE LIFE

The residence life program is under the very capable leadership of Paul Blezien, who will be entering his eighth year at Northwestern in the fall of 1995. Northwestern College is on the cutting edge of student development programming and is frequently cited as a model for the development of a wholesome campus climate in residence life. Northwestern’s goal in this important area is to build on the firm foundation established in the homes of so many of the college’s students. This is in contrast to the erosion of values which so often takes place on many college campuses. To be sure, Northwestern is not perfect in this arena, though the college strives very diligently to confront students with compassion relative to behavior expectations. Rather than worrying about how Northwestern students will embarrass themselves or the college, the college wonders how the students will be used to glorify God and to serve humankind.

Blezien also supervises Northwestern’s outstanding co-curricular program. In the fall of 1994 football coach Larry Korver guided Northwestern’s football team to the semifinals of the national NAIA football tournament. Korver, after twenty-eight years at the helm, is retiring. He compiled a 212-77-6 record, coaching eleven teams that qualified for the NAIA Division II playoffs, two teams that won national championships, and three that finished as runners-up. He retires as the second all-time winningest NAIA Division II coach.

SPIRITUAL LIFE

Northwestern College presents a strong and intentional Christian dimension to the college experience. Although required chapel is perhaps the most visible of the opportunities, there are many varied possibilities for spiritual growth and development. Included is Northwestern’s
exceptional student ministries program, which involves more than 50 percent of the campus community in campus, regional, national, and international service opportunities. This program is under the capable direction of Rebecca King. Overseeing the entire spiritual life program is the Rev. Matt Floding, college chaplain, now completing his seventh year at Northwestern.

FINANCES

Northwestern continues its debt-free status. Wayne Kooiker, vice-president for financial affairs, has served the college with great distinction for the past ten years. The college has finished each fiscal year in the black and remains on solid financial ground. The enviable financial status of the college can be attributed to Kooiker’s abilities in finance and decision-making.

In the fall of 1994 Northwestern College was cited in the U.S. News & World Report Special Edition on America’s Best College Values. Northwestern ranked third in the category of midwestern regional colleges for its overall efficiency. Only the top 20 percent academically rated institutions were considered for the efficiency ranking. The designation indicates that relative to other institutions, Northwestern is providing considerable quality while being a good steward of resources entrusted to the institution.

DEVELOPMENT

Fund raising continues to be an important dimension at the college. Under the excellent leadership of John Greller, now completing his third year at Northwestern, and his staff, the college received record gift income of nearly $3 million for fiscal 1994.

Northwestern College has undergone extraordinary campus development during the past decade. Completed during this time period have been Christ Chapel/Performing Arts Center and DeWitt Music Hall, an extensive renovation of the old chapel into departmental homes for the Kresge Education Center and Demco Business Center, the major expansion of the kitchen and dining areas into the DeWitt Center, and the renovation of the south wing of Van Peursem Hall. Nearing completion is the new intercollegiate athletic center. The final component of the $15.5 million Phase III campus development plan is the restoration of historic Zwemer Hall. This restoration will begin in May 1995. In addition, the enrollment increases at Northwestern have necessitated the construction of a new 200-person women’s residence hall, which will also begin in May 1995.

CONCLUSION

Finally, I am taking the liberty to end this report with a personal note as I complete a decade of service at Northwestern. My wife, Martie, joins me in thanking Northwestern’s Board of Trustees and, indeed, the Reformed Church in America for the privilege and joy of serving as president of Northwestern College. I also give commendation to my faithful administrative assistant, Beth De Leeuw, without whose efforts much of what has been accomplished would have been impossible. Northwestern’s goal has been to plan well, work diligently, and pray fervently for the college. God has blessed Northwestern’s efforts in ways beyond the college’s and my fondest dreams and expectations. I solicit the prayers of the denomination for the furtherance of God’s kingdom in this place. With eager anticipation Northwestern College looks forward to the privilege of hosting the 1996 General Synod of the Reformed Church.
Report of Reformed Church Women's Ministries

Reformed Church Women’s Ministries (RCWM), an organization for ministry for and by women in the Reformed Church in America, underwent a change in leadership in 1994. But while 1994 was a year of transition at the denominational level, the essential work and purpose of the organization and the way that work is carried out at the grass roots have remained much the same. There are still active, creative groups of women willing to dedicate their time and energy to the work of RCWM and the denomination.

MINISTRY

RCWM continues its foci on education and service. In 1994 fifty women participated in short-term mission projects through the Footsteps program. Thousands of women enjoyed the following RCWM’s Bible studies: the Rev. L’Anni Hill-Alto’s Come, Honored Guests and Jean and the Rev. Dr. Charles Van Engen’s It’s Time to Celebrate. Hundreds of women attended conferences sponsored by RCA regional synods.

The RCWM denominational office has long distributed materials for programs to local RCA congregations. Currently the office is working to revise and update a number of these programs in order to provide fresh materials to RCWM’s membership.

MISSION


FINANCES

RCWM continues to be self-funded. After a serious deficit in 1993, to see black ink at the end of 1994—even though the balance was small—was quite a relief. Radical cuts and changes in staffing accounted for much of the savings. Where RCWM goes from here is difficult to assess. If 1995 can be a rebuilding year financially, there is much hope for the organization.

THE FUTURE

Triennial looms large on the horizon. In July 1995 it is expected that 1,500 women will converge on Saratoga Springs, New York, to participate in the twelfth all-RCA women’s gathering. Planning for this event has been underway for over two years.

Study books for the next two years are taking shape. The Rev. Renee House (1996) and the Rev. Edwin Mulder (1997) are creating materials following the RCWM (and RCA) theme for the next three years: God’s People Transformed.

In 1995 Footsteps will go international, with a group traveling to Guayaquil, Ecuador, to work for a week at the Prince of Peace Children’s Home. Twenty-one women have signed up for this adventure.

From 1996 to 1998, RCWM aspires to raise $300,000 for mission work in China through the Mission Service Fund and through conference offerings. The organization will also continue its long-standing commitment to Southern Normal School.
PROJECTS

Several RCWM projects are in the planning or editing stages. They include:

- A mentoring program.
- Revision of RCWM's existing seminars.
- Establishment of an endowment.
- Revision of the bylaws to reflect changes in its membership.

PERSONNEL

Perhaps the change that started the other changes was the appointment of a new RCWM executive director. With the resignation of Diana Paulsen as executive director of RCWM, effective June 30, 1994, the organization launched a search for a new executive director. Christina Van Eyl began work on June 20, 1994, at the Michigan Regional Center in Grand Rapids, Michigan, a relocation of the RCWM denominational office from New York City made to accommodate Van Eyl and her family.

The relocation of the office and other factors made it necessary to hire a new secretary for RCWM. Mary Hondorp accepted the position as RCWM secretary and began work on August 1, 1994. Hondorp works half-time for RCWM and half-time for the coordinator for mission resources and supervisor of RCA mission programs in Asia and the Pacific.

RELOCATION

Construction on the new RCWM office in Grand Rapids was completed in early August 1994. The modification of the General Synod Council suite in the Michigan Regional Center included the construction of two new offices and the relocation of one secretarial station. The denomination offered an interest-free loan to cover the cost of construction; RCWM is paying back its portion over the next five years.

After the construction was complete, boxes of materials were shipped from the New York City office. The process was surprisingly smooth and inexpensive.

CONCLUSION

For RCWM, there is clearly no shortage of ministry to do. RCWM is in a challenging position. The organization needs to be sensitive to all women, and this isn’t easy. Yet it can be done by adhering to RCWM’s roots of service, education, and mission. These were RCWM's goals in its beginning, and they are still the truest goals of RCWM and the church.
In the eighteenth chapter of the Gospel according to Luke, Jesus told a parable of a widow and an unjust judge. At the end of the parable Jesus posed a question for his listeners: “And yet, when the son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?” (Luke 18:8b). The question, like many Jesus posed throughout the Gospels, cuts deep for those who boldly claim to be both Christ’s body, and Christ’s witnesses in the world. For if faith is to be found, faith must be taught. It must be shared, modeled, prayed for, and finally, it must be owned by those who hear it from Christians and witness it in Christians, so the gospel of God’s Christ may flourish throughout the earth.

This business of teaching and sharing has proven no slight task for Christ’s church in every generation. It is no less of a challenge today. The question posed by Jesus is one worth repeating at the end, or in the midst of much church labor. It is fitting to ask it of the church’s efforts at teaching. Church educators also ought to ask it of their efforts to create the programs and resources designed to support the teaching ministries of the congregations of the Reformed Church in America. In the asking, Christian educators together with pastors and lay leaders lay the groundwork for a process of ongoing engagement with each other across the church: Are the RCA’s materials, models, and methodologies faithful to the Christian story? Are they fitting for the contexts where those in the RCA practice ministry? Are they useful for the faithful leaders and teachers the church charges to bring others to faith?

Nearly twenty years ago an Episcopal priest named John Westerhoff (a priest whose own spiritual formation began years earlier as a child in a Reformed Church in America congregation) focused the concerns of many in church education with a little book titled, Will Our Children Have Faith? Westerhoff took religious education and religious educators to task for being too enamored of schooling-instruction as the best way to teach faith. “Faith cannot be taught by any method of instruction; we can only teach religion,” said Westerhoff. He went on to say:

Indeed, the schooling-instructional paradigm works against our necessary primary concern for the faith of persons. It encourages us to teach about Christian religion by turning our attention to Christianity as expressed in documents, doctrines, history, and moral codes. No matter what the rhetoric of our purposes, the schooling-instructional paradigm, modeled after modern psychology and pedagogy, leads us to focus on religion rather than faith. All this must change.

Certainly there is place for schooling and instruction in the church. The history, doctrines, ritual and practice, and the confessional statements of the church are more than simply ancillary to our faith and are important for contemporary believers to learn. These things—all with interactions with other persons, both believers and nonbelievers, and exposure and involvement in the wider culture with norms and values sometimes quite alien to faith—all form the context in which discipleship is practiced. Westerhoff’s challenge then, and his ongoing challenge to be about the primary work of forming faithful Christians, was and is an important criticism of the church’s education practice. The question of his little book has driven much of the work done in Christian education in the Reformed Church in America since he wrote it. Since the reestablishment of a denomination-wide education program over a decade ago, the RCA has been in the vanguard of efforts such as Young Children and Worship, the LiFE curriculum, Project Timothy, and Two by Two to Witness (youth).
These and other projects have been developed to help churches change their own education ministries, to appropriate fresh models and resources for learning, and to engage all children, youth, and adults in the lifelong work of becoming more faithful.

Children's Curriculum

Since the 1994 General Synod, a major focus of the work in children's ministry has been the introduction of LiFE (Living in Faith Everyday), the new curriculum jointly developed by the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC) and the Reformed Church in America. Following five years of designing, writing, and editing, LiFE was ready for use in RCA churches in the fall of 1994. LiFE resources have been well received and are presently used by one-third of RCA congregations.

A network of thirty-five regional consultants and RCA staff provided direct support and training for RCA congregations to introduce LiFE in the fall of 1994. Two-thirds of those RCA congregations using LiFE participated in the LiFE workshops. Responses from follow-up phone calls to LiFE users have been very positive.

The introduction of LiFE does not mean the RCA's commitment to the Bible Way curriculum has discontinued. On the contrary, Bible Way continues to be available as long as there are a sufficient number of churches using it to warrant its printing. Almost one-third of RCA congregations continue to use Bible Way on Sunday mornings or in midweek programs.

Besides these two curricula, the RCA makes available two other core curricula for use with children, youth, and adults. Both Celebrate, produced by the Presbyterian and Reformed Educational Ministry (PREM) partnership, and Bible Discovery, produced by a wider consortium of denominations, were fully revised for 1994. RCA usage of these two curricula continues to decline. Continued support for RCA congregations who use Celebrate or Bible Discovery is available from the RCA Resource Information Helpline or from the education staff in regional synods.

The Office for Christian Education and Youth Ministry is committed to strong support for the planners and leaders in RCA congregations who use any of the four core curricula materials (LiFE, Bible Way, Celebrate, and Bible Discovery) endorsed and available through the denomination. Leader training designs and workshops are available to support planners, leaders, and teachers. Regional synod education staff and consultants are available at no charge to RCA congregations to lead continuing education events, provide teacher training, or consult with churches regarding the development of sound education programs with children. Ongoing support for all congregations is provided through the RCA Resource Information Helpline.

Alert, a magazine for leaders and planners produced specifically to support Celebrate and Bible Discovery is produced by the PREM partnership. The quarterly journal is a valuable resource regardless of the curriculum a congregation uses. Formerly sent at no charge to RCA educators and congregations, it continues to be available from the Office for Christian Education and Youth for a nominal annual subscription rate of $8.

A LiFE leader newsletter is in the development stage. It is anticipated that two issues, one in the fall of 1995 and one in the spring of 1996, will be produced by the RCA. The newsletter will be distributed by both the RCA and the CRC to all LiFE users. Present plans are to include the resource in LiFE orders for distribution to LiFE leaders in congregations.
Children and Worship

Alongside the core curricula developed to support congregational ministries with young children, the Office of Christian Education and Youth Ministry is deeply committed to the Children and Worship program adopted in 1988 as a cooperative ministry of Western Theological Seminary, the Christian Reformed Church, and the Reformed Church in America. Interest in the program continues to grow. A new partner, the Presbyterian Church in Canada, was added to the program in the past twelve months.

During a visit to South Africa in May 1994 by representatives of the RCA including the director of congregational services and minister for education and faith development, the minister for social witness and worship, and the executive director of the African-American Council, discussions were held with representatives of the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa (URCSA) concerning areas of possible partnership in mission and ministry. Several areas of potential cooperation were identified; representatives of both the RCA and URCSA continue to pursue these opportunities.

In November 1994 the chair of the URCSA General Synodical Commission for Christian Education (GSCE) visited the RCA Michigan Regional Center in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan, where they were introduced to the Children and Worship program. In March 1995 the GSCE of the URCSA extended an invitation to the RCA's Office of Christian Education and Youth Ministry to send Dr. Sonja Stewart, professor of Christian education at Western Theological Seminary, to South Africa to introduce the Children and Worship program to local church leaders. The General Synod Council and Western Theological Seminary responded with a tentative acceptance pending identifying financial resources to pay for travel expenses for Dr. Stewart and one RCA Children and Worship trainer to assist her. The URCSA will pay the costs of training and expenses within South Africa.

R-1.
To commend the General Synod Council, the General Synod Council staff, and Western Theological Seminary for their efforts to bring the Children and Worship program to South Africa; and further,

to encourage RCA members and congregations to support this program and other ministry and mission partnerships with their prayers and with financial support. (ADOPTED)

The wide acceptance of the program across the church has led the education offices of the sponsoring partner denominations to implement several revisions in the training and support system put in place in 1988. A management team made up of representatives of the Reformed Church in America, the Christian Reformed Church in North America, and the Presbyterian Church in Canada now oversees the program. The three denominations will continue to jointly support a network of regional Children and Worship trainers (currently numbering twenty-two working in the U.S. and Canada). The trainers are responsible for scheduling and operating basic training events for congregations who want to become involved in the ministry. In addition, the trainers are responding to a growing demand for localized continuing education events for congregations that have been involved in the program for a number of years. The basic training cost is $75 per participant. The fee is used to offset the contract costs of the trainers, and to enable the denominations to offer an annual conference and retooling event for the trainers. Specialized training opportunities for congregations are also available through the trainers. The cost of these events depends on the nature of the event.
This year's annual Children and Worship conference for trainers was held at Stony Point Conference Center in Stony Point, New York, March 24-26, 1995. The conference included a continuing education event for Children and Worship leaders in congregations. Conference leadership included program originator Dr. Jerome Berryman.

Children and Worship trainers who work on behalf of the RCA, the CRC, and the Presbyterian Church of Canada are Barbara Cullum, Jan Hoffman, and the Rev. Phyllis Palsma (Regional Synod of Albany); Dorothy Henderson, Yvonne Hogenes, Wendy Pauw, Marie Prins, Linda Shaw, and Anelia Wierbos (Regional Synod of Canada); Mary Scholten and Ann Jean Vander Veen (Regional Synod of the Far West); Susan Langeland, Holly Schut, Janie Tinklenberg, and Ellen Vellenga (Regional Synod of the Great Lakes); Cheryl Newendorp, Helene Vander Werff, and Connie Vos (Regional Synod of the Heartland); Dorothy De Boer and Karen Stabelfelt (Regional Synod of Mid-America); Kay Weeks (Regional Synod of Mid-Atlantics); and Betsy Tamlyn (Regional Synod of New York).

It is important to be aware of the fact that other persons offer programs similar in approach to the denomination's Children and Worship program. Some of these programs are sponsored by RCA or CRC congregations and their staff or members. The other programs are significantly different in many respects, and the Office of Christian Education and Youth Ministry does not endorse nor advocate their use. Congregations interested in Children and Worship are encouraged to contact the RCA’s Office for Christian Education and Youth Ministry at (800) 968-3943 or the RCA’s Resource Information Helpline at (800) 968-7221 for information about localized training and personnel available to support the Children and Worship program.

Additional Leader Support for Education

During the past program year (July 1994 - June 1995), the Office for Christian Education and Youth Ministry produced three packets of resources to support congregational ministries: Christian Education Sunday resources, 1994 Advent/Christmas packet, and children's bulletins for Lent/Easter.

In October 1994 the General Synod Council (GSC) requested the staff of the denomination’s education office to work with executives and education staff from RCA regional synods to enhance the denomination’s ability to support training and consultation services for congregations and/or classes without increasing budgets. The GSC also urged the education office staff to accomplish this in a way that enabled continued cooperation and collaboration with RCA regional staff and enhanced contact with local RCA congregational leaders for the formation of helpful and effective educational programs and resources. The redesign work was completed in early June 1995. Agreements are in place with five regional synods who have expressed a willingness to either expand the number of personnel available to work directly with congregations or to enhance their consultation and training programs. In some cases the education office will provide small grants to regions to carry out this work through use of the GSC Congregational Services program budget.

In July 1995 regional synod and racial/ethnic council education personnel will join with staff from the education office, TRA/VARCA, the RCA Distribution Center, and other RCA program offices to offer the first annual RCA Christian Education Consultant Equipping Conference. The three- to four-day event will prepare consultants and trainers working with congregations all across the RCA to provide leadership and teacher support, to aid in curriculum evaluation and selection, and to offer support in the implementation of a wide range of education programs. The conference will take place in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The enhanced consulting and training program was developed by using funds previously designated for meetings of the Council for Christian Education, a collaborative staff and constituent team representing regional synods, racial/ethnic councils, and denomination-
wide staff. These staff will continue to meet periodically, but costs will be borne by each sending agency.

Youth Ministry

Following the 1994 meeting of the General Synod, the youth ministry office sponsored Project Timothy, an annual event involving forty-six high school-aged youth and adult sponsors from most regions of the denomination. The ten-day mission experience continues to be an attractive, meaningful, and transformative opportunity for RCA youth. The program has now been in existence long enough (since the mid-1980s) for us to begin hearing of its value for deepening faith from some young adult leaders in congregations. Youth ministry staff continues to evaluate the program and to consider ways to enhance its effectiveness and expand participation by high school-aged youth.

Through its youth ministry office, the RCA continues to support the development of core learning resources for youth in cooperation with the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, and the Presbyterian Church in Canada. Youth Action Curriculum, broadly graded resources for younger youth (grades 6-8) and older youth (grades 9-12), were released in the fall of 1994. The program includes four- to six-week courses focused on the Bible, church history, social action, and building/sustaining community.

The RCA also continues its cooperation with CRC Publications and the education department of the Christian Reformed Church to offer to RCA congregations the full range of learning resources for younger youth (Crossroads) and a variety of course offerings for middle and older youth. In addition, the denomination’s Youth Ministry Team continues to identify a broad range of excellent new resources for use in youth education and youth fellowship programs. These materials, representing the best offerings from a variety of publishers, are described annually in the RCA Resources for Ministry Catalog and are available through the RCA Distribution Center.

In September 1994, after serving as the RCA’s minister for youth and young adults for four years, the Rev. Keith Krebs received a call to become pastor of Christ’s Community Church in Glendale, Arizona. Krebs accepted the call and resigned his duties as a member of the RCA staff at the end of October 1994. The General Synod Council, at its October 1994 meeting, expressed gratitude for the ministry Krebs carried out during his four years of service. Krebs expanded the Project Timothy program; developed the experimental Two by Two to Witness program; initiated Youth News for local youth and leaders of youth; in cooperation with regions, offered the annual “Lead On Tour” youth leadership training programs; and supported the development of a regionally based denomination-wide work-camping program for youth.

The General Synod Council Congregational Services Committee and the director of congregational services developed in the fall of 1994 a revised position description for an associate for youth and young adult ministry. The associate would have primary responsibilities in the areas of equipping leaders of youth in congregations, identifying/developing learning resources for youth, and continuing the Project Timothy program. The reclassification of the position from “minister” to “associate” makes the post parallel to the associate for children’s ministry position within the Office of Christian Education and Youth Ministry and more accurately describes the position as it was carried out in the previous four years. The General Synod Council, at its October 1994 meeting, authorized a search process to fill the position of associate for youth and young adult ministry by spring 1995.

The Rev. Randy Wieland of Paramount, California, who had worked alongside Krebs on Project Timothy for a few years, was contracted to operate the Project Timothy program in 1995. The Rev. John Schmidt of Holland, Michigan, was contracted to provide oversight and
support for the Adventure in Ministry volunteers through the conclusion of their assignments in June 1995.

In late February 1995 the director of congregational services, in consultation with the general secretary and the Administrative Council, temporarily withdrew the position of associate for youth and young adult ministry from the search process. Throughout the late fall 1994 and early winter 1995, youth staff in regions, regional synod executives, congregation-based leaders, and others expressed continuing concern that the denomination try to redefine its responsibility in youth ministry to better complement the work already being carried out in some regional synods. Continuing concern was raised that the areas of needed expertise were unlikely to be found in one candidate and that the broadly expressed need for assistance in equipping local leaders seemed to point to a staffing model of deployed contracted personnel. A revised youth staffing plan was formulated by the director of congregational services for consideration by the General Synod Council. Regional youth staffs were also consulted and were asked to attend a late spring 1995 meeting to assist in the redesign of the youth ministry program area. It is anticipated that a revised staffing plan will be in place by June 1995 and that contracted staff will be in place by September 1, 1995.

Racial Ethnic Scholarships

In 1994 the Office for Christian Education and Youth Ministry assumed administrative responsibility for the $12,000 RCA racial/ethnic scholarship fund. The RCA's racial/ethnic council executives meet with the education and youth ministry staff to make the final selection of scholarship recipients. In 1994 twenty-one students received scholarships ranging in amounts from $500 to $1,000. Applications for 1995 awards were processed by late spring 1995. Awards will be distributed before the start of the 1995 fall semester.

Adult Education

During the past year the RCA continued to work in partnership with the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, and the Presbyterian Church in Canada to develop the comprehensive adult education program, Adult Foundational Curriculum. The core program includes five thematic magazines, each containing two five-session courses (fifty sessions in all). In 1994-95 the program included courses on the Holy Spirit, the books of Acts and Revelation, the sacraments, ethics, Psalms, and wisdom literature. The program also includes elective courses on contemporary issues. In cooperation with the same denominational partners, the education office continued to make available the Adult Bible Discovery series based on the International Bible Lessons for Christian Teaching (the Uniform Series). All of the resources for these programs are described in the RCA Resources for Ministry Catalog and are available from the RCA Distribution Center.

A broad range of study resources for adults is developed through the education department of the CRC, through the program ministries of the RCA, and through Friendship Press (mission education). These resources are too numerous to mention in a report. Resources are revised and released annually for Bible study, church history and doctrine, witness, evangelism, mission education, and Christian living. Courses developed by the RCA’s education partners are reviewed prior to release through the RCA Distribution Center. Often the RCA education office participates in course development.

During the second half of 1994 the education offices of the RCA and the CRC agreed to cooperate in the development of new materials in the area of spiritual formation. The departments agreed to coordinate course development but to take independent responsibility for developing resources for congregational use. Materials developed by each denomination will be available for use in both communions beginning in the fall of 1995.
Family Ministry

The 1990 General Synod instructed the General Program Council "to develop a plan, including job description and a means of funding, to provide full-time staff for the Office of Family Life, making family life ministry a major program priority in the Reformed Church in America" (MGS 1990, R-16, p.101). The General Program Council reported to General Synod in 1991 that it had "moved forward with a cautious implementation of the General Synod's instruct" (MGS 1991, p. 144). The General Program Council, through its Division of Christian Discipleship, had requested the minister for education to assign an assistant in the RCA education office (Gayle Veldboom who was pursuing a master's degree in social work at Western Michigan University) to carry out part-time responsibility in family ministry. The assignment was limited to the identification and review of print and media resources that could be recommended and made available to RCA congregations. The General Synod commended the GPC for moving forward cautiously with a plan that began a redevelopment of the ministry area without requiring any increase in staffing assessments or in program budgets (MGS 1991, R-4, p. 145).

Later in 1991 Veldboom resigned from the RCA to accept a position more closely related to her career goals. The Division of Christian Discipleship asked present staff to continue the resource identification and recommendation work and to work in cooperation with TRAVARCA, the denomination's media library. Since the denomination was moving into a period of restructure, the GPC concluded that it should sustain the level of work it began in 1990 but that a decision about development of a family life office with staff should be made in the context of the restructure discussions or by the successor program agency.

At its first meeting in 1993 the new Congregational Services Committee of the General Synod Council requested Congregational Services staff to give consideration to ways the General Synod Council could provide greater program support to RCA congregations in the broad area of family ministry. Congregational Services staff accepted study assignments, did extensive reading, spoke with congregational leaders about their needs, and met with leaders in the field during 1994. Congregational Services staff presented a preliminary report to GSC in April 1994. In the October 1994 report to GSC, Congregational Services staff presented assumptions that could guide the development of a family life program at the denomination-wide level. The report also included several illustrative program options with an estimate of staffing requirements to fulfill them. The assumptions and program options are:

1. Assumptions

a. Because of the diversity of the RCA, no single program or resource will meet the needs of every congregation. Congregational Services needs to offer a variety of programs and resources, as well as styles of doing effective ministry with families in/through the congregation.

b. A program initiative in family ministry must have a clear focus if it is going to provide helpful support for RCA congregations. Congregational Services needs to focus on providing resources and programs that support and strengthen marriage and promote the well-being of children. Programs and resources to promote the well-being of children need to address the needs of children in all types of family configurations.

Note: The church is involved already in addressing several other very important family-related issues such as abortion, homosexuality, ministry with older adults, adolescents, young adults, and single persons. Some of these issues are being
addressed through specific program initiatives already assigned to Congregational Services staff. Other issues are being addressed by commissions and task forces established by General Synod.

c. Resources and programs identified and/or developed through Congregational Services need to help RCA congregations live as extended families—helping them live out their baptismal vows. Congregational Services needs to recognize in whatever it does that the congregation can be the principal support network for families and individuals.

d. There is a need to offer resources and programs with an explicitly Christian perspective. The aim is not only to raise healthy children, but also to make disciples. Programs such as Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP) and Active Parenting can be adapted by the RCA education office for inclusion in Christian parenting resources for RCA families.

e. The larger U.S. and Canadian societies (economic, cultural, and political) have a tremendous impact in the shaping of family life. The church has a role to play in advocating for those political and economic policies which support and strengthen families and promote the well-being of children.

2. Program Options

a. Develop and/or identify resources and programs.

1) Through its existing ministry areas and staff, and with the use of some contractual staff, the RCA could more clearly identify those family resources recommended and available through the denomination’s distribution center and TRAVARCA media library.

2) Existing staff, with contractual staff support, could give greater attention to the identification, review, and possible support of new resources for use in congregations and make these available through the RCA Distribution Center and TRAVARCA.

3) Contracted staff could be employed to develop leadership guides, intergenerational process guides, and study guides for extant resources. (E.g., Jorge Maldonado’s Even in the Best of Families, WCC Publications, Geneva, 1994. This and similar Bible study resources could be made available as adult or intergenerational courses for use in church-based education, home-based small groups, or retreat settings.)

4) In cooperation with existing ministry areas, regional synod and/or classis-based ministries could encourage the development of or identify existing family intergenerational workcamping, family camping, or travel seminars that could be opened to cross-denominational registration. Congregational Services and RCA assemblies could promote these events through a common brochure/registration process. This project would require some contractual staffing for coordination.

5) Develop a “how to” guide for congregations to design church-based family events or congregation-sponsored workcamping or family camping programs.

6) Through Reformed Church Women’s Ministries (RCWM), develop a mentoring program (e.g., single mothers, teenage mothers, women facing family transition)
for women in the church and as an outreach ministry in the wider community. This program is currently being conceptualized by the executive director of RCWM. A pilot phase may be operable with existing staff. A wider implementation would require additional staffing, a training/equipping manual, and regionalized support for implementation. Funding would need to come from Congregational Services to assist RCWM in development.

7) Through the RCA diaconal program and/or the RCA volunteer program seek placement opportunities for laity in local, regional, national, and international programs and agencies working on family issues.

b. Provide leadership training.

1) Become a clearinghouse service for already designed seminars and conferences such as Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP), Active Parenting, and the Logos Program (surrogate parenting in an intergenerational and educational framework). The RCA could work with these groups to offer events targeting RCA congregational leadership. Contract staff would be required to provide coordination. An extension of this model would be to work with these programs to identify and equip RCA leaders who could provide localized training or actual program leadership in congregations. Personnel recruited to be part of such a network would likely be employed on a “fee for service” model similar to the current Children and Worship trainer network.

2) Redevelop an RCA marriage enrichment leadership network. Contract staff would be required to provide coordination and ongoing support for network participants. Participants would work on a “fee for service” model.

c. Sponsor denominational family-equipping events.

1) With existing staff and some contracted personnel, develop a denominational event “road team” to be made available through classes or regions to lead an equipping/training event (e.g., “The Congregation as an Extended Family”). Events would operate on a registration basis to subsidize the Congregational Services’ family program budget and contracted staff time.

2) Use the denominational theme for 1996-1998, “God’s People Transformed,” to develop, in cooperation with RCA regions or classes, family-equipping events that could be sponsored to coordinate with the three sub-themes (“A Living Sacrifice,” “Renewed in Mind,” “Discerning and Doing God’s Will”) over a period of three years. Event development would require contractual staff and cooperative support from regions or classes. Events would likely charge a registration fee to subsidize costs.

3) Related to number two, or independent of it, develop a denominationwide family event in either 1998 or 2000 (Note: 1998 is an RCWM Triennial year).

4) Design and develop, in cooperation with RCA camps and conference centers, family workcamps or family camping models around themes or for specific populations (e.g., single parents).

5) Design and develop intergenerational travel seminars or international intergenerational workcamps.
The GSC Congregational Services Committee welcomed the work done by Congregational Services staff with enthusiasm. The committee, with the director of congregational services, developed a revised congregational services staff funding plan for 1995 that allocated $5,000 for a part-time staff contract in family ministry. The post was created without requiring an increase in the assessment budget for staffing. The committee reaffirmed the allocation of $2,500 for program development, beginning in 1995. The director of congregational services was asked to begin program development and to seek part-time staffing after January 1, 1995, and to report progress to the GSC at its March 1995 meeting.

General Synod Referrals

The 1993 General Synod voted:

To instruct the Congregational Services Unit, in cooperation with the Evangelism and Church Development Unit, RCA seminaries, regional synods, and RCA publishing partners, to make available resources and programs to equip laity for full involvement in the ministries of the church; and further,


The 1993 General Synod also voted:

To instruct the Congregational Services Unit to work, in cooperation with the other General Synod Council units, regional synods, and classes, to make available models, training events, and resources which will train pastors, elders, deacons, and other church leaders, to equip members of their congregations for ministry in the church, in the community, and in the world; and further,


The director of congregational services/minister for education and faith development has been working in cooperation with the other RCA staff, the associate for diaconal ministries, and the director of mission services to begin implementation of R-3 above. Recommendations R-1 and R-3 above were two of three related recommendations adopted by General Synod in response to the report of its president, Dr. Beth Marcus (MGS 1993, pp. 28-36). The third recommendation prepared in response to the report of the 1993 General Synod president was:

To instruct the Congregational Services Unit and the Mission Services Unit to begin additional programs for diaconal ministries . . . so that such programs may become accessible to RCA congregations . . . ; and further,


As indicated in the report from the Office of Diaconal Ministries (immediately following this report), RCA staff was able to carry out R-2 immediately by utilizing funds available from PPIM. This program is fully underway inclusive of training events, print and video resources, and regionally-based volunteers.

In 1994 attention was directed to development of companion resources and training models for elders. A manuscript for an elder’s booklet was commissioned in the spring of 1994. Extensive editorial work and rewriting was completed by the writer in December 1994. The manuscript is presently in the editorial stream. Release is anticipated in late 1995. Staff is
scheduled to begin work on equipping models for consistories in mid-1995. The models will be related to the two booklets described above.

As a direct result of the above 1993 General Synod votes, regional synods and classes have taken the initiative to offer equipping conferences and workshops for laity. Denominational staff and seminary personnel have worked alongside regional staff in many of these events. Conversations have also been initiated with RCA regional synod, seminary, and classis personnel to encourage the development and denomination-wide linkage of equipping centers for lay leaders, elders, and deacons along the lines of models already initiated by the Regional Synod of Albany (Ephesus Two) and the Classis of California (Ministry Associate Training).

Additional work on resource development to respond to the needs expressed in the 1993 General Synod recommendations has been identified within staff objectives. Some program development may be possible within the proposals accepted for implementation in the $9.8 by '98 campaign.

The 1994 General Synod voted:

To instruct Congregational Services, in consultation with Mission Services, to identify and provide resources which will assist RCA congregations to understand multiculturalism and its implications for ministry (MGS 1994, R-12, p. 87).

Through its ecumenical partnership with Friendship Press, the RCA makes available annually study materials about other cultures for children, youth, and adults. These resources are identified in the RCA Resources for Ministry Catalog, and are available through the RCA Distribution Center. The education office, in cooperation with CRC Publications and the education department of the Christian Reformed Church has made available a series of three workshops for congregations: Confronting Discrimination in the Church; Reducing Bias in Children; and When Cultures Meet. The selection committee of the TRAVARCA media library has also reviewed and authorized the acquisition of new materials that address multicultural and cross-cultural issues in church and society.

NOTES:


2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 The “Young Children and Worship Program” was developed at Western Theological Seminary by Dr. Sonja Stewart in cooperation with Dr. Jerome Berryman, Associate Rector of the Episcopal Church of the Holy Spirit, Houston, Texas. Dr. Stewart’s program was officially adopted for use in the RCA and in the Christian Reformed Church in 1988.

5 The LiFE curriculum was conceptualized, designed, and developed by the Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church in America and is based on concepts of learning that encourage leaders to share their own faith as mentors with children and to encourage children to become immersed in the biblical story as they come to understand themselves as persons of faith.
REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF DIACONAL MINISTRIES

The 1993 General Synod instructed "the Congregational Services Unit and the Mission Services Unit to begin additional programs for diaconal ministries...and to report progress toward fulfillment to the General Synods of 1995 through 2000" (MGS 1993, R-2, p. 153). A basic outline for a diaconal ministries program was approved by the General Synod Council in October 1993 and is in the process of gradual implementation.

A diaconal ministries staff team was organized in November of 1993. Denominational team members are: the Rev. Roger De Young and Char Ten Clay from Mission Services; Ella Campbell and the Rev. John Paarlberg from Congregational Services; and Betty Voskuil from Congregational Services and Mission Services. Voskuil serves as team leader. Regional synods were also invited to name a staff representative to serve on the team. Currently those representatives are: the Rev. Donald Troost from the Regional Synod of Albany; Reuben Brasser from the Regional Synod of the Far West; Ronald Den Hartog from the Regional Synod of the Heartland; the Rev. James Rozeboom from the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes; the Rev. Albert Vander Meer from the Regional Synod of Mid-America; Colleen Wiessner from the Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantic; and the Rev. Jon Norton from the Regional Synod of New York. (The Regional Synod of Canada still has to select a representative to this team.) The staff team met in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in November 1993, in New York City in March 1994, and in Chicago, Illinois, in August 1994, to develop the program for diaconal ministries in the RCA.

The purpose of the RCA diaconal ministries program is "to prepare all God's people for the work of Christian service in order to build up the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12, TEV). Five objectives of the program are:

1. To affirm the office and ministry of the deacon.
2. To help deacons motivate and lead congregations in ministries of mercy, service, and outreach.
3. To encourage deacons to serve as links between needs and resources at the local, regional, national, and international levels.
4. To equip and empower deacons and others in congregations interested in diaconal ministries.
5. To assist those engaged in diaconal ministry in their spiritual journeys by providing resources and opportunities for spiritual nurture and theological reflection.

Several resources developed for deacons include a booklet, The Ministry of the Deacon: As One Who Serves, a ten-minute video, As One Who Serves, and a bookmark, "Spiritual Direction for Those Who Serve." A kit containing these resources was mailed to each RCA congregation in May 1994.

In addition, a newsletter for deacons was developed. The newsletter is titled the RCA Deacons' Bench. The first two editions of this newsletter were mailed directly to deacons at their home addresses. Plans are to publish two editions in 1995 and two editions in 1996. This newsletter supplements information found in the consistory corner feature of the new leadership newspaper, Servant Leaders, which is also mailed to RCA deacons.

Work is also progressing on an elders' booklet. The elders' booklet, together with the deacons' booklet, will eventually serve as the basis for a training/orientation model for RCA consistories. Funding for these resources is provided from the Congregational Services Unit budget.

Two other components of the deacons' program include Profiles in Faith and Justice weekends and work/study trips to various mission sites.
The diaconal ministries staff team recognizes that the goal of the diaconal ministries program is to assist deacons in reclaiming their role as leaders in ministries of mercy, service, and outreach. The deacons also serve as the links between congregations and diaconal ministry possibilities. To achieve the purpose and goals of diaconal ministries and to better link the deacons program with the people in the congregation, the staff team recommended that six representatives from each of the eight regional synods be invited to meet together annually for a denominational diaconal ministries gathering. Representatives from the regional synods attending this gathering are trained in one of the six following diaconal concern areas:

1. Stewardship education/congregational giving and challenge regarding the use of financial resources from a Christian perspective.
2. Special individual and family concerns.
3. Mission education, involvement and support at local, regional, and denominational/global levels.
4. Disaster response/volunteer service opportunities.
5. Hunger education/Reformed Church World Service.
6. Care of creation/simple living.

The first gathering was held at Techny Towers in Techny, Illinois, on May 13-15, 1994. Forty-eight representatives gathered together to worship, to learn about the biblical and historical Reformed understanding of the role of deacon, to be trained in one of the six above diaconal concern areas, and to make plans for diaconal ministries within each regional synod. It was an invigorating weekend filled with worship and prayer, community-building, regional networking, and some brainstorming for the future of diaconal ministries. Since this first gathering, training events for deacons were held in California, Florida, Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa, New York, Michigan, Ohio, and Kentucky. More workshops, retreats, and resourcing of deacons are being planned in most regional synods.

The second annual denominational diaconal ministries gathering will be held at the Villa Redeemer Conference Center in Glenview, Illinois, on May 5-7, 1995. A deacons' handbook will be introduced at this gathering. The booklet will then be available from the RCA Distribution Center. Funding for this gathering will be from the Mission Services Unit budget.

Report of the Task Force on Remembering Baptism, Professing Faith, and Membership Terminology

In its report presented to the 1993 General Synod, the Commission on Worship expressed concerns about the use of the term "confirmation" in RCA membership terminology (MGS 1993, p. 218). The Commission on Worship, in its same report, also expressed the following concern:

It has also become apparent that the church is struggling with the practical pastoral issue of nurturing young people in the Christian faith and in finding or developing programs and resources for guiding people to a more mature faith and in providing them with opportunity to publicly witness to their faith in Jesus Christ. These concerns involve not only issues of theology and liturgy, but also have implications for Christian
education, catechesis, pastoral practice, and church order. The commission therefore recommends the appointment of a task force to study and address these concerns *(MGS 1993, p. 218)*.

In response, the 1993 General Synod voted:

To request the General Synod Council (GSC) to appoint a task force consisting of representatives from the General Synod Commissions on Worship, Theology, and Church Order; additional at-large representatives, including youth and persons with experience in child development, youth ministry, and faith development theory; and staff representation from the GSC Congregational Services Unit. The task force will:

1. Define the need and identify opportunities for children of the covenant to remember their baptism and profess their faith in ways consonant with Reformed theology, liturgical practice, and current understandings of the process of faith maturation.

2. Recommend appropriate vocabulary, including membership terminology, for use in the church.


At its October 1993 meeting, GSC appointed the following persons to serve on the Task Force on Remembering Baptism, Professing Faith, and Membership Terminology:

Amy Jo Van Es Hawley, Chair
Ronald Geschwendt (Commission on Church Order)
L'Anni Hill-Alto (Commission on Worship)
Renee House (Commission on Theology)
Keith Geense

Mark Lemmenes
Daniel Meeter
Carol Myers
David Schalekamp
Melody Washington

Kenneth Bradsell and John Paarlberg served as staff resource persons for the task force.

The task force met March 10-11, 1994; September 21-22, 1994; and March 1-2, 1995, at the Carmel Retreat Center in Mahwah, New Jersey. The report of the task force is divided into three sections. The section on “Membership Terminology” is located in the Church Order section, and the section on “Recognizing Baptism and Professing Faith” is located in the Christian Worship section. The section on “Teaching Ministry” follows.

**THE TEACHING MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH**

In his landmark book, *A Teachable Spirit, Recovering the Teaching Office in the Church*, Richard Robert Osmer summarized the teaching function of the church. Osmer identified three central tasks:

1. The determination of the normative beliefs and practices of the church.

2. The reinterpretation of these beliefs and practices in shifting cultural and historical contexts.

3. The formation and sustenance of educational institutions, processes, and curricula by which the church’s normative beliefs and practices are taught, allowing them to be appropriated meaningfully by each new generation and grasped with deeper understanding by individuals.*1
If one reviews the tasks and functions of the various institutions, agencies, program offices (regional and denominational), commissions, and assemblies of the RCA, it will be noticed that all three functions are being addressed in several different settings. However, one of the tasks tends to be more central than the others, depending on the context of ministry being examined. Indeed, the three functions are also part of the daily life and ministry of RCA congregations.

In one sense, the RCA is living out one of the less recognized geniuses of its Reformation heritage—the dispersion of the church’s teaching authority among multiple offices and agencies operating at various levels. This dispersion of authority was done by the Reformers to avoid the recreation of highly centralized structures of teaching authority (the magisterium) which, in the opinion of the Reformers, led to the temptation of the leaders of the church to substitute their own teachings for those of Christ. The dispersion of the teaching function and authority was consistent with the Reformers’ insistence on the absolute priority of the gospel and the primacy of the authority of Scripture, which contains the record of the original apostolic witness of Jesus Christ. By dispersing the human (hence fallible and subject to correction) authority of those called to carry out the teaching function, the Reformers protected the church from any human claim to a status of authority that belongs to the gospel and Scripture alone.

The Reformers did not intend for this dispersion of authority to lead to disintegration of the teaching function, loss of commitment to the catholicity of the church, or to claims of individual authority or localized congregational autonomy. Both Calvin and Luther understood and gave high regard to the congregation as “the church in its fullness.” They also both understood the need for governing bodies, structures, and offices beyond the congregation, which along with the church’s confessional stance, needs to preserve the pure preaching of the gospel and the proper interpretation of Scripture.

In his work, Osmer points to three centers of teaching authority in the thinking of both Calvin and Luther. These parallel the three tasks of the teaching office in the church:

1. Centers of scholarly theological inquiry and ministerial education.

   These centers are focused today in seminaries, colleges, and universities, and in the teachers and theologians on their faculties.

2. Centers of practical theological reflection and lay education.

   These centers are primarily based in congregations where communities and individuals are helped to appropriate the faith as their own.

3. Centers of teaching and education on behalf of the denomination as a whole.

   These centers are found primarily in denominational assemblies, commissions, and agencies who represent the church as a whole.

A closer look at the RCA shows it to be a denomination in which the three tasks are more frequently addressed and the three centers held together in an uneven, haphazard, uncoordinated, and nonintegrated manner. Congregations often select education resources and entire curricula for various age levels with little consideration of the way in which the resources support or undercut the “normative beliefs and practices” of the church. In some cases, age-level leaders and teachers in congregations are encouraged simply to shop around for “something that works” as if the educative task of the RCA can be consigned merely to the “market conditions” of the prevailing culture without regard to content. Pastoral leaders are often unable to identify the goals, objectives, or the resources in use in the teaching
ministry of their own congregations. Autonomous and independent programs, services, and resources are promoted uncritically in congregations, in classis settings, and at regional gatherings, indeed, even at meetings of the General Synod. On the other hand, the agencies and institutions of the RCA are often unaware of, slow to respond to, or unresponsive to local efforts of congregations and other ministry areas to take seriously the societal context of ministry and the teaching/learning requirements of particular settings that require ongoing reinterpretation of RCA beliefs and practices. The “formation and sustenance of educational institutions, processes, and curricula” is often accomplished in a disconnected fashion. Duplicated or competitive support services and resources can be and have been the result. The training of ordained and lay leaders for the RCA and the formation of programs and resources to support the teaching ministry within the congregations of the RCA are connected only by the voluntary and collegial ties of the individual occupants of the various teaching, programmatic, and administrative offices of the denomination. Agencies and institutions of the RCA with interest in and oversight of aspects of the teaching ministry (e.g. General Synod Council, seminaries, colleges, regional synods) can give direction when time allows only to selective portions of the RCA’s task.

To address the concerns expressed above, the Task Force on Remembering Baptism, Professing Faith, and Membership Terminology proposes that a General Synod Commission on Teaching and Discipleship be established. This commission could serve an integrative and interpretive function for the denomination’s teaching ministry while continuing to honor the dispersion of authority among centers of responsibility. A representative and diverse commission elected by the General Synod and reporting directly to the General Synod could assume responsibility for vision and direction in the teaching ministry, including the task of understanding the contexts for teaching in light of the societal and cultural changes going on about the church. Paul’s image of the church as the body of Christ may be most helpful in identifying the need for a commission. Each center of teaching authority has a unique contribution to make to the body of Christ and has distinctive functions to play. But, for the body to sustain life and grow, the contributions and functions must support and complement each other. The various parts of the body also need assistance in seeing the journey ahead so they can be prepared to meet the needs of the church’s ministry and mission with an equipped leadership and appropriate resources.

Some of the specific tasks of an RCA Commission on Teaching and Discipleship could be:

1. To identify the nature of the “curriculum” of the RCA’s teaching ministry for life-long learning and the kinds of education processes and experiences most appropriate to fulfill this “curriculum.” Through its work a commission would facilitate the RCA’s ability to give policy direction to the General Synod Council, its program offices, and staff.

2. To help the RCA determine the contexts in which the church’s teaching ministry can and should take place (e.g. congregation, family, day school, camp and conferencing ministries, small groups, seminars, travel, work projects, mission assignments, etc.) and the ways in which the learning in these contexts can best interact to help persons mature in the Christian faith.

3. To advise the General Synod, the RCA colleges, and the RCA seminaries on the theoretical and practical training needs of those who will carry out the RCA’s teaching ministry, and recommend those policies and practices that will facilitate the equipping of ordained and lay leaders who will be teachers of the faithful in the RCA.

4. To mediate the core theological convictions (as articulated in the creeds and confessions) of the church to the education programs and teaching ministries of the denomination, its congregations, institutions, and agencies.
5. To assist the RCA in reinterpreting the core convictions, beliefs, and practices that are the basis of its identity in light of shifting societal and cultural contexts for ministry.

6. To mediate the role of the RCA’s theological faculty in assisting in the formation of programs of education in the denomination and in its congregations so that the RCA can more easily and quickly incorporate insights of contemporary scholarship, while preserving its inherited traditions and its core beliefs;

➢ The advisory committee recommended to not adopt R-2.

R-2.

To instruct the directors of Policy, Planning, and Administration Services and Congregational Services, in consultation with the RCA seminaries and the Theological Education Agency, to study the above report, “The Teaching Ministry of the Church”; and further, to consider the proposal to establish a “Commission on Teaching and Discipleship,” for report to the 1996 General Synod. (NOT ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. The advisory committee instructed the director of Policy, Planning, and Administration Services to include the instruction of R-2 above in his 1995-96 performance objectives.

2. The advisory committee also instructed the director of Policy, Planning, and Administration Services to report on R-2 above to the General Synod Council Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee at its spring 1996 meeting.

THE MINISTER AS TEACHER

Mainline churches face tremendous challenges in contemporary society. People everywhere are questioning the ability of mainline churches to remain a viable force in a rapidly changing world. The Reformed Church in America faces these same challenges. In part, the viability of the church will depend on its ability to formulate a Christian moral response in modern society. To begin, this will require the RCA to recover its own core beliefs and practices founded on Scripture; and, through the teaching ministry of the RCA, to pass along this core to its members. At a time when the pastoral care and spiritual needs of individuals increasingly define the shape and priorities of ministry, the RCA must reclaim the vital role of ministers as teachers of the Christian faith. The goal of the church’s teaching task is the deep formation of a community of faith which has the understanding and wisdom to bear authentic witness to the Christian faith in society.

Historically in the Reformed tradition the minister’s primary role has been teacher. Presbyterians identify ministers as “teaching elders” in contrast to the “ruling elders” who have primary responsibility for governance. This definition of the minister’s office reinforces the importance of the pastor’s teaching task. The RCA’s Liturgy, Book of Church Order, and Standards all lift up the minister as teacher.

The declaration which concludes “The Ordination and Installation of a Minister of the Word and Sacrament” proclaims the minister “is the lawfully installed pastor and teacher of this church.” This gives teaching equal weight to all other pastoral tasks. This strong emphasis on teaching is stated at ordination and every time a minister is installed into a new charge:
Towering in the Lord Jesus Christ for strength, I pledge my life to preach and teach the good news of salvation in Christ, to build up and equip the church for mission in the world, to free the enslaved, to relieve the oppressed, to comfort the afflicted, and to walk humbly with God (BCO, Formularies of the Reformed Church in America, “Declaration for Ministers of Word and Sacrament,” p. 114).

The teaching aspect of ministry is also highlighted in the “Charge to the Minister.” This charge is based on 1 Timothy 4:11-15:

be attentive to the flock whom the Holy Spirit may give you to shepherd and teach...feed his sheep..."Command and teach those things. Set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Attend to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching, to teaching....Practice these duties, devote yourself to them.”

John Calvin specified teaching as one of the pastor’s three tasks (instruction, administration of sacraments, and exercise of discipline):

[pastors] have been set over the church not to have a sinecure (a position that provides an income, requiring little or no work), but by the doctrine of Christ to instruct the people to true godliness....To all who have been appointed watchmen in the church the Lord announces: if, by their neglect, anyone perish through ignorance, he “will require the blood at their hand” (Ezek. 3:17-18). To them all applies what Paul said of himself: Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel...[since] I am entrusted with a commission (1 Cor. 9:16-17)⁴

The RCA tradition has relied on teaching to transmit faith and doctrine to each new generation. The Heidelberg Catechism has been a primary tool for inculcating this faith. The Heidelberg Catechism is so important that RCA consistories bear constitutional responsibility for seeing that pastor/teachers actually teach it. The Book of Church Order states:

The points of doctrine contained in the Heidelberg Catechism shall be explained by the minister at regular services of worship on the Lord’s Day, so that the exposition of them is completed within a period of four years (BCO, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Sec. 6f).

It is indeed a daunting task which is given pastor/teachers. Given the growing biblical illiteracy in our culture and the numbers of people without grounding in faith, the teaching task is perhaps more essential than ever before. If Scripture is to be our only guide to faith and life, the RCA members have to know Scripture. Pastors/teachers need to teach the content of faith directly while also modeling a faithful Christian life. The intellectual, spiritual, and moral dimensions of faith need to be wedded and modeled in RCA faith communities.

The characteristics which define us as Reformed Christians—reliance on Scripture as the guide to faith and life, the Standards (by its very nature the Heidelberg Catechism is a teaching document), the Liturgy, and the Book of Church Order—all call the RCA to take seriously its teaching ministry. As pastor/teacher in RCA congregations, the minister of Word and sacrament is charged to see that congregations are able to fulfill their teaching ministry responsibility. The people of God are formed in faith through the proclamation of the Word and the nurturance of sacrament. The pastor/teacher needs to be equipped to empower and inspire the congregation’s broader teaching task. The pastor/teacher needs to be a “teacher of teachers” so that all God’s people will grow in wisdom and knowledge of God.
To equip ministers for this task, attention needs to be given to developing teaching skills while candidates are preparing for ministry. There is a need to determine the ability of candidates, not only to intellectually understand biblical and theological material, but also to competently convey these truths to RCA members, that is, to teach what they have learned. It is not enough to know the story; the story must be effectively communicated.

In the process of licensing and ordaining candidates for ministry, the RCA needs to specifically assess their effectiveness as evangelists—people who vibrantly communicate faith—rather than be content to examine only their grasp of theological content. The RCA needs to know that educational theory and practice for all age groups is understood. Candidates should be able to demonstrate that they will be able to take responsibility for the oversight of a congregation’s broad teaching ministry.

Once in the parish, pastors must be exemplars in faith and lifestyle (1 Tim. 4:10-15, 6:13-16) and must seek to build a staff of teachers and leaders who are examples of faithful Christians for the church’s total educational program. Ministers, along with the elders (1 Peter 5:1-4), are responsible directly to God, not only for the intellectual content of the faith taught, but also for the effectiveness of faith communicated by the leadership in all aspects of the community’s life together.

To be pastor and teacher is two sides of the same coin. The whole church bears responsibility for teaching ministry, yet the particular tasks of equipping the laity for ministry belong to the minister. May the RCA bring such passion to teaching that people will grow through baptism by the work of the Holy Spirit to “walk in a new and holy life.”

Teaching has always been an important part of the way Reformed Christians understand being the church. While the task force recognizes the importance of lifting up the minister’s role as teacher, the task force also recognizes that this requires more thought and work than is within the scope of this task force. As an encouragement and important first steps in this strengthening of ministers’ teaching function, the task force presents the recommendations below.

NOTES:


2 Ibid. p. 182.

3 Ibid. pp. 178-79.


R-3.

To adopt the following revision to the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 8, Section 6a, for recommendation to the classes for approval (addition is underlined):

Sec. 6a. Prior to the final year of study the classis shall satisfy itself concerning the candidate’s competence in the following areas, placing the examination in each subject in the session in which the candidate is best qualified to be examined in it, as determined from a copy of the candidate’s academic record furnished by the seminary: (1) Hebrew; (2) Greek; (3) biblical introduction and exegesis; (4) church history; (5) church
government; (6) views of the ministry and its duties; (7) competence in conducting public worship; (8) sermon preparation and delivery; (9) Christian educational theory for and practice with children, youth, and adults; and (10) personal piety and fitness for the ministry. (ADOPTED)

R-4.
[To request classes in their examinations of candidates for ministry to include in their examination on the "views of ministry and its duties" an examination on the role of the pastor as one who teaches and enables the teaching ministry of the whole congregation.]

➢ Upon recommendation of the advisory committee, the following was substituted for R-4:

To refer R-4 to the Task Force on Standards for the Preparation for the Professional Ministry in the Reformed Church in America. (ADOPTED)

Reason: R-4 is directly applicable to the work of the task force.*

From the Report of the General Secretary

P-3 was referred to the Advisory Committee on Christian Education and Discipleship.

➢ In response to P-3 (p. 41), the advisory committee recommended:

R-5.
To instruct the General Synod Council Congregational Services Unit to expand programs for equipping the laity in the ministries of the Reformed Church in America; and further,

to give a new central emphasis on adult Christian education and spiritual formation. (ADOPTED)*

*Deletion is enclosed in brackets.
REPORTS ON CHRISTIAN HERITAGE
AND COMMUNICATIONS

Report of the Commission on History

The Commission on History was established in 1966 and given responsibility for collecting and preserving the official records of the Reformed Church in America, promoting interest in the history and traditions of the church, and disseminating and stimulating research in the history of the RCA. The Commission on History met October 7, 1994, and March 3, 1995, in Newark, New Jersey.

The commission has been active in publishing the Historical Series of the RCA under the general editorship of the Rev. Dr. Donald Bruggink. Twenty-four volumes have appeared since the inception of the series in 1968. One new volume was published this year: Gathered in Albany, by the Rev. Allan Janssen. Janssen's study covers the history of Classis of Albany from its beginning in 1784 (as one of the RCA's original classes) to the present. The work is of importance not only for its treatment of an important historic regional area of the RCA, but also for its reflection on the nature of that uniquely Reformed institution, the classis.

The commission is also encouraging several other research projects that are now advancing toward possible eventual publication in the Historical Series. Among these are the Rev. Lewis Scudder's work on the Arabian Mission (nearing its final stages of completion); the Rev. Dr. Earl William Kennedy's study of the Reformed and Christian Reformed churches in Orange City, Iowa; a history of the Chiapas mission, by Dorothy Meyerink; a developing collection of essays by African-Americans in the RCA, to be edited by the Rev. Wilbur Washington; and an important survey of the history of the RCA in the nineteenth century, by Dr. Gerald De Jong.

The commission encourages persons who are contemplating RCA research projects to inform the commission and to ascertain whether the commission may offer assistance.

The commission also receives reports on the work of the RCA Archives from the RCA archivist, Russell Gasero, and acts as an advisory board for the RCA Archives. In this advisory capacity, the commission has given much attention this past year to the shortage of storage space and the need for additional staffing in the RCA Archives. The commission has contacted the Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee of the General Synod Council to request this committee to address these two concerns.

In response to requests voiced in the Advisory Committee on Christian Heritage and Communications at the 1993 General Synod, the commission has been considering the possible usefulness of a video, or series of videos, on the history of the RCA. The commission consulted with the Rev. E. Wayne Antworth and John Groeters of the General Synod Council's Stewardship and Communications Services Unit concerning the possible production of a video on RCA history. The commission is convinced that a video has a much wider audience than any printed resource on RCA history, and that a video on RCA history would present an opportunity to engage RCA members with their heritage on a larger scale than has ever before been possible. Such a video would also be useful for confirmation classes, new members' classes, and study groups. In the commission's estimation, a video on RCA history would potentially provide as effective and widely accessible an answer to the question of "RCA identity" as any other resource to date.
The advisory committee recommended to amend R-1:

R-1.

To instruct the General Synod Council Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee to explore the feasibility of producing a video on the history of the RCA; and further,

to consider such items as cost, target audience, and length of tape (no longer than forty-five minutes); to give special care to avoid a dry nostalgic bent; and to ensure that the series celebrates the past and its significance for the future mission of the church, for report to the 1996 General Synod. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

From the Report of the General Synod Council's Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee

RCA ARCHIVES AND OFFICE OF HISTORICAL SERVICES

The Reformed Church Archival Program was formally established by General Synod in 1978. The Office of Historical Services is entrusted with the preservation, collection, and use of the denomination's permanently valuable records. The archivist serves as the staff for this office and as the steward of the RCA's documentary heritage. These documents form the memory of the RCA and reveal the story of its life and mission as it grows into the future. The archivist also administers the RCA Historical Society, has responsibility for the compilation and updating of the *Historical Directory of the Reformed Church in America*, prepares the *Digest and Index of the Minutes of General Synod*, offers staff support for the Commission on History, and provides services to all levels of the RCA in historical matters and records management.

As the steward of the RCA's documentary heritage, the archives accessioned the following records during 1994:

**Denominational Records:**

Board of Theological Education. Records of the Board of Theological Education (BTE) from 1974 to 1992. Records include minutes of the BTE, minutes of BTE executive sessions, minutes of BTE executive committees for the two RCA seminars, minutes of the Theological Education Agency (TEA), performance reviews for staff, bylaws, and constitutions.

General Program Council, secretary for world mission. Records of the secretary for world mission, the Rev. John Buteyn. These records include mission correspondence and reports from the Middle East and India from 1968 to 1980.

General Synod Council Stewardship and Communication Services, TRAVARCA. Filmstrips, scripts, cassette tapes of audiovisual productions, and videotapes: *A People Who Belong: Ministering in the City; A Thousand Miles with Hunger; To Be a Missionary Partner in Africa; Appalachia: A Region Set Apart; Appalachia: They'll Never Keep Us Down;*

*Addition is in light-face type.*
Common Ground: A Vantage Point for Understanding; Gateway to the Future; Kentucky Photo Album; Partners-in-Mission: Capparelli/Meyerink/Toren; Putting People in Mission: Year 1 & 2 & Celebration; Report from Armenia; Volunteers in Mission; The China Connection: A Vision for Mission/A Journey to Discovery/A People With Roots/A Nation on the Move; Classrooms and CORSOCK in Kodaikanal, India: the Work of Keith and Marcine De Jong; Medical Mission in Honduras - Ed Capparelli; Putting People In Mission; Reaching and Receiving; Adventure in Ministry; Northwestern College Admissions Video; School of Many Worlds; Fences or Friends; People Who Belong: Visioning and Venturing; Crisis on the Land: A Christian Concern; and We Are a Covenant Community: A Look at Assessments.

Classical Records:

Classis of Albany. Records include the minutes of classis from 1974 to 1985, Executive Committee minutes of classis from 1985 to 1989, and Board of Trustees minutes from 1972 to 1988.

Classis of Pella. Records include the minutes and consistorial reports of the classis from 1975 to 1994.

Classis of South Grand Rapids. Records include minutes of the classis from 1968 to 1986.

Local Church Records:

Bedminster, New Jersey, Bedminster Reformed Church. Records include consistory minutes, 1841-1992; register books, 1758-1994; correspondence; financial records; Young Men’s Bible Class minutes; Young People’s Society for Christian Endeavor minutes; church directories; historical pamphlets; congregational and pastoral correspondence; and women’s group minutes. The congregation organized in 1758 and disbanded in 1994. A videotape of the January 2, 1994, final worship service was recorded by the archivist.


Grahamsville, New York, Grahamsville Reformed Church. Records include consistory minutes, 1844-1969; baptisms, 1845-1865, 1893, 1905, 1929-1965; members, 1845-1972; marriages, 1844-1867, 1877-1888; elders’ minutes, 1964-1975; and miscellaneous papers, 1923-1942. The congregation organized in 1844.


Lynwood, Illinois, Bethany Reformed Church. Records include baptisms from 1915 to 1959. The congregation organized in 1890.

**Gifts**


**Other Work of the Office of Historical Services**

The archivist continued research and work on the *Digest and Index of the Minutes of General Synod* from 1978 through 1985. Issues of *Historical Highlights* continue to be produced. In the Occasional Papers Series, the *History of the Grahamsville Reformed Church*, by the Rev. James Brumm, was published.

Producing background historical studies for RCA staff and RCA agencies is an important function of the RCA Archives and Office of Historical Services. Studies on the history of assessments, the organization and establishment of women’s boards of missions in the RCA, the actions of General Synod on prayer in schools, and the position of the RCA on the situation in South Africa are a few examples of research projects completed this past year.

In August and September, 1994, microfilm operators filmed twenty-three reels of RCA congregational records. Approximately 75 percent of the congregational records in the custody of the RCA Archives have been recorded on microfilm.

The archivist served as chair of the Archivists of Religious Collections Section of the Society of American Archivists (SAA) this past year. When the SAA met in Indianapolis, Indiana, in September 1994, the archivist presented the following two papers: “Traveling the Information Superhighway: Archivists and the Internet” and “Conceiving Our Future: Growing into the 21st Century.” The archivist also attended a workshop on document imaging and optical disks, and subsequently offered a workshop to religious archivists on document imaging, which is becoming an important means for the preservation and dissemination of one’s heritage.

The RCA Archives continued to serve the needs of a variety of researchers, including family historians, history professors, sociologists, anthropologists, students, church leaders and administrators, and General Synod commissions and agencies. This past year the archivist answered 96 genealogical requests and 207 other types of informational queries, including preparation of historical presentations for celebrations and anniversaries. Eighty-three visitors used the archives on one hundred separate days for a total of nearly seven hundred hours of research time. Other researchers this year included a Visiting Fellow from the Polish
Academy of Arts and Sciences, one from a university in Japan, another from Dubai, an RCA member working on stories of RCA women, and an RCA missionary writing a book on the history of RCA missions.

Documenting RCA Life and Mission

The RCA Archives will continue to gather records of RCA staff offices, regional synods, classes, and congregations. In addition, documentation of the RCA’s life in worship and ministry will also be undertaken through the videotaping of RCA congregations at worship and work. A particular focus is being made on documenting the disbanding of RCA congregations. This includes the collection of records, videotaping of the church and worship services, and collection of oral history interviews with congregation members.

Necrology

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>Dirk J. Kolenbrander</td>
<td>March 27, 1995</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ernest Crounse

Ernest Crounse was born at Schaghticoke, New York, on August 7, 1913. He received his undergraduate education at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1935. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1938.

Crounse was licensed by the Classis of Albany in 1938 and ordained by the Classis of Schenectady the same year. He pastored the following New York congregations: Trinity, Schenectady, from 1938 to 1940; Coeymans, from 1940 to 1944; Clarksbille, from 1942 to 1944; Schoharie, 1946 to 1948; St. Johnsville, from 1948 to 1957; Second, Syracuse, from 1957 to 1962; merged congregations of First and Second, Syracuse, from 1962 to 1969; and Third, Albany, from 1969 to 1980. He also served as a chaplain in the U.S. Army from 1944 to 1946 and as president of the Particular Synod of Albany in 1975.


Werner Christian Minke

Werner Christian Minke was born at Bremen, Germany, on December 8, 1919. He studied at the Mittelschule, Bremen-Blumenthal. He completed a special course in theological education at Western Theological Seminary in 1964.
Minke was licensed by the Classis of Queens in 1964 and ordained by the Classis of Illiana the same year. He pastored the following congregations: First, Lafayette, Indiana, from 1964 to 1970; and North Dade Community, Miami, Florida, from 1970 to 1984. He served as the director of the preschool at North Dade Community Church following his retirement.

Minke died at Sarasota, Florida, on August 24, 1994.

Lorenz Alexander Proli

Lorenz Alexander Proli was born at New York City on October 19, 1914. He received his undergraduate education at Rutgers University, from which he graduated in 1941. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1945.

Proli was licensed by the Classis of Bergen in 1945 and ordained by the Classis of Orange the same year. He served as a student pastor at East Millstone, New Jersey, from 1942 to 1945. He pastored the following congregations: Federated, Kerhonkson, New York, from 1945 to 1948; Fifth Street, Bayonne, New Jersey, from 1948 to 1958; and Trinity, Plainfield, New Jersey, from 1958 to 1979.


Louis Henry Chisman

Louis Henry Chisman was born at Keyport, New Jersey, on October 22, 1921. He received his undergraduate education at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1943. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1946.

Chisman was licensed by the Classis of Monmouth in 1946 and ordained by the Classis of Albany the same year. He pastored the following New York congregations: Coeymans, from 1946 to 1952; and Union, Unionville, from 1953 to 1960. He also served as associate pastor at Delmar, New York, from 1953 to 1960. Chisman served as the first executive director at Camp Fowler from 1960 to 1976. He served as contract pastor at Randall Community, Fultonville, New York, from 1979 to 1981.

Chisman died at Lake Pleasant, New York, on September 14, 1994.

Reuben James Ongna

Reuben James Ongna was born at Gibbsville, Wisconsin, on August 12, 1912. He received his undergraduate education at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1937. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1940.

Ongna was licensed and ordained by the Classis of Wisconsin in 1940. He pastored the following congregations: Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, from 1940 to 1943; Trinity, Orange City, Iowa, from 1943 to 1948; Emmanuel, Morrison, Illinois, from 1948 to 1953; Calvary, Ripon, California, from 1953 to 1957; Leighton, Iowa, from 1957 to 1962; Garden Home, Denver, Colorado, from 1962 to 1967; First, Oak Harbor, Washington, from 1967 to 1973; and Raritan, Illinois, 1973 to 1977. He served as stated supply pastor at Raritan upon his retirement in 1977.

Ongna died at Pella, Iowa, on October 11, 1994.
Nevon Newell

Nevon Newell was born at Chattanooga, Tennessee, on May 20, 1938. He studied law before serving as special assistant at the New Light Baptist Church in Detroit, Michigan. He was received by the Classis of Lake Erie in 1979. He served as pastor of Nardin Park, Detroit, Michigan, from 1979 until his retirement in 1994.

Newell died at Detroit, Michigan, on October 16, 1994.

John Nieuwsma

John Nieuwsma was born at Strasburg, North Dakota, on December 18, 1910. He began his undergraduate education at North Dakota State College and completed it at Central College, from which he graduated in 1934. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1937. He was awarded a Th.M. degree from Western Theological Seminary in 1973.

Nieuwsma was licensed by the Classis of Dakota in 1937 and ordained by the Classis of Germania the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Chancellor, South Dakota, from 1937 to 1940; First, Sioux Falls, South Dakota, from 1940 to 1945; Bethel, Bellflower, California, from 1945 to 1951; Hingham, Wisconsin, from 1951 to 1955; Fourth, Holland, Michigan, from 1955 to 1962; Ebenezer, Morrison, Illinois, from 1962 to 1968; and, Hamilton, Michigan, from 1968 to 1976. He served as pastor of visitation at First, Zeeland, Michigan, in 1976 and as president of the Particular Synod of Iowa from 1944 to 1945.

Nieuwsma died at Zeeland, Michigan, on December 25, 1994.

Alberto Espada-Mata

Alberto Espada-Mata was born at Toa Abaja, Puerto Rico, on December 22, 1918. He studied at the Latin American Bible Seminary in San Jose, Costa Rica, from 1937 to 1939 and graduated from the University of Puerto Rico in 1953. He received a B.A. degree from the Latin American Bible Seminary in 1970. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1977. He also studied at the University of the Americas in 1970 and at Fuller Theological Seminary in 1977.

Espada-Mata pastored the following congregations: Suydam Street, New Brunswick, New Jersey, from 1972 to 1978; and Emmanuel Mission, Paramount, California, in 1982. He served a pastorate in the Christian and Missionary Alliance in Santurce, Puerto Rico, and founded the radio ministry of the Alberto Espada-Mata Evangelistic and Missionary Association in 1984. This radio ministry was broadcast in the United States, Argentina, Costa Rica, and on Trans-World Radio.

Espada-Mata died at Edison, New Jersey, on December 26, 1994.

Abraham Rynbrandt

Abraham Rynbrandt was born at Jamestown, Michigan, on November 29, 1897. He received his undergraduate education at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1922. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1925.

Rynbrandt was licensed by the Classis of Holland in 1925 and ordained by the Classis of Montgomery the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Johnstown, New York, from 1925 to 1928; Fifth, Grand Rapids, Michigan, from 1928 to 1936; Second, Fulton,
Illinois, from 1936 to 1939; North Park, Kalamazoo, Michigan, from 1939 to 1943; First, Zeeland, Michigan, from 1943 to 1949; Grace, Grand Rapids, Michigan, from 1949 to 1953; Maplewood, Holland, Michigan, from 1953 to 1959; and Emmanuel, Waupun, Wisconsin, from 1959 to 1965. He served as associate pastor at Parkview, Santa Ana, California, from 1965 to 1967 and as minister of visitation at First, Grand Haven, Michigan, in 1971. He was president of General Synod from 1949 to 1950.

Rynbrandt died at Holland, Michigan, on February 3, 1995.

Raymond J. Teusink

Raymond J. Teusink was born at Allegan, Michigan, on October 8, 1921. He received his undergraduate education at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1954. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1957. Teusink was licensed by the Classis of Holland in 1957 and ordained by the Classis of Germania the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Chancellor, South Dakota, from 1957 to 1960; Westown (later known as Christ’s Community), Phoenix, Arizona, from 1960 to 1968; First, Yakima, Washington, from 1968 to 1979; and Pella, Adams, Nebraska, from 1979 to 1985. During his retirement he served as the minister of calling at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Yakima, Washington.


Jay R. Weener

Jay R. Weener was born at Holland, Michigan, on December 6, 1927. He received his undergraduate education at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1949. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1952. Weener was licensed and ordained by the Classis of Holland in 1952. He pastored the following congregations: Beaverdam, Zeeland, Michigan, from 1952 to 1955; Third, Grand Rapids, Michigan, from 1955 to 1960; Parkview Memorial, Santa Ana, California, from 1960 to 1966; Second, Kalamazoo, Michigan, from 1966 to 1984; and Fifth, Grand Rapids, Michigan, from 1984 to 1989. Weener was Henry Bast Professor of Preaching at Western Theological Seminary from 1989 to 1994. He served as adjunct professor at Western Theological Seminary from 1994 until his death.

Weener died at Holland, Michigan, on March 2, 1995.

Dirk J. Kolenbrander

Dirk J. Kolenbrander was born at Pella, Iowa, on November 26, 1908. He received his undergraduate education at Central College, from which he graduated in 1931. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1934.

Kolenbrander was licensed by the Class of Pella in 1934 and ordained by the Classis of East Sioux the same year. He pastored the following congregations: First, Sibley, Iowa, from 1934 to 1940; Emmanuel, Springfield, South Dakota, from 1940 to 1946; Steen, Minnesota, from 1946 to 1956; Holland, Nebraska, from 1956 to 1967; and First, Prairie City, Iowa, from 1967 to 1973.

Kolenbrander died at Colfax, Iowa, on March 27, 1995.
Report of the Editorial Council of the *Church Herald*

There is a scene near the end of the film *Out of Africa* when the character played by Meryl Streep realizes that, after a long struggle, she and Robert Redford's character will finally come together. Although elated, she also recognizes that the much-longed-for relationship will spawn new challenges. In that moment, she announces, with a deep theological insight couched in poor theological language, "When the gods are angry, they answer your prayers." The lesson, of course, was clear: be careful what you pray for, because you might get it. And then what will you do?

In February 1992, the Editorial Council of the *Church Herald*, meeting in Grand Rapids, Michigan, found itself again stymied by the conundrum of the continuing decline in subscriptions and significant budget concerns for a magazine that would be named later that year as North America's best denominational magazine. That day, like many times before, the editorial council prayed that God would use the magazine for the ministry of God's church and the work and witness of the RCA.

That summer the 1992 General Synod approved a plan which would put the *Church Herald* in households across the denomination (*MGS 1992*, R-2, pp. 198-9). But getting what you pray for isn't the simple panacea suggested by fairy tales. Make no mistake: the every-household distribution plan was a tremendous blessing given to the *Church Herald* by the RCA, and it continues to be a gift and a blessing. But it was the *Church Herald*’s challenge from the RCA as well: produce a magazine that will now reflect the theological values, the ministry needs, and the personal spiritual goals, not just of those RCA congregations and members who consciously asked for the magazine, but for the whole breadth and depth of the RCA. That challenge is still very real today and, perhaps as well as any, sums up both the past year in ministry for the *Church Herald* and its immediate future.

**FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**

The magazine’s financial mandate from the RCA was as clear as its spiritual goals: the editorial council and the staff of the *Church Herald* must use wisely every dollar of its predominantly General Synod assessment-granted income. The *Church Herald* is proud of its record of stewardship of those funds since the assessment went into effect January 1, 1993. In 1994, for a second straight year, the *Church Herald* spent significantly less than what was available to the magazine. The *Church Herald* ended 1994 with a budget surplus of nearly $108,000 in revenue over expenses. As in 1993, half of that money was returned directly to the denomination. Additionally, confident that a third year of savings was possible, the editorial council asked the 1994 General Synod for fewer assessment dollars in 1995 than in 1994, cutting its budget by 5.2 percent.

The *Church Herald* attained these financial savings in a manner familiar to many local RCA congregations and to the denominational offices: finding ways to do more with less. Some examples:

The *Church Herald* still has one of the highest ratios of magazine pages produced for staff hours worked, a testament to its dedicated and talented staff.

Every quarter, the magazine offers a bonus section of denominational and regional synod news through the cooperative efforts of denominational, regional synod, and magazine staff.

In 1994 the *Church Herald* competed for and received, in cooperation with three other denominational magazines, a $20,000 grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts to help put together (and pay for) its September 1994 focus on population, consumption, and the environment.
New technology has allowed the magazine to offer more color and high-quality design without some of the prohibitive price tags formerly associated with this kind of work.

That kind of active stewardship of resources will continue. Unfortunately, the Church Herald’s relative good fortune in the supply marketplace will not. The U.S. Postal Service socked the Church Herald with two huge increases on January 1: a 22 percent boost in basic delivery rates and a 40 percent increase in the cost of address changes forwarded to the Church Herald by the U.S. Post Office. Paper prices, flat for the last few years, jumped 20 percent in the second half of 1994 and are expected to rise at least another 10 percent in each of the next two years. Those two items alone—paper and postage—comprise over a third of the Church Herald’s total budget. Inflationary pressures also continue to push the largest budget item, printing, higher as well, by about 4-5 percent per year.

Because of these increases, the Church Herald is asking the General Synod to restore for 1996 the income cut from the Church Herald’s 1995 budget. That will keep the Church Herald General Synod assessment at a level equal to the amount originally set in 1992. Since this request is for 1996, that will mean four years with no increase in General Synod assessment for the every-household distribution of the Church Herald.

MAGAZINE DESIGN

Operating with a successful design and ever-improving technology meant tinkering with the magazine’s format, not overhauling it. The staff revamped the standing features (like regular columns authored by the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, the Rev. Louis Lotz, and the Rev. Dr. Gregg Mast, as well as the other monthly constants), introducing graphics on those pages. The magazine’s staff replaced the underused quarterly study guide, “In Focus,” with a new feature directed at elementary school children. Denise Krebs will serve as the freelance general editor of this section, which debuted in March 1995 but whose name, to be nominated by the kids themselves, will not be known until June 1995. Otherwise, bolstered by positive comments, the basic format of the magazine remained the same.

MAGAZINE DISTRIBUTION

The editorial council and staff implemented two changes in the distribution of the Church Herald during the last year. In October 1994, representatives of the Church Herald, the Pioneer Christian Monthly, and the General Synod Council together agreed that the joint mailing agreement which had combined distribution of the Church Herald and Pioneer in Canada would be discontinued at the end of 1994 in order to allow each magazine to realize its own potential and identity within the Canadian congregations of the RCA. In addition, the General Synod Council, at its October 1994 meeting, approved reallocating to Pioneer Christian Monthly $5,000 designated by the 1994 General Synod for the Church Herald to cover the costs of a joint Canadian distribution of both magazines (MGS 1994, R-3, p. 164).

In December 1994, with the goal of increasing efficiency and gaining a significant savings in cost, the Church Herald moved its mailing list into new computer software. For most people, this new way of making the simplest of things—a label for the cover of the magazine—did just what it was supposed to do. The magazine arrived quickly and with less wear and tear, and the Church Herald made up in savings every penny of the 22 percent increase in postal rates that went into effect on January 1, 1995. But for a few people in some areas (and there was little rhyme or reason to whom or where), the magazine not only didn’t come quickly; it didn’t come at all. That prompted the Church Herald to discontinue use of the new software for a limited time until the Church Herald could be sure it was working properly.
STAFF

There were numerous changes in staff in 1994. Half of the Church Herald’s full and part-time staff of eight assumed their current positions during the past year. The Rev. Terry De Young, formerly associate pastor at Central Park Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan, replaced Christina Van Bylas as associate editor. Sheryl Meulenberg moved from TRA V ARCA to the Church Herald as assistant to the editor and secretary; Pamela Huyser assumed sole responsibility for subscription maintenance and oversight; and Thomas Scholten joined the staff as a part-time editorial assistant. Their hard work and commitment to the magazine has made what could have been a staffing disaster into a real team effort.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

While finances and design and staff are all nuts-and-bolts that keep the magazine running, it’s how the Church Herald thinks about and plans for what it does, both practically and theologically, that will ultimately determine how the Church Herald meets the challenge of serving the diverse RCA. To that end, the editorial council and staff have been grateful for opportunities to dialogue, both by letter and in person, with RCA members and consistorys from California to Ontario to New York. For example, a letter to the editorial council from a congregation about some theological concerns over material the magazine printed prompted an informative (and ongoing) editorial council discussion over the purpose and direction of the magazine. The editorial council remains convinced that continued dialogue will help make the magazine the best servant of Christ’s church.

To aid it in this formative work, the editorial council has invested significant meeting time in re-examining its own purpose and the purpose of the magazine, and it has committed itself to a comprehensive strategic planning process through 1995. With representatives from each of the regions of the RCA, the editorial council feels it has important insights to offer the Church Herald staff and remains committed to finding the best ways in which to do that.

The editorial council is excited about the role the Church Herald continues to play in supporting the spiritual growth and development of RCA members across North America. The editorial council continues to pray that God will use the magazine for the ministry of God’s church and for the work and witness of the RCA.

From the Report of the General Synod Council’s Stewardship and Communication Services Committee

Stewardship and Communication Services (SAC) is responsible for the program areas of stewardship and communication. The Rev. E. Wayne Antworth serves as director and is responsible for administration, coordination, and supervision.

COMMUNICATION

Words are of great importance to anyone who works in the area of communication. God spoke a “word” and creation came to be. God sent the “Word” into the world for our redemption. Jesus spoke “words” of grace and healing which give the promise of eternal life. Words can also take visual form and substance. Jesus took bread and wine and said “Take, eat; this is my body.... Drink... this is my blood” (Matt. 26:26-28).
The key to any successful organization is effective communication. Communications reveal who we are, individually and corporately. Spoken words, presented in various forms of print and audiovisual media, communicate one’s faith and philosophy of life. SAC staff has as its mission to effectively communicate the vision and ministries of the Reformed Church in America to its constituency.

The mission of the communications unit is:

To maintain a communication network within the RCA which connects individual members to other individuals, congregations, and the denomination, thus building community, enhancing mutual understanding, promoting cooperation in denominational programs, and providing opportunities for personal growth, spiritual challenge, and involvement in ministry.

To develop and produce print and audiovisual resources which promote and strengthen the total ministry of the Reformed Church in America.

To provide production and distribution services for the Reformed Church in America (including its regional bodies, congregations, institutions, and agencies) and for additional nonprofit organizations.

RCA DISTRIBUTION CENTER

Mission Statement

The mission of the RCA Distribution Center is to provide Reformed Church in America congregations with print and audiovisual resources and to provide RCA staff and agencies with production and distribution services.

Overview

Since its relocation in 1986 from South Holland, Illinois, and the denominational office in New York City to Michigan, the RCA Distribution Center has grown steadily. In its first year of operation, revenue totaled $281,000. In 1994 revenue (excluding TRAVARCA and Reformed Church Productions) exceeded $1,280,000, with the sale of print materials representing over $774,000 of the total—a record amount of sales for any calendar year to date.

Now located in the new Michigan Regional Center in Grand Rapids, Michigan, the operation employs eight full-time staff and three part-time individuals. Kim Baker oversees the operation, and Jane Schuyler is available to answer customer questions on the Resource Information Helpline. A single toll-free telephone number serves customers throughout the United States, Canada, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The RCA Distribution Center is a registered nonresident Canadian importer, allowing it to ship goods quickly and conveniently to Canadian customers. The RCA Distribution Center absorbs all brokerage fees for Canadian shipments.

The RCA Distribution Center is the publishing agent for the Reformed Church in America. It provides high-quality production services for all RCA staff and the Church Herald. It employs three graphic designers who operate state-of-the-art IBM and Macintosh graphic computers.

The RCA Distribution Center provides the denomination with a central location for the sale and distribution of promotional, informational, and educational materials. A staff of five individuals takes orders, packs shipments, invoices customers, and maintains an inventory of over one thousand items in its 4,200 square-foot warehouse.
1994-95 Promotional Efforts

Catalogs

The 1995-96 RCA Resources for Ministry catalog, along with RCA versions of the Friendship Press and PREM catalogs, were distributed to 3,000 customers, including all RCA congregations.

Mini-catalogs

Mini-catalogs on adult group resources, youth resources, and small group materials were distributed to all RCA congregations.

Brochures and fliers

Brochures on the RCA's every-Sunday and special occasion bulletins, LiFE curriculum, the Children and Worship program/resources, and the Vacation Ventures Series were distributed through the reSOURCES mailing. Several fliers advertising new products (such as Revive Us Again!) and special prices on selected items were also distributed through reSOURCES and included in outgoing orders.

Advertising

The RCA Distribution Center paid for full-page, four-color ads for the LiFE curriculum in the January, February, and March 1994 issues of the Church Herald. LiFE was also advertised on the back cover of the 1994-95 RCA Plan Calendar (to be repeated in the 1995-96 calendar). A quarter-page ad introducing the new StoryTellers Series (vacation Bible school) appeared in the March 1995 Church Herald.

Servant Leaders

In January 1995 the RCA Distribution Center produced and distributed over 22,000 copies of the first issue of the new leadership newspaper, Servant Leaders: A Practical Publication Serving RCA Congregations.

The purpose of Servant Leaders is to serve congregations by providing professional and lay leaders in the Reformed Church in America with useful information about new resources, creative programs, special services, upcoming events and conferences, and continuing education opportunities. Servant Leaders is published quarterly and sent free of charge to pastors, elders, deacons, missionaries, chaplains, seminary students, professors, and lay leaders in RCA congregations.

Kim Baker serves as the publication's editor, and an editorial team (Wenda Fore, the Rev. John Paarlberg, Sara Smith, Jane Schuyler, and the Rev. Randy Wieland) assists in planning each issue.

RCA Distribution Center Issues

1. Profit/loss. Each year since 1988 the operation has generated a modest “profit,” contributing a total of $103,917 toward the capitalization of new products and $68,612 into general reserves. However, in 1993 the RCA Distribution Center recorded its first loss of $70,846. The loss was the result of two primary factors: 1) a decline in sales of $100,146, due in part to decreased sales of Bible Way curriculum as congregations anticipated the introduction of the new LiFE materials; and 2) a significant increase in rent with the move to the new regional center facility. Although the RCA Distribution
Center showed an increase in income in several budget areas (sale of books, typesetting, printing, and services), it showed a modest loss in 1994 due to much higher interest charges than anticipated and a one-time adjustment of approximately $10,000 to reconcile cash receivables. Communication and Stewardship Services needs to explore solutions to reduce the interest charge currently being assessed to the RCA Distribution Center.

2. **LiFE.** The RCA Distribution Center capitalized the development of the new LiFE curriculum produced in partnership with CRC Publications. A payback schedule has been established between the RCA and CRC Publications, allowing the RCA Distribution Center to recover its investment through a special discount arrangement. The ability of the RCA Distribution Center to pay off the $256,289 loan from the denomination rests on retaining current users and attracting new LiFE customers. Establishing a strong network of RCA education consultants needs to be a high priority during 1995-96. In 1994 the RCA Distribution Center repaid $29,415 of the loan.

3. **Equipment.** The RCA Distribution Center made its final lease/purchase payment for its high-volume Xerox copier in December 1993. Paying only for maintenance in 1994-95, the RCA will save $2,703 per month through March 1996. Alternatives to Xerox are being explored. In 1995 the RCA Distribution Center will replace its computerized mailing machine and one of its graphics computers.

4. **Charge for Mailing Services.** The RCA Distribution Center currently bears the total personnel and equipment costs related to shipping/mailing from the Michigan Regional Center facility. In January 1995 a new computerized shipping system was installed for approximately $17,000 (expensed over five years). The total annual cost of the mailing operation is approximately $33,000, not including rent. Over a six-month period (August 1994-January 1995) $87,400 of shipping costs were recorded, of which only $24,220 (or 27 percent) was RCA Distribution Center business. Other GSC offices/programs were responsible for the remaining $63,180 (or 73 percent). Charging for these services should be explored.

**PRINT PRODUCTION**

The production of print resources provides the RCA with an opportunity to hear about, understand, and utilize the many programs of the denomination. The Rev. LeRoy Koopman, Una Ratmeyer, and Kristi Naber provide writing and editing services for the production of resources. The following resources are generated as well as put into production by SAC:

**RCA Today**

*RCA Today* was introduced eight years ago as a denominational communication vehicle for RCA congregations to use as a bulletin insert. *RCA Today* is designed to provide news about the RCA to a broad readership. The audience is the “person in the pew.” Each month 160,000 copies of *RCA Today* are printed and distributed free to over 850 congregations. The March 1995 issue of *RCA Today* was sent to all congregations who do not receive this publication, with an order blank to encourage their participation.

In January 1994 SAC and the Council for Hispanic Ministries began a joint venture of providing a Spanish edition of *RCA Today*, entitled *iHOY!*. The translation work is being done by the Council for Hispanic Ministries, and the costs are being underwritten by SAC. Twenty of the twenty-one RCA Hispanic congregations have requested regular monthly mailings of the Spanish edition.
Prayerline

Because the majority of RCA members now regularly receive RCA news from two sources (the *Church Herald* and *RCA Today*), *Hotline* was discontinued in February 1993 after twenty-one years of publication. In response to requests for timely information about prayer needs in the RCA family, *Prayerline* was initiated in May of 1993 as a single sheet mailed with *RCA Today* and Mission of the Month. *Prayerline* is also sent free each month to more than three hundred individuals who have requested it.

Mission of the Month

The Mission of the Month (MOTM) materials are used by over seven hundred congregations and approximately one hundred individuals. These materials include a monthly poster; a children's activity bulletin; a resource list; and *Focus*, a monthly bulletin insert containing articles, photos, prayer requests, and a detachable offering envelope. Approximately 115,000 copies of *Focus* are distributed each month to congregations which use MOTM materials. A total of $163,275 was raised for mission support through this program in 1994. MOTM materials are distributed free to all participating congregations every month.

SAC and Mission Services are working together on a redesigned Mission of the Month which will be available in September 1995. The new program will replace *Focus* with a separate offering envelope and *Mission Today*, a bulletin insert in a format similar to *RCA Today*. Plans are also being made to produce a wall calendar with color mission photos that correspond with the Mission of the Month program.

“Together”

Beginning in June 1993, SAC produced quarterly “Together” inserts placed in the *Church Herald*. These four-page inserts have included personal profiles, features about RCA ministries, “Why?” questions, profiles of new missionaries, and $9.8 by '98 articles.

Profiles in Mission

Profile sheets give information about RCA missionaries, staff, programs, and projects. These half-page sheets are used primarily as bulletin inserts. Congregations are encouraged to use these profiles in raising new mission support and in sharing general information about RCA missionaries and programs. The profiles are continually being updated as personnel and program changes occur. Twenty-four new or updated profiles were produced in 1994.

Missionary Letters

RCA missionaries are asked to correspond with their supporting churches. To facilitate the distribution of missionary letters, SAC edits, types, and distributes the letters to supporting churches and individuals. Last year 108 letters totaling 60,677 copies were distributed. These letters give insight into the work and ministry of missionaries and provide an opportunity to pray specifically for their concerns and needs.

Reformed Church in Mission Packets

A general promotion packet is prepared for each area of mission work: Africa, Japan, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, American Indian Ministries, Appalachian Ministries, Southern Normal School, Volunteer Services, Chiapas, Central and South America, and Reformed Church World Service.
These packets contain maps, photos, missionary profiles, *Church Herald* reprints, and other resource materials to assist in the interpretation of RCA mission work in a particular area. These packets are especially useful for making mission displays and promoting the specific work of a geographical area.

**The Reformed Church in Mission**

*The Reformed Church in Mission* book, which includes the programs that are supported through gifts from RCA congregations and individuals, is produced annually. The first section of the book describes ways to support the mission of the RCA and financial information about how RCA mission dollars are at work.

*The Reformed Church in Mission* book is divided into geographical areas, beginning with the RCA’s work in North America and reaching out around the world. Each section includes all the personnel, programs, and projects that are included in the Mission Services budget. *The Reformed Church in Mission* is a valuable educational and promotional resource for pastors, mission committees, consistories, and members of the RCA who are interested in supporting the denomination’s worldwide mission program.

**$9.8 by ’98 Resources**

The print and audiovisual materials for the $9.8 by ’98 fund drive have all been produced by SAC. Editorial, production, and RCA Distribution Center staff have worked to make the following resources available to regional synods, RCA congregations, and interested individuals:

- General promotional resources:
  - Two brochures
  - Poster
  - Campaign newsletter
  - News bulletin inserts
  - *Church Herald* ads
  - Bimonthly *Church Herald* inserts

- Local church campaign materials:
  - *Church Goal-Setting Guide*
  - Person-To-Person Visitation Guide
  - Special Offerings Guide
  - *Commitment Sunday Guide*
  - *Cluster Meetings Guide*
  - Campaign bulletin inserts

**Brochures and Other Resources**

A number of brochures are produced each year to meet specific program needs of the GSC and other related organizations. In 1994 the following resources were produced:

- “Family Finances” brochure
- Celebrating City Ministries brochure
- RCWM Triennial material
- Direct mail solicitation resources
- Several publications for Southern Normal School
Ads

Eighteen ads were placed in the *Church Herald* in 1994. Ads are used to promote the programs of the Reformed Church in America and to communicate with congregations and individuals about opportunities for support. SAC also assists other RCA organizations in the placement of ads.

Plan Calendar

The annual *Plan Calendar* for clergy and other church workers continues to be a popular item. Free copies were sent to each minister in the RCA, and an additional 912 copies were sold by the RCA Distribution Center. The 1994-95 Plan Calendar cover highlighted the $9.8 by '98 fund drive.

reSOURCES

reSOURCES is used to distribute material to RCA congregations. reSOURCES is mailed six times per year using bulk postage rates. This provides an inexpensive way to distribute the many resources that are available to RCA congregations.

News Service

Thirty-four news releases were sent to the *Church Herald* during 1994. *RCA Today* also publishes many RCA news items. When there is an event that needs immediate coverage, a special news release is distributed to all RCA churches. Seven special news releases were sent in 1994.

In addition, the *Church Herald* published ten “Missionary Corners” as well as other mission-related articles submitted by SAC. The annual meeting of the General Synod is the major news event in the life of the RCA. SAC provides both print and broadcast news coverage during General Synod meetings.

Displays

The displays at the General Synod meeting each year provide an opportunity for the General Synod Council and other agencies of the RCA to distribute materials and give an overview of their work. Six portable displays are “on the road” almost constantly for area and local mission conferences. Display materials are also available for use at other RCA events. Upon request, materials are sent to congregations for special program displays.

TRAVARCA

The TRAVARCA lending library supplies quality audiovisual resources for the congregations, assemblies, institutions, and agencies of the Reformed Church in America; for the Christian Reformed Church in North America; and for the wider Christian community. The TRAVARCA collection houses audiovisual resources in three formats: VHS video, 16mm motion picture, and slide. The diverse titles include programs for a variety of audiences in a wide range of subjects.

Through resources which reflect a Christian perspective, TRAVARCA strives to strengthen and enrich the mission and ministry of the church of Jesus Christ. TRAVARCA provides a balanced collection of over two thousand titles to support ministries in worship, education, evangelism, youth and young adult ministry, family life, leader development, missions, social witness, faith development, church development, and stewardship. All TRAVARCA videos and films are licensed for use at church and church functions. A study guide is
provided with each resource. The resource arrives several days before the actual show date to allow the leader to become familiar with the program and guide. A USPS return postage-paid card, addressed to TRAVARCA, is included with every shipment in the continental United States. (Canadian customers return via Canadian Post.)

TRAVARCA strives to select resources which are consistent with the theology and practice of the Reformed Church in America, the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), and others in the Reformed/Presbyterian family of churches. Some resources, while reflecting a Christian perspective, may not necessarily represent the official stand of either the Reformed Church in America or the Christian Reformed Church. Resource descriptions contained in the Media Resources for Ministry catalog endeavor to alert users to sensitive materials and to suggest the most appropriate settings for their use.

Jane Schuyler began her responsibilities as TRAVARCA’s media specialist in the spring of 1987. She manages the daily operation of the TRAVARCA library and supervises the media assistants, Jamie Knoll and Laurie Rodgers. Schuyler, in consultation with the TRAVARCA Selection Committee, previews, selects, and purchases new audiovisual resources for the collection. Schuyler is available during regular business hours (8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. eastern time) to answer customer questions concerning the content of print and audiovisual resources and their suitability for specific educational settings. The toll-free number of TRAVARCA is (800) 968-7221 and the FAX number is (616) 698-6606. Schuyler also serves as a consultant to the Council for Christian Education and the Youth Ministry Team (both of which are currently being restructured). She attends SAC production meetings for print and audiovisual resources and serves as a member of project groups in the development and production of RCA media resources. Schuyler produces mediagraphies of videos that coordinate with the LiFE and Bible Way curricula and leads workshops as assigned. She reports periodically to the TRAVARCA Management Committee.

During September 1992, TRAVARCA introduced a unique membership program to encourage greater use of videos in congregations throughout the United States and Canada. With an annual TRAVARCA membership fee, a church or organization is entitled to use every resource in the TRAVARCA library free of additional charge, including shipping and handling. There is no limit to the number of resources a member may use. TRAVARCA memberships are based on the size of the congregation and denominational affiliation. All memberships expire on August 31. Non-members may also use TRAVARCA resources but must pay the established handling and shipping fees.

In December 1994 the new Media Resources for Ministry catalog was sent to every RCA/CRC congregation, TRAVARCA members, staff, selected lay leaders, and to other Christian churches within Michigan. Within one month, TRAVARCA received eighty-two new members. As of February 24, 1995, TRAVARCA has 583 members and houses more than 3,674 videos, films, and slide shows (more than 1,461 different titles). It distributed more than 6,889 resources during 1994, an increase of 12 percent over 1993 figures.

A TRAVARCA marketing task force met January 25, 1995. Their decisions included telemarketing to TRAVARCA RCA/CRC non-members during March 1995; a special free membership offer from April 1 through August 31, 1995; displaying TRAVARCA catalogs and mediagraphies at the CRC Publication’s exhibit at CRC Synod and trade shows; advertising with the Church Herald, the Banner, and the RCA Plan Calendar; distributing a catalog update this summer; and exploring membership possibilities with other partners.

TRAVARCA completed its second year of operation in Grand Rapids, Michigan, on January 18, 1995. TRAVARCA ended 1994 with a projected deficit of around $60,000, due to increases in rent and to overestimated membership and income projections. TRAVARCA has projected a balanced budget for 1995, based on 650 members.
The advisory committee recommended:

R-2.
To commend to RCA congregations and individual members the excellent and cost-effective educational and inspirational resources available through TRAVARCA. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. TRAVARCA is the largest church audiovisual library of any denomination in North America.

2. Individual church members are able to utilize the resources at no charge when their church is a member of TRAVARCA.

AUDIOVISUAL PRODUCTION

The audiovisual (AV) production department of Stewardship and Communication Services consists of John Grooters, producer, and Kathy Smarrella, associate producer. Working together with other staff and editors from SAC, they produce audiovisual resources which help tell the story of RCA mission and ministry. The AV production team also occasionally does contract production work for other ministry-oriented groups outside the RCA. These outside projects help offset the costs of maintaining the office.

Unlike other program offices within the General Synod Council, AV production charges for its services. This process was initiated in January 1992 when the AV production budget was shifted into the RCA Distribution Center. In 1994 AV production generated $97,387 from sale of services and supplies and equipment rentals. This was an increase from $96,961 generated in 1993. The additional costs for the operation of the office are offset by a grant from SAC.

Day rates for producer and associate producer services are competitive with independent producers in the Grand Rapids, Michigan, area. Daily rental charges for the broadcast-quality camera, lighting, and audio equipment also help offset the costs of purchasing and maintaining these items. Rate cards and production bids are available from the Grand Rapids office.

An exciting new addition to the Michigan Regional Center production suite in 1994 was the purchase of an Avid Media Composer 1000 non-linear editing system. The Avid is a state-of-the-art computer-based editing system which allows the AV production department to complete videos entirely in-house. This is particularly helpful in the production of lower budget videos, which were previously constricted by the substantial costs incurred in outside editing time.

RCA-produced media can be ordered through the TRAVARCA lending library. Some items are also available for sale through the RCA Distribution Center. Descriptions are included in the TRAVARCA Media Resources for Ministry catalog.

The following is a list of new audiovisual resources produced over the past year specifically for committees/units of the General Synod Council:

1. RCA Today 1995

This eighteen-minute newscast covers stories of Reformed Church in America people and programs around the world. This year's version includes stories on new churches and their participation in the $9.8 by '98 fund drive; reactions to the new LiFE
curriculum; stories of missionaries in Ethiopia, Honduras, and Japan; a story on the emerging Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa; and much more. A copy of the RCA Today video is sent to every RCA congregation.

2. General Synod Synopsis '94

Introduced for the first time in 1994, this video featured the recently elected president and vice-president of General Synod discussing some of the most important topics addressed at the 1994 General Synod. Supplemented with footage shot throughout the week of the 1994 General Synod, this video intended to communicate the spirit, as well as the news, of the 1994 General Synod. A copy of General Synod Synopsis '94 was sent to every RCA congregation.

3. Willing Hearts - A Ministry of RCA Volunteer Services

This video premiered at the 1994 General Synod as part of the celebration of RCA Volunteer Services. Every year thousands of RCA members serve Christ through short- and long-term volunteer experiences and through workcamping programs. Willing Hearts chronicles a few of those stories and is an inspiration for any Christian considering volunteering his or her time for ministry.

4. $9.8 by '98 Consistory Presentation

As $9.8 by '98 entered its congregational giving phase in the spring of 1995, every RCA consistory was asked to consider their church’s participation in this fund drive. This video was designed to summarize the vision of $9.8 by '98 and to speak specifically to consistories as they consider their congregation’s involvement in the fund drive. The Rev. Bruce Laverman, director of Evangelism and Church Development Services, hosts this program.

5. Edwin Mulder Retirement Video

This video also premiered at the 1994 General Synod at the special retirement celebration for the former general secretary, the Rev. Edwin Mulder. Filled with photographs from Mulder’s life and ministry, this video was a touching recap of an appreciated leader and his family.

6. General Synod Orientation Video

The General Synod orientation video is produced every year to welcome delegates to the General Synod and to explain some of the logistics and procedures for the week.


At the twenty-fifth anniversary celebration of the African-American Council in February 1995, a special panel was convened to reminisce about the council’s history and to reflect on its function and importance today and in the future. This video captures the thoughts and sentiments shared at that event.

8. A Video Letter from Christina Van Eyl

In 1994 Christina Van Eyl was appointed as executive director of Reformed Church Women’s Ministries (RCWM). As a way to say “hello” to the women of RCWM, and as a personal and intimate way of sharing her vision for the future of RCWM, Van Eyl sent a video letter to each regional consultant and denominational officer.
9. Mission to Tokyo — Tom and Barbara VandeBerg

The Rev. Tom and Barbara VandeBerg are in mission in Tokyo, Japan. In this slideshow, transferred to video, the VandeBergs share about their work, their faith, and the culture in which they now minister.

10. The Christian Church in China — A Story of Faith

This historical overview, written by RCA missionary the Rev. Wendell Karsen, takes a fascinating look at the struggle Christianity has gone through over the centuries in the country of China.

11. Communicating the Good News in Hong Kong

Also written by RCA missionary the Rev. Wendell Karsen, this video specifically focuses on Karsen's work in Hong Kong with the Hong Kong Christian Council. As that city prepares for takeover by the Chinese government in 1997, Hong Kong is facing many challenging issues.

12. Missionary Conversation Videos

Missionary Conversation Videos are short (five minutes) videos which allow RCA missionaries to share the joys and challenges they face in their work and ministry. In an informal question-and-answer format, illustrated by images from the field, the Missionary Conversation Video is an ideal way for RCA congregations to stay connected with the work of their missionaries. In 1994 new conversations were produced for Jacque and the Rev. Jerry Zandstra and Dr. Angelica Juarez.

The following videos are in progress:

1. World Mission Overview — working title, The Unfinished Task

This video will present an overview of the RCA world mission program and is scheduled to premiere at the Reformed Church Women's Ministries (RCWM) Triennial in July 1995. Camera crews were sent to Ethiopia in January 1995, to New York City in February 1995, and to Estonia in March 1995.

2. Evangelism in a Changing World

This video was prepared for the Monday evening session of the 1995 General Synod. It explores new and successful ways of translating the unchanging gospel in an ever-changing world.

The following is a list of productions produced for other clients during the past year by the AV production office.

1. A Season of Light (Western Theological Seminary)

This video shares the perspective of students, faculty, and administration as Western Theological Seminary prepares for the future under the leadership of its new president, the Rev. Dr. Dennis Voskuil. Two versions of A Season of Light were produced, one specifically designed for student recruitment efforts, and one for supporting churches and individuals.
2. To Know Him and To Make Him Known  
(Third Reformed Church, Holland, Michigan)

Third Reformed Church undertook a significant campaign to build a major addition to its facility. This video helped to communicate to the congregation what the building would look like, and why it was proposed. Many church members spoke about why they were excited about the possibilities for Third's future.

PERSPECTIVES

Perspectives is pleased to report to the 1995 General Synod concerning this ministry in print.

Perspectives' Board of Editors is profoundly grateful for the support—financial and personal—provided by the General Synod. The three RCA colleges and Western Theological Seminary also provide financial support, and the board intentionally draws from the faculties of the RCA's educational institutions for written contributions and for service on the board. The RCA also blesses this theological journal with an appreciative audience of RCA clergy and interested lay members.

Perspectives maintained its publishing schedule of ten issues per year in 1994, and a similar schedule is in place for 1995. Among the subjects that received significant attention in 1994 were Reformed spirituality (January), angels and powers (February), Christianity in places of crisis (August/September), and theological education (October). The Rev. Dr. Martin Marty quoted extensively from the April 1994 issue of Perspectives in his popular newsletter, Context, and heartily commended the journal to his readership.

The Bible and its use commanded significant attention in the pages of Perspectives during 1994. Early in 1994, a dialogue over the merits of the New International Version (NIV) of the Bible occupied several pages. The publication of Christiana van Houten's exegetical piece on the story of the Syro-Phoenician woman in the August/September 1994 issue prompted a discussion that continued into early 1995.

The Associated Church Press (ACP) awarded Perspectives first prize in the biblical exposition category for “Making Stealing Possible: Criminal Thoughts on Building an Ecclesial Common Life.” The author of this article was Stephen Fowl. Perspectives also received the top runner-up award in the ACP's fiction category for Lawrence Dorr's article, "All Loves Excelling."

In September 1994 Perspectives launched a new, monthly column, "Inside Out." This succeeds the former "And for Preachers..." column. The focus of the new column is on fresh interpretation and application of Scripture.

A leadership transition and some modifications in Perspectives' style of operation took place during 1994. The Rev. Marchiene Rienstra and the Rev. Dr. Thomas Boogaart took the reins as coeditors, succeeding the Rev. Dr. James Van Hoeven. Western Theological Seminary generously grants Professor Boogaart time away from his teaching responsibilities to handle some of the work of Perspectives. A nucleus of the board meets monthly to refine and implement the editorial plans which the full board determines at its semiannual meetings. These changes have served to spread the editorial workload more widely and evenly.

A major revision of Perspectives' Bylaws is underway. The original bylaws were created under the former RCA structure, and thus require revision because of the denomination's restructure in July 1993 (MGS 1992, pp. 42-80). The original bylaws also lacked detail about terms of service for board members and for the editor. New bylaws will provide details about terms of service.
Perspectives' finances stabilized during 1994. It was possible to convene both the spring and autumn board meetings (unlike 1993 when lack of funds prevented the editors from meeting more than once). Overall, operations were break-even for 1994.

R-3.
To commend Perspectives to RCA members as a source of stimulating theological inquiry and dialogue. (ADOPTED)

Overtures

Church Herald Assessment and Distribution

1. The Classis of Muskegon overtures General Synod to rescind the decision of the 1992 General Synod to send the Church Herald to every household of the Reformed Church in America (MGS 1992, R-2, p. 198).

Reasons:

1. The 1992 General Synod decision was taken without prior study or consideration.

2. The significant increase in the per active-confirmed member General Synod assessment continues a disturbing trend of assessing for program and mission costs not covered through voluntary contributions. The whole matter of assessing for RCA programs and mission has not been fully addressed.

3. The General Synod assessment for the Church Herald is a financial burden for many congregations. Over one hundred congregations throughout the denomination requested their respective classes to pay the Church Herald portion of the General Synod assessment. This has resulted in a financial burden for classes as well.

4. To distribute the Church Herald to members of RCA congregations who do not want the magazine and do not want to be forced to pay for it, is poor stewardship and bad ecology.

➢ The advisory committee recommended:

R-4.
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:


2. In a covenantal denomination, it is crucial that the RCA has a communication vehicle that connects its congregations and members to one another.
3. Concerns about General Synod assessments were before this General Synod in the reports of the Advisory Committee on Financial Support and the General Synod Council.

Upon a motion from the floor, the Synod

**VOTED:** To instruct the General Synod Council to appoint a task force to study the effectiveness of the distribution of the *Church Herald* to every RCA household and to explore alternative funding methods.

(The appointment of the above task force had a cost effect on the General Synod Operational Budget. See Report of the Committee of Reference, p. 415.)

A motion was made and supported to "request the 1995 General Synod declare the vote of the 1992 General Synod regarding the distribution of the *Church Herald* to every RCA household (MGS 1992, R-2, pp. 198-99) as out of order per the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 2, Section 10." The parliamentarian ruled the motion OUT OF ORDER.

A motion was made and supported to challenge the ruling of the parliamentarian. The Synod

**VOTED:** To sustain the ruling of the parliamentarian.

*Forum for Church Herald Statements*

2. The Classis of Ontario overtures the General Synod to instruct the General Synod Council Stewardship and Communication Services Committee to provide a forum for concerned office bearers of the Reformed Church in America to present (on the grounds of Scripture and the *Standards of the Reformed Church in America*) their reasoned opposition to publication by the *Church Herald* of certain statements and/or articles which appear to undermine doctrines embraced by the Reformed Church in America; and further,

*to instruct the General Synod Council Stewardship and Communication Services Committee subsequent to such a forum to take all appropriate and necessary steps to do the following:*

1. To redress the publication in recent years of any statements in the *Church Herald* that are inconsistent with the *Standards* of the Reformed Church in America; and,

2. To insure that the contents of all future issues of the *Church Herald* are in doctrinal fidelity with—or openly qualified and critiqued by—the Reformed faith as set forth in the Scriptures and *Standards* of the Reformed Church in America.

Reasons:

1. The Classis of Ontario submitted to the 1994 General Synod an overture expressing concern about the publication of certain statements in the *Church Herald*. The classis found these particular statements to be of dubious nature when read in the light of Scripture and the *Standards* of the Reformed Church in America.
2. At its April 1994 meeting, the General Synod Council, upon recommendation of its Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee, ruled the 1994 overture mentioned above as out of order pursuant to the Reformed Church in America Book of Church Order, Chapter 3, Part II, Article 2, Section 7. Section 7 states:

The General Synod may receive overtures from a classis or a regional synod. It shall not receive overtures which deal with matters under adjudication or which make either direct or implied charges against persons . . .

This 1994 overture from the Classis of Ontario was not presented at the 1994 General Synod.

3. While the Classis of Ontario acknowledges the validity of the April 1994 decision of the General Synod Council to rule the above mentioned 1994 overture out of order, the classis still seeks to remain sensitive to the need that exists for an appropriate forum to communicate what are potentially legitimate concerns relative to the doctrinal content of the Church Herald.

4. The forum and the appropriate and necessary steps to follow the forum will help maintain a healthy accountability for the Church Herald to the denomination and specifically to the Classis of Ontario.

5. The forum and the appropriate and necessary steps to follow the forum will strengthen ownership in the Church Herald by the RCA constituency.

The advisory committee recommended:

R-5.
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reason: Overture 2 is in conflict with established procedures. Any complaints regarding theological content of the Church Herald is first to be brought to the Editorial Council of the Church Herald. If the matter cannot be resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant, upon appeal to the General Synod, the General Synod may authorize investigation of any such charge by an appropriate commission of the General Synod, such as the Commission on Theology for study or the Commission on Judicial Business for disciplinary review of a complaint filed.

(A motion was made and supported to “request the Church Herald publish a sidebar containing the theological position of the RCA Standards to be attached to any articles including theological views or having theological implications; and further, to have the content of the sidebar be written by one or more of the General Synod professors of theology. The motion LOST.)
REPORTS ON CHRISTIAN UNITY

Report of the Commission on Christian Unity

The Commission on Christian Unity (CCU) met twice since the last session of the General Synod: October 24-25, 1994, at the Interchurch Center in New York City, and February 27-28, 1995, at the Lutheran Center in Chicago, Illinois, as the guests of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

INTRODUCTION

The Constitution of the RCA gives responsibility for ecumenical relations to the General Synod (BCO, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 2, Section 5). To carry this out, the General Synod created the Commission on Christian Unity (CCU) in 1974 (MGS 1974, R·6, pp. 201-02) and formally adopted the commission in 1975 (MGS 1975, R-4, pp. 101-02). The commission coordinates the whole range of ecumenical involvements at all levels throughout the RCA. The commission advises the General Synod on matters of ecumenical import; it communicates with other denominations, ecumenical councils, and interdenominational agencies; it educates the whole denomination on ecumenical matters; and advocates for actions and positions consistent with the RCA’s confession and practice.

This has been a year of transition for CCU. A key member of the commission is the RCA’s general secretary, who serves as an ex officio member. The general secretary is also the chief “ecumenical officer” of the denomination. The former general secretary, the Rev. Edwin Mulder, filled this role admirably over the last few years, and, on behalf of the RCA, he became a major player on the worldwide ecumenical stage, especially with regard to South Africa. Now that the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson is the general secretary, he has taken Mulder’s place at the table. Granberg-Michaelson brings to CCU great expertise and experience in ecumenical affairs, along with a deep commitment to the history, character, and witness of the RCA. This year also ends the term of the Rev. J. Christian Quella, pastor of First English Lutheran Church in Appleton, Wisconsin. His cheerful and faithful participation enriched the commission. He became a warm friend of the RCA and a strong advocate of “full communion” between the Lutheran and Reformed churches.

ECUMENICAL NETWORK AND APPOINTEES

The Rev. Douglas Fromm, pastor of Upper Ridgewood Community Church in Ridgewood, New Jersey, also serves the RCA as associate for ecumenical relations. This means he assists the general secretary and is the staff person for CCU. One of his particular initiatives has been the establishment of an ecumenical network throughout the denomination. Each classis in the RCA has appointed an ecumenical liaison who CCU staff can contact. The purpose of this ecumenical network is to provide a ready means of communication and information-sharing between RCA classes and CCU. The information goes both ways. At CCU’s February 1995 meeting the associate for ecumenical relations presented a thorough and encouraging report from the Classis of Illinois.

Another initiative of the associate for ecumenical relations was to establish the “Ecumenical Report” form as the means of accountability for all ecumenical appointees who represent the RCA. The reports which the appointees are giving to CCU by use of these forms has become virtually indispensable to the work of General Synod. A third initiative of the associate for ecumenical relations was the drafting of an ecumenical mandate, which is discussed in a later section.
ECUMENICAL COUNCILS AND ALLIANCES

The RCA is a charter member in the World Council of Churches (WCC) and participates in its programs. The Commission on Christian Unity hosted a WCC team studying the response of churches to the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women (ECUDEC). The team’s members were drawn from churches around the world. They visited local congregations, spoke with seminarians, and joined in a round-table discussion, cosponsored by the RCA Commission for Women and a number of RCA women pastors. CCU resolved to consult with the Commission for Women in addressing a number of concerns which were raised at this discussion. CCU plans to organize participation in two other WCC programs: the Gospel and Culture Study Project and the study document, “Towards a Common Understanding and Vision of the WCC.”

The National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA (NCCC) is in a time of self-study and reorganization. CCU is closely monitoring this self-study and reorganization through reports of RCA delegates attending these NCCC meetings. CCU also corresponded with the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC) in response to a concern expressed by a CCU member about public statements made by a CCC officer.

The World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) maintains a number of dialogues with other historic communions and world confessional bodies. CCU received the “Agreed Statement on Christology between the Eastern Orthodox Church and the WARC” (Limmasol, Cyprus, January 12, 1994), and the paper, “Authority in the Reformed Church,” by the Rev. Paul Janssen. Janssen is the RCA’s delegate to WARC’s bilateral dialogue with the National Conference of Bishops of the Roman Catholic Church.

SOUTHERN AFRICA

CCU devotes ongoing special attention to the RCA’s unique ecumenical relationship with the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA). In June 1994 CCU sent the Rev. Ray Timms of Paterson, New Jersey, to South Africa as the RCA’s ecumenical delegate to the URCSA’s quadrennial General Synod. In November 1994 a visiting delegation of South African pastors, theologians, and students was hosted at New Brunswick Theological Seminary. This joint meeting was sponsored by the African-American Council. As a follow-up to this meeting, in February 1995 CCU hosted a consultation for all RCA staff concerned with South Africa in order to plot long-term strategy. Once again, CCU has invited the URCSA to send an ecumenical delegate to address the 1995 General Synod.

For a number of years, CCU has been working together with the RCA Task Force on South Africa. CCU supports the recommendations the task force is making to the 1995 General Synod as the task force concludes its work and celebrates the progress made so far (see Report of the South Africa Task Force in the World Mission and Christian Action sections).

LUTHERAN-REFORMED RELATIONS

In 1992 the document, A Common Calling: The Witness of our Reformation Churches in North America Today, was published as the platform for a relationship of “full communion” among the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the United Church of Christ, the Presbyterian Church (USA), and the Reformed Church in America. The principle of “mutual affirmation and admonition” was the doorway through which the relationship could move forward. The four churches will vote on the recommendations for “full communion” at their respective 1997 synods and assemblies. The 1995 February meeting of CCU was held at the Chicago offices of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
Since 1992 a Joint Coordinating Committee has been working to facilitate the reception process in each of the participating churches. During the past year this committee drafted a document called the Formula of Agreement, which is a brief compendium of A Common Calling and serves as a good introduction to what is at stake. The document also answers some of the questions which have been raised within the participating churches. In compliance with the instructions given to CCU by the 1994 General Synod (MGS 1994, R-1, p. 172), CCU has resolved to distribute the Formula of Agreement to all RCA pastors and consistories. The Formula of Agreement follows:

**FORMULA OF AGREEMENT**

**BETWEEN**

**THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA,**

**THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (USA),**

**THE REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA AND**

**THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

**ON ENTERING INTO FULL COMMUNION**

**ON THE BASIS OF**

**A COMMON CALLING**

**Preface**

In 1997 four churches of Reformation heritage will act on an ecumenical proposal of historic importance. The timing reflects a doctrinal consensus which has been developing over the past thirty-two years, coupled with an increasing urgency for the church to proclaim a gospel of unity in contemporary society. In light of identified doctrinal consensus, desiring to bear visible witness to the unity of the Church, and hearing the call to engage together in God’s mission, it is recommended:

**THAT THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA, THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (USA), THE REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA AND THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST DECLARE ON THE BASIS OF A COMMON CALLING AND THEIR ADOPTION OF THIS FORMULA OF AGREEMENT THAT THEY ARE IN FULL COMMUNION WITH ONE ANOTHER.**

**Thus, each church is entering into or affirming full communion with three other churches.**

The term “full communion” is understood here to specifically mean that the four churches:

- Recognize each other as churches in which the gospel is rightly preached and the sacraments rightly administered according to the word of God.

- Withdraw any historic condemnation by one side or the other as inappropriate for the life and faith of our churches today.

- Continue to recognize each other’s baptism and authorize and encourage the sharing of the Lord’s Supper among their members.

- Recognize each others’ various ministries and make provision for the orderly exchange of ordained ministers of Word and sacrament.
Establish appropriate channels of consultation and decision-making within the existing structures of the churches.

Commit themselves to an ongoing process of theological dialogue in order to clarify further the common understanding of the faith and foster its common expression in evangelism, witness, and service.

Pledge themselves to living together under the gospel in such a way that the principle of mutual affirmation and admonition becomes the basis of a trusting relationship in which respect and love for the other will have a chance to grow.

This document assumes the doctrinal consensus articulated in *A Common Calling: The Witness of Our Reformation Churches in North America Today*, and is to be viewed in concert with that document. The purpose of the *Formula of Agreement* is to elucidate the complementarity of affirmation and admonition as the basic principle for entering into full communion and the implications of that action as described in *A Common Calling*.

*A Common Calling*, the report of the Lutheran-Reformed Committee for Theological Conversations, 1988-1992, continued a process begun in 1962. Within that report was the "unanimous recommendation that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Reformed Church in America, and the United Church of Christ declare that they are in full communion with one another" (*A Common Calling*, pp. 66-67). There followed a series of seven recommendations under which full communion would be implemented as developed within the study from the theological conversations (*A Common Calling*, p. 67). As a result, the call for full communion has been presented to the four respective church bodies. The vote on a declaration of full communion will take place at the respective churchwide assemblies in 1997.

**Mutual Affirmation and Admonition**

A concept identified as early as the first Lutheran-Reformed Dialogue became pivotal for the understanding of the Theological Conversations. Participants in the Dialogue discovered that "efforts to guard against possible distortions of truth have resulted in varying emphases in related doctrines which are not in themselves contradictory and in fact are complementary" (*Marburg Revisited*, Preface). Participants in the Theological Conversations rediscovered and considered the implications of this insight and saw it as a foundation for the recommendation for full communion among the four churches. This breakthrough concept, a complementarity of mutual affirmation and mutual admonition, points toward new ways of relating traditions of Reformation churches that heretofore have not been able to reconcile their diverse witnesses to the saving grace of God that is bestowed in Jesus Christ, the Lord of the church.

This concept provides a basis for acknowledging three essential facets of the Lutheran/Reformed relationship: 1) that each of the churches grounds its life in authentic New Testament traditions of Christ; 2) that the core traditions of these churches belong together within the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church; and 3) that the historic give-and-take between these churches has resulted in fundamental mutual criticism that cannot be glossed over, but need to be understood "as diverse witnesses to the one gospel that we confess in common" (*A Common Calling*, p. 66). A working awareness emerged, which cast in a new light contemporary perspectives on the sixteenth century debates.

The theological diversity within our common confession provides both the complementarity needed for a full and adequate witness to the gospel (mutual affirmation) and the corrective reminder that every theological approach is a partial and incomplete witness to the gospel (mutual admonition) (*A Common Calling*, p. 66).
The working principle of “mutual affirmation and admonition” allows for the affirmation of agreement while at the same time allowing a process of mutual edification and correction in areas where there is not total agreement. Each tradition brings its “corrective witness” to the other while fostering continuing theological reflection and dialogue to further clarify the unity of faith they share and seek. The principle of “mutual affirmation and admonition” views remaining differences as diverse witnesses to the one gospel confessed in common. Whereas conventional modes of thought have hidden the bases of unity behind statements of differences, the new concept insists that, while remaining differences must be acknowledged, even to the extent of their irreconcilability, it is the inherent unity in Christ that is determinative. Thus, the remaining differences are not church-dividing.

The concept of mutual affirmation and admonition translates into significant outcomes, both of which inform the relationships of these four churches with one another. The principle of complementarity and its accompanying mode of interpretation make it clear that in entering into full church communion these churches:

Do not consider their own traditional confessional and ecclesiological character to be compromised in the least.

Fully recognize the validity and necessity of the confessional and ecclesiological character of the partner churches.

Intend to allow significant differences to be honestly articulated within the relationship of full communion.

Allow for articulated differences to be opportunities for mutual growth of churchly fullness within each of the partner churches and within the relationship of full communion itself.

A Fundamental Doctrinal Consensus

Members of the Theological Conversations were charged with determining whether the essential conditions for full communion have been met. They borrowed language of the Lutheran confessions: “For the true unity of the church it is enough to agree (satis est consentire) concerning the teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments” (Augsburg Confession, art. 7). The theological consensus that is the basis for the current proposal for full communion includes justification, the sacraments, ministry, and church and world. Continuing areas of diversity, no longer to be seen as “church-dividing,” were dealt with by the Theological Conversations under the headings: The Condemnations, the Presence of Christ, and God’s Will to Save.

On justification, participants in the first dialogue agreed “that each tradition has sought to preserve the wholeness of the gospel as including forgiveness of sins and renewal of life” (Marburg Revisited, p. 152). Members of the third dialogue, in their Joint Statement on Justification, said, “Both Lutheran and Reformed churches are...rooted in, live by, proclaim and confess the gospel of the saving act of God in Jesus Christ” (An Invitation to Action, p. 9). They went on to say that “both...traditions confess this gospel in the language of justification by grace through faith alone,” and concluded that “there are no substantive matters concerning justification that divide us” (An Invitation to Action, pp. 9, 10).

Lutheran and Reformed agree that in baptism, Jesus Christ receives human beings, fallen prey to sin and death, into his fellowship of salvation so that they may become new creatures. This is experienced as a call into Christ’s community, to a new life of faith, to daily repentance, and to discipleship (cf. Leuenberg Agreement, III.2.a.). The central doctrine of
the presence of Christ in the Lord’s Supper received attention in each dialogue and in the theological conversations. The summary statement in *Marburg Revisited*, reflecting agreement, asserts:

During the Reformation both Reformed and Lutheran Churches exhibited an evangelical intention when they understood the Lord’s Supper in the light of the saving act of God in Christ. Despite this common intention, different terms and concepts were employed which...led to mutual misunderstanding and misrepresentation. Properly interpreted, the differing terms and concepts were often complementary rather than contradictory (*Marburg Revisited*, pp. 103-4).

The third dialogue concluded that, while neither Lutheran nor Reformed profess to explain how Christ is present and received in the Supper, both churches affirm that “Christ himself is the host at his table...and that Christ himself is fully present and received in the Supper” [emphasis added] (*An Invitation to Action*, p. 14). This doctrinal consensus became the foundation for work done by the Theological Conversations.

The theme of ministry was considered only by the third dialogue. Agreeing that there are no substantive matters which should divide Lutheran and Reformed, the dialogue affirmed that:

Ministry in our heritage derives from and points to Christ, who alone is sufficient to save. Centered in the proclamation of the word and the administration of the sacraments, it is built on the affirmation that the benefits of Christ are known only through faith, grace, and Scripture (*An Invitation to Action*, p. 24).

The dialogue went on to speak of the responsibility of all the baptized to participate in Christ’s servant ministry, pointed to God’s use of “the ordained ministers as instruments to mediate grace through the preaching of the word and the administration of the sacraments,” and asserted the need for proper oversight to “ensure that the word is truly preached and sacraments rightly administered” (*An Invitation to Action*, pp. 26, 28, 31).

The first dialogue considered the theme of church and world a very important inquiry. The dialogue examined differences, noted the need of correctives, and pointed to the essentially changed world in which the church lives today. Agreeing that “there is a common evangelical basis for Christian ethics in the theology of the Reformers,” (*Marburg Revisited*, p. 177), the dialogue went on to rehearse the differing “accents” of Calvin and Luther on the relation of church and world, law and gospel, the “two kingdoms,” and the sovereignty of Christ. The dialogue found that “differing formulations of the relation between law and gospel were prompted by a common concern to combat the errors of legalism on the one hand and antinomianism on the other.” While differences remain regarding the role of God’s law in the Christian life, the dialogue did “not regard this as a divisive issue” (*Marburg Revisited*, p. 177). Furthermore, in light of the radically changed world of the twentieth century, it was deemed inappropriate to defend or correct positions and choices taken in the sixteenth century, making them determinative for Lutheran-Reformed witness today. Thus, the Theological Conversations, in a section on “Declaring God’s Justice and Mercy,” identified Lutheran and Reformed “emphases” as “complementary and stimulating” differences, posing a challenge to the pastoral service and witness of the churches. “The ongoing debate about ‘justification and justice’ is fundamentally an occasion for hearing the word of God and doing it. Our traditions need each other in order to discern God’s gracious promises and obey God’s commands” (*A Common Calling*, p. 61).
Differing Emphases

The Condemnations

The condemnations of the Reformation era were an attempt to preserve and protect the Word of God; therefore, they are to be taken seriously. Because of the contemporary ecclesial situation today, however, it is necessary to question whether such condemnations should continue to divide the churches. The concept of mutual affirmation and admonition of A Common Calling offers a way of overcoming condemnation language while allowing for different emphases with a common understanding of the primacy of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the gift of the sacraments. A Common Calling refers with approval to the Leuenberg Agreement where, as a consequence of doctrinal agreement, it is stated that the “condemnations expressed in the confessional documents no longer apply to the contemporary doctrinal position of the assenting churches” (Leuenberg Agreement, IV.32.b.). The Theological Conversations stated:

We have become convinced that the task today is not to mark the point of separation and exclusion but to find a common language which will allow our partners to be heard in their honest concern for the truth of the gospel, to be taken seriously, and to be integrated into the identity of our own ecumenical community of faith (A Common Calling, p. 40).

A major focus of the condemnations was the issue of the presence of Christ in the Lord’s Supper. Lutheran and Reformed Christians need to be assured that in their common understanding of the sacraments, the Word of God is not compromised; therefore, they insist on consensus among their churches on certain aspects of doctrine concerning the Lord’s Supper. In that regard Lutheran and Reformed Christians, recalling the issues addressed by the conversations, agree that:

In the Lord’s Supper the risen Jesus Christ imparts himself in his body and blood, given for all, through his word of promise with bread and wine. He thus gives himself unreservedly to all who receive the bread and wine; faith receives the Lord’s Supper for salvation, unfaith for judgment (Leuenberg Agreement, III.1.18).

We cannot separate communion with Jesus Christ in his body and blood from the act of eating and drinking. To be concerned about the manner of Christ’s presence in the Lord’s Supper in abstraction from this act is to run the risk of obscuring the meaning of the Lord’s Supper (Leuenberg Agreement, III.1.19).

The Presence of Christ

The third dialogue urged the churches toward a deeper appreciation of the sacramental mystery based on consensus already achieved:

Appreciating what we Reformed and Lutheran Christians already hold in common concerning the Lord’s Supper, we nevertheless affirm that both of our communions need to keep on growing into an ever-deeper realization of the fullness and richness of the eucharistic mystery (An Invitation to Action, p. 14).

The members of the Theological Conversations acknowledged that it has not been possible to reconcile the confessional formulations from the sixteenth century with a “common language...which could do justice to all the insights, convictions, and concerns of our ancestors in the faith” (A Common Calling, p. 49). However, the Theological Conversations recognized these enduring differences as acceptable diversities with regard to the Lord’s Supper. Continuing in the tradition of the third dialogue, they respected the different perspectives and convictions from which their ancestors professed their faith, affirming that those differences are not church dividing, but are complementary. Both sides can say
together that “the Reformation heritage in the matter of the Lord’s Supper draws from the same roots and envisages the same goal: to call the people of God to the table at which Christ himself is present to give himself for us under the word of forgiveness, empowerment, and promise.” Lutheran and Reformed Christians agree that:

In the Lord’s Supper the risen Christ imparts himself in body and blood, given up for all, through his word of promise with bread and wine. He thereby grants us forgiveness of sins and sets us free for a new life of faith. He enables us to experience anew that we are members of his body. He strengthens us for service to all people. (The official text reads, “Er starkt uns zum Dienst an den Menschen,” which may be translated “to all human beings” (Leuenberg Agreement, II.2.15).

When we celebrate the Lord’s Supper we proclaim the death of Christ through which God has reconciled the World with himself. We proclaim the presence of the risen Lord in our midst. Rejoicing that the Lord has come to us, we await his future coming in glory (Leuenberg Agreement, II.2.16).

With a complementarity and theological consensus found in the Lord’s Supper, it is recognized that there are implications for sacramental practices as well, which represent the heritage of these Reformation churches.

As churches of the Reformation, we share many important features in our respective practices of Holy Communion. Over the centuries of our separation, however, there have developed characteristic differences in practice, and these still tend to make us uncomfortable at each other’s celebration of the Supper. These differences can be discerned in several areas, for example, in liturgical style and liturgical details, in our verbal interpretations of our practices, in the emotional patterns involved in our experience of the Lord’s Supper, and in the implications we find in the Lord’s Supper for the life and mission of the church and of its individual members ... We affirm our conviction, however, that these differences should be recognized as acceptable diversities within one Christian faith. Both of our communions, we maintain, need to grow in appreciation of our diverse eucharistic traditions, finding mutual enrichment in them. At the same time both need to grow toward a further deepening of our common experience and expression of the mystery of our Lord’s Supper (An Invitation to Action, pp. 16-17).

God’s Will to Save:

Lutheran and Reformed claim the saving power of God’s grace as the center of their faith and life. They believe that salvation depends on God’s grace alone and not on human cooperation. In spite of this common belief, the doctrine of predestination has been one of the issues separating the two traditions. Although Lutheran and Reformed have different emphases in the way they live out their belief in the sovereignty of God’s love, they agree that “God’s unconditional will to save must be preached against all cultural optimism or pessimism.” It is noted that “a common language that transcends the polemics of the past and witnesses to the common predestination faith of Lutheran and Reformed Churches has emerged already in theological writings and official or unofficial statements in our churches” (A Common Calling, p. 55). Rather than insisting on doctrinal uniformity, the two traditions are willing to acknowledge that they have been born out of controversy; and their present identities, theological and ecclesial, have been shaped by those arguments. To demand more than fundamental doctrinal consensus on those areas that have been church-dividing would be tantamount to denying the faith of those Christians with whom we have shared a common journey toward wholeness in Jesus Christ. An even greater tragedy would occur were we, through our divisiveness, to deprive the world of a common witness to the saving grace of Jesus Christ that has been so freely given to us.
The Binding and Effective Commitment to Full Communion

In the formal adoption at the highest levels of this "Formula of Agreement," based on A Common Calling, the churches acknowledge that they are undertaking an act of strong mutual commitment. They are making pledges and promises to each other. The churches recognize that full commitment to each other involves serious intention, awareness, and dedication. They are binding themselves to far more than a mere formal action; they are entering into a relationship with gifts and changes for all.

The churches know these stated intentions will challenge their self-understandings, their ways of living and acting, their structures, and even their general ecclesial ethos. The churches commit themselves to keep this legitimate concern of their capacity to enter into full communion at the heart of their new relationship.

The churches declare, under the guidance of the Triune God, that they are fully committed to the Formula of Agreement and are capable of being, and remaining, pledged to the above-described mutual affirmations in faith and doctrine, to joint decision-making, and to exercising and accepting mutual admonition and correction. This Formula of Agreement responds to the ecumenical conviction that "there is no turning back, either from the goal of visible unity or from the single ecumenical movement that unites concern for the unity of the Church and concern for engagement in the struggles of the world" ("On the Way to Fuller Koinonia: The Message of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order," 1993). And, as St. Paul reminds us all, "The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this" (1 Thess. 5:24, NRSV).

NOTES:


2 The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:

To enter into full communion with these three churches (Presbyterian Church USA, Reformed Church in America, United Church of Christ), an affirmative two-thirds vote of the 1997 Churchwide Assembly, the highest legislative authority in the ELCA, will be required (anticipating action by the Church Council and the Churchwide Assembly in 1995). Subsequently in the appropriate manner other changes in the Constitution and Bylaws would be made to conform with this binding decision by an Assembly to enter into full communion.

The Constitution and Bylaws of the ELCA do not speak specifically of this church entering into full communion with non-Lutheran churches. The closest analogy, in
view of the seriousness of the matter, would be an amendment to the *Constitution* or *Bylaws*. The *Constitution* provides a process of such amendment (Chapter 11). In both cases a two-thirds vote of members present and voting is required.

**The Presbyterian Church (USA):**

Upon an affirmative vote of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA), the declaration of full communion will be effected throughout the church in accordance with the Presbyterian *Book of Order* and this *Formula of Agreement*. This means a majority vote of the General Assembly, a majority vote in the presbyteries, and a majority vote of the presbytery.

The Presbyterian Church (USA) orders its life as an institution with a constitution, government, officers, finances, and administrative rules. These are instruments of mission, not ends in themselves. Different orders have served the gospel, and none can claim exclusive validity. A presbyterian polity recognizes the responsibility of all members for ministry and maintains the organic relation of all congregations in the church. It seeks to protect the church from every exploitation by ecclesiastical or secular power and ambition. Every church order must be open to such reformation as may be required to make it a more effective instrument of the mission of reconciliation (*Confession of 1967, Book of Confessions*, p. 40).

The Presbyterian Church (USA) shall be governed by representative bodies composed of presbyters, both elders and ministers of the Word and sacrament. These governing bodies shall be called session, presbytery, synod, and the General Assembly (*Book of Order*, G-9.0100).

All governing bodies of the church are united by nature of the church and share with one another responsibilities, rights, and powers as provided in this Constitution. The governing bodies are separate and independent, but have such mutual relations that the act of one of them is the act of the whole church performed by it through the appropriate governing body. The jurisdiction of each governing body is limited by the express provisions of the Constitution, with the acts of each subject to review by the next higher governing body (*Book of Order*, G-9.0103).

**The Reformed Church in America:**

Upon an affirmative vote by the General Synod, the declaration of full communion will be effected throughout the church, and the Commission on Christian Unity will, in accordance with the responsibilities granted by the *Book of Church Order*, proceed to initiate and supervise the effecting of the intention of full communion as described in the *Formula of Agreement*.

The Commission on Christian Unity has advised the General Synod and the church of the forthcoming vote for full communion in 1997. The commission will put before the General Synod the *Formula of Agreement* and any and all correlative recommendations toward effecting the Reformed Church in America declaring itself to be in full communion with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (USA), and the United Church of Christ.

The *Constitution* of the RCA gives responsibility for ecumenical relations to the General Synod (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 2, Section 5). To be faithful to the ecumenical calling, the General Synod empowers its Commission on Christian Unity to initiate and supervise action relating to correspondence and cooperative relationship with the highest judicatories or assemblies of other Christian denominations and
engaging in interchurch conversations "in all matters pertaining to the extension of the Kingdom of God."

The Constitution of the RCA gives responsibility to the Commission on Christian Unity for informing "the church of current ecumenical developments and advising the church concerning its ecumenical participation and relationships" (BCO, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 3).

Granted its authority by the General Synod, the Commission on Christian Unity has appointed RCA dialogue and conversation partners since 1962 to the present. It has received all reports and, where action was required, has presented recommendation(s) to the General Synod for vote and implementation in the church.

The United Church of Christ:

The United Church of Christ will act on the recommendation that it enter into full communion with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (USA), and the Reformed Church in America, by vote of the General Synod in 1997. This vote is binding on the General Synod and is received by local churches, associations, and conferences for implementation in accordance with the covenantal polity outlined in paragraphs 14, 15, and 16 of the Constitution of the United Church of Christ.

The UCC is "composed of Local Churches, Associations, Conferences, and the General Synod." The Constitution and Bylaws of the United Church of Christ lodge responsibility for ecumenical life with the General Synod and with its chief executive officer, the president of the United Church of Christ. Article VII of the Constitution grants to the General Synod certain powers. Included among these are the powers:

To determine the relationship of the UCC with ecumenical organizations, world confessional bodies, and other interdenominational agencies (Article VII, par. 45h).

To encourage conversation with other communions and when appropriate to authorize and guide negotiations with them looking toward formal union (VII, 45i).

In the polity of the UCC, the powers of the General Synod can never, to use a phrase from the Constitution, "invade the autonomy of Conferences, Associations, or Local Churches." The autonomy of the local church is "inherent and modifiable only by its own action" (IV, 15). However, it is important to note that this autonomy is understood in the context of "mutual Christian concern and in dedication to Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church" (IV, 14). This Christological and covenantal understanding of autonomy is clearly expressed in the Constitutional paragraphs which immediately precede and follow the discussion of Local Church autonomy:

The Local Churches of the UCC have, in fellowship, a God-given responsibility for that Church, its labors and its extension, even as the UCC has, in fellowship, a God-given responsibility for the well-being and needs and aspirations of its Local Churches. In mutual Christian concern and in dedication to Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church, the one and the many share in common Christian experience and responsibility (IV, 14).
Actions by, or decisions or advice emanating from, the General Synod, a Conference, or an Association, should be held in the highest regard by every Local Church (IV, 16).

The advisory committee recommended:

R-1. To commend the Commission on Christian Unity for its work in developing the Formula of Agreement. (ADOPTED)

The advisory committee recommended:

R-2. To instruct the Commission on Christian Unity to distribute the Formula of Agreement to all RCA clergy, clerks of RCA consistories, and stated clerks of classes; and further, to encourage RCA classes and congregations to study the Formula of Agreement. (ADOPTED)

ECUMENICAL MANDATE

A great part of CCU's energy over the past year was devoted to its policy paper, "An Ecumenical Mandate for the Reformed Church in America." The paper is presented below.

By way of introduction, some history is in order. In 1990 the associate for ecumenical relations presented a paper to CCU encouraging the RCA "to re-examine its ecumenical relations in light of past work, present endeavors, future conversations and dialogues, and overall strategy and vision." At the same time, CCU received a letter from the Classis of Cascades which made a similar request. The classis also requested that guidelines and criteria be established for ecumenical work. CCU resolved that a major effort was in order.

At CCU's request, in January 1992 the General Synod Executive Committee appointed a nine-member task force with a mandate to "define goals and criteria for the RCA entering into and maintaining participation in ecumenical relationships." The task force consisted of representatives of the RCA's diverse membership who were sensitive to the concerns of the RCA and the biblical and theological principals which enlighten and undergird Christian unity. The task force, which held six meetings, shared the first draft of their paper with the Advisory Committee on Christian Unity at the 1993 General Synod. Seventeen outside readers from all parts of the denomination were then solicited for their comments. The task force presented the final results of its work to CCU in February of 1994. CCU expressed gratitude and commended the task force for its excellent work. (It should be noted that the Rev. Dr. Arie Brouwer, one of the members of the task force and former RCA general secretary, died in October 1994 before the completion of the task force's work. The work of the task force can well be regarded as a fitting tribute to Brouwer's ecumenical passion.)

CCU took the paper presented by the task force through the next steps in its evolution. As a result of the February 1994 meeting, a number of additions were incorporated and the paper was revised by a commission member. The draft paper at this stage was also presented to the Advisory Committee on Christian Unity at the 1994 General Synod for its review and response. At the October 1994 CCU meeting, the paper was painstakingly reviewed again and once more subjected to refinement by a commission member. At the February 1995 meeting, CCU worked through the paper line by line and arrived at its final text. CCU is confident that all the careful rewriting has been worth it. The paper is a labor of love on the
AN ECUMENICAL MANDATE
FOR THE REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA

"I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:20-21).

"Considering the precious and blessed unity of the Church of God and the plainly expressed will of our Savior that all should be one, and also the need which the separate parts have of one another, and especially remembering how small and weak we ourselves are, therefore, our hearts have longed for intercourse with the precious Zion of God ever since our feet first pressed the shores of this New World... All God's children, of whatever denomination, are dear to us" (The Classis of Holland, Michigan, 1849, letter to the General Synod, requesting admission into the Reformed Church).

ECUMENISM can be defined as that movement within the church which seeks to give visible expression to the unity that all believers have in Jesus Christ. Ecumenism has always been an important commitment of Reformed Christians. John Calvin was prepared to "cross ten seas" to further the unity of the church. In the Nicene Creed we confess our belief in "one holy catholic and apostolic church," and an ecumenical vision is implicit in Question and Answer 54 of the Heidelberg Catechism:

Q. What do you believe concerning "the holy catholic Church"?

A. I believe that the Son of God through his Spirit and Word, out of the entire human race, from the beginning of the world to its end, gathers, protects, and preserves for himself a community chosen for eternal life and united in true faith. Moreover, I believe that I am and forever will remain a living member of it.

In 1981 the RCA adopted the following "Affirmation of Christian Unity":
We believe that there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all... We pledge to seek the unity of the church through communing with other Christians in worship and work, cooperating with other Christians in councils of churches, and uniting with other Christians in faith and order (MGS 1981, R-5, p. 147).

The RCA has expressed this commitment in a solid tradition of ecumenical involvement. It is a charter member of the World Council of Churches, of the National Council of Churches in Christ of the USA, and of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. It belongs to the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, to the Canadian Council of Churches, and, through some regional synods, classes, and local congregations, to the National Association of Evangelicals. Further, its mission work exemplifies the ecumenical spirit. Throughout its history the RCA has shown a consistent willingness to cross denominational lines and work with other communions for the greater good. For example, the RCA undertakes world mission only in...
partnership with another church in the given region and seeks to expand that local church in its setting, rather than begin a new or separate expression of the RCA. Locally, many RCA congregations have sought closer ties with other churches for a variety of purposes, and many RCA pastors seek fellowship with pastors from other churches.

What does this ecumenical commitment and tradition mean as we move toward the beginning of the next millennium? Ours is a day when denominational walls are crumbling. Believers attend religious conferences and participate in mission and educational events with comparatively little concern for church affiliation. Many RCA congregations have taken in members from nearly every Christian tradition. Since Vatican II, Roman Catholics and Protestants have worshiped together in a variety of settings short of eucharistic fellowship. In today's religious climate many exciting ecumenical invitations and opportunities are arising!

But today's ecumenical opportunities also bring uncertainties and questions: Are we compromising our understanding of truth in our ecumenical activities? What should be the focus of our ecumenical energy and with whom? How do we approach and develop our ecumenical involvements? Do we ever withdraw from them? If so, when?

With these questions in mind, this report, mandated by the Commission on Christian Unity and developed largely by the RCA’s Task Force on Ecumenism, seeks to “define goals and criteria for the RCA entering into and maintaining participation in ecumenical relations.” Part one of this report will lay the theological foundations for Christian unity, with implications therein; part two will detail expressions, assessments, and ramifications of RCA ecumenical activity; and part three will list goals, criteria, and operating principles for maintaining the RCA’s present ecumenical involvements and for establishing new ones.

We live in a fragmented world. Excessive individualism and corporate greed are tearing apart the fabric of our human relationships. The dignity of human life and respect for the diversity of different peoples is severely eroded. Throughout the world, nation lifts sword against nation, the gap between the rich and the poor is widening, and the suffering of the poor increases. We are out of harmony with the created world which God has entrusted to us. The church’s disputes and divisions have contributed to some of these problems. We are unable to sit down at the same Lord’s Table and set an example to the world. A fragmented Christian witness exacerbates the fragmentation of the world.

Jesus Christ’s prayer for unity within his church (John 17) was to the end that the world might know that the Father had sent him. The reality and power of God’s kingdom in Jesus flow through our ecumenical efforts. These efforts proclaim that we have been called out of fragmentation into unity, that we are the reconciling community, and that as Christians our diversity will not prevent us from working toward an authentic experience of oneness in Christ. Christian unity can offer a visible witness to the power and purpose of God who reconciles our broken and divided world.

I. THE FOUNDATIONS OF CHRISTIAN UNITY

1. Christian unity is spiritual.

And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one (John 17:11).

We learn from Jesus’ prayer that Christian unity is derived from the spiritual fellowship of the Father and the Son and is a work of the Holy Spirit. It originates in the Triune God and is therefore God’s gift. The Belgic Confession testifies to the spiritual nature of Christian
We believe and confess one single catholic or universal church—a holy congregation and gathering of true Christian believers, awaiting their entire salvation in Jesus Christ, being washed by his blood, and sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit (Article 27).

But all people are obliged to join and unite with [the church], keeping the unity of the church by submitting to its instruction and discipline, by bending their necks under the yoke of Jesus Christ, and by serving to build up one another, according to the gifts God has given them, as members of each other in the same body (Article 28).

As such, the spiritual unity of the church is an article of faith and it transcends all ecclesiastical divisions. Indeed, “out of the entire human race, from the beginning of the world to its end,” as the Heidelberg Catechism says, the Lord Jesus “gathers, protects, and preserves it” by “his Spirit and Word.” As our Lord’s gift, this spiritual unity is not something we create ourselves. Rather, by faith, we seek to discover it, receive it, and embrace it.

2. Christian unity is visible.

I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me (John 17:20-21).

Here Jesus prays that the spiritual unity of the church will be something that the world can see, so that it might believe. The spiritual unity of the church must never be separated from its visible expression in the institutional church. The Belgic Confession (Article 29) refuses to distinguish between the invisible church and the visible church, as if the former were truer than the latter. There are not two churches, one invisible, one visible. Rather, the spiritual church is known because and insofar as it appears in the visible church. The visible unity of the church is an expression of its spiritual unity. Therefore, the ministry of ecumenism finds its calling, its roots, and its meaning in the spiritual unity of the church.

3. Christian unity is “already and not yet.”

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called...making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all (Eph. 4:1, 3-6).

In these verses we note that Paul’s seven-fold declaration of Christian unity is preceded by the call to maintain unity. Paul is teaching that Christian unity is simultaneously something we have already, but also something we must work towards. In this regard, Christian unity is like all the other realities of the reign of God which are simultaneously “already and not yet.” Another such reality is the gift of sanctification which all Christians already have in Christ (1 Cor. 1:2) and yet are called to work out (1 Pet. 1:15).

Therefore, ecumenical ministry must be carried out eschatologically, that is, in terms of Christ’s coming again and the final fulfillment of salvation. Its vision and urgency come precisely because Christian unity is part of the ultimate reality of God’s reign. God’s “plan for the fullness of time” is to unite all things in Christ (Eph. 1:10, RSV), and the church’s mission is to prepare the world for that unity in righteousness. The unity of the church is a sign that the church is itself a firstfruits of the greater harvest. To deny the church’s calling in this regard is to deny our very hope. However, the “already and not yet” of Christian unity
also presents us with the sobering reality that the visible unity of the church in this present age is always partial and defective. Its complete perfection must wait until that day when “Christ who is your life is revealed” (Col. 3:4). And so we are humble, prayerful, and dependent on the grace of God in the work of ecumenism.

4. Christian unity is unity in truth.

Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth... I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one (John 17:17, 20-21a).

The unity that Jesus prayed for was centered in truth. More specifically, this truth is the word of God in Christ, the word he taught to the apostles whose witness, in turn, is transmitted in the Scriptures. This unity in truth is a matter of shared beliefs as well as of a set of relationships that are “true,” i.e., that are characterized by mutual integrity as well as by faithfulness to God. Christian unity comes out of being one in Christ, as he is in the Father (John 17:21-23).

Because Christian unity is “in Christ,” and because of the need always to bear witness to the apostolic faith, ecumenical activity will involve us in a continual dialogue about doctrine. The nature of the doctrinal discussion will vary according to the form and objective of the particular ecumenical endeavor, but all such discussions are matters of some complexity, requiring patience and perseverance. At the same time, because our unity is in truth, the reality is that limitations to unity do arise. Where the truth of the apostolic witness is consciously denied or rejected, there is no longer any real unity, and in that case Scripture even sounds a call towards separation (2 John 10-11).

This issue is close to the heart of Reformed identity, because our churches define themselves as “confessing churches.” Our confessions, or doctrinal standards, serve us as “standards of unity.” But, as the history of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa and its Belhar Confession remind us, there are times when the organizational unity of the church threatens the integrity of its confession, forcing it into a statu confessionis (“state of confession”), where apparent disunity may be the necessary price to pay for the sake of the gospel. In such cases, although the Reformed Church in America does not dare to judge another denomination’s spiritual unity in Christ, it may be forced, in grief and without triumphalism, to withdraw from apparent unity.

There is a danger, therefore, of making an idol of unity at the expense of doctrine. Unity has a purpose larger than itself, the manifestation of the glory of God to the world (John 17:1-5). Both love and truth are necessary to this end (Eph. 4:15). Truth must not be undermined in our ecumenical activities, and neither must love. We should beware of choosing the easier route of separation in order to avoid the pains that come with love. As Calvin wrote:

The Lord esteems the communion of his church so highly that he counts as a traitor and apostate from Christianity anyone who arrogantly leaves any Christian society, provided it cherishes the true ministry of Word and sacraments. He so esteems the authority of the church that when it is violated he believes his own diminished” (Institutes IV,1,10).

As the ancient motto puts it, “Let there be in necessary things, unity; in doubtful things, liberty; in all things, charity.”

II. THE FORMATION OF CHRISTIAN UNITY

1. Christian unity is grounded in the cross of Christ.
For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down
the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its
commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in
place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one
body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it (Eph. 2:14-16).

God has established reconciliation in the cross of Christ as the basis for the unity that
Christians have with each other. In other words, our unity comes from our sharing God's
forgiveness in Jesus. As baptized believers, we are the fellowship of his death and
resurrection. At the cross we are called to surrender all the pride and self-love which create
divisions among us, and our community is characterized by relationships that testify to God's
gracious reconciliation. This divine reality creates a spiritual unity among Christians out of
which visible unity comes.

Christians cannot just negotiate their way into unity. Ecumenical activity must always
include the work of repentance. This means that confessing previous sins, casting off the
works of pride, and grieving over the pain of separation are all necessary to the formation of
unity. Forming Christian unity must always be a corporate act of genuine repentance and
conversion, which, in the words of the Heidelberg Catechism, is the “dying away of the old
humanity, and the coming to life of the new humanity” (Answer 88).

2. Christian unity is a work of the Holy Spirit.

For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or
free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13).

It follows, then, that true Christian unity is the work of God in us, and it is not the product
of human endeavor or idealism. The Heidelberg Catechism reminds us that it is the “Son of
God through his Spirit and Word” who “gathers, protects, and preserves for himself” this
“community chosen for eternal life and united in true faith” (Answer 54).

Since he does this by the power of the Spirit and the Word, it also follows that Christian
worship is necessary to the formation of unity. Indeed, worship is the beginning and end of
ecumenical activity. We exercise our humility and our faith in worship, and in worship the
reconciling and unifying work of God is confessed, celebrated, and sealed to us by the power
of the Holy Spirit.

III. THE PURPOSE OF CHRISTIAN UNITY

1. Christian unity is for maturity in Christ.

But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head,
into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament
with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body’s growth
in building itself up in love (Eph. 4:15-16).

In Ephesians 4 the apostle Paul is writing about the diversity of gifts in the body. His teaching
(also developed in 1 Corinthians 12) is that in the body of Christ we are not complete without
one another and that we need one another to “come to the unity of the faith and of the
knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ” (Eph.
4:13). One of the purposes of ecumenism, therefore, is to incorporate into our own faith and
practice the full inheritance of the church catholic. It is entered into with the conviction that,
individually and corporately, we need one another in order to grow up into Christ. The first
work of the Holy Spirit, according to the Apostles’ Creed, is “the holy catholic Church” and this implies “the communion of saints,” which the Heidelberg Catechism explains as follows:

First, that believers one and all, as members of this community [of the church], share in Christ and all his treasures and gifts. Second, that each member should consider it a duty to use these gifts readily and cheerfully for the service and enrichment of the other members (Answer 55).

Ecumenism’s purpose is to express this corporately.

2. Christian Unity is for mission to the world.

I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me (John 17:20-21).

Christ prays that the Father’s unity with him might be given to the church in order to manifest the saving work of God to the world. A chief purpose of ecumenism, therefore, is Christian mission, and all ecumenical endeavor must have the glorious and compelling vision continually before it of bringing the gospel to the world:

Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations (Luke 24:46-47).

This mission must also take into account the Lord’s particular concern for the poor and the disenfranchised of the world. It must understand the “world” as broadly as the Scriptures do, and incorporate into its mission a biblical concern for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation. Faithful commitment to such mission should always engage us more deeply in ecumenical realities. With such a vision the church will more deeply realize its unity as it works together in acts of Christian mission.

**EXPRESSIONS AND RAMIFICATIONS OF UNITY**

Having laid some theological foundations and expressed a vision, we can look more closely at how we live these out. What are we doing? How far have we come? Where must we go? What are the different ways the RCA has practiced ecumenism?

**I. EXPRESSIONS OF ECUMENISM**

1. **Cooperative Ecumenism** includes those cooperative endeavors with other denominations to create programs of ministry and mission. Two examples of this are when the RCA works with Christian Reformed or Presbyterian educators to write church school curricula and when the RCA coordinates its earthquake or flood relief efforts. At the General Synod level, the RCA is currently involved in more than twenty cooperative world mission partnerships and more than sixty ecumenical involvements.

Cooperative ecumenism also takes place on the local and regional levels within the RCA. A number of RCA congregations engage with other churches in their communities to run vacation Bible schools, to participate in community worship services, and to distribute food. To a lesser degree some RCA classes cooperate in similar ministry endeavors with their regional counterparts.
The motivation for cooperative ecumenism does not necessarily spring from the
specific desire to express Christian unity. When RCA people join together for a youth
event with their Lutheran neighbors, they may not be consciously promoting the value
of Christian unity, or ecumenism, even though they are in fact engaged in an
ecumenical relationship. Their cooperation is for the sake of their youth, perhaps to
help their young people build a sense of Christian identity in the local high school.
There is, however, more often than not another by-product of such cooperation: the two
congregations cannot help being drawn more closely together, even to the point of
wondering aloud why they do not engage in more joint ventures.

Cooperative ecumenism can happen at any level, formally or informally, and it is
usually prompted by a mutual desire to accomplish a specific ministry or mission goal.
It should be understood, however, that cooperative ecumenism must be open to full
ecumenical engagement rather than obstructing it.

2. Conciliar Ecumenism is what most people mean when they speak of the “ecumenical
movement.” The examples of this form of ecumenism are the various councils of
churches (world, national, regional, and local). Following the example of the Council
of Jerusalem in Acts 15, such conciliar activity attempts to bring the churches into a
common and concrete forum for fellowship and action. The councils encourage people
to come together to hear the Word, to pray and sing, to study the Word, and, when
possible, to celebrate Holy Communion, demonstrating in these very acts the unity of
the worldwide church of Jesus Christ. The councils also facilitate the collaboration of
denominations in various programs of service and witness, recognizing and accepting
the distinctive contributions of each corporate expression of the church catholic.

The Faith and Order Unit of the World Council of Churches is a primary forum for the
expression of conciliar ecumenism. In this arena, representatives from all the major
Christian traditions meet for the purpose of understanding each other’s unique
contributions to the whole body of Christ. Issues of theology, church government, and
the sacraments are discussed to determine the places of convergence and divergence.
Vigorous and passionate discussions demonstrate how deep are the convictions which
the various traditions bring to the table. Building a consensus is often a slow and
painstaking process.

One well-known result of the Faith and Order conversations is the Baptism, Eucharist,
and Ministry (BEM) document, which was widely distributed and discussed throughout
the member communions of the World Council of Churches (WCCC). Every RCA
congregation received a copy of BEM for study and response. This massive effort by
the Faith and Order Unit of the World Council of Churches indicates a determined
commitment to facilitate the whole church’s wrestling with the meaning of being one
in Jesus Christ.

Another important WCC activity is the conciliar process for Justice, Peace, and the
Integrity of Creation, which provides the international opportunity for the churches of
the world to speak and act together in response to the political and economic powers.

3. Conversational/Dialogical Ecumenism includes the bilateral and multilateral
dialogues that take place between the churches at the denominational level. An
example of this is the Lutheran-Reformed Dialogue, which is a formal, ongoing
collection now more than twenty years old, and which holds the promise of bringing
these two historic Protestant families closer together in the United States of America.

The RCA, through its membership in the World Alliance of Reformed Churches
(WARC), is also represented in other church-to-church conversations such as Reformed-
Orthodox, with its emphasis on the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, and Reformed-Roman Catholic, with its focus on such issues as Scripture and authority. The RCA participates in these formal conversations in order to be faithful to its self-understanding: that it is already, by virtue of God's grace, united with all believers in all the denominations around the world. The dialogues seek to give faithful expression to what the RCA believes.

The Lutheran-Reformed dialogue has resulted in the achievement of a significant ecumenical milestone: the principle of "mutual affirmation and mutual admonition." This principle means that denominations which differ in theology may still be in complete fellowship with each other, if, in full recognition of their differences, they honorably affirm and admonish each other, where appropriate, in an ongoing relationship of fidelity and humility. Working on the basis of this principle, the Reformed Church in America is able to enter into relationships of "full communion" with other denominations which confess the ecumenical creeds, and which, according to their own standards, rightly preach the gospel, administer the sacraments, and practice discipline with integrity.

For the Reformed Church in America "full communion" means full "pulpit and table fellowship" and the recognition of each other's ministries, in keeping with the authority and responsibilities of the classes and the consistories. It means responsible and continual engagement and interaction at the levels of the General Synod and denominational program. It also means that, for the Reformed Church in America to have true "ecumenical capacity," it needs, as a confessional church, to be faithful to its confessions and its constitution at all levels—regarding its Standards, for example, not as hindrance to ecumenism, but as part of the gift that it brings. The principle of "mutual affirmation and admonition" allows for this. Indeed, since the RCA Standards call the RCA to "look forward to that great day" of Christ's return, when the "not yet" becomes the "already," the goal of full communion, no matter how far off and how impossible it seems, is always the goal of the RCA's participation in dialogues.

II. PROGRESS IN ECUMENISM

There has been real progress made over the years toward greater expression of RCA unity with other believers, and this is in large part due to RCA ecumenical activities. The RCA has built bridges, begun conversations, fostered understanding, and replaced old suspicions with new friendships. The ecumenical movement has enabled the RCA to relate better to those outside its family faith. The ecumenical movement has demonstrated the value of cooperation and of sharing resources. The ecumenical movement has opened up the church catholic to the RCA in fruitful ways.

However, this ecumenicity has not yet resulted in overcoming many of our most critical and longstanding divisions within the body of Christ. It may be that our expressions of unity have often led us only to those who think about things the way we do, believe in what we do, and practice their faith in ways that are comfortable to us. If so, we haven't gone far enough. If we move toward other Christian traditions only on the basis of mutual agreement on one or two issues, or from the appeal of a certain worship style, then we only mirror the world's way of operating. We ought instead to express our unity in ways that fully reflect the spirit of Jesus' prayer in John 17, "that we may be one."

Another reason for division in the church is an unwillingness to change and learn from others whose traditions differ from our own. Learning from others and changing is not easy. Some Christians fear that involvement with others will lead to the erosion of their group's identity. But ecumenism does not have the purpose of asking that the RCA, or any other church, give up its traditions and standards. The purpose of ecumenical involvement is to recognize our
need for each other and our commonality as God’s people, redeemed by Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit, so that we might celebrate the full inheritance of the church catholic and attain “to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the full stature of Christ” (Eph. 4:13).

Until the “unity of the faith” is attained, our ecumenical endeavor cannot cease. Our motivation for ecumenism arose, as it did for many other church bodies, out of our world mission experience during the last century. It made sense to our forbearers to cooperate in the efforts to reach the world with the gospel. What began as a shared program of many Protestant churches eventually evolved into the formation of the World Council of Churches. Now, some fifty years later, the legacy of these united mission efforts reminds us of what the church can accomplish through togetherness instead of separation.

III. RAMIFICATIONS OF A RENEWED COMMITMENT TO ECUMENISM

The first ramification is that we, as a body (the Reformed Church in America), will need to continue our ecumenical work until the whole church is reconciled. Therefore, we will go beyond achieving our ecumenical goals with only those communions which comprise the historic Reformed family. We will attempt to express our unity with those churches, for example, that practice adult or believers’ baptism, or which adhere to a nonpresbyterian form of government, or which are regarded as liberal or conservative. In other words, our movement toward other church bodies will be one of genuine openness. We will want to see other church bodies heal their divisions.

Because of the RCA’s particular tradition in doctrine and liturgy, and in the spirit of the holistic gospel that the RCA affirms, we accept the special responsibility to build bridges; indeed, to be a bridge, so far as we are able, between those churches which identify themselves as “evangelical” churches and those churches which identify themselves as “ecumenical” churches. To be Reformed is to be simultaneously evangelical and catholic, and the RCA’s commitment to ecumenism is informed by the conviction that these two categories are properly complementary, not opposites.

Our desire for community with all followers of Christ will also direct us toward those Christian bodies that do not refer to themselves as “churches,” and to the many Christian people whose faith experience draws mainly on parachurch organizations or Christian-based agencies and councils. The RCA will thus need to orient some of its ecumenical outreach toward nontraditional settings where significant Christian mission, service, or fellowship is practiced.

Our chief motivation for ecumenism on the denominational level is to provide RCA members a place in the life and worship of other churches, and their people in RCA congregations. Ministers of the gospel would have equal access to each other’s pulpits; communion tables would be open to each other’s members; and baptisms would be mutually accepted.

Our commitment must include the recognition and acceptance of the fact that the church’s obedience to Christ’s call to unity is challenging and even painful. Sometimes we back away from engagement with other church bodies because it involves extraordinary effort either to make a connection or to keep one. The practices of some bodies of Christians are so different from our own that we wonder what we have in common beyond our confession of Christ. Then there are those whose worship practice and theology are very similar to ours, but whose embrace of certain social or political agendas puts us at odds with them. It will require a new courage to surmount the obstacles that stand in the way of expressing with other communions the unity that is ours in Christ.
In summary, our ecumenical journey over the past decades indicates that the road ahead is strewn with challenges. Like the world that we inhabit, the Reformed Church in America experiences disunity in its own life. Not all of its members share an equal sense of belonging. The issues that divide people and nations into hostile camps, and that keep some churches separated from other churches, are the same issues that divide within our own family. A thorough, intentional commitment to ecumenism holds, by God’s grace, the promise for the healing of all divisions. To be a faithful agent of God’s work of reconciliation in the world and in the church, the RCA must set a course that places it at the forefront of ecumenical endeavor and enables it to be ever vigilant in the quest for realizing and manifesting our unity in Christ.

**GOALS, CRITERIA AND OPERATING GUIDELINES**

**I. GOALS**

Christian unity is central to our faith, and so these goals are put forward for review by the General Synod.

1. That the Reformed Church in America continue the prayer of our Lord by regularly praying for the unity of the church universal. Further, that this prayer be lived out by humbly confessing the pride and hostility that divide us from the other members of Christ’s body and by diligently seeking and claiming the reconciliation which Christ has accomplished by his death on the cross and the oneness which the Holy Spirit extended at Pentecost.

2. That the Reformed Church in America move into greater expressions of unity with those endeavors which seek to model and promote Christian unity in the world, as demonstrated by our commitment of prayer, time, and resources. Such endeavors mean international, national, and local councils, associations, alliances, and parachurch organizations which exist to promote the witness and mission of Jesus Christ.

3. That the Reformed Church in America in its ecumenical relationships be guided by the principle of “mutual affirmation and admonition.” This principle means that we will challenge our sister communions and Christian associations by word and example to live in obedience to Christ, and be so challenged by them; and where they lead us into greater awareness of how our denomination can more faithfully witness to and serve Jesus Christ in the world, we will respond with appropriate actions (letters of support, cosponsorship, participation, and assistance). Our aim here is to “build up the body of Christ,” and it is in this spirit that we will practice our affirmation and admonition.

4. That the Reformed Church in America move unreservedly toward embracing full communion with other churches meeting the criteria spelled out below. Full communion means the recognition in other churches that the gospel of Jesus Christ is preached and the sacraments are administered according to the Word of God; and that we as a denomination make provision for the orderly exchange of ministers in accordance with the authority of the classes; and further that we share a common commitment to evangelism, mission, and service. Full communion, however, does not require us to seek structural merger with other denominations.

**II. CRITERIA FOR ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING ECUMENICAL RELATIONS**

How do we establish and maintain ecumenical relationships with other denominations, councils, and Christian organizations? The gospel calls the followers of Jesus to both love and obedience, so it is necessary to emphasize both. The church in all places and at all times
is called to maintain this balance. Paul states in Ephesians 4:15 that Christians are to speak “the truth in love.” If we fail in our ecumenical relationships to achieve a visible expression of unity, the failure is usually traceable to an unwillingness either to love or to embrace the truth of the gospel.

This overarching guideline of truth and love sets the parameters for ecumenical engagement. It does not, however, answer all of the questions that arise when a group is deciding whether to stay in fellowship or dialogue with another group, or, with great sadness, to turn away. Some objective criteria are needed to aid us in making determinations with regard to maintaining or establishing our ecumenical relationships. These criteria are thus set forth as a guideline for the RCA to be faithful participants in ecumenical relationships:

1. We are called to live out our unity with all who “confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior according to the Scriptures and therefore seek to fulfill together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”¹³

2. We will live out our unity in Christ on as broad a plain and with as much depth as possible. This means that we will begin with a bias toward membership and full participation in worldwide, national, regional, and local conciliar, ecumenical bodies. The issue of maintaining such membership may arise should an ecumenical body depart from its own standards or basis of agreement concerning the confession of our common faith.

3. As an alternative to membership, we will enter into various ecumenical relationships for various periods of time to meet various objectives whenever and wherever the conciliar framework is either not the appropriate vehicle or is not intentional enough in moving toward a desired ministry or mission goal.

4. We will give priority to those ecumenical involvements which show greatest promise over time in moving the church to a greater sense of unity in effective mission. This priority must be adopted in view of limited resources, finances, and personnel. Choices must be made concerning membership and participation in the number and depth of ecumenical opportunities.

5. We will be faithful in establishing communication ties with those bodies who, though differing from us, share our desire for closer ties.

6. We will give particular attention to building ecumenical bridges of fellowship and partnership between conciliar bodies and “evangelical” churches and agencies, in order to enhance the healing of our divisions for the sake of our common witness.

7. We will regard our doctrinal standards not as hindrances to ecumenical relationships but as part of the gift we bring to them. As a confessional church we will maintain our ecumenical capacity by being faithful to our standards and constitution as our means of being both evangelical and catholic.

8. We acknowledge our special relationships with those worldwide Reformed denominations that have confessions similar to our own, and we accept the special obligations such relationships have for mutual support, common testimony, and confessional solidarity.

III. OPERATING GUIDELINES

Finally, when we become involved in ecumenical activities, whether as denominational representatives or as individuals in local congregations, the way we approach those efforts
is as critical to the success of the tasks as the work itself. These are occasions which demand integrity and common sense. We are called upon clearly to articulate our faith and also to be sensitive to the beliefs of others, affirming each other in Christ. These are not situations of compromise or manipulation, but rather opportunities for learning about and from one another, even as we engage in the particular tasks at hand.

Several operating guidelines can be suggested and applied appropriately to many situations:

1. Invite voluntary participation at the level of a person’s ability, interest, conscience, or tradition, recognizing that most ecumenical activity is a matter of choice rather than of assignment.

2. Provide a place for people of faith to gather around a project of common interest, nurture the inevitable dialogue, and expect fellowship to result, remaining open to the mystery and power of the Holy Spirit.

3. Welcome opportunities to appropriately address issues in partnership with someone else, such as ecumenical marriage preparation or political action.

4. Help people do what they really want to do, getting involved in programming that extends the local congregation’s ministry, but that cannot be easily done without others, such as emergency shelter response or joint worship.

5. Take a practical approach. Acknowledge the distinctive gifts of all, setting aside differences while individuals cooperate in actions, study, or fellowship. Instead, focus on complementing existing projects so there is no unnecessary duplication of efforts or service.

6. Practice humility in judging and admonishing others. Respect with charity what another communion or denomination says about itself in the expectation that our relationship with others will be mutually enriching.

CONCLUSION

In 1966 the General Synod adopted a statement called “The Unity We Seek to Manifest,” from which an excerpt serves to summarize and conclude this report:

We of the Reformed Church in America resolve to manifest the God-given unity of the Church by working to overcome our divisions. The ways and means to unity are not always known. The goal of unity is a venture of faith. Therefore trusting in the Holy Spirit for guidance, we shall be open to His counsel, willing to converse with any church, ready to cooperate with all Christians, committed to participate in councils of churches on all levels, prepared to merge with any church when it is clearly the will of God, eager to heal the brokenness of the Body of Christ in all ways known to us, until all are one, so that the world may know that the Father has sent the Son as Savior and Lord” (MGS 1966, pp. 246-247, 252).

NOTES:

1 Calvin to Cranmer, Letter No. 1619, Calvin Opera XIV.313.

2 “Strictly speaking, one could say that the expression status confessionis [“a state of confession”] means that a Christian, a group of Christians, a church, or a group of churches are of the opinion that a situation has developed, a moment of truth has dawned, in which nothing less than the gospel itself, their most fundamental confession concerning the Christian gospel itself, is at stake, so that they feel compelled to witness

Both Lutheran and Reformed churches use the term. Reformed churches, unlike Lutheran churches, usually resolve the situation through the writing and signing of a confession or doctrinal standard, such as the Canons of Dort (1619), the Barmen Declaration (1934), and the Belhar Confession (1982).

3 From the Constitutional Basis of the World Council of Churches.

➢ The advisory committee recommended:

R-3.
To commend the paper, “An Ecumenical Mandate for the Reformed Church in America,” to the congregations, consistories, classes, regional synods, commissions, agencies, and institutions of the Reformed Church in America for study, reflection, and response in a process guided by the Commission on Christian Unity; and further,

to request the Commission on Christian Unity to submit the final version of the paper, “An Ecumenical Mandate for the Reformed Church in America,” to the 1996 General Synod for adoption.

(ADOPTED AS AMENDED)*

Reason: According to the original wording of R-3, it appears that the 1995 draft of the “Ecumenical Mandate for the Reformed Church in America” will be before the 1996 General Synod. It is hoped that the year of study, reflection, and response will yield insights that the Commission on Christian Unity may wish to include in the body of its final 1996 version. <

➢ The advisory committee recommended:

R-4.
To commend the Commission on Christian Unity and its staff for their diligence in guiding the formulation of the “Ecumenical Mandate for the Reformed Church in America,” their insightful discernment of the scriptural foundations of Christian unity, their responsiveness to the 1990 communication from the Classis of Cascades requesting such a policy, and their sensitivity in seeking broad consensus throughout the entire Reformed Church in America.

(ADOPTED)<

*Addition is in light-face type.
Overture

RCA Merger with Christian Reformed Church

1. The Classis of North Grand Rapids overtures the General Synod to effect full programmatic and organizational union with the Christian Reformed Church in North America by June 2000.

Reasons:

1. The RCA and the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) share a common tradition, a complementary history, and a collateral mission.

2. There are no present-day insurmountable barriers to complete merger.

The 1966 General Synod stated unequivocally:

In obedience to this divine revelation, we the RCA resolve to manifest the God-given unity of the church, by working to overcome our divisions. The ways and means to unity are not always known. The goal of unity is a venture of faith. Therefore, trusting in the Holy Spirit for guidance, we shall be open to His counsel, willing to converse with any church, ready to cooperate with all Christians, committed to participate in councils of churches on all levels, prepared to merge with any church when it is clearly the will of God, eager to heal the brokenness of the Body of Christ in all ways made known to us, until all are one, so that the world may know that the Father has sent the Son as Savior and Lord (“The Unity We Seek to Manifest,” policy statement adopted by General Synod, MGS 1966, R-21, p. 252, pp. 246-7).

3. The time has come and is perhaps long past when the will of God needs to be heeded to heal a rift that never should have happened. The classis notes the following:

A. Why the RCA and the CRC went their separate ways in 1857:

1. The four documents of secession accuse the Dutch Reformed Church, directly or indirectly, of departing from the standpoint they had jointly held in the Netherlands.

2. Only one of the four documents of secession specifies reasons for secession. Those reasons were:

   a. The collection of eight hundred hymns introduced contrary to the church order.

   b. Open communion—inviting people of all religious views (except Roman Catholics) to the Lord’s Supper.

   c. Neglect of preaching from the Heidelberg Catechism and instruction in the Heidelberg Catechism.

   d. Neglect of home visitation by the elders.

   e. The opinion of some that the 1834 secession in the Netherlands (the so-called Afscheiding) was unnecessary.
3. The CRC was born of two secessions within twenty-three years:
   a. The 1834 secession in the Netherlands.
   b. The 1857 secession from the RCA.

B. Why the RCA and the CRC should abandon their separate ways:
   1. None of the reasons stated above for secession are doctrinal in nature. All the above reasons have lost their cogency.
   2. Differences between individual RCA congregations and individual CRC congregations are presently wider and sometimes of a more serious nature than differences existing between the two denominations.
   3. By virtue of its newly adopted *Ecumenical Charter*, the CRC is mandated to attach first priority to seeking reapproachment with Reformed churches which are Reformed as to confession, polity, and liturgy, as determined not only by formal standards, but also by actual practice.
   4. Since 1976 the RCA has been in ecclesiastical fellowship with the CRC. The term “church in ecclesiastical fellowship” implies a relationship that involves, where possible and desirable, the following:
      a. Exchange of delegates at major assemblies.
      b. Occasional pulpit fellowship.
      c. Intercommunion or fellowship at the Lord’s Table.
      d. Joint actions in areas of common responsibility.
      e. Communion on major issues of joint concern.
      f. Exercise of mutual concern and admonition with a view of promoting the fundamentals of Christian unity.

C. What the RCA and the CRC have in common:
   1. A particular way of believing and practicing the Christian faith. The common message the two denominations share can be summarized as follows:
      All glory goes to God alone, who is authoritatively revealed by Scripture alone, which proclaims salvation by grace alone, achieved by God through Christ alone, and received by believers through faith alone.¹
   As Reformed Christians, we seek:
      The reformation of the whole of life, not only at the level of individual faith and conduct, but also at the level of the church and the wider community, its governing structures, and bases of power.²
   This particular way of believing and practicing the Christian faith sets the RCA and CRC apart from many other churches and denominations and should be the propelling force behind RCA and CRC efforts to unity.
2. A common or similar U.S. and Canadian and ecclesiastical history, reaching back to the time of the Reformation and continuing to the present.

3. A common set of confessional writings.

Notes:


2 Ibid.

The advisory committee recommended:

R-5.
To encourage agencies of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America as well as the Commission on Christian Unity to maintain regular correspondence with the respective corresponding agencies within the Christian Reformed Church in North America and its Inter-Church Relations Committee; and further,

to explore avenues of reconciliation between the Reformed Church in America and the Christian Reformed Church in North America for additional programmatic cooperation. (ADOPTED)
REPORTS ON CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Report of the Commission on Christian Worship

The Commission on Christian Worship met in two stated sessions on October 3 and 4, 1994, and on February 6 and 7, 1995, at the Carmel Retreat Center in Mahwah, New Jersey.

LITURGICAL ORDERS

A number of liturgical forms and worship resources have been completed and adopted by General Synod in recent years, including “Celebration for the Home,” “Worship at the Closing of a Church,” “Blessing-Prayer for Godspeed: A Service of Farewell,” and others. These liturgies are distributed to all RCA churches only through their inclusion in the Commission on Worship’s report printed in the Minutes of General Synod (MGS). They are also included in the occasional revisions of Liturgy and Confessions, but only for those who happen to purchase such revised editions of this book. The commission’s experience is that while these occasional services may be useful to pastors, congregations, or classes, many times people are not aware these liturgies exist.

R-1.
To instruct the Office of the General Synod to distribute to each Reformed Church in America congregation all future liturgies approved by General Synod for inclusion in Liturgy and Confessions. (ADOPTED)

ORDINATION SERVICES

The Commission on Worship studied the paper, “The Practice of Laying on of Hands in Ordination Services,” prepared by the Commission on Theology for presentation at this year’s General Synod (see Report of the Commission on Theology in the Theology section). The paper makes recommendations that affect liturgical practice. In the coming year, the Commission on Worship will examine the implications of this paper and the response of this year’s General Synod to it, in reviewing current RCA liturgies for ordination and in considering the need for any new ordination liturgies.

The liturgy for Ordination of Minister of Word and Sacrament in the 1987 edition of Worship the Lord (p. 3) contains a typographic error. The rubric to invite “ministers of classis” to lay on hands should read “members of classis,” as originally approved by the General Synod in 1982 (MGS 1982, pp. 148, 159). A corrected page was sent to all RCA ministers and stated clerks of classes by the RCA Distribution Center.

In the past several years the commission has received a number of requests to review current RCA services for ordination, and to consider the development of new ordination liturgies. In addition to questions about the laying on of hands, concern has been expressed over archaic language, the need for consistency in providing a Charge to the Congregation, and the more recent understanding in the RCA on the nature of the diaconate. A report on ordination services will be presented to the Commission on Worship at its October 1995 meeting.

EUCHARISTIC PRAYERS

RCA liturgies for celebrating the Lord’s Supper are constitutional. The church is required to use a synodically authorized form when celebrating the sacrament. Through a survey conducted by the Office of Worship, the commission is aware that many RCA congregations
are celebrating the Lord’s Supper with greater frequency than has been the RCA’s historic tradition of four times per year. There is an expressed desire for more variety in the eucharistic prayers. The Office of Worship has written Reformed churches around the world requesting samples of their communion prayers. The commission is very interested in the many replies already received. Possibility for providing greater variation in the RCA liturgy for the Lord’s Supper will be considered by the Commission on Worship, in consultation with the Commission on Church Order. The Commission on Church Order is studying the feasibility of amending the RCA Constitution by dividing it into Constitution and Canons (see the Report of the Commission on Church Order in the Church Order section).

**A SERVICE FOR THE ORGANIZATION OF A NEW CHURCH**

While the Reformed Church in America continues to establish new congregations under the 98 by ’98 plan, the Commission on Worship is considering the development of a new “Service for the Organization of a New Church.” Such a service might include a new look at the way members are received, greater participation by the classis, and perhaps the formation, ordination, and installation of a consistory in the new church.

**WORSHIP VIDEO**

In the fall of 1994 members of the Commission on Worship, joined by the general secretary, engaged in a lengthy discussion on the diversity of worship within the Reformed Church in America. This diversity is reflected in a variety of musical preferences, in the degree of complexity or simplicity of liturgical form and practice, in the creative tension between the dynamics within traditional churches and new church starts, and even in the training and education of church members and ministers of Word and sacrament. Amidst this diversity the RCA has a Liturgy and a Directory for Worship which reflect something of the essential nature of Reformed worship. This Reformed worship is biblically based, historically rooted, and ecumenically informed. The creative tension between form and freedom which characterizes Reformed worship allows many possibilities for fresh expression appropriate for local communities of faith. That the Liturgy is sometimes perceived as a straightjacket restricting vibrant worship suggests there is a need for demonstrating a variety of possibilities available in employing it and the Directory.

The commission has consulted with John Grooters, producer in the Stewardship and Communication Services Unit, regarding the production of a video. The video would be a presentation of the RCA’s Directory for Worship. Its purpose would be to demonstrate the essential elements comprising Reformed worship, and to demonstrate the variety of ways these elements can be expressed in a variety of settings. The Christian Reformed Church has also been approached about coproducing this resource. Members of the commission are working on the script.

**GUIDELINES FOR HYMNAL SELECTION**

A recent survey of RCA congregations confirms that a wide variety of hymnals and supplemental hymn resources are used in RCA worship. While the commission is responsible to recommend standards for worship music (Book of Church Order, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 10b3), little has been done in recent years to identify and distribute criteria for congregations to consider in choosing hymnals. The commission is in the process of researching and developing recommended criteria. When this exposition of recommended criteria has been completed, it will be made available to RCA congregations. Criteria under consideration include singability, theological stance, poetic and rhetorical qualities, balance between both new and familiar texts and tunes, etc.
FEASIBILITY OF A NEW HYMNAL

In 1978 the General Synod approved a recommendation from its Committee on Worship to appoint a subcommittee to study various possibilities for future RCA hymnals (MGS 1978, R-1, p. 241). This ultimately resulted in the publication of Rejoice in the Lord, the first hymnal produced by and for the Reformed Church in America since 1869. The response of the RCA to Rejoice in the Lord has been mixed. Having gone through five printings with sales of nearly eighty-five thousand copies, it has served a number of congregations well, both in the RCA and in other denominations. The book’s structure as a “hymn companion to the Scriptures” is a unique format that has been appreciated by many. Some new hymns, and some rediscovered old hymns, have contributed to a greater breadth of congregations’ repertoire. Also, the use of more inclusive language has been a step in the right direction. Nevertheless, Rejoice in the Lord has its deficiencies as well. Too many tune selections and arrangements have proven to be problematic. The book is perceived by some as being too heavy, both in actual weight as well as in content. The work of a number of contemporary composers is inadequately represented. Greater attention still needs to be given to the use of language. Finally, the binding has failed to hold up over time.

Publishers observe that the average life of a hymnal is about fifteen years. After that, what had once been contemporary may no longer seem fresh or appropriate. New music evolves and the historic, fundamental core of hymnody continues to be developed and revised. Hymns that have not withstood the test of time are replaced.

Having published the first denominational hymnbook in North America (1789), and having made some significant contributions since then, the RCA continues to have a unique contribution to make to RCA congregations and to American hymnody. Many denominational and commercial hymnbooks are for sale today, growing ever larger in an effort to represent a greater diversity of hymns to appeal to a greater diversity of preferences. Still, no one book seems sufficient to satisfy the needs of the whole church. This is particularly evident from the growing use of copyright licensing services and songbook supplements.

Perhaps the contribution from the Commission on Worship could be a smaller collection. It would not be an effort to please everyone with a sufficient collection of diverse hymns and songs, as this would be impossible. Instead, the commission could offer to the church a core collection of hymns as a foundation upon which Reformed Christians could build and grow. This core collection could represent a body of work considered basic or fundamental for all Reformed churches as we enter the twenty-first century.

Such a collection could serve to identify what the RCA has or could share in common with other Reformed Christians. At the same time it would not attempt to be all things to all people. Its intentionally limited scope would leave room for encouraging congregations to supplement this common collection with additional hymns and songs available from other sources, just as many congregations are already doing. A smaller book might be less expensive, allowing congregations to use the savings to buy copyright licenses or inexpensive periodic supplements which change more frequently than a basic hymnbook. The RCA core collection of hymns could be published in a book and could also be made available on computer disk, serving the greater variety of ways in which churches use hymn resources today.

Because it takes five to seven years to produce a hymnal, this may be the time to begin work on a new hymnal project. Both Rejoice in the Lord and a number of other hymnals now in use will have served their purpose by the time a new hymnal is available. By engaging in such a project at this time, the RCA can benefit from the lessons learned from the production of Rejoice in the Lord. The RCA is blessed with a rich tradition upon which to build. The RCA is blessed with gifted, visionary people more than able to engage in such a project.
needs to be determined now is the interest of the RCA in developing and welcoming a new hymnal.

➢ The advisory committee recommended to amend R-2:

R-2.
To approve $5,000 for the Commission on Christian Worship to study and consult, in conjunction with the Consultation on Theology and Practice of Reformed Worship in the Midst of Contemporary Culture (see R-6 below, p. 208), on the desirability and nature of a new hymnal. (NOT ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. This will save time and effort.

2. The discussions in the joint consultation will help answer the question of a new hymnal's nature and desirability. <

From the Report of the General Synod Council's Congregational Services Committee

REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF WORSHIP

John Westerhoff, writing in the Anglican Digest, reminds the church of the centrality of worship:

There remains to the church only one unique and peculiar responsibility: the conduct of public worship. If the church does nothing other than to keep open a house, a symbolic homeland of the soul, where in season and out women and men come to reenact the memory and vision of who they are, it will have rendered society and each of us a service of unmeasurable value. So long as the church bids men and women to participate in the liturgies of the Christian faith community it need not question its place, mission, or influence in the world. If it loses faith or is careless in its rituals it need not look to its rituals to save it.¹

Survey of Worship Practices

The Office of Worship conducted a survey of worship practices in RCA congregations. Approximately 230 congregations participated in the survey. The survey provided information about a number of trends and practices in the RCA. As example, more RCA congregations are celebrating the Lord’s Supper more frequently, two-thirds of RCA congregations include praise choruses in worship, there is a wide variety of hymnals in use in the denomination (with The Hymnbook, 1955, still the most popular), nearly half the congregations in the RCA welcome children to the Lord’s Table, and the practice of lectionary-based preaching has increased. The survey was also designed to compare worship practices based on region, congregation size, and seminary and decade of graduation of the senior pastor. Complete survey results were shared with the Commission on Worship, the Congregational Services

*Addition is in light-face type.
Committee of the General Synod Council, and the RCA seminaries. The survey results will be helpful in providing the Office of Worship with information about the kinds of resources and programming needed in the denomination.

The Question of Culture and the Renewal of Worship

Loren Mead, writing in *The Once and Future Church*, contends that the boundary between the church and the world has become more important today than at any time since Constantine. In many congregations this boundary is felt most acutely in worship as congregations explore various ways of trying to make worship accessible to the contemporary culture while at the same time remaining faithful to the Christian faith. The attempt to design worship that speaks to the current culture is often understood to mean including contemporary music in worship. The issue is both broader and more complex than choice of music. How and to what extent can Christian faith and contemporary society overlap? Most agree there is a good deal less “overlap” in North American society today than there was even a generation or two ago. Some contend attempts to bridge that gap imply “a radical secularization of worship” and “cause loss of distinctive Christian identity in a culture, even to the point that worship no longer has the ability to challenge secular culture.”

Several RCA members attended the North American Summit on the Future of Christian Worship called by Robert Webber, director of the Institute for Worship Studies. This summit explored two alternative models, the seeker service and the catechumenate. Both attempt to cross the boundary between Christian faith and secular culture, but in some very different ways (and, it could be argued, at different points in the “seeker’s” faith journey). The seeker service incorporates contemporary music and use of media and drama in an effort to speak to a secular culture. Little is asked of the seeker other than to observe and to listen. The seeker service is designed to make worship accessible and God understandable to a secular culture. On the other hand, the practice of the catechumenate, based on ancient church practice, is a process designed to shape disciples. It is a process of mentoring and spiritual formation in several stages; each marked by a liturgical rite. Rather than an attempt to make worship accessible to an unchurched individual, the emphasis is on making the seeker into a Christian. The assumption is the Christian faith is so different from the surrounding culture that only through a process of nurture and spiritual formation can one become a full participant in the worship of the Christian community. The RCA has much to learn from both of these models, and they merit further consideration and discussion in the church.

Production of Resources

The Office of Worship provides RCA congregations with resources for worship through its *Worship* newsletter and occasional resource packets. Also completed this year was a supplement to *Pray to the Lord*, a collection of prayers for corporate worship.

Final editing of *Lift Up Your Hearts*, a worship planning manual, was completed in cooperation with CRC Publications. This extensive manual is designed as a planning and discussion resource for pastors, musicians, and worship committees. The RCA Office of Worship and Emily Brink, music and liturgy editor, CRC Publications, have been in conversation about introducing the manual through regional workshops on worship.

The survey of worship practices indicated that RCA congregations are celebrating the Lord’s Supper with greater frequency and that there is a desire for more variety in celebrations of the Lord’s Supper. Through contacts with member churches in the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, the Office of Worship has gathered a collection of liturgies for the Lord’s Supper. It is anticipated that such a collection might be valuable to the Commission on Worship in its work and may also serve as a resource for the Reformed Church in America and for other denominations.
The Office of Worship, in cooperation with the Commission on Worship, has begun work on the development of a worship education video. The Christian Reformed Church has also been approached about possible cooperation with this project.

The Office of Worship responds to numerous requests for resources and information, represents the RCA on the Council of Common Texts, staffs the Commission on Worship, and provides staff assistance for the General Synod worship services.

Notes:

1 Westerhoff, John, Anglican Digest, Easter 1994.


➢ The advisory committee recommended:

R-3.
To request the General Synod Council to consider committing more time and personnel resources to the Office of Worship. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. Worship is at the heart of who the RCA is as a church. Ten to 15 percent of one RCA staff person’s time is not sufficient acknowledgement of this truth.

2. In light of the general secretary’s visions for the RCA’s future and his proposal on the theology and practice of Reformed worship (see P-2 on p. 40 and R-6 below, p. 208), the advisory committee saw the need for increased commitment of RCA staff time devoted to RCA worship. <

From the Report of the Task Force on Remembering Baptism, Professing Faith, and Membership Terminology

RECOGNIZING BAPTISM AND PROFESSING FAITH

INTRODUCTION

In 1988 the General Synod of the Reformed Church took the step of encouraging boards of elders to admit baptized children to the Lord’s Table (MGS 1988, R-6, p. 385). Since then the denomination has been engaged in a stimulating and fruitful discussion on the matters of baptism, faith development, confirmation, and profession of faith. In 1992 the General Synod received a paper called “Confirmation and the Reformed Church” (MGS 1992, pp. 455-68). This paper did not recommend the practice of “confirmation.” The paper contended for a renovation of RCA doctrine and practice of baptism and called for new forms of lifelong response to baptism.
During 1992 members of the Commission on Theology met with ministers and church educators who were involved in the education process and liturgical practice of the confirmation of youth. The commission’s purpose in calling this meeting was to hear responses to the confirmation paper. Many ministers and church educators welcomed the theological principles of the paper and appreciated the renewed emphasis on baptism. They agreed that the practice of confirmation or public profession of faith as a necessary rite for becoming a “full” or “communicant” member of the church could undermine Reformed baptismal theology. However, it was also felt that the practice of confirmation had been serving some pastoral and educational needs which still needed to be met. There was concern that if RCA congregations “do away” with the public service of confirmation for youth, or the public profession of faith by youth, the RCA will lose a tremendous opportunity to celebrate the fruits of God’s blessings in the lives of young people and to confirm these youth in their identity as Christian adolescents.

Then in 1993 the Commission on Worship reminded the General Synod of the 1977 paper, “Baptized Non-communicants and the Celebration of the Lord’s Supper” (MGS 1977, pp. 293-306), a paper which stated it was important for baptized children to make public professions of their faith in ways that did not depreciate baptism. All this discussion, and relevant previous General Synod reports in particular, have been taken into account in what follows.

EBENEZER

One of the finest of American hymns, “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing,” has the following well-known lines:

Here I raise my Ebenezer,
    bither by thy help I’m come;
    and I hope, by thy good pleasure,
    safely to arrive at home.

The word “eben-zer” means “stone of help,” and it is the name given by Samuel to the stone he erected to commemorate the defeat of the Philistines, “for he said, ‘Thus far the Lord has helped us’” (1 Sam. 7:12). Jacob erected such a stone at Bethel to commemorate his encounters with God (Gen. 28:10-22, 35:14-15), and Joshua erected a whole pile of stones to commemorate the crossing of the Jordan (Josh. 4). These stones were important markers in the history of God’s dealing with Israel, even though they were not a part of the most central pattern of Israel’s worship. Although the stones erected by Jacob and by Joshua are not specifically named “Ebenezer,” they fit a common pattern. What the RCA is looking for is a pattern of Ebenezers in the lives of its members.

At Bethel God unilaterally and graciously extended the Abrahamic covenant to the trickster Jacob, promising to be with him in his travels and to bring him back home. When Jacob awoke from his dream, he confessed the presence of God, set up the stone as a commemoration, and made a vow in response to God’s promises. Years later, after his return, God called Jacob back to Bethel, and there God appeared to him again and blessed him. God addressed him as Jacob, but also called him Israel. God repeated the covenantal promises and blessed him, and Jacob set up another stone. In the life of Jacob one sees better than anywhere else a faith that is in development. Jacob lived his life, as crooked and limping as it was, in response to the unshakable covenant which God freely decided to extend to him (and not to Esau!). At certain moments in Jacob’s changing life, he marked his renewed encounter with God’s unchanging graciousness toward him by means of something like an Ebenezer—a marker of memory, of confession, of devotion for the future, and of God’s blessing.
At the Jordan River God instructed Joshua to have the twelve tribes each take a stone from the river bed and pile them on the river bank. Joshua said to the people of Israel:

When your children ask their parents in time to come, “What do these stones mean?” then you shall let your children know, “Israel crossed over the Jordan here on dry ground.” For the Lord your God dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you crossed over, as the Lord your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up for us until we crossed over, so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the Lord is mighty, and so that you may fear the Lord your God forever” (Josh. 4:21-24).

The monument at the Jordan was unnamed, but it too was like an Ebenezer, a marker of memory that was to elicit a confession, not only of God’s mighty acts at the Jordan and the Red Sea, but also of Israel’s rededication.

It is important to recognize that these Ebenezers were not part of Israel’s central core of worship. They marked secondary events in Israel’s life, not primary events. The primary events were the Exodus (the Passover and the Red Sea) and the covenant that was ratified at Mount Sinai (Exod. 24:8). The whole cycle of Israelite worship was meant to extend the benefits of the covenant to future generations and to maintain the Exodus experience of God. The Exodus covenant would be the single definitive event for Israel, and the later revivals of Josiah (2 Kings 22:8 to 23:23) and Ezra (Neh. 8 and 9) were cases of Israel simply returning to its unchanging origin. But the history that came after Mount Sinai was real and deserved to be marked, remembered, and interpreted; and the continuing involvement and blessing of God in the life of Israel needed to be confessed. For all of these purposes, the Ebenezers served. This paper will return to the image of the Ebenezer following a review of the RCA’s understanding of the sacraments and baptism.

THE NEW COVENANT

Christianity is founded upon the “new covenant” with Israel (Luke 22:20). Its Passover was the cross, its Red Sea was the resurrection, and its Mount Sinai was Pentecost. This Easter covenant is the single definitive event of the church, the new Israel, and it never needs to be renewed or repeated. Just as the Exodus covenant included rituals that extended the benefits of that covenant to future generations, so the New Testament instituted means by which the Holy Spirit extends the benefits of Christ’s covenant to each new generation of the faithful.

These means of God’s sovereign grace are called the “sacraments.” They have the particular character of “covenantal signs,” that is, rituals and actions which God has ordained and which God works through, and to which God pledges to be faithful; rituals and actions that convey and celebrate the covenantal promises they illustrate and commemorate. Both sacraments point to the same thing, Christ’s death and resurrection, but they show different sides of that one thing; and the benefits which they extend to us are complementary. For example, the Lord’s Supper emphasizes actively “remembering” the new covenant, while baptism emphasizes receptively “being” a member of the covenant.

The whole Reformed doctrine of the sacraments is based on an understanding of them as “covenantal signs” (as in the Old Testament) which are related to a single covenantal act, Christ’s death and resurrection. Christ is the true covenant partner with God, and by means of the sacraments one shares in his or her status and what he or she has accomplished. This covenant is unilaterally enacted by a sovereign God, and it is God who extends the covenant to whom God wills by means of God’s Word and Holy Spirit, creating faith, and gathering, protecting, and preserving a congregation for eternal life.
Although none of the documents in the Constitution of the Reformed Church in America specifically defines the sacraments as “covenantal signs,” all of them either assume or approach this understanding. A digest of these documents follows directly, and this is of prime importance, for these constitutional documents determine the official doctrine of baptism. What will become clear is that, in every one of the documents, the RCA’s constitutional doctrine is that baptism is first of all God’s activity in the church, and that celebration of the sacraments is how we allow God to do God’s work in us.

THE BELGIC CONFESSION

Article 33 of the Belgic Confession teaches that the sacraments are means which God uses both to instruct us and to accomplish saving work directly in us. The visible symbols (the elements and the action) are offered for our belief, since “they are not empty and hollow signs to fool and deceive us, for their truth is Jesus Christ.” They are means of grace, yes, but much more, they are means of Christ; and so we are actually encouraged to embrace and enjoy the sacraments, for by means of them, Christ, through the Holy Spirit, presents himself to us. Both of the sacraments proclaim the real presence of Christ in the action of the sacramental encounter. This does not mean that we force Christ to be present when we do the ritual, but that Christ has ordained the sacraments as signs of the covenant to which he, for his part, is always faithful.

Article 34 of the Belgic Confession connects baptismal water with the atoning blood of Christ. The Old Testament instituted bloody circumcision as the sign that all Israel was adopted as God’s son and that each male child was included in the people of the promise. The New Testament instituted watery baptism as the sign that bears witness that we are adopted as God’s children and “we are received into God’s church” (notice it doesn’t say “visible church”; to say such implies that the sign can “fool and deceive us”). Then Article 34 uses the metaphor of “washing” to say that what the water does externally the Holy Spirit does internally with the blood of Christ, washing away our sinfulness and transforming us from being “children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3) into the children of God. So it is not the water itself that does this, but the blood of Christ, “who is our Red Sea.” Yet, the water is the trustworthy covenantal sign of Christ’s blood.

Ministers perform the sacrament externally, but our Lord internally gives what the sacrament signifies: purification, renewal, comfort, assurance, “clothing us with the new self,” and mortification. The external sign is to be a lifelong testimony of this, just as God’s internal work in us is lifelong, for “this baptism is profitable not only when the water is on us and when we receive it but throughout our entire lives.”

The defense of infant baptism is made by an appeal to the nature of the covenant. Furthermore, just as the law of Moses required the redemption of infants by the sacrifice of a lamb, so the death of the Lamb of God is also properly the redemption of the children of believers.

THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM

The Heidelberg Catechism’s explanation of the sacraments emphasizes God’s work and God’s promises in them. The Holy Spirit creates “faith in our hearts by the preaching of the holy gospel, and confirms it by the use of the holy sacraments” (Q&A #65). We therefore give way to God’s work in us when we make use of the covenantal signs (Old, p.19) which God has offered and to which God binds God’s self. Both sacraments declare and seal the single, central gospel promise: forgiveness and eternal life from Christ’s passion for us (Q&A #66-7).
The *Heidelberg Catechism* gives a very simple definition of what faith is: believing the promises (Q&A#22). Because true faith is both knowledge and wholehearted trust (Q&A #21), so the proper use of the sacraments requires both knowledge of God's promise (sign) and the acceptance of it (seal). Therefore the use of the sacraments is in itself an act of faith on the church’s part, and simultaneously an act of God's Spirit.

The *Heidelberg Catechism* also emphasizes the metaphor of “washing.” The washing away of sins in Christ’s blood is forgiveness, redemption, and justification, and the washing in Christ’s Spirit is for renewal, sanctification, and incorporation into Christ, which the *Heidelberg Catechism* is not afraid to call the “washing of regeneration” (original text of Q&A #70-1; Titus 3:5). The baptismal water itself does not accomplish this, but water is God’s chosen pledge and sign that Christ’s blood and Spirit wash us spiritually as certainly as the water washes us physically. The defense of infant baptism appeals to the unity of the covenants.

The *Heidelberg Catechism*’s doctrine of baptism cannot be understood apart from its profound and simple doctrine of conversion, as in the key questions 88-91. Conversion is not something done once for all, as revivalism understands it, but something that is continuous, and essentially the same as repentance. Two things are involved in conversion: “the dying of the old self, and the coming to life of the new” (Q&A #88). (Jacob is the Reformation’s example of conversion *par excellence*, especially as symbolized by his two names.) The second question on baptism (Q&A #70) anticipates this. It uses similar language and states that this dying and renewal are accomplished by the work (“washing”) of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the gift of baptism is the ground and assurance to us, as believers, of God’s having converted us, but it is simultaneously the call for us to keep being converted. This is not an either-or but a both-and. Yet the call to keep being converted does not cast into doubt the assurance of God’s sovereign saving work in us.

**THE CANONS OF DORT**

The *Canons of Dort* amplify the *Heidelberg Catechism*’s doctrine of conversion in Articles 11-14 of Chapter III/IV. The *Canons of Dort* call conversion “the regeneration, the new creation, the raising from the dead, and the making alive so clearly proclaimed in the Scriptures, which God works in us without our help.” It is “an entirely supernatural work, one that is at the same time most powerful and most pleasing, a marvelous, hidden, and inexpressible work.” Upon this doctrine of conversion as God’s sovereign and miraculous work in us, the Reformed doctrine of baptism stands or falls. Furthermore, since “in this life believers cannot fully understand the way this work occurs,” we are wrong to look for proof of our salvation in our own experience, but rather in the promises of God. Therefore, the baptism of infants is not only not a problem, but a deep act of faith in God’s promises and God’s converting work.

The *Canons of Dort* forcefully argue against the Pelagian and Arminian idea that, “after God has done the divine work, it remains in the power of individuals whether or not to be reborn or conversed” (Article 12). The *Canons of Dort* are in stark contrast to the Arminian view that dominates modern Protestant doctrine, the view called “decisional regeneration” (Old, 24), which says that one’s own decision for God determines one’s conversion and regeneration. (“There is a big difference between decisional regeneration and justification by faith” (Old, 25). In harmony with a “decisional regeneration” approach is a view of baptism which regards it as a human testimony to the human decision. Once this view is taken, the restriction of baptism to adults is almost inevitable. The Reformed doctrine of baptism as expressed in all RCA doctrinal standards can be seen simply as an extension of the basic Reformed convictions on divine election (predestination), the sovereignty of God, and justification by faith. When these are doubted or poorly understood, the RCA’s historic doctrine and practice of baptism will necessarily suffer.
The original Liturgy’s Form for Baptism (in exclusive use until 1906) explains baptismal water as a metaphor both of birth and of washing. First, the water teaches us that we are born in sin and need to be born again. Second, the water signifies and seals to us that our sins are washed in Jesus Christ. The form then explains the trinitarian formula. Baptism in God the Father is the sign and seal of our adoption, and of God’s unilateral establishment of a covenant of grace with us. Baptism in God the Son means washing in his blood, incorporation into his death and resurrection (Rom. 6:5), freedom from sin, and reconciliation. Baptism in the Holy Spirit is the assurance of the actual indwelling of the Spirit in us (in infants no less than adults) and incorporation into the person of Christ as living members, plus daily cleansing and daily renewal, and the preservation of our perfection in Christ. Once again, the emphasis is on baptism as a real and miraculous work of the Holy Spirit in us, connecting us with the covenant of Christ’s passion.

But, since all covenants include two parties, God, through baptism, calls us to the “new obedience,” which is cleaving to, trusting in, and loving the trinitarian God, forsaking the world, crucifying the old nature, and walking in a new and holy life. This new obedience on our part is pure response to God’s gracious action, and not something which somehow completes the covenant. (Once again the example of Jacob is apropos.) All the human obligations in the covenant have been completely met by Jesus Christ upon the cross, the benefits of which are extended to us by God. Whenever our experiences and consciences might lead us to doubt the reality of our own regeneration, our baptism serves as a “seal and undoubted testimony that we have an eternal covenant of grace with God.”

Because the covenant is unilaterally enacted by a gracious God, the actual ceremony in the RCA’s original Liturgy was very simple. After the long exposition and admonition, there came a vivid and powerful prayer for the work of the Holy Spirit. After this there were three questions asked of the parents, but these are not “vows” or “renunciations,” but actually a mild form of discipline. By answering these questions, parents were not somehow fulfilling their part in a covenant agreement. Since God had already unilaterally enacted the covenant, parents could not add anything or complete the covenant. Rather, the questions were intended to avoid the “custom or superstition” that often accompanies baptism. The Form for Baptism closes with a second prayer, which confidently thanks God for the Spirit’s accomplishment of all the saving work that baptism signifies, and asks that the Spirit continue the work in the child into eternity.

The combined message of our constitutional documents may be restated as follows. Baptism is a covenantal sign which God uses to communicate to the church God’s gospel promises, to enhance and deepen the impact of the preaching of the gospel, and to seal the promises to us. It is the covenantal sign which God has offered us that both testifies and assures us of...
God's promises. As we participate in that covenantal sign, baptism is the means by which we corporately embrace the work of God among us, binding us to the passion and resurrection of Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ is the true object which baptism presents to us. Because Christ is present, God, by that same Spirit, washes us clean from sin with Christ's blood, incorporates us into the fellowship of Christ's death and resurrection, makes us members of his body, and shares with us the Spirit of Christ, adopting us and naming us as children of God along with Christ.

This is accomplished not by the water, but by God's action through the power of the Holy Spirit, and this action of God we appropriate by faith. Yet water is God's chosen covenantal sign, to which God binds both God and us, so that, by our use of it, we are assured that as certainly as we receive the water upon our bodies so certainly does God act in us to fulfill God's promises.

Our part in baptism, our response, is to believe and confess, that is, to receive, by faith, God's promises and God's presence, to accept the covenantal sign, and to live a life of belief and confession. It is also to "remember" the passion and resurrection of Christ, and we do this, in obedience to Christ, whenever we eat and drink as he commanded.

Both baptism and holy communion are intimately related as our celebrations of the passion and resurrection of Christ. Holy communion expresses the continuous side of salvation, the recurrent remembrance and renewal and the need continually to confess, repent, and be converted (Heidelberg Catechism 88-91). This is an important side to God's plan of salvation and our experience of it. But there is another side, the once-for-all act of God, the whole side of salvation that is expressed in such themes as election, imputed righteousness, and our completely gratuitous inclusion in God's covenant. Both sides of salvation, the continuous and the once-for-all, need to be held together.

Baptism is the means by which we claim all those once-for-all type themes of salvation in the Bible. It is also the means by which we modern believers participate in a whole range of scriptural events. Through baptism we participate, most importantly, in Christ's passion and resurrection, and thereby we also participate in the flood, in the exodus from Egypt, and in the crossing of the Jordan.

From its doctrinal standards the RCA needs to reclaim the doctrines: first, that baptism is a real covenantal sign and seal by which God interacts with us; second, that the Holy Spirit is the chief actor in baptism; third, that we are not just passive in baptism, but that our part of baptism is to believe the sign and participate in the covenantal act; and fourth, that baptism, with holy communion, is a celebration of Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension. Furthermore, a real spiritual concern needs to be addressed among RCA members: that if a baptized person's life turns out in a such a way as to cause others to doubt that person's salvation, we should not thereby think that we are forced to doubt God's covenantal promises. We must leave the matter in the knowledge of God and not presume to judge, but faithfully remind every baptized person that baptism is a call to be born again. Finally, addressing the semi-Pelagianism and mild Arminianism in our common religious consciousness is a never-ending task, but it has everything to do with baptism.

RENEWING AND REMEMBERING BAPTISM

In spite of its use in the wider church, there are reasons why the RCA ought to avoid phrases such as "renewal of baptismal vows" and "remembering baptism." God is the one who makes vows in baptism. God alone enacts the covenant signified by baptism; and because God is faithful, the covenant does not need renewing. As concerns remembering our
baptisms, the fact is, those of us who were baptized in infancy cannot actually remember our baptisms. But more important, the whole point of baptism, from a Reformed point of view, is a celebration of God’s promise in opposition to our experience. What each of us needs to remember is not his or her own particular baptisms, but first, what baptism means and promises, and second, “that I am baptized, and remembering that I’m baptized, I know who I am.”

Holy Communion has been ordained by God as the normal and regular means of remembering this passion, and that is why it ought to be done with frequency, and why children ought to be invited to participate, when they are most impressionable and their memories are being formed. Because children enjoy symbols and images and learn best from concrete, physical realities, their participation in the Lord’s Supper can powerfully shape their faith.

Although we each have our own story, there is one great story, the gospel, and the story needs to be heard, and learned, and believed, and enjoyed, and repeated. Children easily come to know this story and are happy to hear it again and again. The church remembers this story whenever the Word and the Lord’s Supper are celebrated in fullness and with integrity. It is very important that every member of the congregation be included in the normal course of the congregation’s worship, for it is in the preaching of the Word and the celebration of the sacraments that God creates and strengthens faith in us. The more baptized children are invited to participate in worship in ways that capitalize on their special gifts—which include a sincere and direct enjoyment of drinking the cup and eating the bread of Communion—the more they remember the story and the more they experience God’s blessing.

But each believer has his or her own story too, and we need to weave the one story into our own particular stories. Our own stories keep changing and growing. What we need to remember is the one story so that we can keep weaving it into our own stories. We are strengthened when we can celebrate that weaving in the congregation. Not everyone of us will be equally as forward with sharing our own stories, nor equally as willing to let the one story interpret our own story. But the church needs to provide opportunities for people to celebrate God’s promises, culminating in professions of faith. The celebrative event does not have to be a retelling of either story, the one or our own, but only a marker, a monument, to remind us that God has brought us this far.

EBENEZER AGAIN

When an individual is baptized, that person is engaged “to confess the faith of Christ crucified, and to be his faithful servant unto [his/her] life’s end.” For those baptized in infancy or childhood, the call to confess the faith of Christ crucified does not wait for adulthood. A child who sings “Jesus Loves Me,” prays the Lord’s Prayer with the congregation, recites a Bible verse, or shares the bread and cup is confessing faith in Jesus.

The Belgic Confession claims that “baptism is profitable not only when the water is on us and when we receive it but throughout our entire lives” (Article 34). In baptism, through the power of the Spirit, God’s promises are sealed to us. In baptism, God assures us that the Spirit is and will be at work in us to give us faith, conform us to the dying and rising Christ, and open our mouths in confession. How can the RCA encourage all its members to confess the faith of Christ crucified throughout their entire lives? How can the RCA help us show that our baptisms are profitable for our entire lives? If confirmation cannot accomplish these things, what shall we do instead? We must find ways for RCA congregations to provide their members with opportunities for Ebenezers, occasions of remembrance, of confession, of rededication, and of blessing.
These Ebenezers will be landmarks and milestones along each person’s pilgrimage, at which point a person confesses to God before the congregation, “Hither by thy help I’m come; and I hope, by thy good pleasure, safely to arrive at home.” For a Reformed Christian, this hope is not a description of one’s own emotions as much as a declaration of faith in God’s promises. The raising of an Ebenezer may occur at different times in each person’s history with God, and, as in the case of Jacob, it may be done again and again.

In Jacob’s story God’s blessing comes dramatically, through vivid dreams and wrestling matches, and Jacob responds in belief and confession. He piles up stones and tells the story of God’s blessing for the sake of all God’s people. Not everyone can claim such dramatic experiences which have convicted them and prompted them to confess the certainty of God’s promise. Very often, our readiness to confess is born out of the rather ordinary patterns and events of our lives in which we can trace God’s faithfulness and grace.

From the perspective of faith development theory, as we move through life we need both educational and liturgical opportunities which enable us to respond to God’s grace in Jesus Christ—first given in our baptisms and nourished through Word and sacrament. Unique life issues, gifts, and capacities in childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, middle adulthood and older adulthood challenge individuals to deepen their self-understanding as people of God and to strengthen their commitment to the ministry of Jesus Christ. Both the RCA’s educational offerings and liturgical celebrations for the raising of one’s Ebenezer need to take account of the human life cycle.

Soon after children are able to speak, they begin to ask “why?” They are eager to learn and to understand how the world works. They are curious about everything. Very often, their questions are prompted by seeing something new. So, when a three-year-old watches others celebrate the Lord’s Supper, he or she will want to know why people are eating bread in church. He or she will also want to know why he or she wasn’t given any. When a six-year-old watches a parent kneeling to receive the laying on of hands in church, he or she will ask “Why did those people put their hands on you?” Children are learning to trust that others care for, love, and value them. They know through concrete reality. They trust they are loved when someone feeds them, hugs them, gives them a lap to sit in, reads them a story, and makes them feel welcome. Children trust God’s love for them when they are invited to eat the holy food which God provides for them. Children can raise their Ebenezer through simple words of confession and through simple drawings which tell the Christian story.

Those in early adolescence have a deep need for a sense of identity and belonging while at the same time they are trying to establish their independence. They are affirmed in their identity and find a sense of belonging primarily through personal relationships with peers, family members, and other adults in their lives, not through institutional membership. But they also need a place to begin to exercise autonomy in their thought and action. They are ready to ask their own questions concerning the Christian faith. This questioning aids them in their search for something to which they can be deeply faithful. They watch Christian adults in order to discover if faith in Jesus Christ can be for them a way toward a deep and enduring fidelity. This is why the use of mentors in educational programs for adolescents is key. Educational programs for young adolescents and opportunities for the raising of their Ebenezers should stress identity, belonging, a growing independence, readiness to help, and the perpetual blessing of God.

Older adolescents continue to search for identity and a place to belong. But persons in this life stage have new cognitive capacities which deepen possibilities for learning about self and others. They are able to step outside their own experience and to be reflective about their lives thus far. Out of this reflection and deepening perspective on the self, older adolescents have a more stable sense of who they are which enables them to begin to project themselves into the future. But they now look to peers, family members, persons in intimate relationships,
and other adults to discover whether their own sense of self is accurate. They are interested to know how they are perceived by others. This concern makes them terribly self-conscious, yet they cannot help wondering and looking for others to be the mirror in which they see themselves. They need to know: Are their personal hopes for the future reasonable? Are they becoming the kind of people they and others want them to be? Are they really gifted? Is God pleased with them? Older adolescents need educational opportunities which allow them to know God, self, and others more deeply. When they raise their Ebenezers, they are ready to confess a faith which they are beginning to make their own, to make commitments to specific missions, and to offer the personal talents and gifts they are learning to trust.

Young adults, because they have achieved a fuller measure of autonomy from parents and other institutional authority, are in a position to recognize and trust their own authority. They are in a position to answer some of the questions of their adolescent years. Consequently, they are ready to take deep ownership of their faith in Jesus Christ. They are also more likely to find their sense of identity and belonging through their membership in institutions such as the church. They will commit themselves to the work of institutions which provide opportunities for them to live out their faith commitments. At this faith stage, Christian education should focus on the shaping of vocation and Christian ethical living. The public confession of faith can include an explicit commitment on the part of the young adult to particular ministries in church and society, and the deepening of God’s blessing. At this life stage, persons need encouragement to affirm and focus their continuing vocation within and outside the ministering community.

The most profound wrestling with the implications of the Christian faith tend to occur in middle adulthood. At this life stage, many adults have had opportunities to lead and teach in the church. In some ways, their faith is solid. But, by middle age many adults will have experienced profound disappointment and loss through child-rearing, death, divorce, unemployment, and unfulfilled hopes for themselves and loved ones. Many will have struggled to raise children in the Christian faith and will bear feelings of guilt for their “failure” as parents. Persons in middle adulthood also find themselves assessing their lives and vocations. They have a sense that if they are going to make vocational changes, they ought to do it before it is too late. They also are ready to reflect seriously on the vocation of the Christian life and to move toward deepening commitments in the years ahead. Education for middle adults should help them discover the ways in which their stories have aligned with the great story and choose paths which will strengthen that alignment. They will need educational and liturgical opportunities to confess, repent, heal, and move toward a deepening commitment to Jesus Christ.

Older adults are also in search of a place to assess their lives and to name the ways in which they have been blessed and have been a blessing. They need to have ample opportunity to bless the generations which follow them. They need to bear witness to the power of God’s presence in the everyday realities of their lives. They seek a place in which to share the wisdom gained through their daily dying and rising through the Spirit of Christ. When they raise their Ebenezers and make their confession of faith in Jesus Christ, they stand as wise guarantors that God’s promises are true and constant. They also stand in need of God’s sure blessing as they journey to the ends of their lives.

Throughout the life cycle, Christians need to be nurtured in the faith of Jesus Christ, and they need chances to mark and celebrate the certainty of God’s promises to them through life’s ordinary and extraordinary circumstances. In part, this need is met through the raising of Ebenezers in the context of the Sunday worship. Here it serves as a witness to the whole congregation.
Outside this context, congregations have the freedom to engage in other kinds of celebrations which mark the developmental life cycles of its members, as well as the congregation's particular racial/ethnic traditions. It makes great sense for God's people to mark important ethnic festivals and personal and communal anniversaries, as well as individual life changes, in ways which are meaningful. It is wise for members of local congregations to also mark together the painful times like divorce, the breakup of close relationships, or the loss of employment. In the context of worship, these realities can be acknowledged in the congregation's prayers. Some of these life-changing events can be marked by rituals which take place in the context of confidential pastoral care. Others can take place throughout the week, in smaller meetings of groups in the church.

Christian families should also be encouraged to develop and engage in family rituals which acknowledge God's presence and mark changes in the lives of family members which are accompanied by changes in family relationships, rights, and responsibilities. Rituals, ceremonies, and celebrations provide an opportunity to pause, take note, focus attention, and mark important moments and transitions. These special times can help shape identity, increase a sense of belonging and worth, and strengthen our personal and communal memories.

While congregations ought to be encouraged to create and engage in rites and ceremonies which speak to their particular social needs, rituals which are to be enacted in public worship in the RCA must find their beginning in God's activity, and they must take account of the theological and ritual traditions of the church universal, as well as the Reformed traditions. Such rituals or liturgies need to be developed by more than a single local congregation so that they might be approved for use in the whole RCA and become a standard part of the denomination's Liturgy.

What this paper has argued is that the RCA needs an order for the public profession of faith which enables its members to respond over and over again to the promises of God. The RCA needs a liturgical form for "Ebenezer-raising" which helps RCA members acknowledge and celebrate the Spirit's work, begun in baptism, and continuing in the lives of children, adolescents, and young, middle, and older adults.

A liturgical order for the public profession of faith to be used throughout the life cycle will provide an opportunity for persons to confess the universal Christian faith and to bear witness to their own convictions concerning God's promise. As part of the order for confession, persons will be able to present their gifts for ministry to God and the congregation, and congregations will be able to receive these gifts, commission those confessing to new service in the church and world, and give God's blessing. Each of these aspects are important, but there is special importance in the act of blessing those who make their confession and commitment.

The story of Jacob shows that God's blessing confirms God's promise and confirms Jacob's identity as God's chosen one. Jacob's life also demonstrates that God's blessing is concerned with people throughout their whole lives, from birth to maturity. Blessing needs to be given when adults choose vocations, change vocations, take partners in marriage, welcome children, let go of children, deepen Christian commitment, lose partners to death, or face their own deaths. Jacob's story assures us of both our need to receive and God's intent to give us God's blessing over and over again. The church is the channel of God's blessing. We can celebrate God's promise to bless and make us a blessing anytime a person is moved by the Spirit to claim publicly that individual's identity as a disciple of Christ, or to witness to the strength of God's promise in his or her life at a given moment, or to deepen that person's commitment and vocation in the Christian life. The Liturgy for the public profession of faith needs to emphasize and dramatize the reality of God's blessing.
It is expected that children and adults will confess their faith in public worship over and over again. This order for confession is not to be used or understood as admittance to the Lord’s Table, since baptism is the liturgical act which admits persons to the Lord’s Table. Neither is it to be taken as a “renewal of the baptismal covenant” nor a “confirmation” of baptism or baptismal vows. Its import is the lifelong need to confess one’s faith as a response to the fact of one’s own baptism.

However, it is important that at least one of a person’s public confessions of faith include a meeting with the elders. This meeting would make explicit the fact that the person confessing faith in Christ now willingly acknowledges and submits to the authority of the elders who themselves exercise the authority of Jesus Christ. In addition, the elders recognize their accountability to this member who is maturing in the faith of Christ crucified. This confession of faith, which includes the mutual recognition of accountability between the church member and the elders, could occur anytime in the member’s life. The elders are responsible to encourage such confession and to practice discernment concerning the member’s readiness to be included among the church’s “confessing members.” (See “Membership Terminology” from the Report of the Task Force on Remembering Baptism, Professing Faith, and Membership Terminology in the Church Order section.)

The order for the public confession of faith should not be in the form of a directory, but of an actual liturgical form, with certain fixed and stable central elements, such as the Apostles’ Creed, a main prayer for the Holy Spirit, and a blessing with the laying on of hands. The order should also provide for a significant number of options and adaptations to correspond to particular life stages and occasions.

We need rituals to help us mark and celebrate the Spirit’s work of conversion begun in baptism and completed in death. Some of these can occur in the community of faith, some in the context of family, some as part of Sunday worship. But glorious rituals alone will not keep children or adults in the church. The church also needs to find more effective ways to nurture people in the Christian faith through all the stages of life, and to support families in this holy labor with children and youth. Children and youth need to be welcomed into the full life of the church from the day of their baptism, to listen and learn from them, and to receive and celebrate their many gifts long before they reach the age at which they can serve on consistory. When these things are taking place, we will see that the Spirit is powerfully at work in the whole congregation, giving endless cause for celebration, thanksgiving, and the raising of Ebenezers in confession of the Christian faith.

NOTES:

1 As God had done once before at the Jabbok, Genesis 32:28.


3 This form dates from 1563 and was published together with the Heidelberg Catechism. It is still part of the RCA Constitution as “An Alternate Order for the Administration of Baptism, 1968” in Liturgy and Confessions. The titles of the sections are not original. Calling the three questions “vows” is an anachronism.

4 In the RCA a major section of the first prayer, the so-called Flood Prayer, originally by Luther, was deleted from the RCA Liturgy by John Henry Livingston after 1814. The RCA thereby lost the prayer’s powerful biblical typology—the flood and the Red Sea and the clear evocation of Romans 6. The Flood Prayer, essentially Leo Jud’s Zurich version of Luther’s original composition, was as follows:
O Almighty and eternal God, who in thy severe judgment didst punish the unbelieving and impenitent world with the flood, and didst of thy great mercy save and preserve eight souls to faithful Noah, who didst drown the hard-hearted Pharaoh with all his host in the Red Sea, and didst lead thy people Israel through the same with dry feet, through which baptism was signified, we beseech thee that thou wilt be pleased of thy infinite mercy, graciously to look upon thy children, and incorporate them by the Holy Spirit into thy Son Jesus Christ, that they may be buried with him into his death, and be raised with him in newness of life, that they may daily follow him, joyfully bearing their cross, and cleave unto him in true faith, firm hope, and ardent love, that they may with a comfortable sense of thy favor, leave this life (which is nothing but a continual death) and at the last day, may appear without terror before the judgment seat of Christ thy Son, through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who with thee and the Holy Ghost, one only God, lives and reigns for ever, Amen.

A proposed liturgical order for “Remembering Baptism and Professing Faith” is currently before the RCA.

R-4.
To instruct the Commission on Christian Worship, in consultation with the General Synod Council’s Congregational Services Committee, to prepare an Order for Professing Faith; and further,

to include in this order such possibilities for adaptation that it might serve not only as the order used when a person makes an initial profession of faith, but also as an order which may be used at other significant times in a person’s life; and further,

to include a section in this order that provides for a meeting with the board of elders when appropriate. (ADOPTED)

R-5.
[To request the General Synod Council’s Congregational Services Committee, in consultation with the Commission on Christian Worship, to assist RCA congregations in responding to the needs and more fully incorporating the gifts of all their members, especially children, youth, and young adults, in the context of worship; and further,

to request Congregational Services to identify resources which can be used by RCA congregations to develop observances to mark significant life events of their members.]*

> Upon recommendation of the advisory committee, the following was substituted for R-5:

To request the General Synod Council Congregational Services Committee, in consultation with the Commission on Christian Worship, to assist RCA congregations by identifying resources which can be used to develop observances to mark significant life events of their members, giving consideration to more fully incorporating in the context of worship the gifts of all their members, especially children, youth, and young adults. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The substitute clarifies the purpose of R-5.<

*Deletion is enclosed in brackets.
From the Report of the General Secretary

P-2 was referred to the Advisory Committee on Christian Worship.

In response to P-2 (p. 40), the advisory committee recommended:

R-6.
To direct the General Synod Council to make plans for a joint consultation among the Reformed Church in America and other denominations in the Reformed and Presbyterian tradition on the "Theology and Practice of Reformed Worship in the Midst of Contemporary Culture"; and further,

to establish the membership of the consultation to be broad-based, involving both laity and clergy, including those from new as well as long-established congregations. (ADOPTED)

Reason: After consultation with the general secretary and with his agreement, R-6 further clarifies the general secretary's intent expressed in P-2.
REPORTS ON CHURCH ORDER

Report of the Commission on Church Order

Since the 1994 meeting of the General Synod, the Commission on Church Order met on September 30, 1994, and February 24, 1995, near O'Hare airport in Chicago, Illinois, to consider referrals from the General Synod and other matters related to church order.

CLERGY CONTRACTS

The Classis of Montgomery submitted an overture to the 1993 General Synod “to undertake a study on the policy of contracts for ordained clergy” (MGS 1993, p. 341).

In response, the 1993 General Synod voted:

To instruct the Office of Human Resources, in consultation with the Commission on Church Order, to undertake a study on the policy of contracts for ordained clergy (MGS 1993, R-25, p. 342).

A paper, “Clergy Contracts,” was prepared by the Office of Ministry and Personnel Services and presented at the 1994 General Synod (MGS 1994, pp. 240-43). After review of this paper, the Advisory Committee on Church Order recommended and the 1994 General Synod adopted the following:

To refer the paper, “Clergy Contracts,” to the Commission on Church Order for review and report to the 1995 General Synod (MGS 1994, R-16, p. 243).

At its September 1994 meeting the commission reviewed the paper and agreed, by consensus, to resubmit the paper to the 1995 General Synod. The paper follows:

CLERGY CONTRACTS

In response to an overture from the Classis of Montgomery, the General Synod of 1993 voted:

To instruct the Office of Human Resources, in consultation with the Commission on Church Order, to undertake a study on the policy of contracts for ordained clergy. (MGS 1993, R-25, p. 342).

In its request for a study of such contracts, the Classis of Montgomery observed in its reasons accompanying the overture that contracts for ordained clergy “seem to violate our understanding of a call.” The classis further stated the RCA “should not abandon its practice simply for reasons such as age or convenience,” and “the church should remain theologically consistent in its hiring of ordained clergy.” The classis also suggested private employers of clergy such as nursing homes, colleges, and the armed forces may make contractual demands that cannot be avoided, but a copy of the written contract should be required and kept on file by the classis and the Office of Human Resources to “safeguard the agreement and to assure that the agreement is theologically consistent with our understanding of a call” (MGS 1993, p. 341).

In its “general superintendence over its enrolled ministers” (BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 2, Section 1), a classis is responsible:
to install every minister to a form of ministry appropriate to the office, whether under a call or contract, full-time or part-time, traditional or specialized ministry, and regardless of remuneration (BCO, Chapter I, Part II, Article 13, Section 4a).

The form of ministry, however, must meet the following clearly stated requirements:

1. Is a ministry which makes a responsible use of the minister’s education and gifts.

2. Is performed under the jurisdiction or with the approval of a classis of the Reformed Church in America.

3. Is intended to witness to the Word in the world or to nurture and train Christians for their ministry in the world (BCO, Chapter I, Article 13, Section 4).

A classis which has approved a form of ministry as appropriate has no jurisdiction over matters of compensation unless the employer is also under the jurisdiction of the classis. In effect, this means that while a classis has every right to determine what constitutes “competent worldly maintenance” (see BCO, Appendix, The Formularies of the Reformed Church in America, No. 5, Call to a Minister of Word and Sacrament) when one of its ministers serves a congregation of the classis, it has no such authority over other employers.

To insist that ministry should take place only in such arenas which comply with the compensation standards set by the classis would be limiting and less than faithful to the RCA’s understanding of the Christian mission. The Book of Church Order’s wise provision includes “witness to the Word in the world” (BCO, Chapter I, Part II, Article 13, Section 4.a3).

With regard to RCA congregations, the Book of Church Order provides that “the consistory shall provide a minister, or ministers, for the church” (BCO, Chapter I, Part I, Article 2, Section 2). Such ministers are to be called (not provided with a contract) by the church if they are to serve as the installed “minister” or “associate minister” of the congregation. Such installation shall be in full accordance with provisions spelled out in the Book of Church Order (see BCO, Chapter I, Part II, Article 13, Section 4a). The only permissible uses of contracts between its ministers and RCA churches are: 1) when a classis permits a church to “contract for the purpose of maintaining public worship, under that church’s direction, in a place or pulpit in any locality, or provide assistance for its own installed minister/s” (BCO, Chapter I, Part II, Article 7, Section 9); and 2) between a minister and a particular congregation upon the minister’s attainment of the age of seventy years on a “renewable contract basis” (BCO, Chapter I, Part II, Article 13, Section 9).

In the first permissible use of contracts noted in the above paragraph, the BCO continues: “In such cases a formal call is not required, though the classis shall review all such appointments annually” (BCO, Chapter I, Part II, Article 7, Section 9). In the second permissible use of contracts noted above, the BCO states: “the length of time of the contract being no more than one year at a time, with each renewal approved by consistory and classis” (BCO, Chapter I, Part II, Article 13, Section 9).

The implication is clear that contracts are permitted only when the church is without an installed minister, when the services of a specialized interim minister are desired between installed ministers, when additional assistant ministers are required to fulfill the demands of ministry in a church which already has one or more installed ministers, when a church wishes to maintain worship under its direction in a location other than the place where a congregation normally meets, or where a pastoral relationship is desired with a minister who is older than seventy. In every instance, contracts call for annual review and additional approval by the classis each time they are reviewed.
It is clear the issuance of a call and the provisions which surround the call to the minister are intended to be normative for congregations of the Reformed Church in America. Instances, however, have been reported in which the use of a “contract” was a means exploited to avoid minimum compensation and benefit requirements established by the classis. Such use of contracts currently violate the spirit of the Book of Church Order, except in those instances in which part-time ministry is indicated. In other instances, contracts have been utilized as a means of avoiding what was perceived to be a tenured relationship which would be difficult to terminate. A specific schedule for reevaluation of the relationship with use of a contract seemed preferable. Again, the practice violates both the spirit of the Book of Church Order and is in conflict with the theology inherent in the concept of the call.

It may be helpful to make as clear a distinction as possible between what is meant by the terms “call” and “contract.” They are synonymous terms in that both imply an agreement between two parties to provide the unique services required by a church of an ordained minister. However, “contract” carries with it the implication of a commercial transaction, whereas “call” implies a significant theological component in the agreement. The concept of “call” includes covenant. As with the covenant between God and Israel, as well as with the church as the new Israel, the doctrine of election is deeply involved. Election brings with it both blessings and responsibilities, and covenant implies an enduring quality of faithfulness which is not easily or lightly terminated.

Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary indicates the terms “contract,” “agreement,” “bargain,” “compact,” and “covenant” are each descriptive of a mutual arrangement between two parties. It goes on to state that whereas “agreement” is the most general term which often implies little more than a mutual understanding, “contract” applies especially to such formal agreements as are legally binding. “Covenant” has specific referral to solemn religious engagements. This clarification from a secular source confirms the appropriateness of the “call” (with its implication of covenant) when defining the relationship of ministers and congregations.

The use of specific term contracts instead of a call has much in common with the illusions which surround trial marriages. The “for better or worse” quality in a lasting marriage bears similarity to the relationship between a minister and a congregation. A minister’s call carries an implication of an established connectedness within family rather than that of an employer-employee with the right to hire and fire. Ministers are not employees of churches in the same sense that those who work for a corporation are employed. They are rather chosen to be the spiritual leaders of a faith community, all members of which stand in covenantal relationship with one another. The justly prized tradition of “freedom of the pulpit” gives the preacher responsibility to proclaim the message of the Scriptures even when the clear guidance of the Holy Spirit may not be popular with the hearers. This freedom becomes a mockery if a decision as to whether or not to renew a contract casts a permanent shadow over the pulpit.

The language of the RCA Liturgy gives further expression to the kind of relationship which is intended to exist between a minister and a congregation. In the service of installation, the words used are “to invest with this sacred office” (Liturgy and Psalms, New York: The Board of Education of the Reformed Church in America, 1968, p. 102), not “employ” or “contract with.” Whereas one of the purposes of a contracted minister is to provide assistance to the installed ministers, the called and installed minister is enjoined in the Liturgy to “proclaim... to instruct, admonish, confront, and reprove, ...and to refute and, to call upon the name of the Lord, ...administer the sacraments, ...to govern the Church of God” (Liturgy and Psalms, p. 103). The verbs used are significant. The congregation, for its part, promises within the same Liturgy to receive this person as its minister, “to submit...to encourage and help, ...and to labor with,” and “provide competent worldly maintenance” (Liturgy and Psalms, p. 105). Such language is significantly more appropriate to a mutual covenant than it would be to an employment contract.
Finally, contractual thinking in lieu of covenantal relationships leads to a very different relationship between pastor and congregation. A minister’s contract is easily seen in business or commercial terms. The minister becomes a professional functionary. What the minister does for the church overshadows what the minister is in relationship to the church in a shared ministry.

At the same time, while the minister’s call carries implications of a lasting covenantal relationship, it does not obviate the importance of effective leadership by the minister or ministers. The need for accountability is in fact greater within the concept of covenant than it is in the more instrumental understanding of contract. One who is in covenant does not take “time off” from the conditions of the relationship, whereas someone under contract may justly consider that he or she can be “minister” for only a certain number of hours per week. (This is not to suggest that ministers do not owe to themselves, their families, and their congregations “time off” for adequate renewal. The concept of sabbath applies to them as well. It does mean that he or she does not cease being a minister, and indeed, the congregation’s minister, when at rest or leisure.)

Neither does the relationship of a called minister and congregation, although intended to be of significant duration, imply permanent tenure. The Book of Church Order provides for dissolution of a pastoral relationship for sufficient cause, even when both parties may not agree (see BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 13, Section 8).

Here John Calvin’s wisdom concerning the tie which binds minister and congregation is instructive to both parties of the covenant. Calvin noted that once a minister has been installed in a church:

> he is bound to this law of the divine call . . . [This does not mean] that he is fixed to his station so as never to be permitted to leave it in a regular or orderly manner, if the public benefit should require it; but he who has been called to one place ought never to think either of departing from his situation, or relinquishing the office altogether, from any motive of personal convenience or advantage. But if it be expedient that he should remove to another station, he ought not to attempt this on his own private opinion, but to be guided by public authority (Institutes of the Christian Religion, Book IV, Chapter 3, Section 7).

Such is the language of sacred covenant, not commercial contract. Both ministers and consistories will do well to remember the special nature of their relationship.

**R-1.**

To encourage RCA congregations and classes to use the paper, “Clergy Contracts,” as a study resource for understanding clergy contracts and clergy calls. (ADOPTED)

**INTERPRET BOOK OF CHURCH ORDER TERMS “NOTORIOUS” AND SCANDALOUS”**

The Classis of Mid-Hudson submitted the following overture to the 1994 General Synod:

> . . . to interpret and define the terminology “notorious” and “scandalous” in the BCO, Chapter 2, Part I, Article 2, Section 2 (MGS 1994, Overture 1, p. 245).

In response, the 1994 General Synod voted:

To refer Overture 1 to the Commission on Church Order for study and report to the 1995 General Synod (MGS 1994, R-17, p. 245).
At its September 1994 meeting the commission reviewed Overture 1 and agreed, by consensus, that it is the responsibility and obligation of each local board of elders and classis to define the terms "notorious" and "scandalous" within the context of local standards on a case-by-case basis. The commission then noted the terms "notorious" and "scandalous" are intended to define "public offenses."

Using only these two terms, "notorious" and "scandalous" eliminates the need for a list of sins as was previously found in the BCO. It also eliminates the possibility of an oversight of not listing a specific offense that is "notorious" and "scandalous." Using general terms like "notorious" and "scandalous" is more flexible.

The commission notes that the 1994 General Synod directed the General Synod Council to appoint a task force to study revisions of Chapter 2 of the BCO, "The Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures" (MGS 1994, p. 51). Since the task force will review the terms "notorious" and "scandalous" in its revisions of Chapter 2, the commission has determined no further review of these terms is necessary and no formal recommendation to the 1995 General Synod is presented.

DEACON REPRESENTATION AT CLASSIS MEETINGS

The Classis of Rocky Mountains submitted the following overture to the 1994 General Synod:

... to incorporate revisions of the Book of Church Order to allow deacon delegate representatives from each congregation within its bounds to have the privilege of voting on all issues brought before the classis except on matters dealing with Christian discipline; and further,

to permit each classis to have the option of including or not including voting deacon delegates (MGS 1994, p. 246).

Although the Advisory Committee on Church Order recommended denial of this overture, the 1994 General Synod did not adopt the advisory committee's recommendation (MGS 1994, R-18, p. 246). Instead, upon a motion from the floor, the 1994 General Synod voted:

To instruct the Commission on Church Order to incorporate revisions of the Book of Church Order to allow at classis meetings deacon delegate representatives from each congregation within its bounds; and further,

to allow classis deacon delegate representatives to have the privilege of voting on all issues brought before the classis except on matters dealing with Christian discipline; and further,

to instruct the Commission on Church Order to present its report on deacon representation at classis meetings at the 1995 General Synod (MGS 1994, p. 247).


The commission, also at its September 1994 meeting, reviewed the different plans for diaconal representation proposed to the 1988 General Synod (MGS 1988, pp. 239-41); 1989 General Synod (MGS 1989, pp. 207-09); and 1991 General Synod (MGS 1991, pp. 228-31).
All of these plans proposed diaconal representation at the classis, regional synod, and General Synod level.

After discussing and reviewing a variety of plans, the commission is presenting a plan for deacon delegate representation at the classis level only and is not proposing deacon delegate representation at the regional synod or General Synod level. The commission determined the most workable plan is to insert into the BCO the words “and may have a deacon delegate” after the words “elder delegates” in each section of the BCO pertaining to delegates at the classis level. The commission notes that use of these words “may have” fulfills the intent of the overture from the Classis of Rocky Mountains to allow each classis to have the option of deacon delegate representatives. In other words, the classis is not required to have deacon delegate representatives. It is an option.

As for the role and participation of deacons during times of judicial business, the commission, at its September 1994 meeting, reviewed its report on this matter presented at the 1991 General Synod (MGS 1991, pp. 227-28) and noted that deacons could be permitted to participate in debate and vote on judicial business. The only exception, however, concerned matters of discipline. On matters of discipline, participation and voting would continue to be limited to elders only. The commission agreed, by consensus, to allow deacons to participate and vote in most matters of judicial business, except for discipline.

R-2.
[To amend the BCO where the elder(s) is referred to as a delegate to classis by adding the phrase “and/or deacon(s)” after each reference to “elder(s),” for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined):

Chapter 1 The Government

Part II The Classis

Article 1. Classis Defined

The classis is an assembly consisting of all the enrolled ministers of that body and the elder and/or deacon delegates who represent all the churches within its bounds. The classis is a permanent, continuing body which functions between stated sessions through committees. Voting rights shall be limited to elder and/or deacon delegates and those enrolled ministers who are actively serving as ministers either under the jurisdiction of or with the approval of the classis.

Article 3. Elder and/or Deacon Delegates

Sec. 1. A church with three hundred or fewer active-confirmed members shall have one elder delegate and may have one deacon delegate, and an elder and/or deacon delegate for each additional three hundred active-confirmed members or fraction thereof. A church shall not have more than four such elder and/or deacon delegates. A church without an installed minister shall have an elder and/or deacon delegate who shall not be counted as one of the above delegates. A collegiate church shall have at least one elder and/or deacon delegate for each of its constituent congregations.
Sec. 3. The elder and/or deacon delegate to classis shall be chosen from the entire body of elders and/or deacons in a church, whether or not presently a member of the board of elders and/or deacons.

Sec. 4. The elder and/or deacon delegate shall be a member of classis from the date of election or appointment and shall continue in that responsibility to classis until the effective date of election or appointment of a successor. If, however, active-confirmed membership in the church represented shall be terminated during the period of appointment, the delegate shall cease to be a member of classis.

Article 4. Sessions of Classis

Sec. 1. Stated sessions of classis shall be held at least annually at such times as the classis may determine. All classis sessions shall begin and end with prayer. There shall be a sermon preached, or a devotional service, or both, at each stated session. The presence of a majority of the elder and/or deacon delegates and a majority of those ministers who are actively serving in ministries under the jurisdiction of the classis is required.

Sec. 2. The president of classis shall call a special session of classis whenever special business requires it or upon the written request of two ministers and two elder and/or deacon delegates. At least ten days' notice of any special session shall be given to all the ministers and elder and/or deacon delegates of the classis. The notice shall state the purpose of the special session. The presence of three ministers and three elder and/or deacon delegates shall constitute a quorum to transact the business stated in the notice of such special session.

Article 7. Superintendence of the Churches

Sec. 1. The president of classis, at the same meeting at which delegates to the synods are appointed, shall address the following inquiries to the ministers and elder and/or deacon delegates of each church. The answers shall be entered in the minutes of classis for the information of the synods:

a. Are the doctrines of the gospel preached in your church in their purity . . .

b. Are the points of doctrine contained in the Heidelberg Catechism explained . . . [etc.]

Article 11. Supervision of Licensure and Ordination

Sec. 3. The licensed candidate for the ministry shall not be a minister delegate to any ecclesiastical assembly or judicatory, but may be elected an elder or deacon delegate to such bodies.
Article 13. Supervision of Ministers of Word and Sacrament

Sec 6. The installed pastor shall be ipso facto a member of the church served. A minister not serving as an installed pastor shall become a member of a local church, but shall not represent that church in any classis or synod. A minister remains solely amenable to the classis, but if elected an elder or deacon, shall be entitled to all the privileges and responsibilities pertaining to that office.]

Upon recommendation of the advisory committee, the following was substituted for R-2:

To refer R-2 to the Commission on Church Order for further study and report to the 1996 General Synod. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. Recognizing the vital role of deacons and being aware of the renewed emphasis on the diaconate, the advisory committee affirmed the intent of the Commission on Church Order.

2. The proposed revisions need further clarity. The “and/or” statements are particularly subject to various interpretations.

3. Allowing for deacon representation only at the classis level leaves open the issue of the inclusion of deacons at the regional synod and General Synod levels.

R-3.
To adopt the following addition to the BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 1, for recommendation to the classes for approval (addition is underlined):

Add a fourth sentence:

Voting rights on judicial matters of discipline shall be limited to elder delegates and minister delegates.

(Because of the vote taken by Synod to refer R-2 to the Commission on Church Order, the moderator of the Commission on Church Order withdrew R-3 and the Synod did not vote on R-3.)

CERTIFICATION OF LAY PREACHERS/PASTORS

In response to an overture from the Classis of Mid-Hudson (MGS 1994, pp. 248-49), the 1994 General Synod voted:

To instruct the Commission on Church Order to study the feasibility of setting up a process to certify qualified laity for ministry for report with appropriate recommendations to the 1996 General Synod (MGS 1994, R-20, p. 249).

At its September 1994 meeting the commission noted the following in its report presented at the 1991 General Synod: “An insistence on an educated clergy has been a tradition and requirement in the RCA...preaching by an ordained minister is not to become only a periodic option” (MGS 1991, p. 234).

*Deletion is enclosed in brackets.
In further discussion, however, the commission noted that in practice lay pastors are listed in Supplement D of the RCA Directory. Also, the 1991 General Synod voted to recommend to the classes for approval amendment of the BCO, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 6e, to allow a consistory to authorize “in occasional or special circumstances, other persons to preach” (MGS 1991, R-13, pp. 234-35.) The classes approved this amendment and it was declared for incorporation into the 1992 edition of the BCO by the 1992 General Synod (MGS 1992, R-4, pp. 38-9).

Although consistories do have the authority to permit laity to preach “in occasional or special circumstances,” the commission reaffirms the requirement that the proclamation of the Word must ordinarily be performed by an ordained minister or a theological student (BCO, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 6e). “In the RCA tradition, preaching is considered to be a means of grace as significant and vital as the sacraments” (MGS 1991, p. 234).

The commission acknowledges, however, that special circumstances do occur from time to time. For these special circumstances, the commission recommends the following standards by which a lay preacher shall be measured before receiving permission to preach the Word.

R-4.
[To adopt the following revisions to the BCO, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 6e, (addition is underlined):

Sec. 6. The consistory shall be guided by the following requirements in their provision of services of worship:

e. The consistory of a church may invite or permit ministers of other denominations whose character and standard are known to preach for them. Ministers of other denominations or their counterparts whose character and standard are not known shall not be engaged to preach in a local church until they have furnished to the consistory written evidence of recent date of their good ministerial standing and of their authorization to preach the Word. The consistory shall then determine whether to issue an invitation to preach. Ordinarily, the preaching of the Word shall be performed by an ordained minister or a theological student appointed pursuant to the Government of the Reformed Church in America, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 7, or a licensed lay minister appointed pursuant to the Government of the Reformed Church in America, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 14. However, a consistory may authorize with the approval of classis, in occasional or special circumstances, other persons to preach.]*

Upon recommendation of the advisory committee, the following was substituted for R-4:

To refer the matter of certification of lay preachers/pastors to the Taks Force on Standards for the Preparation for the Professional Ministry in the Reformed Church in America for inclusion in its study of ministry.

Reasons:

1. The task force is already addressing this matter in a comprehensive way and will present its report to the 1996 General Synod.

*Deletion is enclosed in brackets.
2. In the light of the task force’s study, it is premature for this General Synod to vote on R-4.

3. The task force is aware of the need in the RCA for lay preachers/pastors and the desirability of setting standards and establishing a means for certification.<

Upon a motion from the floor to amend the substitute for R-4, the Synod

VOTED: To refer the matter of certification of lay preachers/pastors to the Task Force on Standards for the Preparation for the Professional Ministry in the Reformed Church in America for inclusion in its study of ministry; and further,

...to refer the matter of certification of lay preachers/pastors to the Commission on Theology for study and report to the 1996 General Synod.*

R-5.
To adopt the following addition to the BCO, Chapter I, Part II, for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined)

New Article 14. (Current Article 14 and Article 15 rembered):

**Article 14. Licensure of Lay Ministers**

Sec. 1. The lay minister shall be an elder in the Reformed Church in America who desires to provide pastoral leadership for a congregation within a classis. The ministry of a lay minister shall be normally limited to the privileges and responsibilities of the function of a licensed lay minister, which is to preach the Word, administer the sacraments, and exercise pastoral leadership for a congregation within the classis. The lay minister shall be examined by the classis in those areas of ministry that it deems necessary for approval as a lay minister of a church in the classis. It shall be understood that such a licensure does not meet the requirements imposed by certain states or provinces to perform marriages.

Sec. 2. The following qualifications must be met in order to obtain a license as a lay minister:

a. The lay minister shall be an active-confirmed member and an elder in the Reformed Church in America.

b. The lay minister shall minister and be subject to the Doctrinal Standards, Liturgy and Government and Disciplinary Procedures of the Reformed Church in America.

c. The lay minister shall agree to a program of continuing education and training under the supervision of the classis in which the ministry is performed.

d. The lay minister shall submit a regular report of pastoral activity to the classis in which the ministry is performed.

*Addition is in light-face type.*
Sec. 3. The following procedures must be followed in order to obtain a license as a lay minister.

a. The lay minister shall request a license for lay ministry from the classis in which the ministry is performed.

b. There shall be a recommendation for fitness for ministry from the church where membership is held at the time of application for licensure.

c. There shall be a classical examination of fitness for ministry before beginning pastoral work.

d. The license shall be for one year and renewable at the discretion of the classis.

e. The classis shall be responsible for pastoral care of each licensed lay minister and their immediate family. Pastoral care shall be exercised by such means as the classis deems appropriate, which shall be reported to the classis annually in order to assess its adequacy and effectiveness.

f. The classis shall designate a minister to serve as a mentor to guide, counsel, and model the learning and developmental processes of each lay minister where deemed appropriate by classis.

(Because of the vote taken by Synod to refer R-4 to the Task Force on Standards for the Preparation for the Professional Ministry in the Reformed Church in America and to the Commission on Theology, the moderator of the Commission on Church Order withdrew R-5 and the Synod did not vote on R-5. R-5 will be sent with R-4 to the Task Force on Standards for the Preparation for the Professional Ministry in the Reformed Church in America and to the Commission on Theology.)

"CONSCIENCE CLAUSES"

In its report to the 1994 General Synod, the Commission for Women requested deletion of the "conscience clauses" in the BCO (MGS 1994, p. 275).

In response, the 1994 General Synod voted:

To instruct the Commission on Church Order to review Chapter 1, Part I, Article 5, Section 2h; Chapter 1, Part II, Article 2, Section 7; and Chapter 1, Part II, Article 13, Section 14, of the Book of Church Order; and further,

...to consider recommending modification of these sections for report to the 1995 General Synod (MGS 1994, R-12, p. 275).

At its September 1994 meeting the commission discussed deletion or modification of the "conscience clauses" from the Book of Church Order. Commission members cited recent examples in which the "conscience clauses" were invoked. Although some members of the commission favored modification or deletion of the "conscience clauses," the commission agreed, by consensus, to retain the "conscience clauses" at this time in order to maintain unity in the RCA. The commission noted that the "conscience clauses" allow persons on either side of the issue of the ordination of women to coexist and work together within the RCA.
No formal recommendation by the commission to modify or delete the “conscience clauses” in the BCO is presented to the 1995 General Synod.

AMEND FORMAT OF RCA CONSTITUTION

The Classis of the Greater Palisades submitted the following overture to the 1994 General Synod:

... to begin the process of amending the entire RCA Constitution—Doctrine, Liturgy, and Government—by dividing it into two parts, Constitution and Canons; and further,

... to designate as one of the goals of the project to have a hardcover RCA Constitution again, available to and usable by every member of the RCA (MGS 1994, p. 247).

Although the Advisory Committee on Church Order recommended denial of this overture (MGS 1994, R-19, p. 248), the 1994 General Synod did not adopt R-19 to deny the overture (MGS 1994, p. 248). Instead, upon a motion from the floor, the 1994 General Synod voted:

To instruct the Commission on Church Order, in consultation with the Commission on Theology and the Commission on Christian Worship, to study the feasibility of amending the RCA Constitution in its entirety—Doctrine, Liturgy, and Government—by dividing it into two parts, Constitution and Canons, the first part, Constitution, consisting of those items which are basic and truly constitutional and distinguish the very nature and character of the Reformed Church, and the second part, Canons, consisting of those items of an authority which are secondary, which interpret and apply the more basic principles of the Constitution, and which provide the regulations and procedures such as is already done with the Bylaws of the General Synod (MGS 1994, p. 248).

At its September 1994 meeting the commission requested from the Rev. Dr. Daniel Meeter (author of the overture and the book, Meeting Each Other in Doctrine, Liturgy, & Government) to submit to the commission a sample copy of the Government showing the proposed revisions which would be deleted from the Constitution and included instead in the Canons.

The commission has received a sample copy of the Government indicating the proposed revisions. The commission will review this sample copy at its October 1995 meeting. The commission will report again on this matter to the 1996 General Synod.

From the Report of the General Synod Council’s Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee

REVIEW OF GENERAL SYNOD COMMISSIONS

One of the responsibilities of the General Synod Council (GSC) is “to review all General Synod commissions at least once during each five-year period and to recommend to General Synod a continuation of, a reconstitution of, or a discontinuation of such commissions, with the understanding that necessity for continuation shall not be assumed” (BCO, Chapter 3,
Part I, Article 3, Section 6b). The first review under this section was conducted in 1984-85 for report to the General Synod in June 1985. The second review was conducted in 1989-90 for report to the General Synod in June 1990.

At its April 1990 meeting, the General Synod Executive Committee (GSEC) voted to review at least two commissions each year, beginning in 1992, rather than review all commissions at one time every five years. The following 1991-95 schedule for review of commissions was then approved at the January 1991 GSEC meeting:

1991 - No review of commissions
1992 - Commission on Church Order
      Commission on Judicial Business
      Commission on Nominations
1993 - Commission on Christian Worship
      Commission on Theology
1994 - Commission on History
      Commission on Christian Unity
1995 - Commission on Christian Action
      Commission for Women

At its March 1995 meeting the General Synod Council (GSC) voted to continue reviewing at least two commissions each year. The following 1996-2000 schedule for review of commissions was then approved:

1996 - No review of commissions
1997 - Commission on Church Order
      Commission on Judicial Business
      Commission on Nominations
1998 - Commission on Christian Worship
      Commission on Theology
1999 - Commission on History
      Commission on Christian Unity
2000 - Commission on Christian Action
      Commission for Women

For the review of the Commission on Christian Action and the Commission for Women, GSC appointed the following special committee: the Rev. Warren Burgess, Nancy Miller, and Betty Unger.

Following a review of its task, the committee sent each commission a questionnaire on what it viewed as its major accomplishments over the previous years, the value of its work for the life of the denomination, its plans for the future, etc. The committee interviewed the moderator and/or a representative of each commission during the 1994 meeting of the General Synod at Central College in Pella, Iowa.

The General Synod Council received the final report of this committee in March of 1995 and makes the following recommendations for each commission. It should be noted that, in addition to specific recommendations, there are brief descriptions of the functions of each commission and sometimes a comment or suggestion.

Commission on Christian Action

This commission undertakes its task in accordance with its responsibilities as delineated in the BCO, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 2:
The commission shall inform and advise the church concerning current social issues and the scriptural and Christian principles by which critical evaluation may be exercised on those issues and proper action taken.

Major accomplishments of the commission during the past five years include preparation of the following papers for General Synod meetings:

1. "The Two-Tiered Society: Inequality Amid the Ascendance of Capitalism" \( (MGS \ 1990, \ pp. \ 65-72) \).

2. "Third World Debt—The Churches’ Response" \( (MGS \ 1990, \ pp. \ 72-7) \).

3. "Alcohol and Drug Use and Abuse" \( (MGS \ 1990, \ pp. \ 77-82) \).

4. "The Christian Use of Time" \( (MGS \ 1991, \ pp. \ 91-100) \).

5. "An Encounter Between Cultures: A Journey Toward Understanding" \( (MGS \ 1992, \ pp. \ 111-19) \).

6. "Adult Literacy and the Ministry of the Church" \( (MGS \ 1992, \ pp. \ 123-27) \).

7. "Transnational Tobacco Companies: Marketing Death Around the World" \( (MGS \ 1992, \ pp. \ 127-30) \).

8. "Welcoming the Strangers in Our Midst" \( (MGS \ 1993, \ pp. \ 86-97) \).

9. "Global Warming" \( (MGS \ 1993, \ pp. \ 98-103) \).

10. "A Christian Response to Physician-Assisted Suicide" \( (MGS \ 1994, \ pp. \ 70-7) \).

11. "Toxic Waste Dumps and Minority Communities" \( (MGS \ 1994, \ pp. \ 77-80) \).

12. "Investing in the New South Africa: Overcoming the Legacy of Apartheid" \( (MGS \ 1994, \ pp. \ 80-1) \).

The commission expressed a concern that the above papers often do not receive enough time and consideration at General Synod meetings.

The commission welcomes comments and input from RCA congregations and is working on new ways to communicate Christian action concerns to RCA congregations.

R-6.
To affirm the continuation of the Commission on Christian Action as specified in The Bylaws of the General Synod; and further,

to commend the Commission on Christian Action for its excellent work and dedication to fulfilling its responsibilities assigned by General Synod and The Bylaws of the General Synod. (ADOPTED)

Commission for Women

This commission undertakes its task in accordance with its responsibilities as delineated in the BCO, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 9. Major accomplishments of the commission during the past five years include the following: 1) working for full participation and leadership of women in the RCA; 2) examining the issue of sexual harassment; 3) preparation
of materials for the “Celebration of Women” Sunday (designated as the first Sunday in November (MGS 1991, R-6, p. 270); and 4) working jointly with Reformed Church Women’s Ministries on preparation of a book of stories of RCA women. Also, the commission, in cooperation with Reformed Church Women’s Ministries, sponsors a luncheon for women delegates at each General Synod meeting.

R-7.
To affirm the continuation of the Commission for Women as specified in The Bylaws of the General Synod; and further,
to commend the Commission for Women for its excellent work and dedication to fulfilling its responsibilities assigned by General Synod and The Bylaws of the General Synod. (ADOPTED)

APPOINTMENT OF TASK FORCE TO REVISE DISCIPLINARY AND JUDICIAL PROCEDURES

The 1994 General Synod voted:

To direct the General Synod Council to appoint an eight-member task force to study, in consultation with the Commission on Church Order and the Commission on Judicial Business, Chapter 2 of the Book of Church Order, “The Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures”; and further,
to include in the membership of the task force one representative from the Commission on Church Order, one representative from the Commission on Judicial Business, and six at-large members with experience in classis-level disciplinary and judicial procedures; and further,
to instruct the task force, following the 1996 General Synod, to refer and distribute this preliminary report to RCA agencies, institutions, pastors, consistories, classes, and regional synods for prayerful consideration, study, discussion, and response; and further,
to instruct the task force to present a final report to the 1997 General Synod (MGS 1994, p. 51).

At its October 1994 meeting the General Synod Council approved the following appointments to the Task Force to Revise Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John De Koster</td>
<td>At-large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ronald Geschwendt</td>
<td>At-large and member of the Commission on Church Order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allan Janssen</td>
<td>Member of the Commission on Judicial Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wesley Kiel</td>
<td>At-large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol Myers</td>
<td>At-large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea Van Beek</td>
<td>At-large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Van Lant</td>
<td>At-large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan Vogel-Vanderson</td>
<td>At-large and member of the Commission on Church Order</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Rev. David Schreuder was appointed to serve as staff resource person.

The task force met December 13, 1994; March 9-10, 1995; and May 8-9, 1995; in Holland, Michigan.
A preliminary report will be presented to the 1996 General Synod. The task force will also present a plan to the 1996 General Synod for the distribution of its report in order to provide an opportunity for a year of consultation throughout the RCA before a final report is presented to the 1997 General Synod.

From the Report of the Task Force on Remembering Baptism, Professing Faith, and Membership Terminology

MEMBERSHIP TERMINOLOGY

Clear identification of one another in the body of Christ is important because it gives better understanding to the substance and practice of faith. Vocabulary is significant both within the community of believers and before an unbelieving world. There are several factors which prompt the following recommendation for changes in RCA membership categories and terminology, particularly as it relates to a person’s baptism and confession of faith:

1. Need for Clarity

Definitions on membership categories are not universally clear. Divergent views on the meaning of baptism and grace even among members of the RCA add to the confusion. It becomes important, therefore, to define what a person’s membership is in the body of Christ.

On the surface, defining a person’s membership in the body of Christ appears simple. However, the Commission on Worship, the Commission on Theology, and the Commission on Church Order have not always had a consensus on the definition of terms. In 1990 representatives from each of the three above-named commissions met for the purpose of defining membership categories. Although there was agreement on definitions, there was not agreement on the terms be used (MGS 1990, p. 230). With hesitancy, the Commission on Church Order agreed to these membership categories:

- active-confirmed
- inactive
- unconfirmed-baptized
- adherents

These terms were adopted by the 1990 General Synod (MGS 1990, R-3, pp. 230-31). In 1993 there was once again a request for appropriate vocabulary, including changes in terminology for membership categories. The Commission on Worship desired to avoid the term “confirmation” (MGS 1993, p. 218).

2. Problem with the Term “Confirmation”

The Commission on Worship reported to the 1993 General Synod that the commission affirmed and was in fundamental agreement with the theology expressed in the paper, “Confirmation and the Reformed Church.” This paper was presented at the 1992 General Synod (MGS 1992, pp. 455-68).

The commission reported: “In conversations with members of the Commission on Theology, the Council on Christian Education, and others, it has become apparent that the term ‘confirmation’ is problematic. For many, it is a term that devalues
baptism. It was never the intention of the commission to imply that confirmation is a completion of or supplement to baptism. Baptism does not need completion; we do need to remember our baptism and to daily live out our baptism" (MGS 1993, p. 218).

3. Centrality of Confession

Vocabulary needs to reflect the theology enunciated by the Commission on Theology concerning how it was important for baptized children who had been nurtured at the Table to make a public confession of faith in Jesus Christ. The commission said:

We believe that there are important biblical and theological grounds for baptized children, who have been participating in the sacrament of the Supper, to be required to stand before the church and deliberately and publicly affirm in their own persons the reality of God’s grace in their lives and to confirm the vows signified in baptism....

Therefore we believe the church should continue to make room in its life and liturgy for a responsive act on the part of children of the covenant who have been baptized in infancy, whereby they may affirm the reality of God’s blessings in their own lives. At the same time, such affirmation must be carefully considered and expressed, lest it have the effect of depreciating baptism.

This act of affirmation...should be carefully distinguished from such rites as “deciding for Christ,” “becoming Christians,” “being confirmed,” and “joining the church.” It should rather look back to baptism and provide an occasion at which the baptized may express their response to God’s grace and their personal appropriation of the promises extended to them in baptism” (MSG 1977, pp. 300-01).

4. Identification of Terms

Terms used to identify membership categories in the RCA in the past have not always been helpful. For example, the terms “communicant” and “non-communicant” failed to describe clearly a confessing member and a baptized member. More recently, the 1990 General Synod approved membership categories “active-confirmed” and “unconfirmed-baptized” (MGS 1990, R-3, pp. 230-31). These membership categories suggest a necessary liturgical act between baptism and the Lord’s Table. Hence, many are uncomfortable with these terms.

The proposed membership categories of the task force are:

confessing
inactive
baptized
adherents

These categories reflect a theology which says that persons who receive the sign and seal of baptism are members of the body of Christ, and therefore of the church. The Belgic Confession states: “[Jesus Christ]...has ordained...the sacrament of Baptism, by which we are received into the Church of God” (Article 34).

The marks of the true church are: 1) the pure preaching of the gospel, 2) the pure administration of the sacraments, and 3) the exercise of Christian discipline (Belgic Confession, Article 29). “Confessing” members then, are all persons who affirm their baptism, express repentance and faith in Christ, make faithful use of the means of grace, and submit to the discipline of the board of elders. This membership category
"confessing members" acknowledges the necessity of a person signed and sealed by baptism to embrace Christ in living confession. The word "confessing" speaks of the reality which is a continuing part of the Christian’s life, and discourages people from pointing to an appearance before the elders as the time of their conversion.

The task force therefore recommends:

R-8. To adopt the following revisions of the Book of Church Order for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined; deletions are enclosed in brackets):

Preamble.

Membership Categories and Definitions. Membership in congregations of the Reformed Church in America includes ["active-confirmed"] "confessing" members, ["unconfirmed-baptized"] members, and "inactive" members. Reformed Church in America congregations also include "adherents."

["Active-confirmed"] "Confessing" members are members who have received Christian baptism and have been received by the board of elders through [public confession] profession of faith, reaffirmation of faith, or presentation of a satisfactory certificate of transfer of membership from [an evangelical] another Christian church, and who [continue confessing their faith by word and deed] make faithful use of the means of grace, especially the hearing of the Word and the use of the Lord’s Supper.

["Unconfirmed-baptized"] members are members who have received Christian baptism, who may or may not participate at the Lord’s Table, and who have not been received by the board of elders as [active-confirmed] confessing members.

"Inactive" members are members who have been removed by the board of elders from the [active-confirmed] confessing membership list.

"Members" are all [active-confirmed] confessing members, [unconfirmed-baptized] baptized members, and inactive members.

"Adherents" are all who participate in the life, work, and worship of the church, but are not members.

Chapter 1, Part I, Article 1. Definitions

Sec. 3. Ministers are those men and women who have been inducted into that office by ordination in accordance with the Word of God and the order established or recognized by the Reformed Church in America. They are equal in authority as ministers and as stewards of the mysteries of God. Ministers shall ordinarily be [active-confirmed]
confessing members of only the Reformed Church in America, except as otherwise provided in Chapter 1, Part II, Article 13, Section 1. No person who has relinquished the ministry for which installed or who has been suspended or deposed from the ministry shall exercise that office.

Sec. 7. Elders are confessing members of the local church who have been inducted into that office by ordination in accordance with the Word of God and the order established or recognized by the Reformed Church in America.

Sec. 9. Deacons are confessing members of the local church who have been inducted into that office by ordination in accordance with the Word of God and the order established or recognized by the Reformed Church in America.

Sec. 11. A great consistory of a church consists of all confessing members of that church who have served it, or are serving it, as elders and deacons on its consistory. The great consistory may be convened by the consistory when matters of special importance relating to the welfare of the church demand consideration. Members of the great consistory have only an advisory voice.

Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2. Responsibilities of the Consistory

Sec. 9.a. The elders and deacons shall be chosen from the confessing members of the church in full communion who have attained the age of twenty-one years or, at the discretion of the consistory, eighteen years. They shall be elected by a vote of the confessing members of the church.

Sec. 9.c.(2). The confessing members of the congregation shall nominate and choose the whole number to be elected with or without advisory nominations by the consistory or other representatives of the congregation.

Sec. 13. The president and the clerk of the consistory shall keep a careful register of all baptisms and marriages, of all admissions to confessing membership, of all dismissions to other churches, and of the deaths of members.

Chapter 1, Part I, Article 5. Responsibilities of the Board of Elders.

Sec. 2.a. It shall pass upon the qualifications of those who desire to make public confession of faith. It alone has authority to admit persons to membership and to transfer members to other churches. It shall consider requests for infant baptism, providing at least one parent or guardian is an confessing member of the church to
which the request is presented. A request for baptism from
a parent or guardian who is not an [active-confirmed]
confessing member of the church to which the request is
made shall first be submitted for approval to the governing
body of the church where the parent or guardian has
membership.

Sec. 2.b. It shall receive as [active-confirmed] confessing
members of the church only those persons who have made
a [profession] profession of their faith in the Lord Jesus
Christ before the board of elders, or who have made a
reaffirmation of a previous [profession] profession of faith,
or who have presented a satisfactory certificate of transfer
from an [evangelical] another Christian church.

Sec. 2.d. It shall place on the inactive list the name of any
[active-confirmed] confessing member whose relationship
with the church has ceased for one year or who for one year
has not made faithful use of the means of grace, especially
the hearing of the Word and the use of the Lord's Supper,
unless there are extenuating circumstances making such
faithful use impossible. After making due effort to notify
the member of such action, the board shall seek diligently for
an additional period of one year to recover that member. If
there is no renewal of an active connection with the church
in spite of these efforts, the board may vote to strike the
name of the member from the church membership. Due
effort shall be made to notify the member of the action.

Sec. 2.f. It may permit a[n active-confirmed] confessing
member of a congregation or classis of the Reformed Church
in America who is serving as a missionary outside of the
United States or Canada to hold membership also in an
indigenous church.

Chapter 1, Part II, Article 3. *Elder Delegates*

Sec. 1. A church with three hundred or fewer [active-
confirmed] confessing members shall have one elder delegate,
and an elder delegate for each additional three hundred
[active-confirmed] confessing members or fraction thereof.
A church shall not have more than four such elder delegates.
A church without an installed minister shall have an elder
delegate who shall not be counted as one of the above
delegates. A collegiate church shall have at least one elder
delegate for each of its constituent congregations.

Sec. 4. The elder delegate shall be a member of classis
from the date of election or appointment and shall continue
in that responsibility to classis until the effective date of
election or appointment of a successor. If, however, [active-
confirmed] confessing membership in the church represented
shall be terminated during the period of appointment, the
delegate shall cease to be a member of classis.
Chapter 1, Part II, Article 6. *Transaction of Business*

Sec. 4. Except as otherwise provided in the *Book of Church Order*, membership on classis committees, commissions, or boards shall be open to all [active-confirmed] confessing members of the church in the classis.

Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7. *Superintendence of the Churches*

Sec. 12.f. Insufficiency of [active-confirmed] confessing membership to fulfill the purposes and responsibilities of an organized church.

Sec. 19.c.(1) Notice of the calling of a special meeting of the congregation, stating the time, place, and purpose of the meeting, shall be read from the pulpit on two successive Sundays at all regular worship services, beginning at least ten days prior to the date set for the meeting. A copy of the notice shall also be mailed to each [active-confirmed] confessing member of the church at least ten days prior to the date of the meeting.

Sec. 19.c.(3) Only [active-confirmed] confessing members eligible to vote for election of elders and deacons shall be entitled to vote at the meeting. Proxy voting shall not be permitted.

Chapter 1, Part II, Article 8. *Superintendence of Students of Theology*

Sec. 1. A [active-confirmed] confessing member of a congregation in the Reformed Church in America who desires to become a minister shall apply to the classis with jurisdiction over the church in which membership is held to be enrolled as a candidate for the ministry. This application shall be made through the consistory of the church in which membership is held.

Chapter 1, Part II, Article 9. *Certificates of Fitness for Ministry*

Sec. 2.b. The General Synod through the board of trustees of the Theological Education Agency shall require the applicant to furnish, at the conclusion of seminary studies, the following: a master of divinity degree or its equivalent from a seminary accredited by the Association of Theological Schools or a theological accrediting agency of comparable standards as determined by the General Synod Council; a transcript of the applicant’s academic record at this seminary; and evidence of [active-confirmed] confessing membership in a Reformed church of the classis making petition.
Chapter 1, Part II, Article 10. Dispensations

Sec. 2. Persons Without Formal Theological Education

A [active-confirmed] confessing member of a congregation in the Reformed Church in America who has received special gifts for the office of minister, but is unable to take the regular course of seminary instruction because of age, lack of necessary academic preparation, language differences, or other sufficient reason, may seek a dispensation from the requirements for the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry by making application to the classis.

Chapter 1, Part III, Article 3. Delegates

Sec. 1. The delegate shall be a member of regional synod from the date of election or appointment and shall continue in that responsibility to the regional synod until the effective date of election or appointment of a successor. If, however, ministerial membership in the classis represented or [active-confirmed] confessing membership in a church within the classis represented shall be terminated during the period of appointment, the delegate shall cease to be a member of the regional synod.

Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 1. General Synod Defined

The General Synod is the highest assembly and judicatory of the Reformed Church in America. It consists of two minister delegates and two elder delegates from each of the classes having four thousand or fewer [active-confirmed] confessing members on the roll of its churches, and one minister delegate and one elder delegate for each two thousand [active-confirmed] confessing members, or fraction thereof, from each of the classes having more than four thousand [active-confirmed] confessing members on the roll of its churches as computed in accordance with The Bylaws of the General Synod; one elder or minister delegate from each of the regional synods; two delegates from each of the theological seminaries of the Reformed Church; a number of furloughing missionary and chaplain delegates; and corresponding delegates provided for in The Bylaws of the General Synod. Voting rights shall be limited to elder delegates and those ministers who are actively serving in ministries under the jurisdiction or with the approval of an assembly. The General Synod is a permanent, continuing body which functions between stated sessions through the General Synod Council, commissions, and agencies.

Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 3. Delegates

Sec. 1. The delegate shall be a member of the General Synod from the date of election or appointment and shall continue in that responsibility to the General Synod until the effective date of election or appointment of a successor. If, however, ministerial membership in the classis
represented or [active-confirmed] confessing membership in a church within the classis represented shall be terminated during the period of appointment, the delegate shall cease to be a member of the General Synod.

Chapter 2, Part II, Article 1. Nature of Complaints

Sec. 3. A complaint may be filed only by:

a. One or more [active-confirmed] confessing members in good and regular standing against the consistory or board of elders having superintendence over them.

and further,

to approve in first reading the following amendment to The Bylaws of the General Synod in the Book of Church Order, Chapter 3 (additions are underlined; deletions are enclosed in brackets):

Article 3. General Synod Council

Sec. 1. Membership

The membership of the council shall consist of the following:

b. One member nominated by each of the classes and elected by the General Synod. Nominations shall be open to ministers and all [active-confirmed] confessing members of the Reformed Church in America. Members shall hold office only as long as they remain resident within the bounds of the classes they represent.

Article 4. Membership on General Synod Agencies and Commissions

Sec. 2. Eligibility

Membership on General Synod agencies and commissions shall be open to all [active-confirmed] 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. (ADOPTED)
RCA FOUNDATION

The Reformed Church in America established the Office of Gift Planning (OGP) in 1983. The office provides RCA congregations and members with professional gift planning services. The Giving Intended For Thoughtful Stewards Foundation (G.I.F.T.S.) was established in 1987. G.I.F.T.S. also provided professional gift planning services.

Since both OGP and G.I.F.T.S. have a similar purpose, the General Synod Council (GSC), at its July 1993 meeting, approved merging the work of OGP and G.I.F.T.S. At its October 1994 meeting the GSC approved the name “RCA Foundation” be used when referring to various functions of the RCA relating to gift planning, including the work of the Office of Gift Planning and G.I.F.T.S.

At its October 1994 meeting GSC reviewed proposed bylaws for the RCA Foundation.

The advisory committee recommended to amend R-9:

R-9.
To approve the incorporation of the RCA Foundation [into the RCA Foundation, Inc.]; and further,

to adopt the following Bylaws of the RCA Foundation, [Inc.,] effective July 1, 1995. *

*Deletions are enclosed in brackets.

BYLAWS
of
RCA FOUNDATION

ARTICLE I NAME

The name of this organization shall be RCA Foundation, a Not-for-Profit Corporation organized and existing under the laws of the State of New York.

ARTICLE II PURPOSE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

A. The purpose of the RCA Foundation shall be to support the work of the Reformed Church in America by rendering assistance in the following areas:

1. To provide gift planning services for the General Synod Council, related assemblies, institutions, and agencies of the Reformed Church in America.

2. To provide gift planning services to other RCA-related mission agencies or organizations.

3. To provide management of funds related to gift planning services, e.g., gift annuities, pooled income fund, etc.

4. To provide management for certain endowment and other
funds of the Reformed Church in America.

B. These purposes shall be fulfilled on a nonprofit basis, and no part of the foundation’s earnings shall inure to the benefit of any individual or organization; but such earnings may include reasonable charges designated for administrative services. It shall be understood that upon the dissolution of the RCA Foundation all assets, if any, remaining after payment of liabilities, shall become the property of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America or its successor. In the event that said organization is not then in existence and has not been succeeded by a qualifying organization, then the property or net assets of the foundation shall be transferred to other corporations which fulfill similar purposes located within the United States and which qualify as tax exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Service Code, subject to the approval of the Supreme Court of the State of New York.

C. The RCA Foundation shall have the authority to acquire, hold, and dispose of real property. Such property may be acquired only by action of the Board of Directors. Any and all real property acquired by the foundation may be sold, conveyed, mortgaged, or otherwise transferred as in the ordinary course of business, by order of the Board of Directors.

D. The foundation shall function under the ecclesiastical authority of the Reformed Church in America through the General Synod Council.

ARTICLE III BOARD OF DIRECTORS

A. The Stewardship and Communication Services Committee of the General Synod Council of the Reformed Church in America shall act as the Board of Directors of the RCA Foundation. The General Secretary of the Reformed Church in America shall be a nonvoting member of the foundation ex officio, with the right to attend all of its meetings and to speak on any matter before the board.

B. The directors shall meet annually in the month of October at the time and place of the fall meeting of the General Synod Council.

C. Special meetings may be called by the president of the foundation in consultation with the staff of the foundation or upon the request of any three members of the Board of Directors.

D. A written notice of each regular and special meeting, together with an agenda, background information, and proposed actions shall be mailed or faxed to each director and received at least ten days before each regular meeting or five days before a special meeting.

E. A majority of the voting members of the Board shall constitute a quorum. An affirmative vote of a majority of the voting
members present at any meeting of the board shall be necessary to take any actions. In the absence of a quorum a majority of the members present may adjourn the meeting to a later date.

F. All meetings shall be opened and closed with prayer.

ARTICLE IV OFFICERS

A. The officers of the foundation shall be a president, a vice-president, a secretary, and a treasurer. The president shall be the moderator of the Stewardship and Communication Services Committee of the General Synod Council. The vice-president shall be elected by and from the directors. The Board of Directors shall designate the treasurer of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America as treasurer. The Board of Directors shall designate the general secretary of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America as secretary. The board may appoint one of its members as a recording secretary or designate a staff person serving the Stewardship and Communication Services Committee of the General Synod Council to serve as recording secretary. The board may elect such other officers as it may from time to time deem appropriate.

B. The officers shall be elected for one-year terms.

C. The duties of the respective officers shall be those ordinarily performed by such officers.

D. The president shall preside at all meetings.

E. The vice-president shall perform the duties of the president in the event of the absence or disability of the president.

F. The secretary shall be responsible for the minute books and other records of the foundation and of the corporate seal, and shall be responsible for the maintenance of regular records of all business transacted by the foundation, including the minutes of the Board of Directors, and shall otherwise perform such duties and exercise such authority as the Board of Directors may direct.

G. The treasurer shall be custodian of all funds of the foundation, for the administration of all accounts and the maintenance of regular records of the financial transactions of the foundation. The treasurer may contract with outside agencies for the administration of certain specialized funds (e.g., pooled Income Fund). The treasurer shall make an annual report as well as such other reports as the Board of Directors and the General Synod Council may from time to time require.

ARTICLE V FOUNDATION STAFF

A. The operations and staff of the foundation shall be supervised by the Stewardship and Communication Services Committee of the General Synod Council of the Reformed Church in America.
B. The foundation shall establish and supervise an Office of Gift Planning. The purpose of this office shall be to assist members and friends of the Reformed Church in America in making gifts to the related assemblies, institutions, and agencies of the Reformed Church in America and other mission organizations by means of bequests and life income gift instruments. The best interests of the donor and the donor's family shall be primary when providing assistance. Office of Gift Planning staff shall not be involved in the management of funds.

C. The foundation shall use the services of the Financial Services Committee and the Managing Director of Investments of the General Synod Council of the Reformed Church in America for the management of investments. The foundation may use other investment services with the approval of the Stewardship and Communication Services Committee of the General Synod Council.

D. Other staff may be employed as necessary in order to carry out the functions of the foundation.

E. Staff persons shall make an annual report to the board on their activities. More frequent reports may be required by the board.

ARTICLE VI OPERATING PRINCIPLES

A. The foundation may offer a Charitable Gift Annuity program to the constituency of the Reformed Church in America. This program shall use the guidelines and interest rates established by the American Council on Gift Annuities and shall be a member of that organization or its successors.

B. The foundation may offer at least one Pooled Income Fund to the constituency of the Reformed Church in America. This fund shall be operated in accordance with its trust agreement and Internal Revenue Service guidelines.

C. The foundation may provide a Revocable Gift Agreement program for the constituency of the Reformed Church in America. This fund shall be managed so as to provide the highest return possible for donors to the fund, consistent with safety of principal.

D. The foundation may act as trustee of such charitable remainder trusts as shall be established by the constituency of the Reformed Church in America. These trusts shall be managed with due concern for the best interests of the donor and the remainder beneficiaries.

E. The foundation may act as trustee of such Charitable Lead Trusts as shall be established by the constituency of the Reformed Church in America. Such trusts shall be managed in the best interest of the charitable recipients of income and the trust beneficiaries.
F. The foundation shall manage the GIFTS Philanthropic Fund. Such fund shall be managed to provide the largest possible gift to charitable recipients of the fund consistent with safety of investments and prudent investment practices.

G. The foundation shall manage endowment funds given to it for management by the General Synod or General Synod Council of the Reformed Church in America. Such funds shall be managed in a prudent manner which will provide for the highest return, consistent with safety of principal, for the recipients of income from such funds.

H. The foundation shall receive and manage all gifts donated to it for the work of the assemblies, institutions, and agencies of the Reformed Church in America and other mission organizations. All such funds shall be managed in a manner which will provide for the best interests of such assemblies, institutions, agencies, and organizations.

I. The foundation may receive funding from assemblies, institutions, and agencies of the Reformed Church in America for the work of the foundation. Independent Christian agencies whose mission philosophy is consistent with that of the Reformed Church in America, and that have a significant number of Reformed Church in America members as clients or supporters, may also support the work of the foundation in return for gift planning and management services.

J. The foundation will levy such fees as are necessary in order to provide the services outlined above. These may take the form of management or other fees. Organizations for whom funds are managed but who do not directly participate in supporting the foundation may be charged higher fees than those who directly participate.

K. The Board of Directors shall establish policies and procedures for the operation of the foundation consistent with the principles contained herein.

ARTICLE VII THE CORPORATE SEAL

The RCA Foundation shall have a seal, an impression of which is affixed to these bylaws.

ARTICLE VIII AMENDMENTS TO THE BYLAWS

These bylaws may be amended at any duly constituted meeting of the Board of Directors, by a majority vote, provided that the substance of the proposed amendment shall have been presented to the board with the notice of meeting. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)*

Reason: The official incorporation title is "RCA Foundation" rather than RCA Foundation, Inc." as per RCA legal counsel.

*Deletions are enclosed in brackets. (See p. 232.)
From the Report of the African-American Council

AMENDMENT OF THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN COUNCIL CONSTITUTION

In October 1993 representatives from the western region of the African-American Council requested that the executive committee of the council amend the African-American constitution to redistribute representation from regions of the U.S. on the African-American Council that more accurately reflects current membership and provides a more balanced representation on the caucus. Also, this redistribution of representation reduces regional membership on the council from twenty-six to twenty-two members. (Representation of one youth from each region and a student from an RCA institution of higher learning remains the same.) This request was approved at the Caucus '93 meeting in Newark, New Jersey, in October 1993 and is recommended to the 1995 General Synod for adoption.

R-10.
To adopt the following revisions to the Constitution of the African-American Council of the RCA (additions are underlined; deletions are enclosed in brackets):

Article III - MEMBERSHIP

Section 1b. The African-American Council shall be composed of [three (3)] one (1) representative[s] from the southern [and western] region[s], [five (5)] four (4) from the midwestern and western region[s], and [fifteen (15)] thirteen (13) members from the eastern region . . . (ADOPTED)

Overtures

Formation of Union Churches with NonReformed

1. The Classis of South Grand Rapids overtures General Synod to instruct the Commission on Church Order to prepare revisions to the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 7, to allow the formation of Union Churches with a variety of Christian churches other than "Reformed bodies" (BCO, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 7, Section 1), for report to the 1996 General Synod.

Reasons:

1. The development of the BCO article on union churches in the 1960s included a restriction to "Reformed" churches.

2. In some cases, churches within the RCA are not in close enough proximity to other "Reformed" churches to make the formation of a union church possible.

3. Since the 1960s, many RCA classes have used the union church model to establish ties with a wide variety of nonReformed denominations.
4. By changing the word “Reformed” in the BCO, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 7, Section 1, to “Christian” or “evangelical,” the classes would have more flexibility in establishing union churches.

5. By making the membership of ministers in the assembly of both denominations optional instead of the current BCO requirement of ministers being full and responsible members of each assembly (judiciary) and subject to the discipline of each assembly (BCO, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 7, Section 2k and Section 2s), classes could avoid the complicated and potentially impossible procedures for the reception of ministers from other denominations as described in the BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 12.

6. Classes would retain the right to deny requests from churches within their bounds to form union churches that were judged to be inappropriate.

The advisory committee recommended:

R-11.
To refer Overture 1 to the Commission on Theology for study and report to the 1996 General Synod.

Reason: The theological implications of forming union churches with other than “Reformed bodies” needs more study.

Upon a motion from the floor to amend R-11, the Synod:

VOTED: To refer Overture 1 to the Commission on Theology, in consultation with the Commission on Christian Unity, for study and report to the 1996 General Synod.

Revision to the Constitutional Inquiries

2. The Classis of Illinois overtures General Synod to revise the reporting procedures in response to the questions in the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 1 (what are known as the “constitutional inquiries” required of the consistory in reporting to the classis); specifically to require the following reporting procedures:

1. To require the board of elders and the installed minister(s) of each church to address each question in the BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 1, prior to the stated session of classis.

2. To require each church to answer each question in Section 1 of the BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, using a scale of zero to five to indicate the level of compliance rather than answering “yes” or “no.”

For example, to answer the question “Are the points of doctrine contained in the Heidelberg Catechism explained in your church from time to time, as required by the Government of the Reformed Church in America (BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 1b) would require the following response:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVEL OF COMPLIANCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-------4-------3-------2-------1-------0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Addition is in light-face type.
3. To require the consistory to communicate the levels of compliance and any other responses to the questions contained in the BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 1, to the classis prior to the stated session of classis.

Reasons:

1. Addressing the questions contained in the BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 1, prior to the stated session of classis allows for discussion, reflection, and self-examination.

2. Many classes already fulfill this BCO requirement in Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 1, by using some type of reporting form completed by the churches.

3. Many of the questions in the BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 1, cannot be easily answered by a simple “yes” or “no.” Some questions have varying levels of compliance. For example, at what level is a church fulfilling its stewardship obligations (BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 1b) or significantly involved in gospel witness (BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 1i)?

4. Using a reporting scale (see level of compliance example above) would stimulate the elders and ministers to better self-examination and provide more accurate information.

The advisory committee recommended:

R-12. To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. This sliding scale is not acceptable to some of the questions in the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 1.

2. The introduction of sliding scale answers to “constitutional inquiry” questions complicates supervisory work without adding any significant value.

Regional Synod Membership on Commission on Christian Action and Commission on Christian Unity

3. The Classis of South Grand Rapids overtures General Synod to amend The Bylaws of the General Synod, Part I, Article 5, Sections 2 and 3, to revise the membership on the Commission on Christian Action and the Commission on Christian Unity to include one representative nominated by each regional synod. (The Commission on Judicial Business and the Commission on Nominations currently have one representative from each regional synod.)

Reasons:

1. Currently, the Commission on Christian Action and the Commission on Christian Unity have nine members each. Representation from each of the eight regional synods is not required on either of these commissions.

2. The concerns and priorities of RCA congregations should be reflected in the concerns and priorities which these two commissions choose. By requiring that representatives are nominated from a more “grass roots level,” the likelihood increases for these two
commissions to spend their time, energy, and budget on issues of Christian action and Christian unity which are most reflective of current needs and issues affecting local congregations and classes.

3. Representatives nominated by each regional synod may be more likely to seek interaction within their respective regions for feedback and suggestions about issues and priorities for these two denominationwide commissions.

4. Representatives nominated regionally for these two commissions may have less of a tendency to tell congregations what they “ought to be doing,” and more of a flexibility to listen to “what the congregations are doing,” as well as hearing from congregations about their continuing needs and challenges.

➢ The advisory committee recommended:

R-13.
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. The Commission on Christian Action (CCA) and the Commission on Christian Unity (CCU) need members with specific skills, knowledge, experience and interest. To add a regional requirement hampers this process.

2. Under the current nomination process, interested potential commission members are suggested by the regional synods and these individuals are given serious consideration by the Commission on Nominations.

3. The type of work done by CCA and CCU is vastly different from that of the Commission on Nominations and the Commission on Judicial Business.

4. The process of recruiting for the commission members needs not be the same for all commissions.

4. The Regional Synod of the Great Lakes overtures General Synod to amend The Bylaws of the General Synod, Part I, Article 5, Sections 2 and 3, to revise the membership on the Commission on Christian Action and the Commission on Christian Unity to include one representative nominated by each regional synod. (The Commission on Judicial Business and the Commission on Nominations currently have one representative from each regional synod.)

Reasons:

1. Currently, the Commission on Christian Action and the Commission on Christian Unity have nine members each. Representation from each of the eight regional synods is not required on either of these commissions.

2. The concerns and priorities of RCA congregations should be reflected in the concerns and priorities which these two commissions choose. By requiring that representatives are nominated from a more “grass roots level,” the likelihood increases for these two commissions to spend their time, energy, and budget on issues of Christian action and Christian unity which are most reflective of current needs and issues affecting local congregations and classes.
3. Representatives nominated by each regional synod may be more likely to seek interaction within their respective regions for feedback and suggestions about issues and priorities for these two denomination-wide commissions.

4. Representatives nominated regionally for these two commissions may have less of a tendency to tell congregations what they “ought to be doing” and more of a flexibility to listen to “what the congregations are doing,” as well as hearing from congregations about their continuing needs and challenges.

➢ The advisory committee recommended:

R-14.
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reason: Overtures 4 is identical to Overtures 3. The General Synod adopted R-13 above in response to Overture 3. (See p. 240.)

Preaching Elder Position

5. The Classis of Mid-Hudson overtures General Synod to adopt the following addition to the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, for recommendation to the classes for approval (addition is underlined):

New Section 8. (current Section 8 and subsequent sections renumbered)

The classis may appoint an elder from among its member churches to provide preaching and pastoral services to a church within its bounds when the membership and financial circumstances of such church preclude the possibility of its calling a minister of Word and sacrament as an installed, full-time minister. Such an elder, to be known as a Preaching Elder, shall be examined by the classis to determine his or her fitness to serve in this capacity. The appointment of a Preaching Elder shall be for one year, to be renewed annually by classis or at the special request of classis within that appointed year. The Preaching Elder shall be amenable to classis in matters of theology, pastoral relationships with the congregation served, life, and practice. The Preaching Elder shall consult regularly, as the classis may determine appropriate, with the supervisor of the church served. The Preaching Elder may, at the request of the consistory of the church served, preside at meetings of the consistory, but shall not vote.

Reasons:

1. Congregations unable to financially afford to call a full-time minister or to find stated supply ministers, can be served by elders who conduct worship and perform a number of pastoral services.

2. Elders are entrusted, along with ministers of Word and sacrament, with the spiritual welfare of the church. Elders make certain that what is preached and taught by the minister of Word and sacrament is in accord with Holy Scripture, assist the minister of the Word and sacrament with their good counsel, and administer the sacraments upon approval by the board of elders (BCO, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 1, Sections 7 and 8).
3. These congregations can be well served by an elder who provides preaching, pastoral, and administrative services on a part-time basis. While such congregations are often small membership churches and consequently have limited financial resources, they remain viable congregations with the possibility of significant service and real growth.

4. Creating the position of Preaching Elder enables classes to insure that pastoral services are provided to such congregations. The alternative of encouraging members to attend another church and subsequently close such a church prematurely could have devastating effects.

5. The classis would maintain supervision of such a congregation with an appointed supervisor and through the process of examination and annual review of appointed Preaching Elders. The Preaching Elder would be amenable to classis in matters of theology, spiritual care, life, and practice just as ministers of Word and sacrament are amenable to classis in these areas.

➢ The advisory committee recommended:

R-15.
To refer Overture 5 to the Task Force on Standards for the Preparation for the Professional Ministry in the Reformed Church in America. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. The task force is already addressing this matter in a comprehensive way and will present its report to the 1996 General Synod.

2. In light of the task force’s study, it is premature for this General Synod to vote on approval of preaching elders.

3. The task force is aware of the need in the RCA for lay preachers/pastors and the desirability of setting standards and establishing a means for certification.

Appointment of General Synod Council Members by Classes Rather than Election by General Synod

6. The Classis of Ontario overtures General Synod to insure that classical representation on the General Synod Council be consistently and unambiguously the prerogative of the classis and to therefore approve in first reading the following amendment to The Bylaws of the General Synod, in the BCO, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 1a (additions are underlined; deletions are enclosed in brackets):

Article 3. General Synod Council

Sec. 1. Membership

The membership of the council shall consist of the following:

a. The president, vice-president, and the immediate past president of General Synod.
b. One member [nominated] appointed by each of the classes [and elected by the General Synod]. [Nominations] Appointment shall be open to ministers and all active-confirmed members of the Reformed Church in America. Members shall hold office only as long as they remain resident within the bounds of the classes they represent, or until the term of appointment expires, or the member resigns, or the classis chooses to appoint a different member to represent the classis.

Reasons:

1. Representation on the General Synod Council is based clearly and primarily on classis representation.

2. The Bylaws of the General Synod restrict the right and prerogative of the classes to choose and to change their representatives on the General Synod Council.

3. The General Synod Council, in its responsibilities to administer the affairs of the Reformed Church in America between the sessions of the General Synod BCO, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 6a), best functions through classical representation just as its mother body (General Synod) also functions primarily through classical representation.

4. Effective July 1, 1993, the General Synod Council replaced the General Synod Executive Committee and the General Program Council. Already, there is a case of a classical nomination for a General Synod Council representative being rejected by the General Synod Council upon recommendation of the Commission on Nominations. This was against the will of the classis. This precedent is disturbing. It leans toward the General Synod Council choosing its own representatives rather than the classes.

5. The election of nominees by General Synod delegates to the General Synod Council is generally an automatic procedure. Few General Synod delegates know the nominees being elected. The classes, however, know well the people they are nominating as representatives on the General Synod Council. Direct appointment by classis can only strengthen the General Synod Council and increase the confidence of the classes in their representatives on the General Synod Council.

The advisory committee recommended:

R-16.
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. The current nomination and election procedure already allows for the strong influence of classes when they name nominees.

2. Historically and constitutionally, the General Synod elects representatives to all of its committees, commissions, and agencies (Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 7, Section 4).

3. Allowing the classes to appoint and replace representatives at will could lead to instability in the desired and required membership composition of the General Synod Council.
General Synod Council Representation

7. The Regional Synod of Albany overtures General Synod to approve in first reading the following amendment to *The Bylaws of the General Synod in the Book of Church Order*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 1b (additions are underlined):

*Article 3. General Synod Council*

*Sec. 1. Membership*

The membership of the council shall consist of the following:

b. One member nominated by each of the classes and each of the regional synods and elected by the General Synod. Nominations shall be open to ministers and all active-confirmed members of the Reformed Church in America. Members shall hold office only as long as they remain resident within the bounds of the classes or regional synod they represent.

Reasons:

1. The General Synod has deemed that the perspectives of the regional synods are important. The General Synod has maintained membership at General Synod meetings for regional synods (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 1). The Regional Synod of Albany believes the same is true for regional synod membership on the General Synod Council.

2. Membership for regional synods on the General Synod Council would provide a necessary and appropriate liaison between program agencies of the General Synod and the program agencies of the regional synods.

3. The regional synods always held membership on the former General Program Council of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America. The absence of regional synod membership on the General Synod Council is an oversight which needs to be corrected.

➢ The advisory committee recommended:

*R-17.*

To approve in first reading the following amendment to *The Bylaws of the General Synod in the Book of Church Order*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 1b (additions are underlined):

*Article 3. General Synod Council*

*Sec. 1. Membership*

The membership of the council shall consist of the following:

b. One member nominated by each of the classes and each of the regional synods and elected by the General Synod. Nominations shall be open to ministers and all active-confirmed members of the Reformed Church in America.
Members shall hold office only as long as they remain resident within the bounds of the classes or the regional synod they represent. (NOT ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. The General Synod has deemed that the perspectives of the regional synods are important. The General Synod has maintained membership at General Synod meetings for regional synods (Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 1). The advisory committee believed the same is true for regional synod membership on the General Synod Council.

2. Membership for regional synods on the General Synod Council would provide a necessary and appropriate liaison between program agencies of the General Synod and the program agencies of the regional synods.

3. The regional synods held membership on the former General Program Council. The absence of regional synod membership on the General Synod Council appears to be an oversight which needs to be corrected.

8. The Regional Synod of Albany overtures General Synod to adopt the following revision to the Book of Church Order (BCO), Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 1, for recommendation to the classes for approval (addition is underlined):

   Article 1. General Synod Defined

   The General Synod is the highest assembly and judiciary of the Reformed Church in America. It consists of two minister delegates and two elder delegates from each of the classes having four thousand or fewer active-confirmed members on the roll of its churches, and one minister delegate and one elder delegate for each two thousand active-confirmed members, or fraction thereof, from each of the classes having more than four thousand active-confirmed members on the roll of its churches; one elder or minister delegate from each of the regional synods, except that each regional synod may send a second delegate provided that one of the two delegates is a woman; two delegates from each of the theological seminaries of the Reformed Church; a number of furloughing missionary and chaplain delegates; and corresponding delegates provided for in the Bylaws of the General Synod.

Reasons:

1. The General Synod Council membership requires that “not less than one-third of the membership shall be women” (BCO, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 2). The above proposed revision enables the General Synod to have greater representation by women delegates.

2. The above proposed revision is consistent with and a continuation of the resolution adopted by the 1989 General Synod, “Ecumenical Decade: Churches in Solidarity with Women” (MGS 1989, R-2, pp. 173-75).

3. The Reformed Church in America still has much to do before women are fully involved in the life of the church. The above proposed revision provides the opportunity to enhance the role of women in the life of the RCA.
4. The 1992 General Synod denied an overture from the Regional Synod of the Far West to amend the *Book of Church Order* to not provide for two women corresponding delegates from each regional synod (*MGS 1992*, R-24, p. 386). The reason presented by the Advisory Committee on Church Vocations at the 1992 General Synod recommending denial of the overture was "[The] overture...denies an opportunity for an increased presence and diversity of women at General Synod meetings" (*MGS 1992*, p. 386).

The above proposed revision allows for the "increased presence and diversity" for those regional synods who choose to send a women as a regular delegate in addition to regional synods sending two women corresponding delegates as now provided for in the *BCO*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 8, Section 12.

➢ The advisory committee recommended:

**R-18.**
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. Although the advisory committee affirmed the intention of Overture 8, the advisory committee did not believe it would be wise to move toward a quota system.

2. Additional General Synod delegates increase General Synod meeting costs and thus assessments.

3. The advisory committee celebrated the increasing representation of women in the consistories, classes, and regional synods and expected as this trend continues, additional representation of women will become more evident at the General Synod level as well.

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From the Report of the President

P-1 was referred to the Advisory Committee on Church Order.

➢ In response to P-1 (p. 29), the advisory committee recommended:

**R-19.**
To add an additional "constitutional inquiry" question in the *Book of Church Order (BCO)* for the identification of leaders in the congregation; and further,

to adopt the following revision of the *BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 1 (addition is underlined):

New section d. (existing section d and subsequent sections to be renumbered e-j)
d. Has the consistory prayerfully considered persons within the congregation, especially the young people, in order to identify with them their gifts for pastoral ministry, to encourage the development of these gifts, and to pray for those individuals on a regular basis? (ADOPTED AS AMENDED—See Editorial Report, p. 411.)

Reason: After consultation with the president, R-19 clarifies the intent of P-1. <

(A motion was made and supported to "refer P-1 to the Commission on Church Order for review and report to the 1996 General Synod." The motion LOST.)

(Another motion was made and supported to amend R-19 by deleting the words "especially the young people." The motion LOST.)

(Another motion was made and supported to amend R-19 by inserting the word "ordained" after the words "in order to identify for them their gifts for." The motion LOST.)
From the earliest years of its North American experience, the Reformed tradition showed a special concern for the preparation of persons to serve as Reformed pastors. That concern was present in the establishment of Harvard College in 1636. The Calvinist Puritans understood their action in this fashion:

After God had carried us safe to New England, and we had builded our houses, provided necessaries for our livelihood, rear'd our convenient places for God's worship, and settled the Civill Government: One of the next things we longed for, and looked after was to advance Learning and perpetuate it to Posterity; dreading to leave an illiterate Ministry to the Churches, when our present Ministers shall lie in the dust ("New Englands First Fruits," quoted in American Christianity: An Historical Interpretation with Representative Documents. H. Shelton Smith, Robert P. Handy, and Lefferts A. Loetscher. New York: Charles Scribners and Sons, 1960. Vol 1, p.124).

New England's concern for a continuous stream of carefully prepared pastors led to the founding of Harvard College. Dutch Reformed immigrants to the Middle Atlantic colonies were similarly concerned about the quality of ministerial preparation. For more than a century and a half, at great expense and risk, they sent their sons who responded to God's call to pastoral ministry back to the Netherlands to receive a proper foundation in theological and ministerial education. Eighteenth-century Reformed Church discussions of how best to prepare persons for ministry were regarded as so important that these discussions (among other issues) led to a great rift—the Coetus-Conferentie controversy. When, in 1771, there was opportunity for reuniting the two factions, the issue of a school for the education of ministers was foremost in the Articles of Union. The RCA has a long and serious commitment to excellence in the education and preparation of pastors.

A new century and a new millennium now stand before the RCA. The opportunities and challenges of this moment require that the RCA renew its commitment to assuring a continuous stream of women and men who will respond to God's call and provide the church of Jesus Christ with dynamic and dedicated leadership. New Brunswick Theological Seminary (NBTS), the oldest seminary in North America, stands ready to meet the challenge of preparing, training, and educating these persons. But neither New Brunswick, nor Western, nor any other seminary can accomplish this task by itself. The assistance and support of individuals, congregations, and the denomination are needed. The following are three areas in which NBTS seeks help in order to continue adequately to train outstanding persons for faithful ministry:

1. Theological education needs a place within the mission structure of the denomination.

Over the course of the last thirty years—from 1965 to 1995—the RCA has been less and less sure about how it wanted to integrate the seminaries into the mission of the denomination. In 1965 the Board of Education still existed within the denomination. This board had many areas of responsibility, but theological education was always principal among them. Here was a place, within the structure of the RCA, where the seminaries had an advocate.

In 1968 the General Program Council came into being. The Board of Theological Education was also created at that time to oversee the work of both RCA seminaries, but it was not integrated into the mission structure of the RCA. It was, instead, listed off to the side with "Other Boards and Agencies," as if it were parallel in the life of the denomination with the boards of trustees for RCA colleges.
In the 1993 restructuring of the denomination, separate boards of trustees were created for each RCA seminary and for the Theological Education Agency (TEA) (*MGS* 1992, pp. 293-314). But, again, the work of theological education and ministerial preparation was not seen as integral to the mission of the RCA. Through the Ministry and Personnel Services Committee of the General Synod Council, the RCA seminaries and TEA were assured that they would have "a place at the table." But, for the RCA seminaries and TEA, no direct involvement is possible in the planning and programming done by the General Synod Council.

Given the rising desire by RCA congregations to have a "hands-on" involvement in ministerial preparation and theological education, and given the centrality of theological education to the RCA's preparation for its future mission and ministry, the Board of Trustees of New Brunswick Theological Seminary recommends:

R-1.

[To instruct the General Synod Council to reorganize itself so as to include within its membership a Committee on Ministerial Preparation and Theological Education; and further,

>to lodge in this committee the General Synod Council's responsibility to oversee the standards for the preparation for professional ministry in the Reformed Church in America.] *

>Upon recommendation of the advisory committee, the following was substituted for R-1:

>\[To refer R-1 to the Task Force on Standards for the Preparation for the Professional Ministry in the Reformed Church in America. (ADOPTED)\]

Reason: The process for R-1 is within the purview of the task force. <

2. New Brunswick Theological Seminary and Western Theological Seminary need to be assured of the systematic and sustained support of the denomination and its congregations. It ought not be a surprise that during those same thirty years when the Reformed Church in America was less and less clear about where and whether it was going to locate theological education within its mission structure, the denominational and congregation financial support for theological education failed to keep pace with expenses. In 1965 gifts from the denomination and its congregations represented 58.5 percent of all New Brunswick's support.

In 1995 those same gifts represent only 35.2 percent of New Brunswick's support. The situation for Western Theological Seminary is probably very much the same.

As life has become more and more challenging for RCA congregations, it has become more and more difficult for them to feel that they can support those portions of the RCA's mission which extend beyond their own congregations. The sustaining of the congregation's local witness has become the focus of each year's budget. But the assurance of a steady stream of persons to be available for pastoral leadership is a vital part of each congregation's effort to keep its own witness vital. Every RCA congregation ought regularly to participate in the support of programs for the preparation of future ministers or some day there will be no educated and faithful ministers for any RCA congregation. A renewed vision must be placed before every RCA congregation, calling them to partnership with the RCA seminaries in the challenging mission of preparing persons for the exciting task of leading Christ's people.

*Deletion is enclosed in brackets.*
RCA congregations must sense again that if the RCA is to have outstanding leadership in the future, the process must begin now and be systematically supported now and into God's future.

The advisory committee recommended to amend R-2:

R-2.
To encourage each congregation within the Reformed Church in America to commit an amount equal to 1 percent of its budget for congregational purposes to support New Brunswick Theological Seminary and 1 percent to support Western Theological Seminary, [in order] to [systematically] support the [preparation of future pastoral leadership] non-administrative budgets of both these institutions. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)*

Reason: The amendment clarifies that this is a suggested asking in addition to the assessment for the administration of theological education. <

3. The RCA seminaries are dependent upon local congregations to identify and recruit persons with outstanding gifts for ministry.

General Synod president, the Rev. Harold Korver, has carried out a year-long project to determine how the RCA can better identify, recruit, and train outstanding persons for leadership in the name of Jesus and for the sake of the gospel. He has discovered that the first step is the identification of persons with gifts for ministry. Seminaries cannot be responsible for this step. But pastors, teachers, parents, and friends of gifted individuals are in a position to point out their giftedness and to suggest that God may have given them their gifts to be used in pastoral leadership.

The Board of Trustees of New Brunswick Theological Seminary recommends:

R-3.
[To urge each congregation in the Reformed Church in America to make a systematic assessment of the gifts God has given to the men and women within its membership; and further,

to urge those persons with demonstrated capacity for leadership within Christ's church to consider whether God might be, by entrusting them with such gifts, calling them to service as a minister of Word and Sacrament.]*

> Upon recommendation of the advisory committee, the following was substituted for R-3:

To refer R-3 to the Task Force on Standards for the Preparation for the Professional Ministry in the Reformed Church in America. (ADOPTED)

Reason: R-3 is within the responsibilities and expertise of the task force. <

LIFE AND MINISTRY

The continuing institutional mission of New Brunswick Theological Seminary is to assure the church of a supply of outstanding persons competent to lead congregations in the work of ministry. The special mission of NBTS is to provide access to quality theological education for students who are committed to serving minority congregations or who are

*Addition is in light-face type; deletions are enclosed in brackets.
coming to ministry while continuing to work in another vocation. The student body of NBTS is increasingly reflective of the marvelous inclusiveness which the book of Revelation uses to describe the company of heaven: "a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb" (Rev. 7:9).

Enrollment has remained at record high levels—211 students registered in the fall 1994 semester and 202 in the spring 1995 semester.

The student body is just one of the factors which make NBTS such an exciting place to be. The curriculum is another. In New Brunswick's new curriculum, the classic disciplines of theological education are integrated with courses which seek to meet the pressing needs of this present age. Each student's classroom experience is balanced and strengthened by direct involvement in the life and work of the church, under the mentorship of pastors specially trained to supervise students in ministerial practice.

NBTS also rejoices in a dedicated, skilled, and pastoral faculty. Each of the members of the full-time faculty regularly receives high praise for the quality and insight of his or her teaching. Two faculty had books published this year: the Rev. John W. Coakley, Creative Women in Medieval and Early Modern Italy (an exploration of spirituality), and the Rev. David W. Waanders, Treasure of Earthen Vessels (on pastoral care). Several other faculty have published journal articles, presented lectures, or contributed to research in their fields.

All faculty participated, in continuing and personal ways, in the life and work of congregations in the New Jersey and metropolitan New York area.

Of the many honors which came to NBTS faculty in the past year, two can serve as representative. On Sunday afternoon, February 26, 1995, in First Reformed Church of New Brunswick, New Jersey, the Rev. Dr. John Coakley was formally installed as the L. Russell Feakes Memorial professor of church history. The Feakes professorship was endowed by a most generous gift from Martha Feakes, in memory of her husband, L. Russell Feakes (1905-1986). L. Russell Feakes, long-time controller with Johnson & Johnson, served as treasurer of NBTS from 1953 to 1967. Professor Coakley is a profound scholar and an outstanding teacher. He is most worthy of appointment to this named and endowed position.

Professor Warren Dennis, assistant professor of urban ministry, was named a fellow in Leadership New Jersey. This program describes its purposes as follows:

Leadership New Jersey is a program of the Partnership for New Jersey, an association of corporate chief executives and selected leaders from the nonprofit community. The program ... selects about fifty candidates from applicants who demonstrate a record of professional and volunteer leadership, and who show the desire and potential to do more. Through a series of seminars, these outstanding women and men visit all regions of the state to explore critical issues facing New Jersey.

The ordinary and extraordinary daily needs of NBTS are met by a wonderful staff whose willingness to go the extra mile and do the extra work is one of God's greatest gifts to NBTS.

PETITIONS TO SUBSTITUTE PERIODS OF MINISTRY FOR THE TWENTY-SEVEN-MONTH REQUIREMENT

Chapter 1, Part II, Article 8, Section 3, of the BCO states:

Immediately following the enrollment of a candidate for the ministry, the classis shall petition ... on behalf of the candidate for a Certificate of Fitness for Ministry. Such a petition must be received a minimum of twenty-seven months prior to the time it is to
be given final disposition by the General Synod through its agent. However, in instances where completion of theological training takes place prior to the required period of twenty-seven months, the classis may petition to substitute a period of ministry supervised by the General Synod through its agent for all or part of its twenty-seven month requirement.

The Board of Trustees of NBTS received a petition from the Classis of Delaware-Raritan and a petition from the Classis of New Brunswick to substitute periods of ministry for part of the twenty-seven month requirement.

The Classis of Delaware-Raritan petitioned General Synod through its agent to substitute a period of ministry for part (seven months) of the twenty-seven month requirement for Samuel Pomper. Pomper received the M.Div. degree from NETS in May 1995.

The Board of Trustees of NBTS is recommending denial of the petition from the Classis of Delaware-Raritan for the following two reasons:

1. During the spring of 1994 the seminary faculty required Pomper to complete an internship and unit of Clinical Pastoral Education before it made a final recommendation to the board of trustees concerning the disposition of Pomper’s petition for a Certificate of Fitness for Ministry. Pomper will be engaged in fulfilling this requirement for some months following his graduation.

2. Pomper failed to initiate the process of enrollment as a candidate for ministry in a timely way in spite of being advised to do so by a representative of the seminary who is also a member of the petitioning classis. At that time the twenty-seven-month requirement was explained to Pomper.

R-4.
To deny the petition from the Classis of Delaware-Raritan to substitute a seven-month period of ministry for Samuel Pomper for part of the twenty-seven-month requirement under Chapter 1, Part II, Article 8, Section 3 of the Book of Church Order. (ADOPTED)

The Classis of New Brunswick petitioned General Synod through its agent to substitute a period of ministry for part (nine months) of the twenty-seven month requirement for Roberto Pois. Pois received the M.Div. degree from NBTS in May 1995.

The Board of Trustees of NBTS is recommending approval of the petition from the Classis of New Brunswick for the following two reasons:

1. Although Pois has requirements to complete before disposition can be made concerning his petition for a Certificate of Fitness for Ministry, Pois will be able to complete them within the reduced time period created by granting this petition.

2. When Pois felt led to transfer his membership to the Reformed Church in America, Pois promptly initiated the process of enrollment as a candidate for the ministry.

R-5.
To approve the nine months of ministry under the supervision of New Brunswick Theological Seminary’s Supervised Ministry Program for Roberto Pois; and further,
to approve the petition from the Classis of New Brunswick to substitute a nine-month period of ministry for Roberto Fois for part of the twenty-seven-month requirement under Chapter 1, Part II, Article 8, Section 3 of the Book of Church Order.

Upon a motion from the floor to amend R-5, the Synod

VOTED: To approve the nine-month period of ministry under the supervision of New Brunswick Theological Seminary's Supervised Ministry Program for Roberto Fois; and further,

to approve the petition from the Classis of New Brunswick to substitute an eleven-month period of ministry for Roberto Fois for part of the twenty-seven-month requirement under Chapter 1, Part II, Article 8, Section 3 of the Book of Church Order.*

(The advisory committee had recommended the adoption of R-5.)

NOMINATIONS TO THE FOURTH OFFICE

Paul R. Fries

The Rev. Dr. Paul R. Fries first joined the New Brunswick Theological Seminary faculty in 1968. He served as assistant professor of systematic theology until 1978, when he resigned to become pastor of Hope Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan. In 1982 Fries returned to his faculty appointment as professor of theology and ministry. From 1985 to 1991 he was NBTS's academic dean.

WHEREAS the Rev. Dr. Paul R. Fries has demonstrated a love of teaching, a capacity to inspire students to excellence, and a continuing commitment to ministry in the name and for the sake of Jesus Christ; and

WHEREAS the Rev. Dr. Paul R. Fries teaches systematic theology, counsels students, and plays vital roles within the life and ministry of New Brunswick Theological Seminary; and

WHEREAS the Rev. Dr. Paul R. Fries ministers to the church through his faithful preaching of the Word and celebration of the sacraments within congregations within the region around New Brunswick, New Jersey, and daily seeks to be faithful to the calling of his Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ;

THEREFORE, it is fitting and proper that the Board of Trustees of New Brunswick Theological Seminary nominates the Rev. Dr. Paul R. Fries to the Office of Professor of Theology in the Reformed Church in America.

R-6.
To elect the Rev. Paul R. Fries, Ph.D., professor of theology and ministry, to the Office of General Synod Professor of Theology in the Reformed Church in America, as provided for in the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 8. (ADOPTED)

*Additions are in light-face type; deletions are enclosed in brackets.
The president introduced the Rev. Dr. Paul Fries to the Synod. The president read the “Appointment of a General Synod Professor of Theology” from the Book of Church Order and authorized a service of installation into the Office of General Synod Professor of Theology for the Rev. Dr. Paul Fries at the closing General Synod worship service on Friday afternoon, June 16, 1995.

The Rev. Dr. Paul Fries addressed the Synod.

John W. Coakley

After ten years of distinguished service as a pastor in the United Church of Christ, the Rev. Dr. John W. Coakley was called to the New Brunswick Theological Seminary faculty in 1984 to teach church history. In 1988 he was received into the ministry of the Reformed Church in America by the Classis of Newark. Professor Coakley has faithfully served the seminary and the church as a careful scholar and compelling lecturer.

WHEREAS the Rev. Dr. John W. Coakley has demonstrated a love of teaching, a capacity to inspire students to excellence, and a continuing commitment to ministry in the name and for the sake of Jesus Christ; and

WHEREAS the Rev. Dr. John W. Coakley teaches church history, counsels students, and plays vital roles within the life and ministry of New Brunswick Theological Seminary; and

WHEREAS the Rev. Dr. John W. Coakley ministers to the church through his faithful preaching of the Word and celebration of the sacraments within congregations within the region around New Brunswick, New Jersey, and daily seeks to be faithful to the calling of his Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ;

THEREFORE, it is fitting and proper that the Board of Trustees of New Brunswick Theological Seminary nominates the Rev. Dr. John W. Coakley to the Office of General Synod Professor of Theology in the Reformed Church in America.

R-7.
To elect the Rev. John W. Coakley, Ph.D., Professor of Church History, to the Office of General Synod L. Russell Feakes Memorial Professor of Theology as provided for in the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 8. (ADOPTED)

The president introduced the Rev. Dr. John Coakley to the Synod. The president read the “Appointment of a General Synod Professor of Theology” from the Book of Church Order and authorized a service of installation into the Office of General Synod Professor of Theology for the Rev. Dr. John Coakley at the closing General Synod worship service on Friday afternoon, June 16, 1995.

The Rev. Dr. John Coakley addressed the Synod.
Report of Western Teological Seminary

This is a time of transition for theological education in North America. As the church of Jesus Christ seeks to minister during an increasingly pluralistic and post-Christian age, seminaries have begun to shape new strategies, develop new technologies, and design new and better programs to recruit, nurture, and equip leaders for the church of the future.

The 1994-95 academic year was certainly a time of transition for Western Theological Seminary (WTS). Building upon a proud heritage and firm foundation, WTS has begun an exciting process of review and renewal. With the inauguration of a new president, the seminary has continued to shape a program of theological education which is grounded in Scripture, rooted in Reformed theology, centered in mission, attuned to new technologies, church-based in training, and adaptable in approach. Dependent upon God’s grace and guidance, WTS faces the enormous task of preparing a new generation of leaders for the Reformed Church in America with confidence and hope.

PRESIDENTIAL INAUGURATION

On October 27, 1994, the Rev. Dr. Dennis N. Voskuil was inaugurated as the tenth president of WTS. The service of inauguration was held at Third Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan. Voskuil had previously served for two years as interim senior pastor at Third Reformed Church, and he and his family attended this church while he was a professor of religion at Hope College.

After Carol Wagner, moderator of the Board of Trustees of WTS, invested him in the office, President Voskuil delivered his inaugural address. The address, “Our Foundation for the Future,” was based on 1 Corinthians 3:11: “No one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ.” Voskuil suggested that, built upon the foundation of Christ, WTS could move with confidence to face the challenges of the future. He also indicated that WTS’s commitment to be a Reformed seminary meant that it would be both evangelical and ecumenical. A Reformed seminary, said Voskuil, must have “an evangelical heart with ecumenical arms.”

On the morning following the inauguration, the Rev. Dr. Richard Mouw, president of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, presented a public lecture which charted the future of theological education. This challenging address provided background for a seminary forum, as small groups of church leaders discussed the past, present, and future of theological education at WTS.

CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR CHRISTIAN TRAINING AND SERVICE (CONNECTS)

To meet the growing need of continuing education for both clergy and laity, WTS established CONNECTS, an acronym for Continuing Education for Christian Training and Service. Under the visionary leadership of the Rev. Dr. Robert Coughenour, recently retired WTS professor of Old Testament, and an advisory board composed of RCA pastors, Christian educators, and WTS seminary faculty, CONNECTS has begun to put the WTS on wheels, providing opportunities for learning and spiritual growth, not only at its Holland, Michigan, campus but at locations across North America. Events have already been held in Florida, Canada, and Illinois, as well as in Michigan. Beginning in the fall of 1995, day-long continuing education opportunities are planned for northern Michigan, Iowa, Arizona, and California.
In an effort to determine the learning needs, a questionnaire was sent to church leaders across the denomination. The results of the questionnaire will help to shape courses in Bible, theology, evangelism, spirituality, contemporary religious movements, etc. WTS envisions that CONNECTS will soon become a full-service program for continuing education across the denomination.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

At the October 1994 meeting of the Board of Trustees of WTS, the final draft of the seminary’s strategic plan, “Seeking New Wineskins,” was received and approved. The planning process involved scores of people throughout the denomination, and the process gave shape to a mission statement as well as a list of goals which was subsequently prioritized and cost-accounted. The strategic plan provides a guide for future decisions to be made by the Board of Trustees of WTS. WTS is grateful for the time and energy which so many persons devoted to the strategic planning process.

FINANCES

In recent years it has become increasingly difficult to balance the annual WTS operating budget. The 1993-94 budget of $2.4 million had a deficit of more than $125,000; and while it is difficult at this writing to project final budget figures, a deficit appears likely for the 1994-95 operating budget as well. While various factors account for the strain on the budget, which has increased relatively little over the years, it appears that gifts from congregations and tuition income have not kept pace with the budget.

In 1984 church gifts accounted for 36 percent of the budget support and tuition provided 20 percent; but in 1994 church gifts, including those received through assessments, accounted for 24 percent and tuition provided 16 percent. Given the financial pressures upon congregations, it is increasingly important for WTS to make its case for support with clarity and conviction. While tuition rates have been raised in recent years to generate additional income, such increases mean that seminarians graduate with considerable financial indebtedness. One of the abiding values of the RCA has been to not encumber seminarians with overwhelming debts.

Despite the strains on the budget, there were many positive signs with respect to institutional support. The percentage of alumni who give has increased. Gifts from individuals in general remained high, and significant grants were received from foundations.

Early in the fall of 1994 an anonymous donor presented a wonderful challenge to the seminary’s board of trustees. The donor offered to match all gifts generated through the collective fund-raising activities of board members up to the sum of $100,000. Board members have been working throughout the year to meet this matching gift challenge.

CAMPAIGN PLANNING COMMITTEE

Not many decades ago the full cost of training church leaders was funded by RCA congregations. In fact, as late as the 1950s, seminary tuition was not charged. As late as 1977, nearly 50 percent of seminary expenses were met through church gifts. Increasingly, however, the seminary is responsible for meeting budgets in part through tuition. But while colleges may gain as much as 80 percent of revenue through tuition, seminaries cannot be tuition-driven and expect to meet the needs of the church. More and more, therefore, seminaries are looking to endowment funds to supplement and stabilize operating budgets. At present the working endowment at WTS, that which supports the general fund and student aid, stands at just $5.5 million.
Considering the general giving patterns and the tuition constraints, it has become increasingly clear that for WTS to meet the goals of its strategic plan and to fulfill its mission of providing quality training for the future leaders of the church, it must seek additional endowment funds. Therefore, at its October 1994 meeting, the Board of Trustees of WTS voted to ask Campbell and Associates to assist the advancement office to investigate the viability of a capital funds campaign. Under the leadership of the advancement officers, the Rev. Vernon Hoffman and Harold Ritsema, a campaign planning committee was drawn together to hear and respond to the seminary’s case for a campaign. At working luncheons in November and December 1994, thirty committee members gathered as President Voskuil unveiled “Mission 21,” a broad-based vision for the future of WTS. Building upon the ongoing strategic planning process, Voskuil said that a capital funds campaign would meet the seminary’s mission into the 21st century by encouraging students, faculty, church leaders, and congregations and by enhancing mission and curricular effectiveness. Following these meetings, Campbell and Associates conducted a feasibility study.

STUDENT ENROLLMENT AND RECRUITMENT

As the church faces new challenges in evangelism and mission, it is especially important that committed, capable, and visionary leaders are called to ministry. It has become a high priority at WTS, then, to identify and recruit able RCA candidates. During the 1994-95 academic year, 139 students were enrolled at WTS; eighty-five were male and fifty-four were female. There were sixty-seven students enrolled in the Master of Divinity program, twenty-two in the Master of Religious Education program, twenty-seven in the Doctor of Ministry program, six in the Master of Theology program (international students), and seventeen special students.

One of WTS’s pressing goals is to increase enrollment by 50 students within five years. The seminary can employ many strategies to reach that goal, but identification and nurture of future church leaders occurs in the congregations, as pastors, parents, grandparents, Sunday school teachers, and friends affirm spiritual gifts. Therefore, WTS invites members of RCA congregations to assist in recruitment and to encourage potential leaders to seek theological education.

SEMINARY VIDEO

To assist in recruitment and promotion, WTS engaged John Grooters from Stewardship and Communication Services to produce a thirteen-minute video on the life of the seminary. Entitled A Season of Light, it shows viewers WTS from the inside out through the eyes of students, faculty, church leaders, and graduates. Already shown at various meetings throughout the RCA and sent to prospective students, A Season of Light is available through the seminary’s advancement office.

EVENING CLASSES

In keeping with one of the goals of its strategic plan, WTS’s faculty and administration have begun a thorough process of curricular revision. However, to meet the immediate needs of students unable to attend day classes, the seminary has already substantially strengthened its offerings of evening classes. With a three-year rotation of courses, it is now possible for a student to complete two-thirds of the course requirements at night. This arrangement, as well as projected intensive courses during the summer, will enable the seminary to engage and equip a significant number of new students.
NEW ORGAN AND CHAPEL RESTORATION

Under the impetus of the Rev. Marvin D. Hoff, former president of WTS, funds for a new organ were provided from the estate of Richard and Ethel Vanden Heuvel. During the fall and winter of 1994-95, a magnificent new van Daalen organ was installed in Mulder Chapel, and the chapel was painted and carpeted through the courtesy of Peter and Emajean Cook. On March 13, 1995, the organ was dedicated at a special service of worship, and on the following evening, the Dutch organist, Johann Lemckett, presented a recital. The seminary community is most grateful for the opportunity to glorify God through the glorious organ in a beautifully restored Mulder Chapel.

STUDENT AND FACULTY LIFE

The academic year began in August 1994 with an all-seminary retreat at Camp Geneva near Holland, Michigan. President Voskuil set the tone with an address entitled "Our Life Together." In this address, he stressed the point that WTS is a spiritual as well as an academic community. Growth as Christians only takes place when Christians care for and pray for one another.

The theme of "Our Life Together" has permeated the seminary community throughout the year. Central to the life of the seminary community were the daily chapel services led by students, staff, faculty, and guests.

The seminary community was also enriched by guest lecturers and teachers. Among those who visited the campus were evangelist, the Rev. Luis Palau; biblical scholar, the Rev. Dr. Bruce Metzger; Taiwanese theologian, Dr. Han-Luan Chih; and theologian, the Rev. Dr. Justo González, who presented the annual Osterhaven Lectures on the contemporary relevance of Reformed theology. The Rev. Dr. Gregg Mast of First Church in Albany, New York, presented the Bergsma lecture on "The Heidelberg Catechism and the Sacraments," and the Rev. Dr. Steven Hoogerwerf of Hope College spoke on "Culture Wars: Convicted Christians in an Age of Pluralism." The Bast Festival of Preaching was led by the Rev. Dr. William Willimon of Duke University Divinity School; the Advent preaching workshop was led by the Rev. Dann Stouten and the Rev. Douglas VanBronkhorst; and the Lenten workshop was led by the Rev. Marchiene Rienstra and Barbara Borr Veurink.

Senior Steve Norman was the student council president during the past year. The council engaged a variety of student concerns, including the need for a student lounge in the basement of the main seminary building. Plans were made to make such a student center available.

While the Rev. Dr. Carol Bechtel Reynolds was appointed a year before, she began teaching Old Testament at WTS in the fall of 1994. The Rev. Dr. Christopher Kaiser, professor of theology, enjoyed his sabbatical during the first two quarters of the 1994-95 academic year. This allowed him to work on a project entitled "From Biblical Secularity to Modern Secularism."

The seminary's search for a homiletics professor continued during the past 1994-95 academic year. During the fall of 1994 church leaders were invited to suggest names of potential candidates. Following a thorough search process, the Board of Trustees of WTS voted unanimously to appoint the Rev. Dr. Timothy Brown to the position of Henry Bast Professor of Preaching and Director of Church Vocations. A graduate of Hope College (B.A., 1973) and WTS (M.Div., 1976; D.Min, 1992), Brown most recently served as senior pastor of Christ Memorial Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan. He previously served RCA congregations in Hudsonville, Michigan, and South Holland, Illinois. Members of the seminary community are most pleased that Brown has accepted this call to employ his gifts of preaching, teaching, and pastoring in preparing persons for Christian ministry.
The seminary community was deeply saddened by the sudden death on March 2, 1995, of the Rev. Jay Weener, revered RCA pastor who served as the Henry Bast Professor of Preaching from 1989-1994. Though retired, Weener was serving as an adjunct professor when he died. Students, faculty, and staff mourn the loss of a dear friend, mentor, and colleague.

RETIREMENTS

Two members of the WTS community retired at the end of the academic year. They are the Rev. Dr. James I. Cook, professor of New Testament, and Joan Bolman, registrar.

James Ivan Cook

The Rev. Dr. James Ivan Cook was born and raised in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He graduated from Hope College in 1948 (A.B.); from Michigan State University in 1949 (M.A.); from WTS in 1952 (B.D.); and from Princeton Theological Seminary in 1964 (Th.D.). He was pastor of Blawenburg Reformed Church in Blawenburg, New Jersey, from 1953-63; professor at WTS from 1963-95; vice-president of General Synod in 1981-82; and president of General Synod in 1982-83.

James Ivan Cook has had a long and distinguished ministry at WTS and in the Reformed Church in America. He is known to his students and colleagues as the quintessential pastor/teacher in the rich tradition of the Rev. Dr. Richard Oudersluys and the late Rev. Dr. Lester Kuyper. He set high standards for his students; prepared meticulously for lectures; opened, together with his wife, Jean, his home and table to generations of students; edited rigorously student papers and articles for the Reformed Review; and critiqued errant work in love.

As a theologian, he helped all to understand the radicality of God’s grace, the significance of a personal, covenanting God, and the sustaining love of God in personal tragedy. He found God incarnate in God’s people and introduced the seminary community and church to authors like Frederick Buechner, who shared his incarnational view of reality.

The WTS community honored Cook’s gifts when it made him Anton Biemolt Professor of New Testament (1977-94), and the larger community showed its affection with the establishment of the James and Jean Cook Chair of New Testament (1994).

R-8.

To adopt the following resolution:

BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred eighty-ninth regular session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting at Ramapo College in Mahwah, New Jersey, on the fifteenth day of June 1995, offers thanks to God for years of competent and faithful service to Western Theological Seminary and to the Reformed Church in America by the Reverend Dr. James I. Cook, whose pastoral and scholarly gifts have blessed the lives of students, colleagues, and congregations, and strengthened the work of theological education and biblical studies; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the one hundred eighty-ninth regular session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, on behalf of the Reformed Church in America, expresses to James and Jean Cook its gratitude, admiration, and affection, and offers its prayers for years of health, love, and joy in continuing service to Christ and the church. (ADOPTED)
The president introduced the Rev. Dr. James and Jean Cook to the Synod. The Rev. Dr. James Cook addressed the Synod.

R-9.
To declare James I. Cook professor emeritus of the General Synod.
(ADOPTED)

Joan Bolman

Joan Bolman is well-known to the host of Reformed Church in America pastors and religious educators who have studied at WTS. For twenty-eight years she guided entering students through the complexities of course registration, solved scheduling problems, answered endless questions covering the full range of academic concerns, and responded to requests for academic transcripts. Bolman introduced new faculty to WTS’s grading policies and academic procedures, and she worked closely with faculty on course schedules and grade reports. Bolman faithfully served as registrar and administrative assistant to four deans. Three times during her service at WTS, Bolman gave careful attention to the rigorous and challenging demands of the accreditation process employed by the Association of Theological Schools.

Following her graduation from Zeeland High School in Zeeland, Michigan, Bolman held highly responsible secretarial positions in business. From there she moved to Hope College to work with academic records. In 1967 she came to WTS to serve as administrative secretary to President Herman J. Ridder and to Dean Elton J. Eenigenburg, a position she held from 1968 to 1982. Bolman was registrar and administrative assistant to the dean of faculty from 1982 until her retirement at the end of the 1994-95 academic year. As the seminary grew and changed, Bolman coped with the complexities of the bi-level, multi-site program of the early 1970s and with the challenges of launching the doctor of ministry degree and continuing education programs.

Bolman is a member of First Reformed Church in Zeeland, Michigan.

R-10.
To adopt the following resolution:

BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred eighty-ninth regular session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting at Ramapo College in Mahwah, New Jersey, on the fifteenth day of June 1995, offers thanks to God for years of competent and faithful service to Western Theological Seminary and to the Reformed Church in America by Joan Bolman, whose competent and careful work as registrar blessed the lives of students and colleagues; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the one hundred eighty-ninth regular session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, on behalf of the Reformed Church in America, expresses to Joan Bolman its gratitude, admiration, and affection, and offers its prayers for years of health, love, and joy in continuing service to Christ and the church. (ADOPTED)

DISPENSATIONS

The faculty and Board of Trustees of WTS believe that the intended meaning of “a student at a theological seminary” in Chapter 1, Part II, Article 10, Section I, of the Book of Church Order (BCO) is “a student at a theological seminary enrolled in the degree program which
is designed to prepare persons for the ministry of Word and sacrament." (Section 1 applies to students at theological seminaries seeking a dispensation from a language requirement, etc., in order to receive the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry.) When this section was originally written, that meant a degree of Bachelor of Divinity or, more recently, a degree of Master of Divinity (M.Div.). Most theological seminaries now offer several degree programs in addition to the M.Div. degree.

The current wording is unclear. Under the current wording of this section 1, Master of Religious Education students and Master of Arts in Religion students are not distinguished from Master of Divinity students and could erroneously be considered candidates preparing for ordination to the office of minister of Word and sacrament.

According to the Standards of the Association of Theological Schools, specialized theological degrees, such as the Master of Religious Education or the Master of Arts in Religion, are not intended to be an equivalent to the degree of Master of Divinity as preparation leading to ordination to the ministry of Word and sacrament.

Seminary programs other than the M.Div. program do not adequately prepare candidates in all the subject areas in which the Book of Church Order requires candidates to be examined.

The context for theological education has changed. Persons attend theological seminaries for personal enrichment, to be equipped for a specialized lay ministry, or for professional work in the church, such as evangelist, youth worker, or religious educator. The changing context calls for more precision in the wording of BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 10, Section 1.

Because the wording in BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 10, Section 2, is also unclear, the wording should be revised to clarify that the M.Div. degree is the "regular course of seminary instruction." (Section 2 applies to persons who do not have formal theological education and are unable to take the "regular course of seminary instruction," who are seeking dispensation in order to receive the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry.) The suggested rewording for section 2 simply makes consistent the language of sections 1 and 2 and clarifies the appropriate section under which petitions for dispensation should be processed.

R-11.
To adopt the following revision to the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 10, Section 1 and Section 2, for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined, deletions are enclosed in brackets):

Sec. 1. [Students] Master of Divinity Degree Candidates at Theological Seminaries — A candidate for the ministry who is a student enrolled in a Master of Divinity degree program at a theological seminary, but because of age, lack of necessary academic preparation, or other sufficient reason, finds it too difficult to meet the full requirements for the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry, shall make application to the classis for a dispensation.

Sec. 2. Persons [Without Formal Theological Education] Not Enrolled in a Master of Divinity Degree Program — An active-confirmed member of a congregation in the Reformed Church in America who has received special gifts for the office of minister, but is unable to take the regular course of seminary instruction in a Master of Divinity degree program because of
The Board of Trustees of WTS received a report and recommendation concerning the following dispensation under the BCO, Chapter I, Part II, Article 10, Section 1, which allows an RCA seminary student, who because of age, lack of necessary academic preparation, or other sufficient reason, finds it too difficult to meet the full requirements for the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry, to seek a dispensation.

The Board of Trustees of WTS submitted a recommendation with respect to the petition from the Classis of Rocky Mountains for a dispensation from the biblical language requirement for the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry for Ronald D. Gray on the basis of lack of necessary academic preparation. Gray completed an M.A. degree at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California.

R-12.
To grant Ronald D. Gray a dispensation from the biblical language requirement for the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry. (ADOPTED)

PETITIONS TO SUBSTITUTE PERIODS OF MINISTRY FOR THE TWENTY-SEVEN MONTH REQUIREMENT

Chapter I, Part II, Article 8, Section 3, of the BCO states:

Immediately following the enrollment of a candidate for the ministry, the classis shall petition...on behalf of the candidate for a Certificate of Fitness for Ministry. Such a petition must be received a minimum of twenty-seven months prior to the time it is to be given final disposition by the General Synod through its agent. However, in instances where completion of theological training takes place prior to the required period of twenty-seven months, the classis may petition...to substitute a period of ministry supervised by the General Synod through its agent for all or part of its twenty-seven month requirement.

The Board of Trustees of WTS received two petitions from the Classis of Zeeland to substitute periods of ministry for part of the twenty-seven month requirement.

The Classis of Zeeland petitioned General Synod through its agent to substitute a period of ministry for part of the twenty-seven month requirement for Daniel J. Kuik. Kuik received the M.Div. degree from WTS in May of 1995, but will not fulfill the twenty-seven month requirement until March 2, 1996.

Kuik matriculated in the M.Div. program at WTS in the fall of 1991. Kuik has been supervised by the faculty of WTS since September 1991. Before coming under the care of the Classis of Zeeland on December 2, 1993, Kuik served as a Bible teacher in a Christian school and served as a nonordained staff person for youth and education in a Christian Reformed Church (CRC) congregation for seven years.

R-13.
To approve nine months of service in a congregation of the Christian Reformed Church as a substitute period of ministry for Daniel Kuik; and further,
to approve the petition from the Classis of Zeeland to substitute a nine-month period of ministry for Daniel Kuik for part of the twenty-seven-month requirement under Chapter 1, Part II, Article 8, Section 3 of the Book of Church Order. (ADOPTED)

The Classis of Zeeland petitioned General Synod through its agent to substitute a period of ministry for part of the twenty-seven month requirement for Michael L. Herring. Herring will receive the M.Div. degree from WTS in May 1996, but will not fulfill the twenty-seven month requirement until February 11, 1997.

Herring spent fourteen years as a youth worker in various traditions. During part of this time, he was on the staff of Harvest Community Church in Wichita, Kansas, a new church start in the RCA. While working at Harvest Community Church, Herring decided to seek ordination in the RCA and enrolled in TEA. He matriculated in the M.Div. program at WTS in the fall of 1994. Herring has been supervised by the faculty of WTS since September 1994. He came under the care of the Classis of Zeeland on November 11, 1994.

R-14.
To approve ten months of ministry at Harvest Community Church (a new church start in the RCA) in Wichita, Kansas as a substitute period of ministry for Michael Herring; and further,

to approve the petition from the Classis of Zeeland to substitute a ten-month period of ministry for Michael Herring for part of the twenty-seven-month requirement under Chapter 1, Part II, Article 8, Section 3 of the Book of Church Order. (ADOPTED)

NOMINATION TO THE FOURTH OFFICE

James V. Brownson

The Rev. Dr. James V. Brownson joined the Western Theological Seminary faculty in 1989. His two faculty evaluations were positive and led to new contracts. As part of his most recent review, there was a discussion with Brownson regarding his desire to be nominated to the fourth office as provided for in the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 8, Section 3. Brownson expressed his desire to serve the church as a professor of theology of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America.

WHEREAS the Rev. Dr. James V. Brownson has demonstrated competence in teaching, skills in interpreting the Scriptures, and commitment to ministry with Jesus Christ today; and

WHEREAS the Rev. Dr. James V. Brownson teaches the New Testament and plays vital roles in the life and ministry of the Western Theological Seminary community; and

WHEREAS the Rev. Dr. James V. Brownson serves Jesus Christ and the church through sharing the word of Scripture and living the word of Scripture in his daily ministry;

THEREFORE, it is fitting and proper that the Board of Trustees of Western Theological Seminary nominates the Rev. Dr. James V. Brownson to the Office of Professor of Theology of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America.
R-15.
To elect the Rev. James V. Brownson, Ph.D., James and Jean Cook Professor of New Testament, to the Office of Professor of Theology in the Reformed Church in America, as provided for in the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 8. (ADOPTED)

The president introduced the Rev. Dr. James Brownson to the Synod. The president read the “Appointment of a General Synod Professor of Theology” from the Book of Church Order and authorized a service of installation into the Office of General Synod Professor of Theology for the Rev. Dr. James Brownson at the closing General Synod worship service on Friday afternoon, June 16, 1995.

The Rev. Dr. James Brownson addressed the Synod.

CONCLUSION

The board of trustees, staff, faculty, and students of WTS give thanks to God for the privilege of serving, teaching, and leading during the past year. WTS also thanks God for the prayers which have been raised on behalf of the seminary’s ministry throughout the Reformed Church in America. To God be the glory!

Report of the Theological Education Agency (TEA)

The Board of Trustees of the Theological Education Agency (TEA) of the Reformed Church in America is pleased to present its report to the delegates of the 1995 General Synod. TEA has continued its operations with an eight-person board of trustees; a director, the Rev. Cornelis G. Kors; and an administrative assistant, Kelly J. Talsma. TEA has two offices: 1) a main office at the Classis of California office in Cerritos, California, and 2) a faculty office at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California.

During this past year, twenty-seven new candidates were admitted to the TEA program upon recommendation of the candidates’ respective classes. Thirteen candidates were dismissed or withdrew from the TEA program for various reasons or transferred to an RCA seminary. TEA was also asked to oversee two supervised ministries of licensed candidates by their respective classes.

The TEA Board of Trustees awarded seven Certificates of Fitness for Ministry this past year to the following individuals:

David Alexander (conditional)            Classis of California
David Izenbart                           Classis of Wisconsin
Jeanette Beagley-Koolhass (conditional)  Classis of California
Jeffrey Kreiser                          Classis of Central California
Melody Meeter                           Classis of Greater Palisades
Jill Russell                            Classis of Southwest Michigan
Jeffrey Wenke                           Classis of Southwest Michigan
The following nine candidates will be presented to the TEA Board of Trustees by the TEA Certification Committee for the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry in June 1995:

Edward Baker
Walter Brockhaus
Scott Christiansen
Karl Neerhof (conditional)
Russell Ooms
Dunston Sampson
Timothy Schaaf
Charles Spencer
James Wall

Classis of South Grand Rapids
Classis of Central California
Classis of Central Plains
Classis of the Rocky Mountains
Classis of California
Classis of California
Classis of Illiana
Classis of the Red River
Classis of the Red River

TEA completed oversight of supervised ministry experiences for the following candidate:

Reuben Kwint
Classis of Ontario

ENROLLMENT STATISTICS

| Registered Candidates | 73 |
| Inactive and Special | 1 |
| Supervision of Candidates for Licensure | 2 |
| Applicants | 9 |
| TOTAL | 85 |

ASSET MANAGEMENT, FINANCES, AND SUPPORT

TEA budgets over the past four years are listed below:

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*Fiscal year changed from July 1-June 30 to January 1-December 31.
+Revenues and Expenses from previous years included.

The TEA program has been blessed financially over the past three years with an excess of income over expenditures. Thus, TEA has been able to reduce its deficit (see above). An effort to raise extra funds for the purpose of granting financial assistance to candidates who need to participate in the Summer Intensive II continues. In 1994, $9,593 of financial assistance was raised for Summer Intensive II. Originally $4,000 was budgeted for the 1995 program. However, at the time of writing this report, approximately $7,000 had been pledged for the 1995 Summer Intensive II program.

The PPIM Endowment Fund for the Summer Intensive I Program currently has over $160,000. The interest income from this fund is specifically used to assist TEA candidates to participate in the Summer Intensive I program.

During the first quarter of 1995, contributions to TEA from RCA congregations are down at least 10 percent from 1994. This continues the downward trend of the past five years. (In 1994 there was an exception to this downward trend due to a special fund-raising effort.)
PROGRAM

Summer Intensive

The past year was the second time TEA was able to offer two summer intensives. Summer Intensive I was held in June 1994 at Central College in Pella, Iowa. The instructors in the program were the Rev. Dr. I. John Hesselink from Western Theological Seminary (WTS) and the Rev. Dr. Robert Hoeksema from New Brunswick Theological Seminary (NBTS). Hesselink taught RCA Standards and Hoeksema taught RCA Polity.

Summer Intensive II on RCA History and RCA Worship was held in July 1994 at Rancho Capistrano in San Juan Capistrano, California. The instructor for this program was the Rev. Dr. Donald Bruggink from WTS. Participants in the 1994 summer intensives received academic credit recorded at WTS. For 1995 the institution of record for academic credit for Summer Intensive participants will be NBTS.

In 1995 Summer Intensive I—RCA Standards and RCA Polity will be held at Warwick Conference Center in Warwick, New York. Summer Intensive II—RCA History and RCA Worship will be held at Redeemer College in Ancaster, Ontario. The instructors will be the Rev. Dr. Paul Fries teaching RCA Standards, the Rev. Paul Smith teaching RCA Polity, and the Rev. Dr. Daniel Meeter teaching RCA History and RCA Worship.

Resignation from TEA Certification Committee

The TEA Certification Committee received the resignation of the Rev. Dr. James I. Cook, recently retired professor at WTS. The faculty of WTS nominated the Rev. Dr. James Brownson to replace Cook on the certification committee. The TEA Board of Trustees approved this nomination, and Brownson will begin his six-year term in July 1995. Special thanks are extended to Cook for his years of service.

Completion of Term on TEA Certification Committee

The Rev. Dr. Paul Fries, professor at NBTS, completed his term on the TEA Certification Committee. The faculty of NBTS nominated the Rev. Renee House to replace Fries on the certification committee. The TEA Board of Trustees approved this nomination, and House will begin her six-year term in July 1995. Special thanks are extended to Fries for his years of service.

TEA Board of Trustees

The Rev. Harold Korver continued to serve as moderator for the TEA Board of Trustees. The Rev. Richard Koerselman served as secretary/treasurer for the board. The Rev. Rufus McClendon resigned from the board, and the Rev. Chester Droog completed McClendon's term. Special thanks are extended to McClendon for his years of service.

Adding and Extending Intensive Courses

The TEA Board of Trustees reviewed the summer intensives of the past three years and concluded that additional intensives should be offered. The board hopes these additional intensives can be implemented in cooperation with the RCA seminaries and possibly Fuller Theological Seminary. There are a number of other new areas of study and ministry preparation TEA is considering as intensive courses. TEA is also considering different formats for intensive courses in addition to the format currently in use. The board is considering the following:
1. Utilizing RCA churches for offering intensive courses in a number of formats (one week, three Friday/Saturday weekends, or ten week-day evening sessions of three hours each).

2. Offering additional intensive courses that provide a Reformed and/or RCA perspectives. Examples of these possible intensive course offerings are:

   - Systematic Theology I, II, III
   - Reformation Church History
   - Church Administration and Leadership (RCA context)
   - Issues in Ministry
   - Spiritual Formation and Reflection, etc.

   (Utilizing RCA pastors who have been successful in some of the above areas as instructors should be considered. Also, these courses could be made available to lay people as well as ordained pastors seeking continuing education credit.)

3. Courses in languages other than English, such as the Systematic Theology course currently being taught in Spanish by RCA professor, the Rev. Dr. Charles Van Engen, at Fuller Theological Seminary, could be offered to RCA lay pastors seeking professional development and ordination.

4. Extension courses via new technological opportunities such as videotaped lectures and computer-satellite communication should also be considered as part of this project.

R-16.

[To instruct the General Synod Council Ministry and Personnel Services Committee, in cooperation with the RCA seminaries and the Theological Education Agency (TEA), to initiate and create additional intensive course offerings, and to consider new models and formats for intensive courses; and further,]

   to instruct the General Synod Council Ministry and Personnel Services Committee, in cooperation with the RCA seminaries and TEA, to explore technologies to facilitate and make available these intensive courses to wider regions of the RCA throughout North America.]*

> Upon recommendation of the advisory committee, the following was substituted for R-16:

To instruct the Task Force on Standards for the Preparation for the Professional Ministry in the Reformed Church in America, in cooperation with the RCA seminaries and the Theological Education Agency (TEA), to explore the creation of additional intensive course offerings, and to consider new models and formats for intensive courses; and further,

   to instruct the Task Force on Standards for the Preparation for the Professional Ministry in the Reformed Church in America, in cooperation with the RCA seminaries and TEA, to explore technologies to facilitate and make available these intensive courses to wider regions of the RCA throughout North America. (ADOPTED)

Reason: It is premature to initiate additional intensive course offerings prior to the final report of the task force. <

*Deletion is enclosed in brackets.
There is a significant cost factor associated with the above additions and extension of intensive course offerings. The RCA seminaries and TEA do not have funds to implement this project. The board recommends that $25,000 in the 1996 General Synod assessment for expenses account be designated as start-up funds for extending the intensive course offering project.

-The advisory committee recommended to not adopt R-17.

R-17. To designate $25,000 in the 1996 General Synod Operational Budget to fund the addition, implementation, and extension of intensive courses offered through the cooperative efforts of the RCA seminaries and the Theological Education Agency. (NOT ADOPTED)

Reason: It is premature to fund additional intensive course offerings prior to the final report of the task force.

DISPENSATIONS

The TEA Certification Committee and the Board of Trustees of TEA present a request for a dispensation from the degree of Master of Divinity on behalf of David Alexander. Initially, the Classis of California requested this dispensation under the provision of the Book of Church Order (BCO), Chapter 1, Part II, Article 10, Section 1.

The following factors were cited for this request:

1. Alexander completed the degree of Master of Arts in theology at NBTS and has completed all the equivalent course work required for the degree of Master of Divinity. However, since Alexander was not able to remain at one location for his studies, he cannot be awarded the actual degree of Master of Divinity. The reasons for Alexander not being able to remain at one location for his studies were:

   a. Alexander was called, together with his wife, Char, to serve the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan.

   b. Alexander, due to responsibilities as an RCA missionary in Taiwan, and for his wife and children, was unable to move to a distant location to complete the degree of Master of Divinity.

2. Alexander made every effort to meet the additional requirements for TEA and the RCA through study at WTS.

3. Alexander has many years of ministry experience through his work in mission in Taiwan.

   a. Alexander has proven himself competent in ministry.

   b. Documentation to show Alexander’s competency in ministry was supplied to TEA.

4. The faculty of WTS through its academic dean, the Rev. Dr. George Brown, reviewed Alexander’s academic record and approved it as meeting the equivalent requirements of the degree of Master of Divinity as awarded at WTS; short of the regular supervised ministry offered at WTS.

   a. The director of TEA reviewed Alexander’s ministry experience and obtained a number of evaluations on Alexander’s past twenty-three years in ministry.
b. The director of TEA recommended to the TEA Certification Committee and the TEA Board of Trustees that Alexander's ministry experience qualify as meeting the supervised ministry requirement.

**R-18.**
To grant David Alexander a dispensation from the degree of Master of Divinity requirement of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry. (ADOPTED)

The TEA Certification Committee and the Board of Trustees of TEA present a request for a dispensation from the degree of Master of Divinity on behalf of Jeanette Beagley-Koolhaas. Initially, the Classis of California requested this dispensation under the provision of the BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 10, Section 1.

The following factors were cited for the request:

1. Beagley-Koolhaas has completed the degree of Master of Arts in theology at Fuller Theological Seminary and has completed all the equivalent coursework required for the degree of Master of Divinity. However, since Beagley-Koolhaas was not able to remain at one location for her studies, she cannot be awarded the actual degree of Master of Divinity. The reasons for Beagley-Koolhaas not being able to remain at one location for her studies were:
   a. Jeanette Koolhaas was called in 1980 to serve the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan as an RCA missionary teacher. Since 1986, when she married Alan Beagley, she has continued to serve with the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan.
   b. Beagley-Koolhaas, due to responsibilities to her husband and son, was unable to move to a distant location to complete the degree of Master of Divinity.

2. Beagley-Koolhaas made every effort to meet the additional requirements for TEA and the RCA through summer intensive courses and study at WTS.

3. Beagley-Koolhaas has many years of ministry experience through her work in mission in Taiwan.
   a. Beagley-Koolhaas has proven herself to be competent in ministry.
   b. Documentation to Beagley-Koolhaas’ competency in ministry was supplied to TEA.

4. The Rev. Dr. George Brown, academic dean at WTS, and the Rev. Dr. Cornelis Kors, director of TEA, reviewed Beagley-Koolhaas’ academic record and considered it as meeting the equivalent requirements of the degree of Master of Divinity as awarded at WTS, short of regular supervised ministry.

**R-19.**
To grant Jeanette Beagley-Koolhaas a dispensation from the degree of Master of Divinity requirement of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry. (ADOPTED)

The TEA Certification Committee and the Board of Trustees of TEA present a request for a dispensation from the Hebrew language on behalf of Karl Neerhof. Initially, the Classis of Rocky Mountains requested this dispensation under the provision of the BCO, Part II, Article 10, Section 1.
The following factors were cited for the request:

1. Neerhof is a gifted person and has proven himself in ministry in the following ways:
   - Neerhof established and developed effective youth ministry programs at Long Beach Christian Reformed Church in Long Beach, California; Second Christian Reformed Church in Denver, Colorado; and Hillcrest Christian Reformed Church in Denver, Colorado.
   - Neerhof established and developed effective adult education programs at Second Christian Reformed Church in Denver, Colorado; Hillcrest Christian Reformed Church in Denver, Colorado; and Our Saviour's Reformed Church in Lakewood, Colorado.
   - Neerhof established, developed, and administered effective educational programs for children at Second Christian Reformed Church in Denver, Colorado; Hillcrest Christian Reformed Church in Denver, Colorado; and Our Saviour's Reformed Church in Lakewood, Colorado.
   - Neerhof successfully administered religion education programs at Second Christian Reformed Church in Denver, Colorado; Hillcrest Christian Reformed Church in Denver, Colorado; Our Saviour's Reformed Church in Lakewood, Colorado; and Denver Christian High School in Denver, Colorado.
   - Neerhof served faithfully with his wife, Cherie, and son, Jared, in their roles as worship leaders at Our Saviour's Reformed Church in Lakewood, Colorado.
   - Neerhof developed and led worship services for the contemporary worship celebrations for the past two years.
   - Neerhof was actively involved in community outreach and visitation for the congregations he served. Neerhof organized and coordinated the efforts of the congregations he served to meet the needs in the surrounding neighborhood of these congregations.

2. All of the above ministry efforts were accomplished as Neerhof pursued his primary responsibilities as a high school teacher. Neerhof is a forty-three year old teacher at Denver Christian High School in Denver, Colorado. He has taught at the school from 1978 to the present. He teaches Bible (Grades 9-12) and has served faithfully as religious activities coordinator for the past fifteen years (1980-1994). Neerhof has been responsible for the chapels, assemblies, special programs, and community outreach service projects for the school's nearly three hundred students. Neerhof places a high priority on his work at Denver Christian High School and he communicates God's truth to young adults through his words and actions.

3. Neerhof and his wife, Cherie, also work part-time for Our Saviour's Reformed Church in Lakewood, Colorado. Neerhof and his wife prepare and lead a weekly contemporary worship service.

4. It is unreasonable to expect Neerhof to face the additional pressures of time, energy, and financial resources necessary in order for him to meet the Hebrew language provision required at Denver Seminary to receive the degree of Master of Divinity and to meet the Hebrew language provision required to receive the RCA Certificate of Fitness for Ministry.
5. Neerhof earned a degree of Master of Arts at Denver Seminary with honors. Neerhof has taken a course of study meeting the equivalent requirements of the degree of Master of Divinity as awarded at Denver Seminary, short of the Hebrew language.

6. Neerhof has had extenuating complications due to recent family illness.

7. Throughout the summer of 1994, Neerhof persevered to fulfill the Greek language requirement. Neerhof was the only remaining student at the end of the ten-week summer course. Complications in the Greek instructor's life concerning his employment, relationships, and family need made the continuity and effectiveness of the course an even greater challenge. Neerhof applied himself diligently to his Greek language studies, devoting six hours every day to the ten-week class. He earned a passing grade and the approval of his instructor.

8. Neerhof is willing to replace the Old Testament 501 course, Old Testament 502 course, Old Testament 503 course sequence, with the Old Testament 500 Hebrew course and suitable Old Testament course work through Denver Seminary. This alternative or substitute is very close to what is required at WTS.

9. Neerhof took TEA Summer Intensive I in June 1994. The instructors, the Rev. Dr. I. John Hesselink and the Rev. Dr. Robert Hoeksema, claimed Neerhof to be one of the best Reformed students they have had the pleasure to teach.

10. Neerhof meets all other TEA requirements, including TEA Summer Intensive II.

R-20.
To grant Karl Neerhof a dispensation from the Hebrew language requirement of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry. (ADOPTED)

The Classis of California also requested a dispensation from the degree of Master of Divinity for TEA candidate Roy Behnke. Behnke earned a degree of Master of Arts from Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. He has taken a number of courses to earn the equivalency of a degree of Master of Divinity in order to be admitted to the degree of Doctor of Ministry program at Fuller Theological Seminary.

The TEA board of trustees decided to deny this request at this time, with the understanding that Behnke may make this request again when more academic work is completed. Behnke will be serving for the next five years with Wycliffe Bible Translators in Great Britain. He will attempt to continue his studies there.

IDENTIFICATION OF TALENTS AND GIFTS FOR RCA ORDAINED MINISTRY

TEA, through its director and its board of trustees, was involved in a number of discussions over the past year dealing with the RCA standards for preparation for professional ministry and ministerial leadership recruitment. Some of these discussions were initiated by a Task Force on Standards for the Preparation for the Professional Ministry appointed by the 1994 General Synod (MGS 1994, R-14, p. 278). These discussions were also initiated by the Rev. Harold Korver, moderator of the Board of Trustees of TEA and president of the 1995 General Synod. At the same time, TEA began discussions with Murdoch Trust about standards for preparation for professional ministry. Much was learned from Murdoch Trust and its research on ministry formation and seminary models.

All these discussions and research resulted in a number of observations relevant to TEA and how TEA places itself in the context of overseeing the standards for preparation for professional ministry in the RCA. The research sensitized TEA's board to the importance
and need for proper identification and recruitment of those called into leadership and ministry. It is the hope of the TEA board that its moderator, the Rev. Harold Korver, also serving as president of the 1995 General Synod, will be able to mobilize the denomination into setting up new procedures and structures to facilitate the identification and recruitment of leadership in the RCA.

A part of these new procedures and structures may include a formalized discernment process. The Board of Trustees of TEA has been exploring the possibilities of utilizing the research capabilities and interview skills of the Gallup Organization, which has a special department that works with denominations. (Gallup designed an interview process which the RCA uses in evaluating abilities of individuals who demonstrate interest in beginning new RCA congregation. See the New Church Development Report in the Evangelization and Church Growth Section.) If and when the RCA contracts with an organization such as Gallup to create an appropriate evaluation tool, all TEA applicants applying for acceptance into the TEA program and applying for the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry would be interviewed to identify and ascertain that they exhibit a minimal number of talents for ordained leadership in the RCA. (At its March 1995 meeting, the General Synod Council approved, upon recommendation of the Rev. Harold Korver, to employ the Gallup Organization to develop a Leadership Profile, in order to help identify pastoral leadership gifts of those considering ordained pastoral ministry in the Reformed Church in America.)

Report of the Board of Pensions

Much of the work of the Board of Pensions involves money, so it is important to state at the outset of an annual report that the primary focus of the board is persons. Those in the Reformed Church in America who benefit directly from the several programs of the Board of Pensions include retired ministers, missionaries, their spouses, widows of RCA ministers, their children, staff, and other lay employees who serve the church in denominational, regional, and local church offices, and all those not yet retired who participate in the Reformed Church Annuity Fund or one of the insurance programs provided under RCA sponsorship. All told, their numbers total in the thousands, including 874 retirees and surviving spouses, 1,927 active members of the Reformed Church Annuity Fund, and approximately 5,000 human lives insured in one or more of the insurance programs. But the entire Reformed Church in America also shares the benefits of the Board of Pensions through being served by clergy and others who to a significant degree are freed from anxiety and through the satisfaction of having cared for these persons properly and well.

Many, especially some who are very elderly, have special needs. During 1994, 269 received $673,089 in assistance grants. Assistance grants are issued both for emergencies and for ongoing support and care. The RCA insurance programs paid out a total of $8,105,213 in benefits during 1994, most with dollars provided through premiums. Since the RCA’s insurance program is a self-funded program, the dollars paid in benefits are provided by the dollars collected in premiums. Stop-loss insurance is purchased for claims which may exceed $200,000.

“Pensions” popularly connotes benefits to elderly people. The foundation of the RCA’s retirement program is the annuity fund, a defined contribution retirement plan in which the dollars contributed during the years of active service, plus interest accrued on established accounts, combine to provide a total sum available to provide retirement income. There are
several retirement options, depending upon the age of the retiree and other factors. The RCA retirement program is thus different from "defined benefit" plans in which the benefits available at retirement are determined by the number of years of service and a fixed percentage related to final years of compensation. The RCA's retirement program is a "defined contribution" plan in which the amount of money contributed and accumulated in an individual's account is the major determinant of the amount of retirement income.

The RCA's "defined contribution" is 11 percent of salary plus housing, or an annually published sum based on average incomes of RCA members, whichever is greater. In addition, participating individuals may have money contributed to their accounts in lieu of salary, a feature common to many plans governed by Section 403(b) of the Internal Revenue Service Code. During 1994, 325 individuals elected to participate in the voluntary contribution plan to supplement their income when retired.

During 1994 thirty-four ministers retired from active service. The average annual income from pension sources for those who had served approximately thirty years was $22,087. This amount, when combined with income anticipated for these same persons from Social Security sources, compares quite favorably with the average RCA minister's salary (inclusive of housing) of $43,000 in 1994. However, before such a figure inspires too much euphoria, it is important to recognize that income from a "defined contribution" retirement plan such as the RCA's remains relatively fixed for the life of the retiree and such dependents as may be included in the retirement option. What may be a very adequate income at age sixty-six will, through the course of years, become progressively less substantive and by the time one is age ninety-six may have become inadequate. Thus, those who are retiring are well advised to set aside some of their income in their earlier years for use later.

The 1994 General Synod adopted the following two recommendations which affect the Board of Pensions:

To instruct the Board of Pensions to urge the consistory of each congregation of the Reformed Church in America to include the General Fund ("Thanks Fund") in its annual benevolence budget; and further,

to consider ways this can be creatively facilitated (MGS 1994, R-9, p. 272).

To direct the Board of Pensions, in consultation with the Office of Stewardship and Communication Services, to establish an annual offering, at Thanksgiving or some other appropriate time, and to urge congregations of the Reformed Church in America to set aside this special offering for the needs of those elderly servants of the church who require assistance grants from the Board of Pensions (MGS 1994, R-10, p. 272).

In responding to these mandates, letters were sent to each consistory asking for their participation in a "Thanks Fund" offering at Thanksgiving time and for inclusion of the needs of the General Fund of the Board of Pensions in the congregation's annual benevolence budget. The response of the congregations has been gratifying. Even without benefit of the year-end appeal which helped so much in 1993, contributions for the General Fund and the special "Thanks Fund" totaled nearly $175,000 in 1994, an increase of 25 percent over 1992. When combined with contributions of the Children's Christmas Fund in 1994, the income contributed by individuals and congregations to the Board of Pensions in 1994 once more exceeded $200,000.

At the same time, increases were also necessary in the amount of assistance provided to the most elderly and needy of the retirees. Whereas in 1993 assistance amounted to $626,593, in 1994 that figure increased to $673,089. The needs of retirees are determined largely through visitation by the Board of Pensions senior pastors. In 1994 two senior pastors completed their years of exceptional service to their retiree colleagues. The Rev. Dr. James
Nettinga served in California and Arizona. The Rev. Dr. Norman Thomas served in the Mid-Atlantic and New England areas. The Rev. Dr. Nettinga and the Rev. Dr. Thomas were replaced in their role of senior pastor by the Rev. Eric Schulze and the Rev. Edwin Mulder, respectively. The other senior pastors who continue to serve are the Revs. Henry Vermeer, Henry Mouw, Levi Akker, and Bruce Penn. In each case, the senior pastor’s spouse is an important member of the visitation team and contributes greatly to the effectiveness of the program.

The Board of Pensions, in addition to urging congregations to take a special offering and to include the needs of the board in their benevolence budgets, also responded to the 1994 General Synod’s direction “to devise and implement a program to provide more adequate assistance for retirees and their spouses who were employed by the Reformed Church in America” (MGS 1994, R-23, p. 292). The details of this program are outlined in the following comprehensive plan adopted by the board at its October 1994 meeting:

**BOARD OF PENSIONS COMPREHENSIVE PLAN TO ENHANCE SUPPORT FOR RETIRED PASTORS AND OTHERS**

1. Appoint an over-all task force to coordinate efforts.

2. Improve methods of distributing assistance grants.
   
   A. Establish committee to review reports of senior pastors.
   
   B. Set up meeting for senior pastors with Board of Pensions.
      - To hear concerns of senior pastors.
      - To orient and inform senior pastors.
      - To assure consistent judgments and recommendations of senior pastors.
      - To reduce possibility that a genuine need goes unnoticed.

3. Increase available resources in General Fund for assistance grants.
   
   A. Review accounting changes in allocating costs in the General Fund.
   
   B. Develop plans for fund raising.
      - Communicate with RCA congregations and members.
      - Develop a system of Board of Pensions agents for each RCA classis.
      - Encourage consultation with RCA stewardship staff.
      - Advertise and encourage use of *Side-by-Side* video.
   
   C. Appraise viability of increased assessment for the General Fund.

4. Analyze special impact of insurance cost on retirees.
   
   A. Review “Super-65” coverage and review possible cost savings.
   
   B. Examine alternatives to “Super-65” coverage available to retirees.
      - RCA pilot plan with U.S. Healthcare.
      - A government contracted Medicare insurance policy, e.g. Oxford Plan.
   
   C. Work to enhance understanding of programs and reasons for fee changes through content and style of communications.
D. Analyze the differences in ‘assistance’ programs to meet individual need and ‘entitlement’ programs to compensate in general all who received inequitable salary in the past.

Several of the features of this comprehensive plan are already in place, including establishment of a network of classis agents for the Board of Pensions who represent the needs of the board at meetings of their respective classes and are prepared to share information from the board. In this way, it is hoped that the church at large will be kept more fully informed of needs which for the next several years will continue to be acute.

It is cause for thanksgiving that the comprehensive plan and measures taken over the past several years are beginning to have good effect. The 1994 year-end report of the General Fund showed a deficit of only $12,952, compared with much larger deficits during the last several years, e.g., $110,002 in 1993 and $346,976 in 1992. Congregations and individuals have exhibited responsive compassion when they have become aware of the needs of the elderly.

1994 was a difficult year for investors, particularly those with bond portfolios. The conservative approach taken to investments of board funds meant that a difficult year was not a disastrous one. Interest credits to the annuity fund throughout most of the year were paid at 8.3 percent, and while the amount which it will be possible to pay in 1995 is somewhat lower (7.75 percent), income from the board’s investments remained respectable. In addition, as close examination of the board’s financial statements reveal, the quality of investments has been upgraded during the past few years with decreasing reliance on investment contracts with insurance companies and increases in the portion of the board’s assets placed in quality government obligations. The day-to-day attention given by the RCA full-time managing director of investments continues to prove its worth.

The cost of medical insurance was a major focus of both board and staff efforts during 1994. After several years of sharply increasing premiums, premium increases have now returned to a more moderate rate. In 1994 no increase was required from those enrolled in the Medicare Supplement Plan, and the percentage of increase in the plan for active participants was well below national averages. In addition, a great many innovations were instituted. Among them:

- Addition of blind Preferred Provider Organizations (PPO’s)—Medical Resource Managed Care; Corporate Health Administrators, Inc.; Multi Plan.
- Increase of long-term disability premium in 1994 to cover medical premiums for clergy on disability.
- Pilot Medicare government retiree program.
- Baby well-care program.
- Decrease in premium for stop-loss renewal for life insurance.

The national attention given to the crisis facing the health-care industry seems to have had some good effect. New options are appearing almost daily which make it possible for some participants in the RCA programs to benefit. For example, health maintenance organization (HMO) plans available to those on Medicare in New York now offer supplementary insurance at no premium. Provision has been made within the RCA plan which makes it possible for those who can take advantage of such offers to do so, without jeopardizing future participation in the RCA plan should they move to a different locality or their HMO is no longer available.
As a result of much conscientious effort on the part of the Insurance Committee of the Board of Pensions, representatives of Corporate Health Administrators, and Board of Pensions staff, the deficit in the RCA insurance program, which stood at $1,390,308 in 1993, was reduced to $188,023 at the end of 1994. Another year of good experience will serve to eliminate this deficit entirely.

Finally, it can be reported with some satisfaction that the restructure of the Board of Pensions to its present configuration and the provision for its meetings to be held prior to General Synod Council meetings has been working well. In a recent response to a correspondent who required some assurance that the affairs of the board are in good hands, board president Dr. Kenneth Weller noted:

Perhaps a word about our board is in order. The sixteen members are also members of the General Synod Council which is appointed by the church with representatives from all the classes across the country. There are nine clergy and seven lay persons. Among the laity are four attorneys, a physician, and two people with management backgrounds. One of the latter has a Ph.D. in finance.

What all board members have in common is a desire to serve faithfully and to put their unique experience and training to work on behalf of all those the Board of Pensions serves.

R-21.
To request each congregation of the Reformed Church in America to include the Board of Pensions General Fund (“Thanks Fund”) in its annual benevolence budget; and further,

to give members of each congregation of the Reformed Church in America an opportunity to contribute to the needs of elderly ministers, missionaries, and their spouses, with a special offering at Thanksgiving or on a Sunday when such an expression of thanks is convenient. (ADOPTED)

Report of the Commission for Women


The 1994 General Synod voted:

To instruct the Commission for Women to develop questions and/or guidelines for RCA seminaries to use to evaluate the treatment of women students; and further

to instruct the RCA seminaries, in consultation and dialogue with women students, to prepare an annual report for five years on the treatment of women on RCA seminary campuses and to indicate specific steps taken and systems established (with attached samples) to secure just and fair treatment, and further,

(to send this report to the Commission for Women to review at its spring meeting (MGS 1994, p. 276).
In response, the commission developed a questionnaire for the RCA seminaries to use in evaluating the treatment of women on RCA seminary campuses. This questionnaire was sent by the commission to the RCA seminaries, and the RCA seminaries returned reports to the commission.

The responsibilities of the Commission for Women fall into two general areas: 1) to be the conscience of the Reformed Church in America (RCA) concerning full participation of women in the life of the church, and 2) to be an advocate for women in leadership. Some may think the commission is no longer necessary since women have been ordained as RCA ministers of Word and sacrament for sixteen years. Unfortunately, such is not the case. Women continue to struggle for their rightful place in the RCA as ordained ministers of Word and sacrament, and there are indications that in some areas of the RCA the struggle is becoming more intense rather than lessening. Some popular movements today strongly emphasize that spiritual leadership is the role of men, not women. Men sometimes become angry when women get appointed to RCA boards, commissions, and committees more quickly and feel women have not “paid their dues.” The very existence of the Commission for Women ought to prick the conscience of the denomination for it is a reminder that women still struggle to be accepted as equals. Paul’s words, “there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28b) are still not a full reality in the RCA.

In April 1993 a report was submitted to the Division of Pastoral Resources of the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec (BCOQ) evaluating the position of women since women were first allowed to be ordained in the BCOQ forty years before. The report said that:

most female graduates of theological colleges recommended for ordination within the BCOQ have yet to experience equal opportunities for settlement in pastoral positions in our church. Very few women, it seems, have been able to live out their call to pastoral ministry.

In forty years not much changed in the BCOQ. In sixteen years not much has changed in the RCA either.

The Commission for Women has listened to women, it has sought to track the ministries of ordained RCA women, it has corresponded with the RCA seminaries, and it has listened to the RCA. The commission concludes that the RCA needs to be called to repentance and confession, and a change in behavior.

It seems strange that the RCA is concerned about raising up people with gifts of leadership when it has refused to accept some of the gifts of leadership God has called forth. Women are called into the ministry of Jesus Christ, they are called to be elders and deacons, but some RCA congregations are unwilling to use these gifts simply because these gifts are found in women. Many of the unique gifts that women have to offer have never been experienced by large segments of the RCA. Women have sometimes felt it necessary to deny their own unique contributions in order to be accepted. God calls men and women into positions of leadership as pastors and consistory members. If the RCA does not acknowledge these calls or use these gifts, then the RCA is guilty of obstructing God’s purposes.

As a denomination, the RCA needs to acknowledge that it does not treat women fairly or justly. The commission has learned that almost every woman who finds herself in a position of leadership has at one time or another experienced sexism or sexual harassment. Sometimes such things happen through ignorance and insensitivity; sometimes they happen deliberately. Imagine being in a meeting where the group is consistently referred to as “fathers and brethren,” and you are a woman. Imagine being in a meeting where no one acknowledges you or speaks to you. Imagine being in a meeting where comments are made that indicate that women’s hands are good for knitting and housekeeping, but not for holding a gavel. Imagine being in a situation where you allow your name to be put in nomination for an office,
and then are subjected to ridicule and cutting remarks. Imagine being in a situation where you are physically afraid because behavior of a highly sexual nature is being exhibited by male leaders in the congregation.

The RCA has often failed to support women with its assembly structures. Consistories recommend that women come under the care of classes and classes recommend women to a seminary, but the same consistories and classes are unwilling to allow women to preach in their pulpits or at their meetings. If a congregation or a classis is willing to support a woman’s call to ministry, God’s Spirit also calls them to accept and empower these women whose call they affirmed.

Imagine how it feels to have the conviction that you are called into ministry, to have that call confirmed by your consistory, and to have your call and your gifts affirmed by a seminary, only to seek a call from a congregation and be told by a search committee, “We recognize that you have the gifts for ministry, but because you are a woman we will not call you.” Imagine how it feels to discover later that the same search committee that turned you down called a male who may have had fewer gifts?

Women discover that many search committees are unwilling to consider them as potential candidates. Because opportunities are limited for women to serve as ordained ministers of Word and sacrament, women often find themselves competing with their female friends for the few positions available. Often in the interview process they are asked inappropriate questions. Women discover they are not considered for minister of education positions if they have a Master of Divinity degree, because they might want to preach. For those women who do eventually receive a call, some find their authority is questioned. Even equality of pay becomes a major issue.

In the RCA ordained women are reaching the stage of moving from a first pastorate to a second or a third pastorate. The “good old boy” network often works in ways that naturally open up opportunities for men. Such does not appear to be the case for women. Difficult as it is to find a first position, it becomes increasingly difficult to find a second or third position. The commission has received information indicating that the process of finding a new position takes more than six months and often over eighteen months for 75 percent of the RCA ordained women. Obviously for RCA ordained women, doors do not open with experience. Of the theologically trained women in the denomination, only two women have become senior pastors. Lateral movement from one entry church to another is often the only option.

Part of the problem, as stated before, is that the RCA as a denomination does not fully support women with its assembly structures. While as a denomination the RCA affirms the right of women to be ordained, the “conscience clauses” in the Book of Church Order (BCO, Chapter I, Part I, Article 5, Section 2h; Chapter I, Part II, Article 2, Section 7; and Chapter I, Part II, Article 13, Section 14) keep the structure from fully supporting women. The clauses were intended to modify a controversial situation and to preserve the consciences of those individuals who “in good conscience” could not agree with the ordination of women. However, the clauses are often used by assemblies in ways that block or deter women. While the commission has not yet been able to fully assess the results of a survey sent to RCA ministers regarding the “conscience clauses,” it is saddening for the commission to read in many of the survey responses the anger and lack of feeling for RCA ordained women. The commission is going to explore other ways to deal with this issue and hopefully help move the RCA in a more positive direction.

Women in leadership often display a greater degree of servant leadership than others in the RCA. Many women are willing to work for woefully inadequate salaries. This is particularly true for many single women. Statistics the commission has gathered indicate that the average
annual starting salary for ordained RCA women clergy is $19,500. However, if the salaries of the six highest-paid RCA ordained women are removed, the average annual starting salary drops to $15,900. The only opportunities open to RCA ordained women seem to be opportunities to serve in poor struggling congregations in which men are unwilling to serve. But women are willing to serve in such settings. Some RCA ordained women, whose husbands are also ordained, have found it necessary to “sell themselves” as a “two-for-the-price-of-one” package in order to find a position.

Almost 45 percent of RCA ordained women serve in specialized ministries. Some of those who do serve in pastoral settings do so in other denominations. It is frightening to note the number of clergy women who have left the RCA and the number who have simply given up seeking a call. Because so many regular avenues are closed, women often find it necessary to create their own ministries. Many of these ministries pay little or nothing. The sense of call is so great in these women that they are willing to make this sacrifice. Ironically, often the church is willing to accept the validity of these ministries and use them without accepting the women who created them. The examples of servanthood on the part of women are remarkable. On the other hand, what the church does to women has a name; it is called exploitation.

Women who serve on consistories often face similar problems. These women are sometimes ridiculed for allowing their names to be placed in nomination. Often these women are not accepted for their gifts. When these women do get elected to consistories, they often feel out of place. Many times they do not feel the support of other members of the consistory or do not feel the support of some members of the congregation. Many times they are the lone woman on the consistory. When these women attend classis meetings, they are sometimes ignored. After one term of service on a consistory, many women vow never to serve again.

No one seems to be willing to accept responsibility for such situations. When RCA seminaries are approached, they say the congregations are the problem. When male RCA ordained ministers are approached, they say: “Personally I support women in ministry but my consistory is the problem.” When consistories are approached, they often say the consistory members are open but the problem is that the congregation or the minister isn’t open. As a result, the situation continues to worsen.

Such discriminating behavior is “sin” because it denies the Holy Spirit’s equipping of all people for ministry. This type of discriminating behavior indicates that the RCA, RCA congregations, and RCA members are in need of confession and repentance. All need to confess to the inconsistent treatment of women in leadership; all need to confess to not accepting or using the gifts God gives through women; all need to confess to continuing abuse, harassment, and exploitation of women in the church; all need to confess to often closing minds to women’s issues, and when confronted, to often reacting in jealousy or anger; all need to confess to not treating women fairly or justly; all need to confess to paying lip service to the idea of equality, but to not supporting equality with attitudes or actions; all need to confess to not being willing to accept responsibility for this sinful situation; and all need to acknowledge to having sinned against God, each other, and particularly, sisters in Christ.

Women came to the door of the church and knocked, and for many years no one answered. Women patiently and persistently continued to knock, and finally the door was opened a crack. Often women continue to be ignored and are made to feel unwelcome. Is it any wonder that some women put their shoulder to the door and try to push it open wider? Would any of us do less?
In love and pastoral concern for the RCA, the commission recommends:

R-22.
To pause for a time of reflection on, and confession of, the ways in which we, as participants and observers at the 1995 General Synod persistently sin against women.

Upon a motion from the floor to amend R-22, the Synod

VOTED: To pause for a time of reflection on, and confession of, the ways in which we, as participants and observers at the 1995 General Synod, persistently sin against women may have sinned and continue to sin against one another and pray for repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation.*<

(The advisory committee had recommended the adoption of R-22.)

The Rev. Norman Schouten, moderator of the Commission for Women, led the General Synod in a time of silent prayer.<

R-23.
To instruct the general secretary to send a copy of the 1995 General Synod Commission for Women report and a pastoral letter to all RCA assemblies, commissions, committees, consistory, boards, and institutions to urge incorporation into one of their respective meetings during 1995-96, a time of reflection on and confession of the ways they may have sinned and continue to sin against women. (NOT ADOPTED)

(A motion was made and supported to amend R-23 by deleting the word “women” after the words “continue to sin against” and inserting the words “one another.” The motion LOST.)

(The advisory committee had recommended the adoption of R-23.)

R-24.
To make available in a reSOURCES packet, worship resources, including prayers of confession and repentance, prepared by the Commission for Women; and further,

to urge RCA congregations to use these resources. (ADOPTED)

R-25.
To encourage all RCA ministers, consistory, congregations, commissions, councils, committees, institutions, boards, and assemblies to explore ways to be more proactive in enabling the gifts of women to be used more fully and more widely in the Reformed Church in America. (ADOPTED)

(The advisory committee recommended:

R-26.
To instruct the Commission for Women to analyze the actual circumstances existing for women within the Reformed Church in America; and further,

*Addition is in light-face type; deletion is enclosed in brackets.
to consider options for facilitating the ministry of women within the RCA, including issues relating to the “conscience clauses” in the Book of Church Order (BCO, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 5, Section 2h; BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 2, Section 7; and BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 13, Section 14); and further,

to instruct the Commission for Women present a report of these deliberations to the 1996 General Synod. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. There is a growing sensitivity in the RCA to the great potential value of ministry by women.

2. There is also a growing awareness in the RCA of the multiplicity of difficulties women experience in ministry in the RCA.

(A motion was made and supported to amend R-26 by inserting the words “in consultation with the Commission on Theology” after the BCO references noted in parentheses. The motion LOST.)

R-27.
To affirm the paper, “A Code of Sexual Ethics” (see “A Code of Sexual Ethics” from the Report of the General Synod Council’s Ministry and Personnel Services Committee in the Church Vocations section; and further,

to commend this paper, “A Code of Sexual Ethics,” to the RCA seminaries and the Theological Education Agency (TEA) for study and review; and further,

to instruct the RCA seminaries and TEA to distribute this paper, “A Code of Sexual Ethics,” each year to RCA seminary and TEA graduates. (ADOPTED)

WOMEN IN MINISTRY EVENTS

Women in ministry events have been held for women who have been theologically trained and/or are serving in various ministry positions, including the ordained pastorate, since 1978. In 1978 General Synod instructed the General Synod Executive Committee (GSEC) to:

convene a meeting of... more than 50 Reformed Church women who have received their theological education in seminaries... for the purpose of affirming them in their Christian ministry and offering them our encouragement, support and counsel” (MGS 1978, R-9, p. 31).

These events have provided time for theological reflection, informal mentoring, and networking. The responses of women who have attended these events have been very favorable. The women value these events because they are nourished with fresh theological insights and they are supported through professional friendships. These events continue to be an integral part of the work of the Commission for Women, and the commission encourages General Synod to continue supporting theologically trained women by providing for these gatherings.
R-28.
[To designate $6,000 annually to fund national and regional gatherings of theologically trained women in the Reformed Church in America ($3,000 to be funded from the budget of Congregational Services and $3,000 to be funded from Ministry and Personnel Services), beginning in 1996.]*

➤ Upon recommendation of the advisory committee, the following was substituted for R-28:

To designate $6,960 annually in the General Synod Operational Budget for funding national and regional gatherings of theologically trained women in the Reformed Church in America, beginning in 1996. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The substitute designates funding by assessment from the General Synod Operational Budget. ☐

(The above substitute for R-28 had a cost effect on the General Synod Operational Budget. See Report of the Committee of Reference, p. 415.)

➤ Following the conclusion of the Report of the Commission for Women, the General Synod paused for a time of silent prayer. ☐

Report of the General Synod Council’s Ministry and Personnel Services Committee

REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF MINISTRY AND PERSONNEL SERVICES

The mission of the General Synod Council’s Ministry and Personnel Services Committee is to:

ensure that those who are engaged in all the ministries of the Reformed Church in America as their primary vocation are prepared for competent ministry, cared for spiritually, emotionally, and physically in order to fulfill their call and be motivated to grow in competency to minister in the service of Jesus Christ (General Synod Council Handbook V-1).

In attempting to carry out this mandate, Ministry and Personnel Services (MAPS) and its staff keeps before it a vision of the Reformed Church in America as a healthy and supportive context within which to fulfill the vocational commitment of those engaged in professional ministry. Such hopes for the Reformed Church in America as a “system” demands attention to a broad range of services which contribute to its health. For example, preventive care is the rationale for providing the services of the Clergy Consultation Service, which gives importance to “800” number access to pastors and their families for confidential assistance on personal and professional concerns. MAPS staff also serve the Board of Pensions and carry out the board’s programs of support for both the active and retired. (During 1994 some services which had been funded through the Board of Pensions were lodged more appropriately within the Ministry and Personnel Services budget, e.g., the annual Chaplains Conference and the pastor-to-pastors program.)

*Deletion is enclosed in brackets.
A number of concerns which were under consideration at the 1994 General Synod were either continued or referred for attention during the ensuing year. With the restructure which resulted in the General Synod Council and the inclusion of Ministry and Personnel Services as one of its committees/units (MGS 1992, pp. 42-80), the matter of funding this office and its services was given thorough review. The MAPS report to the 1994 General Synod raised three possibilities for future funding, i.e., General Synod assessments, a surcharge on the annuity fund, or requesting payment of professional dues on the part of those served (MGS 1994, pp. 282-84). In working through the implications of these three approaches, it became clear that General Synod assessments, combined with fees for staff services provided to the Board of Pensions, is the most feasible way to pay for the costs of MAPS. Care of personnel is, after all, an appropriate and necessary expense in every organization, and seems especially so in the people-intensive operations of a denomination. Accordingly, some program dreams needed to be reshaped, as MAPS came in focus more as a support-services provider than as a program agency. One such program during recent years was the pastor-to-pastors pilot project, initiated by the 1988 General Synod (MGS 1988, R-27, p. 298). It ended on December 31, 1994, and learnings from the pilot project were shared with the classes of the RCA in a communication sent to stated clerks and pastoral support committee chairpersons in February 1995. These learnings were reported as follows:

Simply noting in the Book of Church Order that pastoral care of ministers and their families is the responsibility of the classis does not make it happen. Too often what is everyone's responsibility becomes no one's. Specific people need to be given this task, with explicit permission to initiate contact, make calls, and establish a relationship of genuine pastoral nature.

A pastoral relationship is most likely to evolve when the persons being served own the choice of pastor.

Pastors to pastors need to be intentional about relating to the entire family. It is relatively easy to arrange a visit with a clergy colleague, not quite as easy to make sure the spouse is included, and downright difficult to develop a relationship with the children. Yet all deserve access to a genuine pastor who is not also their parent, husband, or wife.

Fundamental to the care of clergy and their families is a clear disconnection between their pastor's pastoral role and any administrative responsibility. This is perhaps the most important learning. The great advantage to using the services of retired ministers in the role of pastor to pastors is that they are out of the power network. When officials of the church, be they classis committee members, stated clerks, regional synod executives, or denominational staff, are also charged with pastoral care responsibilities, there will always be a barrier caused by the knowledge that this person who is sincerely trying to care for "me" also has influence over "my" career. Every system which tries to mix administrative and pastoral responsibilities ultimately fails at the points when care is most needed, such as when the pastor has "messed up" and run afoul of the classis or other parts of the "system." In this trial pastor-to-pastors program, pastors to pastors were forbidden to comment either positively or negatively on any of their parishioners' lives or work. To the degree this was observed, trust became possible.

Geographical proximity was critical to effectiveness. If a pastor to pastor was perceived to live too far away, the call to come to the hospital to be present in a crisis was much less likely to be made than if the pastor to pastor lived nearby. Even in moments of need, people are reluctant to trouble one another "too much" and the perception of imposition is a reality even when it is ill-founded.
The skill of the pastor to pastors, particularly in being a good listener, was a major factor in whether a particular pastor's services were highly valued or viewed as simply pleasant. Pastoral skills seem to be unrelated to reputation as a preacher or successful church leader.

Compensation, including payment of expenses for travel and hospitality, gives both the pastor to pastors and those served a sense that this is a relationship and responsibility which is to be taken seriously and a task to be done in a professional manner.

Consistories, when they understood the program, were genuinely appreciative and in most instances would have gladly paid for it to happen.

Like many programs in the church, this one will probably work best if it is funded and "owned" locally rather than out of a central office such as Ministry and Personnel Services, where it had been thought it might best be done. A major factor here is that the care of one pastor and his or her family involves a small stipend ($200 per year seems about right) which becomes $200,000 when combined into a single budget figure denominationwide. Assessments are unpopular and probably always will be, since they equate so easily to taxes. But payment of a small sum for a direct service which is recognized as important for everyone else in the church (but which the pastor's family doesn't get) doesn't feel the same.

A denominational network of pastors-to-pastors would have value even as the stated clerks' meeting has value. Denominational funding for occasional regional gatherings of pastors-to-pastors and even some funding of expenses for travel and hospitality in the course of their duties might be absorbable in a denominational budget.

Since the Book of Church Order rests responsibility for pastoral care of pastors and their families with the classes, it is hoped the classes will find in the experiment now completed an instructive and useful model.

R-29.
To commend the learnings from the pastor-to-pastors pilot project to the RCA classes for their guidance as the classes seek to carry out their responsibility to pastors and their families; and further,

to request each classis through its stated clerk to communicate to Ministry and Personnel Services how his/her respective classis has chosen to carry out its responsibilities as described in the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 13, Section 3; and further,

to instruct the director of Ministry and Personnel Services to follow up with each classis to encourage a pastor-to-pastors ministry and offer resources as necessary and available. (ADOPTED)

Task Force on Standards for the Preparation for the Professional Ministry

The 1994 General Synod voted:

To appoint a Task Force on Standards for the Preparation for the Professional Ministry in the Reformed Church in America comprised of eight members (two RCA lay persons, two RCA pastors, one General Synod professor of theology from New Brunswick Theological Seminary, one General Synod professor of theology from Western Theological Seminary, one Theological Education Agency representative, and one RCA specialized minister with Clinical Pastoral Education certification) (MGS 1994, R-14, p. 278).
The report of the task force is before this General Synod and follows the paper, “A Code of Sexual Ethics,” in this section.

**Professional Development and Continuing Education**

Professional development and continuing education are a lifelong requirement for those who seek to grow and remain current in their chosen vocation. During the past year, MAPS staff made information available concerning continuing education opportunities and administered leadership development funds which are available on a limited basis. Continuing education opportunities were printed in regional synod newsletters as well as in the new *Servant Leaders* publication. The Society for the Advancement of Continuing Education and Ministry continues to be an excellent resource in providing networks and contacts. The society also has a wide variety of continuing education providers. The secretary for professional development made personal contact with many pastors in regard to their individual continuing education as reported on the consistorial report forms. The inclusion in the call to each installed pastor of a provision for time and money for professional development bears fruitful results as clergy direct their attention to those areas in which they feel a need for greater knowledge and competence. Instances in which this mandate is not observed are always cause for concern.

A continuing education program provided by MAPS staff, in cooperation with the Board of Pensions and the director for gift planning, is a preretirement planning workshop. These workshops are currently scheduled or have already taken place in four regional synods. The workshops are designed specifically for clergy and their spouses fifty years of age or more.

**Specialized Interim Ministry**

Maintaining a corps of trained specialized interim ministers for assignment to congregations in which there is a need for an interim minister prior to calling a minister on a more permanent basis has been an objective of Ministry and Personnel Services for the last several years. Currently, there are eighteen trained specialized interim ministers who are on active assignment within the RCA. The MAPS office maintains a specialized interim ministers’ roster and encourages persons who seem well-suited to the task of interim ministry to obtain the formal training required for specialized interim ministry. Regional synod executives and classis church supervision committees share responsibility for this interim ministry program by determining when and where assignment of an interim is most appropriate. It has been observed that when the services of an interim are needed and not used, the next minister to serve in that congregation is an interim whether or not this was intended. Use of trained specialized interim ministers prior to issuing a call to a more permanent minister has proven its worth many times over.

**Profile System**

Maintaining the ministers’ profile and church profile system continues to be an ongoing task of the Office of Ministry and Personnel Services. During the past year a minor but important change was made to the church profile form by the addition of the following question:

PLEASE INDICATE IF THERE ARE ANY SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS WHICH JUSTIFY DISCRIMINATION ON THE BASIS OF GENDER, AGE, RACE, OR NATIONAL ORIGIN IN CONSIDERATION OF MINISTERS’ PROFILES WHICH MAY BE SENT:

___ No basis for discrimination

___ Please consider the following factors which we believe require consideration:
This change was made in direct response to the efforts of a task force working within the 
Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics and in consultation with the Commission for Women. 
The acceptance of women in ministry positions has grown steadily through the years. At the 
present time there are 110 RCA ordained women. Of these 110 ordained women, 53 serve 
as pastors of congregations (33 are senior or solo pastors) and the others serve as chaplains.

Future RCA Clergy Statistics

A study conducted by the Office of Ministry and Personnel Services during the past year 
sought to determine the number of ordained clergy which will be required by the Reformed 
Church in America during the next forty years. By calculating the numbers in successive 
retirement classes and factoring in the average number of pastors who leave active ministry 
in any given year, it was determined that between the years 2012 and 2018 a significant 
increase in the numbers of clergy available to serve RCA churches will be required. The 
pastors who will need to be available to fill the pulpits during the decade beginning in the year 
2012 are currently young people of junior high school age. Responsibility for recruiting 
enough persons of exceptional quality for the ordained ministry rests with the congregations 
where these young people are now active in church school and youth groups. Identification 
of those with potential gifts for ministry needs to be a matter of concern now so that the needs 
of the RCA in the future will be met.

R-30.
To encourage pastors of RCA congregations and RCA youth leaders 
to identify young people who appear to have the qualities required 
for future ministry; and further,

to actively nurture the development of these young people and help 
them to determine whether they may be called by God to the 
ministry of Word and sacrament or other special ministry. 
(ADOPTED)

Specialized Ministries

Significant numbers of RCA clergy do not serve in parish settings. A glance at the specialized 
ministers listed in the pages of the RCA annual Directory gives a rich overview of the 
multiplicity of ministries which are now being carried out. Many of these ministries, 
especially chaplaincies in hospitals, prisons, and within the military forces, are not dependent 
upon church funding. Yet, the highly committed and well-trained clergy who serve in these 
specialized functions carry out in every sense the ministry and mission of the Reformed 
Church in America. A new “growth industry,” which is a sad commentary on our society, 
is prison chaplaincy. A few years ago the Reformed Church in America had few prison 
chaplains. Today that number has increased and opportunities continue to become available.

Military Chaplaincy

A particularly rich field of ministry is in the armed forces, where military chaplains serve a 
unique mix of persons, mostly young, and increasingly female as well as male. Chaplains 
minister to their needs at a particularly formative time of life. A shift in the duty assignments 
of military chaplains has been observed within the last couple of years. Prior to the end of 
the cold war, military chaplains were attached to units preparing for major conflict and were 
not frequently deployed. Today military forces are being sent to many places in the world 
in peacekeeping assignments. It is said that today a typical peacekeeping force consists of 
representatives of the military police, legal staff, and the chaplain’s corps. RCA chaplains 
have been part of these peacekeeping missions. For example, the RCA’s newest Army 
chaplain, the Rev. Jonathan Eiterbeck, deployed to Kuwait within days of his assignment to
active duty. Army chaplains, the Rev. Dennis Westbrooks, the Rev. Sidney Mauldin, and the Rev. Jack Ritserna, all served in Cuba during this year and shared the unique challenge of ministry to Cubans detained in Guantanamo. The richness of these ministries is reason for thanksgiving by the entire Reformed Church in America.

RCA Clergy Gathering

On April 12-14, 1996, parish clergy of the Reformed Church in America will gather in St. Louis, Missouri, for a first RCA Clergy Gathering. Further announcements of this unique event will be forthcoming in the months ahead. Reserving these dates now on every clergy calendar, plus the encouragement of each consistory to its pastor to participate, will do much to ensure an event which is stimulating and supportive. The rich relationships among RCA clergy are among the great strengths of the Reformed Church in America. Wonderful things do happen when RCA ministers get together, and the St. Louis event is one which holds high promise.

R-31.
To direct the general secretary to request every consistory in the Reformed Church in America to encourage and provide for their pastor’s or pastors’ participation in the RCA clergy gathering, April 12-14, 1996, in St. Louis, Missouri; and further,

to designate Sunday, April 14, 1996, as a day of prayer for the clergy of the Reformed Church in America, their spouses and their children, offering thanks to God for their faithfulness, petitions for their physical and spiritual health, and continued and increased effectiveness of their service; and further,

to encourage each congregation of the Reformed Church in America to provide for alternative worship leadership on Sunday, April 14, 1996. (ADOPTED)

(A motion was made and supported to amend R-31 by inserting the words “as a leave of absence” after the word “provide” in the first paragraph. The motion LOST.)

(Another motion was made and supported to amend R-31 by inserting the words “along with their spouses” after the word “participation.” The motion LOST.)

Retired Clergy

During 1994 thirty-three RCA clergy retired from active service. Those who retired are being recognized by a display of their pictures and service records in the Church Herald, as well as by General Synod’s endorsement of an appropriate certificate of appreciation for their years of faithful and dedicated ministry in the church.

R-32.
To adopt the following resolution:

These have loved Christ and fed his sheep.
They have devoted themselves
to spreading the Word
and equipping the saints
for the work of ministry.
Their contribution to a needy world
is rich beyond measure;
their record is on high.

The Reformed Church in America,
with admiration,
deep affection,
and overflowing thanks to God
celebrates their lifelong service.

Joel Bensema
Sioux Center, Iowa

Rudolf Kuyten
Holland, Michigan
(ADOPTED)

Stuart Blauw
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Donald Lenderink
Brooklyn, Ohio

George Bradford
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Harold Lenters
Sioux Center, Iowa

William Brownson
Holland, Michigan

Sanford Morgan
Lake George, Colorado

Warren Bull
Surfside Beach, South Carolina

Edwin Mulder
New York, New York

David Chen
Cranford, New Jersey

Emmo Oltmanns
Sioux Falls, South Dakota

Leonard De Beer
Wallingford, Vermont

Arlen Salthouse
Langhorne, Pennsylvania

Vernon Dethmers
Montague, New Jersey

Eric Schulze
Lynden, Washington

Paul De Vries
Crete, Illinois

Robert Spencer
Tucson, Arizona

Lawrence Doorn
Comstock Park, Michigan

John Tien
Grandville, Michigan

Jacob Dykstra
Worth, Illinois

Gerard Van Heest
Holland, Michigan

Jack Hascup
Ho-Ho-Kus, New Jersey

Donald Van Hoeven
Kalamazoo, Michigan

Eugene Heideman
Wilmington, Delaware

Eugene Vander Well
Bothell, Washington

Charles Johnson
Williamsport, Pennsylvania

Stephen Veldhuis
Pella, Iowa

Wayne Kiel
Middleville, Michigan

Douglas Walrath
Strong, Maine (ADOPTED)

Carl Kleis
South Hampton, Pennsylvania
A CODE OF SEXUAL ETHICS

A matter the 1994 General Synod referred back to MAPS concerns sexual ethics. The 1994 Synod voted:


The following revised paper has been prepared for consideration by this General Synod:

Preface

In 1993 General Synod instructed the General Synod Council, “in consultation with the Office of Human Resources, to prepare a code of sexual ethics, which will be a consistent standard across the church” (MGS 1993, R-14, p. 319). The 1993 General Synod also urged “all RCA institutions and agencies who have not yet prepared a code of sexual ethics to do so and to submit their codes to the Commission for Women” (MGS 1993, R-15, p. 319).

In response to these two directives, both a set of guidelines and procedures for dealing with allegations of sexual misconduct (MGS 1994, pp. 237-40) for classes and a proposed Code of Sexual Ethics were submitted to the 1994 General Synod (MGS 1994, pp. 285-90). A number of RCA classes and regional synods, as well as RCA colleges and seminaries, responded by preparing codes of sexual ethics. These codes have provided helpful guidance to many in the RCA whose daily ministries with human beings inevitably involves human sexuality. The 1994 General Synod voted: “To instruct MAPS...to distribute to RCA classes and congregations the paper, “Guidelines and Procedures for Dealing with Allegations of Sexual Misconduct” (MGS 1994, R-15, pp. 239). These guidelines and procedures were distributed by MAPS. The 1994 General Synod also voted:


While it is important to have clear standards of what is appropriate and inappropriate behavior, an importance heightened by increasing litigation in this society, it is even more essential for each person involved in Christian ministry to establish his or her own clear internalized boundaries. What actions or responses will or will not genuinely express Christian love and concern? Internalized boundaries do not automatically result when a set of guidelines or a code of ethics is written and approved. At best, such documents may serve to inform and thus help shape internalized standards of behavior. However, when confronted with a specific situation in which one’s response needs to be immediate, the existence of a written document in a file or even a copy of the Minutes of General Synod does not ensure that response will reflect the gospel. Not infrequently, responses will have been influenced by the values instilled by the culture, for one is shaped by culture as well as by faith. Christians engaged in ministry need to internalize sexual values which produce behavior which truly reflects the gospel to which they are committed. After-the-fact awareness of one’s inappropriate conduct, for all its pedagogical value, is sadly tardy for those who may have been damaged by persons they had a right to trust.

For these reasons, training in sexual ethics for clergy has been a priority in the Reformed Church in America. The discussion of sexual ethics which follows is intended as an educational and reflective document as well as a working code.
Jesus offered the basis for a "consistent standard" of sexual ethics when he taught that "you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength...[and] your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:30, 31). It has been observed that few Christians appreciate the passion inherent in this double commandment, offered as an implication of the familiar "Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone" (Deut. 6:4).

This is a culture that persistently confuses genuine love with desire for self-fulfillment and indulging one’s own desires. "Love" is defined in this report as willing and doing what is best for the other, and includes the ever-present possibility of that "greater love" of self-sacrifice exemplified by Jesus himself. The English language, a primary expression of the dominant American culture, offers but one word "love" to express varied nuances of sexual desire, friendship, and spiritual devotion. This is indicative of the culture’s confusion. The confusion also points to a reality, that the many facets of "love" are seldom neatly segregated, as a reading of the most eloquent expressions of religious mysticism or even the hymns of Fanny Crosby give evidence. Spirituality and sexuality are related, often blindly blended, so that a search for God through human romantic relationships is a frequent human failing. Psychiatrist M. Scott Peck points out that one reason such a quest ends in delusion is that it violates the First Commandment: "I am the Lord your God...you shall have no other gods beside me" (Deut. 5:6, 7) (M. Scott Peck, M.D., Further Along the Road Less Traveled, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993, passim).

Many people clearly perceive a minister who preaches the Word and administers the sacraments in the name of God as uniquely God’s representative. No matter how much emphasis is placed on the priesthood of all believers, affirming that "all members are in ministry together," or a sharing of responsibility for mutual Christian growth, ordination to the ministry of Word and sacrament is to a sacred office. It involves being "set apart," called by God to invoke the name of the Lord on behalf of the community and to administer the sacraments of the church. The minister, in the eyes of most, is first of all "the holy person" and a minister of God. From the dawn of history, people have always needed such persons to preside over the mysteries of life’s great transitions. The priestly role and function in society is both ancient and contemporary.

Sexuality is one of the gifts God has given people to draw them into relationship with one another. The component of sexual energy is also a crucial ingredient in the charisma which is almost always present in effective leaders. When this is combined with sacred office, the resulting power is formidable though often unrecognized. As a result, a significant imbalance of power exists in relationships between people and their ministers in their role as spiritual leaders. Peter Rutter, author of Sex in the Forbidden Zone, writes of this power imbalance as a difference in degree of personal and social freedom between two people which permits one to impose his or her will on the other (Peter Rutter, M.D., Sex in the Forbidden Zone, Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher, Inc., 1989, p. 42). Rutter observes that the power equation is always unequal whenever "a person with a specific need looks for help from someone who is more knowledgeable, trained, or competent." To the extent the minister is perceived as God’s representative, it is difficult to imagine how the imbalance of power could be greater.

The power inherent in the minister’s role is often used to everyone’s benefit. Indeed, practically every revered church leader in memory has used power constructively. The fundamental ethical principle for not only sexual ethics but every other dimension of ministerial ethics is that power is to be used solely for the benefit of persons who look to the minister for help, counsel, instruction, or any other dimension of that minister’s role in their lives. Of course, this principle has implications which relate to much more than sexual ethics,
and prohibits crossing many boundaries in which the office of minister can be used primarily to meet the minister’s own needs. However, when applied to sexuality it means specifically that contact of a sexual nature is not permitted with anyone with whom the role as minister is either primary or preeminent.

Peter Rutter refers to such a prohibition as “sex in the forbidden zone.” This “forbidden zone” Rutter writes about occurs “whenever a relationship of unequal power exists between a man and a woman, especially where the woman has explicitly or implicitly placed herself in trust into the care of a professional” (See Rutter, Sex in the Forbidden Zone, pp. 1-28). “Trust” is the assumption by a person with less power that the one with greater power will act in his or her best interests, i.e., out of genuine love and concern. Since sexual contact in such instances cannot be justified by the genuine consent of the parishioner, given the power imbalance which exists, sexual contact within the practice of ministry is wrong. Such contact with a parishioner, staff member, employee, or other person with whom the power differential inherent in the office of the minister is present violates a sacred trust. It takes place without true consent because of the power imbalance and is clearly exploitative, unloving, and unethical.

Ministers often assign their own vulnerability to temptation to the unhealthy needs or sinful desires of some they are called to serve. But a more frequent context for sexual abuse is a situation in which a parishioner is in need of love, empathy, and understanding, and the minister puts aside awareness of transference issues in order to feed his or her personal desires. This vulnerability is heightened by the ready access which ministers have to persons in need; access which in large measure results from the trust people place in them. Of all professions that exist to be helpful to others, the ministry is the only one which retains the privilege of initiating relationships without specific invitation; and the minister is now the only professional who routinely makes house calls, often by self-invitation. Awareness of vulnerability is a healthy reminder of ministerial humanity but is never an excuse for sexual misconduct. A lack of health or wholeness among those served does not offer an exemption from ministry to their genuine needs, though it may call for some common-sense precautions. Ministers are the representatives of one who said “I have come to call not the righteous but sinners” (Matt. 9:13b).

In any event, responsibility for the nature of a pastoral relationship and for maintaining appropriate boundaries rests squarely with the minister, the one who holds the balance in the power equation. The degree to which a minister recognizes and accepts that responsibility and is self-aware of his or her own personal vulnerabilities which might lead to misuse of power, is the degree to which a safe climate of trust can be sustained. Then a ministry marked by genuine love is not only possible but likely.

At the same time, no code of sexual ethics ought to inhibit ministers from taking the risks of association and relationship which are inherent in the gospel. The teacher and model is Jesus, who did not remain aloof even from those who were notorious. However, Jesus knew what he was doing. So must clergy. Self-awareness of limitations, vulnerabilities, loneliness, unresolved emotional conflicts, marital stress, and the spiritual shadows in the minister’s own life, combined with intentional steps to grow toward wholeness, may be the most important ethical demand a responsible code of sexual ethics lays upon clergy.

There is some evidence that ministers who are at greatest risk of sexual misconduct and most likely to violate ethical boundaries are those who choose to deny their power and thus remain blind to their own potential to do harm. In a provocative study entitled “Sex in the Parish: Social-Scientific Explanations for Why it Occurs” (The Journal of Pastoral Care, Winter 1993) Donald Capps observes that while pastors often do not feel powerful, they have power which those in other professions do not have, namely, the power of freedom from close supervision by others, the power of access which results from the trust parishioners place in their ministers, and the power of knowledge derived from long and often intimate observation.
of relationships. Capps notes that those pastors who make the greatest efforts to reduce the power difference ("Just call me Bob, none of that Reverend stuff") actually increase it. If, in an attempt to establish a common bond, a pastor shares intimate facts about himself, such self-disclosure only increases access and accessibility to the parishioner. According to Capps, "The more you succeed in reducing the power differential between you and the parishioner, the greater it becomes" (Capps, p. 357; see also Karen Lebacqz and Ronald Barton, *Sex in the Parish*, Philadelphia: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991, p. 130).

The power differential is less clear when the minister is a woman. For some parishioners the respect they have for the office and role of minister is deep enough so that the dynamics are not significantly different. However, in other instances the awareness of difference in power is much reduced. Males in the congregation who have difficulty in relating to women as other than objects of sexual interest may not readily view their female pastor in a different manner. Such a tainted view of women carries over into the pastor-parishioner relationship. Church membership does not ensure wholeness, and the reality of sinfulness within the Christian community is cause for sadness but not surprise.

Many women pastors have experienced persons whose attitude and behavior is at best inappropriate. Elders and deacons, as well as colleagues who are ordained ministers, bear a special responsibility to insist that women clergy be treated with the respect and dignity due the office of minister of Word and sacrament and them as sisters in Christ.

Guidelines

The following ethical guidelines should inform the practice of ministry in the Reformed Church in America:

1. Ministers in the Reformed Church in America are prohibited from engaging in:

   **Sexual misconduct**, which is any sexual activity or behavior a minister engages in with a person for whom the primary basis of the relationship is the minister's role, whether or not such a person is a member of the congregation the minister serves. With the sole exception of the minister's own spouse, sexual contact with a member of the congregation certainly constitutes what the *Book of Church Order* terms a "gross offense" (*BCO*, Chapter 2, Part I, Article 3, Section 3b).

   Forms of sexual misconduct include:

   a. **Sexual harassment**, which is any verbal or physical sexual advance which is unwelcome, or sexual conduct which creates an offensive, hostile, or intimidating environment, including verbal abuse, lewd or suggestive jokes or innuendo, and unwanted physical contact about which the offender has been informed or which is clearly sexually motivated. Any request for sexual favors with an implication of reward or threat is unethical, constitutes a "gross offense," and is conduct unbecoming a minister. Such conduct is also unbecoming to elders and deacons, and is of special concern when directed to a minister who is a woman.

   b. **Sexual abuse**, which is sexual conduct which results in emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual harm to the victim. State laws vary as to what forms of sexual activity constitute criminal abuse; some apply the same criteria to members of the clergy in their relationships to parishioners as they do to the relationships between therapists and clients. Whether or not subject to criminal laws, the absence of true consent due to an imbalance of power identifies sexual misconduct by a minister as abusive.

   c. **Sexual exploitation**, which is any activity of a sexual or potentially sexual nature by which a minister uses the power of role and position to gain personal gratification.
2. A minister of the Reformed Church in America, who has responded to the call of God and the church to serve in a ministry of Word and sacrament, must to the best of his or her ability represent the love of Christ in all human relationships. All forms of sexual misconduct, harassment, abuse, and exploitation violate the covenant which a minister makes with God and the church when he or she is ordained.

3. When ministers of the Reformed Church in America engage in the counseling of individuals, they are obligated to recognize and abide by their own limitations as to training and competency, as well as the time demands of their other pastoral duties, and to make referrals to other competent and responsible professionals whenever doing so is in the best interests of the person seeking help, even when a decision to refer is met with resistance.

4. In recognition of the serious and destructive effect of sexual violations on victims, the immediate families of both victims and offenders and the congregations affected, Reformed Church classes are expected to give strict and immediate attention to procedures outlined in the Book of Church Order, to the Guidelines and Procedures for Dealing with Allegations of Sexual Misconduct adopted by the 1994 General Synod (MGS 1994, pp. 237-40), to pay particular attention to the needs of any and all victims, and require all ministers and others who hold positions which invite trust and vulnerability to give evidence of appropriate training in the ethical use of power, including the area of sexual ethics.

R-33.
To encourage classes to adopt the above guidelines or similar guidelines for ethical sexual conduct. (ADOPTED)

➢The advisory committee recommended to amend R-34:

R-34.
To instruct the general secretary to inform each ordained minister and consistory in the Reformed Church in America about the inclusion in the 1995 Minutes of General Synod of the paper, “A Code of Sexual Ethics;” and further,

- to request each RCA minister and consistory to review and study this code and to take responsibility to participate in training opportunities which may help to clarify and internalize their own standards of ethical sexual behavior. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)*

Reason: It is important for consistory also to be aware of this code and to study and review this code.<

R-35.
To encourage classes to determine on an annual basis whether there are RCA ministers serving within their bounds and under their care who have not as yet received formal training in the area of sexual ethics, and when such is the case, to take steps to make such training available. (ADOPTED)

R-36.
To direct the Office of Ministry and Personnel Services to continue to provide for training opportunities in sexual ethics in ministry upon request by the classes. (ADOPTED)

*Additions are in light-face type.
The advisory committee recommended:

R-37.
To express gratitude to the Office of Ministry and Personnel Services for providing training opportunities in sexual ethics in ministry to RCA classes and other RCA groups. (ADOPTED)

Report of the Task Force on Standards for the Preparation for the Professional Ministry

The 1994 General Synod then voted “to authorize the moderator of the General Synod Council to appoint members of the Task Force...prior to the October 1994 General Synod Council meeting” (MGS 1994, R-15, p. 278).

The GSC moderator, after consultation with the general secretary, the directors of Ministry and Personnel Services and Policy, Planning, and Administration Services, the president of General Synod, and others, appointed the following members to the task force:

- Robert Anderson, Jr.
- James Cook (chair)
- Vernon Hoffs
- Norman Kansfield
- Cornelis Kors
- Barbara Liggett
- Stanley Perea
- Fred Wezeman
- Dennis Voskuil

Alvin Poppen and Wesley Granberg-Michaelson serve as staff resource persons. Two representatives from the racial/ethnic councils, Ella Campbell and Barbara Alexander, also attended these task force meetings. The task force met on November 21, 1994, January 26-27, 1995, and March 16-17, 1995.

The Task

The task force was created to assist the Office of Ministry and Personnel Services to interpret and implement the responsibility assigned by the 1992 General Synod relative to “oversight of the standards of theological education” (MGS 1992, R-20, pp. 65-7). Its task is to determine how best to provide such oversight, what will be of significance and encouragement to those engaged in administering theological education, and how to determine whether the process leading to ordination provides the Reformed Church in America with the quality and quantity of ministerial leadership the RCA requires.

Over the course of its three meetings the task force has organized itself; explored its mandate; identified available resources; met with representatives of the RCA racial/ethnic councils; isolated core issues; reviewed existing documents; described ministerial competencies under the categories of “head,” “heart,” and “hand”; and has begun to address the structural issues that would arise in connection with new standards for the assessment, preparation, licensure, ordination, and continuing education and professional development of ministers in the RCA.
The Context

As a result of these discussions, the task force believes that the need for new standards is clear; the preparation of visionary leaders is critical; the role of the church in the preparation of its ministers is essential; the procedures to accomplish these goals are complex; and the nature of the changes necessary to their implementation is radical (see also Report of the President, “A Prescription for Leadership Recruitment in the RCA”).

The Emerging Vision

The steps of a new procedure are beginning to emerge—steps that can underline, sharpen, and enlarge the traditional roles of RCA congregations, classes, and seminaries; steps that can incorporate standardized assessments, examinations, objectives, and professional development. Scenes from the task force’s emerging vision are:

1. The Role of the Congregation

The base component for ministerial recruitment and preparation is the congregation. The best answer to the question, “Where should the search for church leadership begin?” is “In the congregation, and at the earliest age when ministerial gifts can be identified, affirmed, encouraged, and nurtured.” A congregation’s recommendation that a gifted applicant be taken under care of classis is to be accompanied by a statement of their commitment to the applicant of spiritual, pastoral, and financial support.

The conviction that ministerial preparation be congregation-based also means that all candidates are to be linked to an RCA “teaching church” throughout their seminary training. Following licensure, candidates are to begin their ministry in an RCA “residency church.”

2. The Role of Classes

Assisted both by interviews which focus on the applicant’s character, spiritual journey, emotional health, and giftedness, and by the results of a standard assessment instrument provided by the Commission on Ministerial Formation (see number 4 below), the classis determines whether or not to take the applicant under care as a candidate for ministry. The classis will then initiate the formation of a Ministry Formation Committee for each candidate under its care.

3. The Responsibility of Candidates

The congregations’ and classes’ responsibility to work with candidates is not to be interpreted as their doing everything for candidates. The latter need to be responsibly involved at each step of the process in order to encourage their commitment, ownership, and maturity.

4. The Creation of a Commission on Ministerial Formation

This commission would be a new creation to formulate and oversee the standards for the preparation of RCA candidates for ministry. Its task would not be to replace the responsibilities of congregations, classes, or candidates, but to assist these three in discharging their respective responsibilities. Such assistance would involve providing for congregations and classes appropriate standard assessment instruments; a standard written portion of the classis’ examination for licensure; standards for teaching churches, residency churches, and residency evaluation; and methods of assessing continuing education and professional development. This commission might also coordinate the recruitment and training of RCA “teaching churches” and “residency churches.”
5. The Residency Requirement

All licensed candidates would begin their ministry with a residency period of standard length in an RCA “residency church.” Their license would authorize them to perform the full duties of pastoral ministry, but only in their “residency church.” The license and residency period would be renewable at the discretion of the classis. The residency period is intended to culminate in a residency evaluation, final ministry examination, and—following successful completion—ordination.

6. Continuing Education and Periodic Assessment and Support for Professional Development

To assure the continuing quality, competency, and growth of all active RCA ministers, the Commission on Ministerial Formation would provide standards for continuing education, periodic assessment, and professional development.

Conclusion

The task force is grateful for progress made, but is keenly aware that the proposed steps must be carefully refined before presentation to General Synod.

The task force recommends:

R-38.
To continue the Task Force on Standards for the Preparation for the Professional Ministry in the Reformed Church in America; and further,

to request the task force present a final report to the 1996 General Synod. (ADOPTED)

Overtures

Create General Synod Council Committee for Oversight of Theological Education, Ministry Formation, and Continuing Education

1. The Classis of California overtures the General Synod to instruct the General Synod Council to create immediately a new General Synod Council Committee for Oversight of Theological Education, Ministry Formation, and Continuing Education.

Reasons:

1. Under the new structure of the RCA, effective July 1, 1993, the Board of Theological Education ceased to exist. Responsibilities of the Board of Theological Education were transferred to the RCA seminaries, the Theological Education Agency, and the General Synod Council’s Ministry and Personnel Services Committee. This current structure does not lend itself to efficient coordination, practical strategies, or integrated decisions involving ministry formation, theological education, and continuing education.
2. The many other important responsibilities and functions of Ministry and Personnel Services (MAPS) do not allow for adequate attention to overseeing the standards for the preparation for the professional ministry in the Reformed Church in America. Although the classis appreciates the very committed efforts by MAPS to devote as much time and attention as necessary to oversight of theological education, the demands and time needed for this oversight are sometimes complicated, extensive, and time-consuming. It is unreasonable to expect MAPS to focus extensively on this area of oversight for theological education at the expense of fulfilling its other vitally essential responsibilities and functions.

3. The proposed General Synod Council committee provides a forum for discussions on theological education between RCA seminaries and RCA agencies.

4. The proposed General Synod Council committee provides a direct structural connection between the RCA seminaries/Theological Education Agency and the denomination.

5. Oversight for theological education and preparation for ministry needs more than two hours of time at a General Synod Council Ministry and Personnel Services Committee meeting. A separate General Synod Council Committee for Oversight of Theological Education, Ministry Formation, and Continuing Education allows for complete and undivided attention to these fundamentally important needs and concerns. The proposed General Synod Council committee places theological education and the preparation for ministry directly in the structure of the denomination rather than at the peripheral of the denomination.

➢The advisory committee recommended:

R-39.
To refer Overture 1 to the Task Force on Standards for the Preparation for the Professional Ministry in the Reformed Church in America. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The content of Overture 1 is similar to R-1 above which the General Synod referred to the task force. (See p. 249.)

Offer Spanish Language Courses for Those Preparing for Ministry

2. The Classis of California overtures the General Synod to instruct the General Synod Council to begin and to fund the formation of denominationally sensitive courses (M.Div. level) in the Spanish language suitable for those preparing for the pastorate.

Reasons:

1. The RCA is ministering in many areas that will be predominantly Spanish-speaking in the not-too-distant future. The RCA needs to prepare pastoral leaders to serve in these areas.

2. There are already instructors available and structures exist in the RCA to begin these Spanish language courses. Present resources exist at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, Western Theological Seminary, and Fuller Theological Seminary.

3. All that is needed to provide for these courses is the vision, decision, and funding from the RCA. The RCA needs to provide annual funding of $25,000-$50,000 to offer these courses.
4. Many Spanish-speaking lay pastors and potential pastors in the RCA are prepared and eager to pursue formal theological education but are held back by language difficulties.

5. The RCA should utilize the many new ways of technology and communication to offer such courses.

➢ The advisory committee recommended:

R-40.

to instruct the Task Force on Standards for the Preparation for the Professional Ministry in the Reformed Church in America to give attention to the need for the formation of denominationally sensitive courses (M.Div. level) taught in Spanish to those preparing for the pastorate. (ADOPTED)

Reason: It is premature to begin and to provide funding for these courses prior to the final report of the task force.

Dissolution of the Theological Education Agency

3. The Classis of Albany overtures the General Synod to begin the orderly dissolution of the Theological Education Agency.

Reasons:

1. The General Synod assessment of $80,968 is too great for the RCA classes and congregations to bear in an era of spiraling assessments.

2. The Theological Education Agency (TEA) provides a director who functions as an unelected and uninstalled General Synod professor of theology. This violates RCA church order.

3. TEA weakens theological education in the RCA. The RCA educates future RCA clergy through the office of General Synod professor of theology (BCO, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 8). This office provides a "norm" of education through the two RCA seminaries. As increasing numbers of candidates for ministry attend other theological education institutions, the RCA's capability to maintain with candidates for ministry an integral process for theological education and future ministry in the RCA grows more diluted.

4. Both potential RCA clergy and congregations find it increasingly more difficult to live out the Reformed covenantal vision as more candidates for ministry enter theological education with not only little nurture within the Reformed community, having received little sense of a living communal tradition in non-RCA theological education institutions.

5. The dissolution of TEA would still leave in place the authority and right of General Synod to grant dispensations from meeting the full requirements for the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry.

6. The pre-1984 examination procedure for candidates by General Synod professors of theology allows students to attend other seminaries at a far smaller cost to the General Synod.
The advisory committee recommended:

R-41.
To instruct the Task Force on Standards for the Preparation for the Professional Ministry in the Reformed Church in America to study and evaluate the impact of the Theological Education Agency (TEA) in relation to the overall theological education program of the Reformed Church in America; and further,

to urge classes to pay strict attention to the following four criteria adopted by the 1990 General Synod for seminary selection:

1. Academic accreditation; and
2. Compatible theology; and
3. Denominational identity; and

(ADOPTED)

Reason: It is premature to proceed with the dissolution of TEA, but the advisory committee was persuaded by the reasons accompanying Overture 3 to request further constructive discussion by the task force.

Loan Fund for Theological Education Students

4. The Classis of Mid-Hudson overtures General Synod to establish a loan fund for theological education students; and further,

to make these loans available interest-free to any student under the care of a Reformed Church in America classis; and further,

to require repayment of the loan over a five-year period beginning one year after the theological education student's seminary enrollment ends.

In the event a former theological education student, ordained and serving within the Reformed Church in America, can demonstrate both unusual hardship (low salary, extraordinary health problems and medical expenses, etc.) and an honest attempt at repaying the loan as faithfully as possible, the outstanding loan balance (indebtedness) may be forgiven at the end of ten years of service in the Reformed Church in America.

Reasons:

1. The RCA is historically committed to an educated clergy and quality theological education. The existence of a loan fund program to assist RCA theological education students would bear effective witness to this commitment.

2. The cost of theological education (tuition, books, and other expenses) at the two RCA seminaries as well as at other non-RCA seminaries has increased drastically in recent years.

3. Living expenses (housing, food, etc.) have skyrocketed.

4. Students entering seminary immediately after completing their undergraduate studies are often deeply in debt. Other theological education students are making a career change later in life and cannot obtain the loans needed for theological education from commercial institutions. The interest charged by these institutions is prohibitive in any case.
5. New pastors just graduated from seminary are seldom able to find well-paying positions. The repayment of debts incurred in the course of college and seminary studies creates a financial hardship.

6. The RCA once had a loan fund for theological education students. Many RCA ministers now serving RCA congregations benefited from its availability. Without this loan fund, their gifts may well have been lost to the RCA as they would have pursued other avenues of endeavor.

7. Some RCA classes and congregations are able to offer loans for theological education. In some instances, outright grants to students under the care of a classis are possible. However, not all classes or congregations are able to offer this sort of assistance. Access to a denomination-wide loan fund for theological education would make it uniformly easier for all those who are called to ministry to respond to that call.

➢ The advisory committee recommended:

R-42.
To refer Overture 4 to the General Synod Council Finance Services Committee for study and report to the 1996 General Synod; and further,


Reasons:

1. The advisory committee sympathized with the intent of Overture 4, but notes there are already existing funds available to theological education students.

2. More information is needed to make an appropriate decision.

Parental/Family Leave Policy


Reason: Written in 1982, the guidelines need to be updated and expanded to include addressing the growing problem of caring for aging parents as well as caring for problems of severe illness of a spouse or children. The guidelines would better be renamed “Family Leave.”

➢ The advisory committee recommended:

R-43.
To instruct the Office of Ministry and Personnel Services to update as a “family leave” policy the “Guidelines for Establishing a Maternity Leave Policy” adopted by the 1982 General Synod as a study paper (MGS 1982, R-20, pp. 200-01; see also MGS 1983, pp. 232-34, and MGS 1985, p. 218). (ADOPTED)

Reason: An update on this issue is due.
From the Report of the President

P-2 and P-5 were referred to the Advisory Committee on Church Vocations.

➢ In response to P-2 (p. 29), the advisory committee recommended:

**R-44.**
To instruct the Task Force on Standards for the Preparation for the Professional Ministry in the Reformed Church in America to consult with the Council of Field Secretaries (COFS), the RCA seminaries, and the Theological Education Agency (TEA), along with the appropriate General Synod Council committee/unit, or any other appropriate RCA agency, commission, or committee to develop processes to identify, establish, and equip "teaching churches" throughout the Reformed Church in America, for report to the 1996 General Synod. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The instruction of R-44 to the task force takes advantage of its responsibilities and expertise for such matters.

➢ In response to P-5 (p. 30), the advisory committee recommended:

**R-45.**
To urge the classes to use the RCA Leadership Profile process developed by the Gallup organization as one of the methods for determining whether or not to receive an applicant under care as a candidate for ministry; and further,

to direct the Office of Ministry and Personnel Services to survey and compile the methods and tools which classes presently use to determine whether or not to receive an applicant under care as a candidate for ministry; and further,

to direct the Office of Ministry and Personnel Services to monitor the use of the RCA Leadership Profile process by the classes and to report on its use to the 1998 General Synod. (ADOPTED)

Reason: R-45 emphasizes the use of all available tools for the selection of ministerial candidates.
REPORTS ON EVANGELIZATION AND CHURCH GROWTH


The Reformed Church in America Building and Extension Fund, Inc. (RCABEF) was originally incorporated in 1958 as a New York not-for-profit corporation. Its original name was “The Reformed Church in America - Extension Foundation, Inc.” (EF). Its purpose was to supplement the work of the Church Building Fund (CBF) loan program of the Reformed Church in America. The 1994 General Synod voted to consolidate the operations of the EF and CBF into a single entity (MGS 1994, R-13, p. 233). To effect this policy, the certificate of incorporation of the EF was restated to change the name of the EF to The Reformed Church in America Building and Extension Fund, Inc., and make certain other changes to the structure of the corporation to enable it to operate the CBF. The restated certificate of incorporation was approved by the Supreme Court of the State of New York and filed with the Department of State for the State of New York on November 30, 1994.

At the end of 1994 the corporation had an asset base of nearly $29 million. Of this amount, more than $21 million was in the form of mortgages to RCA congregations, $4 million was committed to RCA congregations for their current building projects, and $4 million was available for new projects. As of December 31, 1994, there were 113 CBF loans and fifty-seven EF loans that were outstanding to local RCA congregations.

The RCABEF is administered by a board of directors which consists of six voting members, all of whom must be RCA active-confirmed members. The general secretary of the RCA is a non-voting, ex-officio member. Of the six voting members, one must be a member of the General Synod Council (GSC) whose term on the RCABEF board must be co-extensive with his or her term on the GSC. Additionally, at least one voting member must be a resident of the State of New York.

The primary source of funds for the CBF is gifts, bequests, and grants from members, agencies, and instrumentalities of the RCA. The primary source of funds for the EF is the sale of promissory notes. Such notes are offered in fixed maturities of approximately two, five, or ten years. The notes are securities, and therefore are offered for sale through an offering circular pursuant to registration requirements, exemptions, or other qualifications under applicable regulatory procedures. Presently the RCABEF offers its notes for sale in fourteen states, namely Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Michigan, New York, New Jersey, North Carolina, Wisconsin, Texas, and Washington. The rates of interest paid on EF notes is established quarterly by a four-person subcommittee of the RCABEF board.

The RCABEF makes loans to local RCA congregations for construction of new facilities or renovation of existing facilities. RCABEF policy requires that all such loans be secured by a lien on the borrower’s real property. EF loans must be secured by a first lien. CBF loans may be secured by subordinate liens. In reviewing loan applications and establishing loan policies and procedures, the RCABEF board works in consultation with the Council of Field Secretaries and the General Synod Council Evangelism and Church Development Services Committee.

On June 1, 1994, Paul Karssen assumed the newly formed position of fund executive for the RCABEF. Prior to assuming this position, he practiced law in the State of California, principally in the area of real estate secured financing. He works in the RCA regional office in Orange City, Iowa.
With the consolidation of the CBF and EF loan funds, the anticipated increase of the CBF loan fund's asset base as a result of the $9.8 by '98 fund drive, and the hiring of the fund executive to oversee the ongoing operation of the two funds, the RCABEF is looking forward to making a significant contribution to the development of new RCA congregations and the redevelopment of existing congregations of the Reformed Church in America.

Report of the General Synod Council's Evangelism and Church Development Services Committee

EVANGELISM

The 1994 General Synod voted:

To instruct the General Synod Council’s Evangelism and Church Development Services Committee to develop a plan for implementing Section IV of “Building the Church for the 21st Century” and to report progress to the 1995 General Synod (MGS 1994, R-11, p. 322).

Section IV of “Building the Church for the 21st Century” states:

Hearing the Lord’s charge “to all nations...every creature...the end of the earth”;
Knowing Christ's love for those “other sheep”;
Holding the gospel treasure in trust for them;
Debtors to all;
Building on a great missionary history;
Yearning for the earth to be filled with God’s praise;

We seek by all means to lead others to faith in Christ and service in the church.... May we be workers unashamed! (Section IV, “Building the Church for the 21st Century,” adopted by the 1990 General Synod, MGS 1990, R-15, p. 353).

Section IV of “Building the Church for 21st Century” also states the following:

For that we need to be nurtured;
We seek to be educated for ministry;
We long to be empowered for witness;
We rise to a new readiness.

In development of its plan, Evangelism and Church Development Services reports the following progress:

1. For that we need to be nurtured

   a. Evangelism and Church Development Services has communicated with every RCA classis urging them to set aside time each year in their classis agenda to discuss how they can improve outreach in their churches most effectively.
b. Evangelism and Church Development Services has requested RCA congregations to review the evangelism programs they are using to determine which are most effective and to then utilize them.

2. We seek to be educated for ministry

a. Evangelism and Church Development Services is in the process of implementing a program for training “regional evangelism assistants” to serve in RCA regional synods of the U.S. and Canada (see report below, “Regional Evangelism Assistants”).

b. On the Way produced a new book, *Revive Us Again! Hope for Stagnant, Stuck, and Sterile Churches*. This book, written by the Rev. David Dethmers and specifically geared for use by RCA consistories, has a very practical emphasis. The book was sent to all enrolled On the Way RCA congregations and is available through the RCA Distribution Center at minimal cost. (See “On the Way” report below.)

c. Another classic book, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, by Robert E. Coleman, was also sent to all enrolled On the Way RCA congregations to assist in evangelism training.

3. We long to be empowered for witness

Evangelism and Church Development Services is convinced that empowerment for witness arises from people at prayer. Evangelism and Church Development Services therefore called for a “Day of Prayer” for the RCA and its mission efforts at home and abroad. This “Day of Prayer,” which will be observed on Sunday, June 11, 1995, occurs during the 1995 General Synod meeting at Ramapo College in Mahwah, New Jersey. Materials were made available by Evangelism and Church Development Services for all 968 RCA congregations to participate in this dynamic spiritual undergirding of the RCA’s mission.

4. We rise to a new readiness

The format of the 1995 General Synod has been designed not only to transact the church’s business, but also to inspire and equip the leadership of the RCA to implement Christ’s command to “make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19) in the context of this culture and time. Inspiration and instruction is woven throughout the entire 1995 General Synod meeting on the 1995 General Synod theme, “Evangelism in a Changing World.”

**STATEMENT ON EVANGELISM BY NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (NCCC)**

For the first time in twenty years, the National Council of Churches of Christ (NCCC) in the U.S. has produced a statement on evangelism. This statement was approved unanimously at a November 1994 NCCC meeting.

According to the *United Methodist Reporter*, “the statement makes a sound theological case for placing proclamation of the Good News at the heart of the church’s mission.” To assist in use of this statement by congregations, a workbook is being prepared by the NCCC’s Program Ministry on Evangelization. It is hoped that congregations will use the statement and workbook in their evangelism efforts both within their congregations and in their communities. Copies of this statement are available for review at the 1995 General Synod and from the Office of Evangelism and Church Development Services. The Rev. Bruce Laverman, director of evangelism and church development services, served on the NCCC committee that produced the final draft of this statement.
The advisory committee recommended to amend R-1:

R-1.
To refer "A Call to Dialogue and Action in Evangelism: Jesus Christ and God’s Reign," a policy statement of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, to RCA congregations for their use in discussions on evangelism and for their use in preparing and implementing evangelism [programs].

Reason: If evangelism is understood as a program, it becomes optional. A biblical understanding of evangelism suggests that all congregations should be involved in evangelizing.

Upon a motion from the floor to further amend R-1, the Synod

VOTED: To refer "A Call to Dialogue and Action in Evangelism: Jesus Christ and God's Reign," a policy statement of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA (with a qualifying statement that this General Synod does not consider the words "sexual orientation" to be appropriate as a difference to be included in the policy statement list of gender, race, age, class and physical ability), to RCA congregations for their use in discussions on evangelism and for their use in preparing and implementing evangelism [programs].

ON THE WAY

The RCA evangelism emphasis, On the Way, began in 1987 and is in year eight of its ten-year lifespan. It continues to provide helpful, useful, and practical resources. Three hundred seventy RCA congregations are enrolled. A participating congregation is defined as one that identifies evangelism as a priority. Congregations pledge to pray and work to extend God's kingdom. As a sign of commitment, participating congregations contribute one hundred dollars upon enrollment.

On the Way is viewed as a covenantal relationship. The RCA provides congregations with an annual On the Way resource packet—including at least one new book. In turn, congregations have the responsibility to pray for and to work at doing effective evangelism.

The 1994-95 resource packet was mailed to each participating congregation in November 1994. Included was the latest book in the On the Way series, Revive Us Again! Hope for Stagnant, Stuck, and Sterile Churches, written by the Rev. David Dethmers. Also included was a series of how-to pamphlets, a list of educational opportunities for 1995, reprints of several magazine articles, and a bonus book, The Master Plan of Evangelism by Robert E. Coleman. Twenty-six congregations completed and returned to Evangelism and Church Development Services the evangelism (self-evaluation) checklist—twice the number returned in previous years.

There have been some problems in the On the Way program. Sometimes, RCA clergy forget On the Way is a congregational membership; these clergy add On the Way books to their own personal libraries or take these books with them when they move to another congregation. Over the years, some RCA congregations have forgotten the original covenant. Some have forgotten they were even enrolled in the On the Way program.

To determine whether On the Way should continue after 1996, a survey of participating RCA congregations is being conducted by the Rev. Donald R. Baird, associate for congregational evangelism. Baird provides services to On the Way congregations and also serves as the

*Addition is in light-face type; deletion is enclosed in brackets.
editor of the annual resource packet. The results of the survey will be analyzed and reported to the 1996 General Synod.

**EVANGELISM WORKSHOPS AND SEMINARS**

During the 1994-95 program year the associate for congregational evangelism conducted weekend workshops, witnessing seminars, and consultations for twenty-six RCA congregations, ranging from New York and New Jersey to the Virgin Islands and California in the U.S., from Ontario to Alberta in Canada.

Evangelism workshops are designed to provide specific helps in specific contexts. Held on Friday evening and all day Saturday, it is an intensive eight-hour schedule. Local church leaders, together with persons who can effect change, are urged to participate in these workshops. Although time limits prevent sufficient discussion of ideas which emerge during a workshop, a process is provided for follow-up. A specially designed form enables participants to list ideas they believe would work best in their congregation and community. The ideas are compiled by the associate for evangelism. The associate for evangelism then returns a detailed summary to the congregation, adding suggestions, commentary, and assessment.

There is no charge for an evangelism workshop; the services of the associate for evangelism are provided to RCA congregations by Evangelism and Church Development Services. Congregations are asked to make a suitable contribution to help defray travel costs.

One of the most difficult challenges facing most parishioners and many clergy is how to witness effectively. Seminars, designed for Christians who find it difficult to engage others in faith conversations, begin with Bible study and use role-playing techniques to strengthen learnings. The three-hour seminars are usually held weekday evenings. Suggestions are made at the evening seminars for follow-up training.

**REGIONAL EVANGELISM TRAINERS**

If the task of evangelization is going to happen, it must begin with the leadership in a local congregation. To assist leadership in the local congregation for evangelism, the associate for congregational evangelism has met over the past five years with leaders from almost one hundred RCA congregations to strategize on how to do evangelism more effectively. Assistance from the associate for congregational evangelism has proven to be practical and effective.

**Background**

The associate for congregational evangelism is a seventy-five-day-per-year contract position. The demand for services of the associate for evangelism services far exceeds the available time. To alleviate this problem, the General Synod Council, at its March 1995 meeting, approved a proposal to recruit and equip a corps of regional evangelism trainers to provide additional leadership for evangelism at the local congregational level. The concept for these regional evangelism trainers originates from the biblical passage: "The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry" (Eph. 4:11-12).

**Nominations**

In June 1995 regional synod executives were contacted by the associate for congregational evangelism and were asked to nominate persons from within their respective regional synods to serve as regional evangelism trainers. Efforts to be inclusive in gender and race and to
include both clergy and laity as nominees was emphasized. In addition, nominees were to be persons with open minds about evangelism, willing to be trained to bring new ideas and appropriate suggestions concerning evangelism to congregations. Persons with specific evangelistic axes-to-grind or narrow evangelism agendas were not sought.

Invitations to Serve

Upon receipt of names of recommended nominees, forty invitations were sent in January 1995 to nominees in both Canada and the U.S. to serve as regional evangelism trainers (RETs).

Expectations

Expectations for regional evangelism trainers include the following:

1. Receive two to three days of training conducted by the Rev. Bruce Laverman, director of evangelism and church development services, and the Rev. Donald R. Baird, associate for congregational evangelism. Room and board plus transportation to and from the training site is paid by Evangelism and Church Development Services.

2. Attend an evangelism workshop led by the associate for congregational evangelism prior to the RET nominee/trainee signing a contract. It is the responsibility of the RET nominee/trainee to make arrangements to attend this evangelism workshop at his or her own cost.

3. Be willing and available to provide training in practical evangelization and witnessing for no more than five RCA congregations per year in his or her regional synod, using as the model the evangelism workshop designed by the associate for congregational evangelism.

4. Be open to a variety of methods and ways of doing evangelism.

5. Be an advocate for evangelism and serve as a liaison for the Office of Evangelism with classes and the regional synod.

6. Participate in an annual performance review evaluation.

7. Be accountable to the associate for congregational evangelism, who will provide a system of certification and recertification of RETs.

Training

An intensive RET training course was conducted May 22-23, 1995, at Camp Manitoqua in Frankfort, Illinois. Those persons who successfully completed the first stage of training are now in the process of arranging to attend an evangelism workshop. As soon as RETs are certified, their names will be given to regional synod executives. To request the services of an RET, contact the Office of Evangelism and Church Development Services or the appropriate regional synod executive. RCA congregations may also contact RETs directly.

Funding

For each evangelism workshop conducted, the RET receives a stipend of $250 (plus reimbursement for expenses incurred for transportation, room, and board) from the Office of Evangelism and Church Development Services. RETs are funded through the On the Way program. RCA congregations are not charged. The number of days clergy may serve as
RETs are restricted in order for them to devote the necessary and sufficient time required and expected by their congregations.

R-2.
To encourage RCA congregations to conduct an evangelism workshop; and further,

to encourage RCA congregations to utilize the services of an RCA regional evangelism trainer or the RCA associate for congregational evangelism. (ADOPTED)

CITY CONGREGATIONAL MINISTRIES

Newspaper headlines and television images of blight, war and conflict, human-rights and substance abuse, homelessness, hunger and disease (especially HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis) in cities of the world invoke myriad questions regarding the needs and suffering of humans who are deemed hopeless without intervention by the political and nonpolitical affluent. Is there any hope at all for the impoverished people of the cities? How are Christians in the cities working for empowerment, economic security, social justice, and peace in urban communities? What are the visions, new models of ministry, and new possibilities that will revive, rebuild, and restore the urban communities?

Indeed, hopelessness has prevailed too long as the order of the day with its preconceived notions of inner-city dwellers as passive recipients of private and government handouts; and their patronizing arms-length mission ventures and programs that have given the illusion of progress, but have actually created dependency and lack of initiative. Thus, the investments by corporations, foundations, churches, and synagogues in the cities have yielded few changes, and hopelessness has become cynicism; for “Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life” (Prov. 13:12).

In other words, when hope is realized, it comforts and invigorates the body and soul. Thus, the “hopeful few” have begun to lift their voices in the call for new ways of perceiving and dealing with cities. The “hopeful few” speak of a new and shifting paradigm for the approaching twenty-first century. It is incumbent, therefore, that considerable efforts be expended in search of a revitalized metropolitan mission.

To this end, the associate for city congregational ministries responded to and joined the ranks of the “hopeful few” by planning—in consultation with the City Congregational Ministries Advisory Committee, the racial/ethnic councils, and the director of Evangelism and Church Development Services—a consultation, “Celebrating City Ministries,” April 20-22, 1995, at the Ramada Hotel, Newark International Airport, New Jersey. All who have a heart for the diversities of effective ministry in metropolitan areas were invited to carefully scrutinize in focus groups and workshops what has been and is being done in City Congregational Ministries (CCM), what is needed, and where the RCA is to go from this consultation in its search for a revitalized metropolitan mission for the twenty-first century. The Rev. Dr. Raymond J. Bakke, executive director of International Urban Associates and co-founder of the Seminary Consortium for Urban Pastoral Education (SCUPE), was the featured speaker. Over 150 persons attended. The consultation provided insights, identified resources, promoted partnerships and collaboration, and motivated participants to use their leadership roles in a broader perspective. Some of the workshops and workshop leaders at this consultation were:

“Developing An Urban Strategy”
The Rev. Stanley Perea and Professor Warren Dennis

“Enhancing One’s Spiritual Resources”
The Rev. Dr. Paul Smith
"Developing Leadership Strategies"  The Rev. Earle Hall
"Crossing Borders, Challenging Boundaries"  The Rev. Dr. George Beukema
"Mundane Ministries—Empowering Giftedness"  The Rev. Beth Vigil
and the Rev. Clara Woodson

In addition to the above, workshops on “Partnering for Change,” “Revitalizing Youth Ministries,” and another for “Elders and Deacons” were offered.

The following covenant was adopted by the participants at this consultation:

THE NEWARK COVENANT
April 22, 1995

In 1979, in Richfield, Ohio, RCA pastors and members of RCA churches located in cities came together to lay the groundwork for an “Urban Ministries Policy Statement” which was adopted by the 1980 General Synod (MGS 1980, pp. 200-05). In the fifteen years since then, the statement has not been changed. The context for ministry in the city has shifted, however, and there is a new framework for understanding the relationship of people involved in ministry in the city to each other and to the denomination as a whole.

At its “Celebrating City Ministries” consultation held in Newark, New Jersey, on the twenty-second day of April 1995, the consultation participants expressed the following observations that represent a new contextual understanding to frame our life together in the future:

1. The Paradigm Shift in the Understanding of Mission. As the world’s nations have streamed into North American cities, the dynamic increase in cultural pluralism, accompanied by a parallel process of secularization, has shifted the context of the missionary effort of the church from “over there” to “right here.” Churches in cities are being used by God to retool the larger church for the work of missions in the post-Christian, secular world.

2. The Mission as One. The work of the church globally and locally is the same work of bringing the good news in word and deed. Thus, ministry in the city is seen as an integral part of the work of the whole church rather than as “specialized” ministry.

3. An Increasing Cultural Diversity. A celebration of the rich and growing cultural diversity within the RCA has strengthened a common bond in Christ, a growing sense of inclusivity within the RCA, and the emerging agenda for ministry in the city common to us all.

4. City Congregational Ministries Expanding. The definition of city congregational ministries is expanding to include all who proclaim the good news within the context of the city, and to value the contributions of all beyond race, power, and economic lines.

5. Changing RCA Denominational Structures and Staffing. Denominational structures and staffing are changing to reflect the new understanding of mission and to undergird the RCA in mission. This will enable a unified approach to mission that was not possible in previously departmentalized and traditional approaches to mission.

6. Biblical Proclamation of God’s Love and Purpose. Biblical proclamation of God’s love and purpose for the city encourages the church to embrace and evangelize the city as the arena where the kingdom will find its fullest expression on earth.
In the light of the new understanding of mission, of ourselves, and of our denominational structures, we covenant together to do the following and charge the Office of City Congregational Ministries to be accountable for evaluation and implementation:

1. **To take risks in seeking new approaches to ministry** in the cities—approaches which are adapted to the changing needs in cities—and to test and implement these new approaches.

2. **To develop and commit human and financial resources** to support the implementation of new innovative ministries which meet spiritual and social needs for empowerment in cities.

3. **To be missionaries by crossing cultures** to learn about the language and history of at least one other cultural group represented in an urban setting for the purpose of taking action in mission.

4. **To creatively raise up and train RCA clergy and lay leaders** for the task of urban ministry, involving the RCA colleges and seminaries as well as denominational staff involved in global and local mission.

5. **To find concrete ways to love, value, affirm, and pray** for each other and for our cities.

6. **To commit ourselves to developing a common urban RCA policy and agenda** through appropriate forums which continue to bring us together.

7. **To collectively advocate for denominational structures, staff, and processes** to give high priority to advancing the agenda of urban ministries.

8. **To collectively advocate for the Office of City Congregational Ministries to be served by a full-time position as soon as possible** through either conventional or creative funding methods.

**PRAYER:**

Let us then examine ourselves by the light of the Spirit and the Word of God, that we may see where we have failed or fallen short in faith and practice; and, considering all this covenant means, may we give ourselves anew to God and to each other. May the covenant which we make this day on earth be sustained for all of our days in this world and may it be ratified in heaven. Amen.

A wonderful momentum in city ministries began at this consultation and needs to continue to be nourished. Because of the high quality of the April 20-22, 1995, consultation, the following recommendation is presented.

R-3.

To urge the Office of City Congregational Ministries to regularly and periodically schedule similar gatherings like the “Celebrating City Ministries” consultation held April 20-22, 1995, in Newark, New Jersey. (ADOPTED)

Throughout 1994 the associate for city congregational ministries sought to respond to the call for new ways of ministering in the cities through advocacy of partnering between affluent congregations and inner-city congregations in worship, fellowship, and working together. In August 1995 a three-way partnering will occur between Mott Haven Reformed Church in
Bronx, New York; First Reformed Church in Orange City, Iowa; and Central Reformed Church in Oskaloosa, Iowa. The associate for city congregational ministries also visited seventeen RCA congregations in New York, New Jersey, and California.

City congregations have proven themselves to be vital centers of witness by their active role in the struggle against hunger and in providing clothing for needy individuals. Although their movement toward empowering people has often met the resistance of apathy, progress is being made through diligent and earnest prayer, through the preaching of God’s love and concern for all persons, and through the lifting up of human dignity and the assurance of God-given gifts to all who believe.

Indeed, as RCA congregations strive to express signs of hope in the city, they must be aware not only of shifting values, priorities, and the use of resources, but also the need for acceptance and empathy in spite of differences.

While it remains uncertain what the new paradigm will be, may the Reformed Church in America be engaged continually to heed the call of the cities; and with God’s help, transform the call into loud and clearly resounding voices that advocate in this time for the revitalizing of cities.

**SMALL MEMBERSHIP CHURCHES**

On a typical Sunday morning over four hundred RCA congregations worship in a fellowship that numbers one hundred or less. These are the congregations that, year after year, faithfully serve God and support the denomination with a deep sense of their calling to be an indispensable part of the body of Christ.

It is a privilege for the associate for small membership churches to be in touch with many of the pastors and lay leaders in these congregations in an attempt to provide support and encouragement to them in their mission, and it is a joy to be able to represent them and advocate for them within the denomination.

The RCA is blessed with women and men of extraordinary faith and vision whom God has called to serve the RCA’s smaller congregations. In the midst of a secular society where success is measured with numbers and dollar signs and big is always better, the RCA’s smaller congregations are providing the constant witness of elders, deacons, and pastors in rural, urban, and suburban settings. The integrity of these congregations displayed in worship, education, outreach, and service is providing opportunities for many to come to know Christ in an intimate way.

Often challenged by the burden and the blessing of beautiful but-aging facilities that demand a great deal of energy and money to maintain, there remains a strong sense of the church as Christ’s presence in a wide variety of communities.

The primary service provided for small membership churches is a toll-free consultation service, (800) 291-4464, available to all congregational and denominational leaders who wish to engage the associate for small membership churches in creative problem-solving or in a sharing of resources and experiences. Over the past year, there were 116 such contacts and follow-ups made by the associate for small membership churches with congregational leaders.

Additionally, a series of pamphlets on small church ministry is being developed. Realizing that many commercial resources target larger congregations, this series of pamphlets will provide small congregations with less costly, and less glossy, ways of programming. The first pamphlet in the series, “A Do-It-Yourself Vacation Bible School for $38 a Week,” was made available in the spring of 1995; while the second pamphlet, “The Joy of Consistory: Moving From Oxymoron to Redundancy,” is projected for October 1995.
The Office of New Church Development is responsible for the following areas:

1. Coordinating New Church Starts

One of the most effective ways to begin a new congregation is to have an established congregation be a parenting congregation. This means that key lay people from the parenting congregation form a sponsoring committee to design this new ministry from its inception to its organization as a congregation.

R-4.

To encourage RCA congregations to accept the challenge of helping to parent a new congregation. (ADOPTED)

2. Evaluations

Evaluating the strengths and abilities of a potential new church development pastor is useful, both to the new church development candidate and to the search committee of a new church development project.

The fourth RCA Assessment Clinic was held August 1-4, 1994, at Thorn Creek Reformed Church in South Holland, Illinois. Seventeen candidates and spouses participated. The participants were evaluated on their strengths and weaknesses. Their gifts in the areas of communication, group process, interpersonal relationships, conflict, faith development, and visioning were assessed as to whether or not they have the gifts necessary to begin an RCA congregation. At the conclusion of the clinic, the candidates were encouraged to do one of the following: to pursue new church planting, to seek some personal growth and skill development before entering new church development work, to remain in their present ministry, or to explore other opportunities.

Another tool used in the assessment and evaluation process is an interview developed by the Gallup organization. This interview process was designed to assist an individual in evaluating his or her particular abilities for beginning a new RCA congregation. During the past year, more than twenty-five candidates were interviewed and given feedback by Gallup.

R-5.

To encourage RCA congregations and pastors to identify persons who have skills to begin new RCA congregations, and then to assist those persons in pursuing the option of beginning a new congregation. (ADOPTED)

The 1993 General Synod voted:

To instruct the Office of Evangelism and Church Development Services to explore ways of working in cooperation with the RCA seminaries and the Theological Education Agency [TEA] for the purpose of identifying, recruiting, and training those persons with gifts for new church development (MGS 1993, R-5, p. 353).

At its February 1994 meeting, the Council of Field Secretaries (COFS) decided to invite representatives from the two RCA seminaries and TEA to meet with COFS at its annual retreat in February 1995 for the purpose of exploring ways to implement the above recommendation.
On February 9-10, 1995, COFS met at Camp Manitoqua in Frankfort, Illinois, with the Rev. Dr. Norman Kansfield, president of New Brunswick Theological Seminary, the Rev. Dr. Dennis Voskuil, president of Western Theological Seminary, and the Rev. Dr. Cornelis Kors, director of the Theological Education Agency. The Rev. Harold Korver, president of General Synod and pastor of Emmanuel Reformed Church in Paramount, California, and Gallup representative Roseanne Leisfeld from Lincoln, Nebraska, were also present at this meeting.

John Sikkink, current chairperson of COFS, guided the group through the meeting based on a retreat format. The meeting included opening remarks by each of the principal participants, small group activities which assisted in the identification of concerns which needed to be addressed, and ideas to consider for future seminary training. There was a strong positive consensus at this meeting, and it was decided to meet again for further communication and collaboration.

3. Consultations

The coordinator for new church development is available to regional synods as a resource person. Each regional synod executive was contacted by the coordinator for new church development in the past year, and assistance was given when requested. A number of congregation evaluations were completed and various possibilities for new congregations were explored.

4. Changing Immigration Patterns

For the past number of years, many racial/ethnic groups have been immigrating to the U.S. The most effective way of reaching these racial/ethnic groups with the gospel of Jesus Christ is by beginning new congregations. Some of these new congregations begin by adoption, others by tentmaking ministries, and still others by a more traditional new church development approach.

The coordinator for new church development has contacted each of the RCA racial/ethnic council executives to discuss the unique problems and opportunities their particular racial/ethnic population presents.

5. Denominational Plan

All new RCA congregations must complete an application to be accepted into the denominational plan. The application requests information concerning the purpose of the ministry, the supervision of the ministry, and the financial plan to support the ministry. Once completed, the denominational plan must be submitted to the classis, the regional synod, and the Council of Field Secretaries for approval. After approval by COFS, the application is submitted to the General Synod Council for final approval.

Since the 1994 General Synod, the General Synod Council, upon the recommendation of its Evangelism and Church Development Services Committee, received and approved for new church starts the following eight denominational plan applications:

a. Grace Reformed, Stillwater, Oklahoma
b. The Church at Hemlock Farms, Hawley, Pennsylvania
c. Valley Life Community, Boise, Idaho
d. Iowa City, Iowa
e. New Song Community, Cedar Rapids, Iowa
f. Grand Forks, North Dakota
g. Valley Ridge Community, Grapevine, Texas
h. Haven Shores Community, Holland, Michigan
R-6.
To pause for a time of prayer to support the above eight ministries that have been entered into the denominational plan from July of 1994 to June of 1995. (ADOPTED)

➢ The Rev. Richard Welscott, coordinator for new church development, led the General Synod in a time of prayer. <

6. Reception of New Congregations

Churches organized between April of the previous year and April of the present year are recognized at the General Synod meeting. This year the Road Home Church of Eden Prairie, Minnesota, is recognized and receives a suitable inscribed plaque.

R-7.
To adopt the following resolution:

BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred and eighty-ninth regular session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting at Ramapo College in Mahwah, New Jersey, on the fourteenth day of June, 1995, gives recognition and heartily celebrates the organization of the Road Home Church, Eden Prairie, Minnesota. (ADOPTED)


7. $9.8 by '98

This fund drive directly affects the health of new congregations begun under the 98 by '98 program. New congregations are assured that the denomination has the necessary funds to lend them when they are ready to build their first units. The $9.8 by '98 fund drive also provides funds to help evaluate, assess, and train those persons who accept the challenge of beginning a new RCA congregation (see also Capital Campaigns, "$9.8 by '98," from the Report of the General Synod Council's Stewardship and Communications Services in the Financial Support section).

R-8.
To encourage each RCA congregation to participate in the $9.8 by '98 Fund Drive. (ADOPTED)

➢ The campaign director, Everett Hicks, addressed the Synod about the $9.8 by '98 fund drive. <
From the Report of the General Synod Council's Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee

GENERAL SYNOD 1995 THEME

The 1995 General Synod theme is "Evangelism in a Changing World."

The following members of the 1995 General Synod Theme Planning Committee met on September 7, 1994, at New Brunswick Theological Seminary in New Brunswick, New Jersey:

From GSC
Warren Burgess (chair)
Wesley Granberg-Michaelson

From the Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics
Jill Fenske
Steven Giordano
Georgia Tenor Jadick

From the Staff
William Burns
Bruce Laverman
David Schreuder

Harold Lay
Milton Nieuwsma
Peter Paulsen
Aaron Pulhamus
Eugene Roberts
Gail Sternitzke
Arlene Walters
Everett Zabriskie

(Harold Korver and I. John Hesselink from GSC were unable to attend the meeting.)

At this meeting the committee discussed the 1995 General Synod festival theme, "Evangelism in a Changing World." The committee agreed to recommend to the General Synod Council (GSC) to change the General Synod festival design. In recent years the festival consisted of weekend events immediately preceding the beginning of General Synod. The theme planning committee recommended incorporating the 1995 festival theme and festival throughout the week of General Synod.

At its October 1994 meeting, GSC agreed, by consensus, to approve incorporating the 1995 General Synod festival theme and festival throughout the week of the 1995 General Synod. GSC then voted to convene the 1995 General Synod meeting on Saturday, June 10, 1995, rather than Monday, June 12, 1995. GSC also urged reports, greetings, and worship services presented at the 1995 General Synod incorporate the theme "Evangelism in a Changing World."

The Sunday evening worship service, held at North Reformed Church in Newark, New Jersey, featured John Perkins. Perkins, involved for many years with issues of biblical justice and the economic development of the African-American community, also agreed to speak to the General Synod on Tuesday evening, June 13, 1995.

A video on RCA Churches in the Context of a Changing World was shown on Monday evening, June 12, 1995.

GENERAL SYNOD FESTIVAL THEMES

The General Synod festival was initiated by the General Synod in 1982 (MGS 1982, R-1, p. 262). The General Synod in 1984 (MGS 1984, R-1, p. 222), 1985 (MGS 1985, R-7, p. 248), and 1986 voted to continue the festivals, with the 1986 action specifying that they continue...
for an additional five years (through 1992). This 1986 action also directed the General Synod Executive Committee (GSEC) to develop a schedule for festival themes (MGS 1986, R-4, p. 262).


In addition to General Synod festival themes, the RCA has a three-year denominational theme. For 1993-95, the theme is: “That My House May Be Filled” (Luke 14:23). This theme began at the Reformed Church Women’s Ministries’ Triennial event in July 1992. (“Serve the Lord with Gladness” was the prior three-year denominational theme.)

In January 1993 a group of denominational staff, the general secretary, the president of General Synod, and representatives from Reformed Church Women’s Ministries met to discuss a denominational theme for 1996-98. The theme chosen was “God’s People Transformed.” Three subthemes were also chosen. This theme will be introduced at the Reformed Church Women’s Ministries Triennial event in July 1995.

At its January 1994 meeting, GSC approved a suggestion from the Administrative Council to use the three subthemes of the denominational theme, “God’s People Transformed” as the themes for the 1996-98 General Synod festivals. The 1996-98 General Synod festival themes approved by GSC are:

1996—God’s People Transformed: A Living Sacrifice
1997—God’s People Transformed: Renewed in Mind
1998—God’s People Transformed: Discerning and Doing God’s Will

As noted in the preceding report, “General Synod 1994 Theme,” the design of General Synod festivals changed in 1995 to incorporating the festival and the festival theme throughout the week of the 1995 General Synod rather than limiting the festival theme and festival to just the weekend preceding General Synod. The director of Policy, Planning, and Administration Services, in consultation with the general secretary and GSC Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee, will review at the October 1995 GSC meeting the General Synod theme format for the 1996 General Synod.

DENOMINATIONAL DIRECTION FOR THE 1990s

A responsibility of the General Synod Council (GSC) and specifically its Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee is long-range planning (BCO, Chapter 3, Part 1, Article 3, Section 6b).

The 1990 General Synod adopted the following “Building the Church for the 21st Century” document, and it was distributed throughout the RCA in January 1991 (MGS 1990, pp. 349-54). The Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee includes this directional statement as part of its report to the 1995 General Synod (see also the General Synod Council’s Evangelism and Church Development report, “Evangelism” in this Evangelization and Church Growth section).

BUILDING THE CHURCH FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Preamble

Aware that the future is in God’s hands, and in reliance on the Spirit’s power, we, the members of the Reformed Church in America, joyfully covenant together during the closing decade of the 20th century to the task of
I. We will seek the Lord for renewal.

Aware that our future is in God’s hands, and that only the risen Christ can build the church, we seek the Lord in repentance and prayer, in faith and celebration, for the renewing work of the Holy Spirit.

II. We will become more and more a church reformed, catholic, and apostolic.

We seek to become increasingly the people we are called to be, reformed and reforming in our faith and life, catholic in our ties with the worldwide church of Jesus Christ, and apostolic in our commitment to the faith once delivered to the saints.

In reliance upon God, we seek a fellowship in which each member receives a sense of identity, significance, and belonging; in which each congregation has a sense of mission and destiny; in which each assembly shares a sense of unity and direction with the whole church.

III. We will serve the gracious reign of Christ for the sake of justice, peace, freedom, and the care of God’s creation.

In obedience to our Lord’s great command, we seek Christ’s kingdom and righteousness. In fellowship with Christ, we choose to identify ourselves more and more with the needy, the suffering, and the oppressed; seeking justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God. By God’s grace, we will be peace-makers and trust-keepers, faithful stewards of God’s good earth.

IV. We will add to the church a great company of believers in Jesus Christ.

In obedience to our Lord’s Great Commission and in reliance on the Spirit’s power, we seek to enlarge and extend our community of faith, as all our members are nurtured, educated, and equipped for ministry and witness.

We look upward in faith and dependence, inward in mutual concern, and outward in commitment to serve human need and to make disciples in all nations.

I. SEEKING THE LORD FOR RENEWAL

For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from God. Trust in God at all times, O people; pour out your heart before God; God is a refuge for us.

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in God’s word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning.

Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage . . . Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength.

All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer . . . All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit . . . When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness.
If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to you children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the holy Spirit to those who ask!

(Ps. 62:5,8; Ps. 130:5-6; Ps. 27:24; Isa. 40:31; Acts 1:14; 2:4; 4:31; Luke 11:13)

Grateful for God’s goodness to us and for the treasure of a rich heritage;
Renouncing all trust in our own wisdom and strength;
Rejoicing in the Creator’s readiness to give;
Learning from the disciplined prayerfulness of brothers and sisters in other lands and other communions;
Longing for God’s transforming work in our midst;
Sensing already the stirrings of the Spirit;

We set ourselves to seek the Lord with persistence and hope.

II. BECOMING MORE AND MORE A CHURCH REFORMED, CATHOLIC, AND APOSTOLIC

It is Christ whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all...making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God...on this rock I will build my church...built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone.

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ.

Speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into the One who is the head, into Christ from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body’s growth in building itself up in love.

(Col. 1:28; Eph. 4:5-6; Matt. 16:16-18; Eph. 2:20; 1 Cor. 12:27; 1 Cor. 12:7; 1 Pet. 4:10-11b; Eph. 4:15-16)

Valuing our heritage;
but welcoming further light;

Prizing our Reformed communion,
but yearning to embody our oneness with all God’s people;

Holding fast the biblical gospel,
but needing to be shaped by it anew;

We set ourselves to become increasingly the church we are called to be.

We have called ourselves “a people who belong”;
We have explored together who and what we are;
We have sought to reach and receive across cultural barriers;
We have called ourselves to welcome the gifts of each;
We have searched for shared ministry at all levels of our church life;
We set ourselves now to build on what we have begun.

III. SERVING THE GRACIOUS REIGN OF CHRIST FOR THE SAKE OF
JUSTICE, PEACE, FREEDOM, AND THE CARE OF GOD’S CREATION

Who is like the Lord our God...who looks far down on the heavens and the earth? God raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap.

Strive first for the kingdom of God and God’s righteousness. Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream. God has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because God has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. God has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. The Lord God took and placed the human being in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. Moreover it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy.

(Ps. 113:5-7; Matt. 6:33; Amos 5:24; Mic. 6:8; Luke 4:18; Matt. 5:9; Gen. 2:15; 1 Cor. 4:2)

Called to follow the crucified One;
Assured that ministry to the suffering is service also to Christ;
Blessed by Christ’s gift of peace;
Awakened by Christ’s passion for justice;
Set free by Christ’s liberating love;
Entrusted with Christ’s good creation;
Forgiven all our evils and failures to care;

We, who have received so freely, offer ourselves freely to give and serve.

IV. ADDING TO THE CHURCH A GREAT COMPANY OF BELIEVERS IN
JESUS CHRIST

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations....Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation....You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

I have other sheep, that do not belong to this fold; I must bring them also....In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places....Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled.

Look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. I sent you to reap.

And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. The Word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly. The gospel...is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world.

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.
The Lord's charge “to all nations...every creature...the end of the earth”;
Knowing Christ's love for those “other sheep”;
Holding the gospel treasure in trust for them;
Debtors to all;
Building on a great missionary history;
Yearning for the earth to be filled with God’s praise;

We seek by all means to lead others to faith in Christ and service in the church.

For that we need to be nurtured;
We seek to be educated for ministry;
We long to be empowered for witness;
We rise to a new readiness;

May we be workers unashamed!

(Adopted by the 1990 General Synod, MGS 1990, R-15, p. 353.)

AGENCY REPORTS

REPORT OF THE LORD'S DAY ALLIANCE OF THE UNITED STATES

The Lord's Day Alliance (LDA) of the United States, organized in 1888, continued its sole purpose in 1994 to preserve the Lord's Day (Sunday) as a day of worship, rest, Christian education, and the doing of good deeds.

LDA is controlled by a board of managers who elect and give direction to the executive director. Jack P. Lowndes continues to serve as executive director. The board of managers meets twice a year.

The semi-annual meeting of LDA was held in Bernardsville, New Jersey, October 5-6, 1994. At this meeting, the annual James P. Wesberry award is given to someone who has made a significant contribution to the Lord’s Day. This year’s award was given to Dr. Norman Adrian Wiggins, president of Campbell University in North Carolina, who has continued the University’s policy of prohibiting organized Sunday athletic events. Wiggins continued this policy despite pressure to change.

The annual meeting of LDA was held at its national offices in Atlanta, Georgia, February 1-2, 1995. At this meeting, LDA’s State and National Affairs Committee changed its name to the Cultural Affairs Committee, but retains its assignment to keep the board of managers informed about family, occupational, and governmental activity on the local, state, and national levels.

Sunday magazine, the quarterly publication of LDA, has approximately twelve thousand subscribers. The magazine, which provides information on the current status of preservation of the Lord’s Day, is sent to most theological seminaries in the U.S.
Each year the Lord's Day Alliance of Georgia, a local affiliate of the national Lord's Day Alliance, sponsors an essay contest. Awards for essays related to the preservation of the Lord's Day are given to winners from Georgia and the nation. More young people entered the essay contest in 1994 than in any previous year.

LDA promotes the second Sunday in February each year as Observance of Sunday as the Lord's Day. Bulletin inserts provided by LDA to encourage this emphasis are used by a number of churches.

LDA is grateful for the contributions of all its members on the board of managers, which includes several valuable RCA members. Loreen Damhof, an RCA member from Blomkest, Minnesota, and Ruth Stafford Peale, an RCA member from Pawling, New York, serve on the board of managers. The Rev. Warren Hietbrink, an RCA pastor living in Worthington, Minnesota, also serves on the board of managers. The Rev. Dr. Robert Schuller, founding pastor of the Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, California, is on the honorary board of managers.

LDA thanks RCA congregations for their continuing support and contributions. LDA also requests the RCA to pray for the alliance as LDA continues to emphasize the importance of preserving the Lord's Day.

REPORT OF THE AMERICAN BIBLE SOCIETY

The Unseen Reality

“For we fix our attention, not on things that are seen, but on things that are unseen. What can be seen lasts only for a time; but what cannot be seen lasts forever” (2 Cor. 4:18, Today’s English Version).

“Faith makes us sure of what we hope for and gives us proof of what we cannot see” (Heb. 11:1, Contemporary English Version).

During 1994 the echoing cries for the Bible were heard as loudly as they were heard nearly two hundred years ago when the American Bible Society (ABS) began its work. Opportunities for responding to people's need for the Word of God were many and varied, including simple Scripture selections for hospital patients, Scripture cassettes for those in refugee camps around the world, braille Bibles for the visually impaired, and Scriptures in American sign language for the hearing impaired.

In 1994 ABS’s church partners across the U.S. were generous in their support of the Bible cause. Increased contributions from denominations, including denominational agencies and parachurch groups, totaled $1,326,343.

ABS continues to be blessed in its partnership with the Reformed Church in America. The RCA and its members faithfully supported the ABS in 1994 with contributions of $9,716. The continued dedication of the Reformed Church in America, together with the prayers and financial support of others, made it possible for ABS to put seventy-seven million copies of Scriptures into the hands of U.S. men, women, and children. Over fifty-two million Scriptures were distributed to a variety of institutions such as correctional facilities, schools,
hospitals, nursing homes, and other Christian ministry agencies. ABS reached out with Scriptures to young and old, students and immigrants, prisoners and professors, thus bringing the simple peace of God’s Word to the hurting people of the world.

Again in 1994, ABS was summoned to make the Word of God available to flood-ravaged residents in the U.S. Over 110,000 Scriptures were distributed to residents of Alabama, Georgia, and Florida following torrential rains during the summer of 1994. In partnership with churches in Los Angeles, California, following the January 1994 earthquake, ABS was able to respond to requests for over twenty thousand Scriptures. Also in 1994, during the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the allied invasion of Normandy, ABS, in partnership with the Pocket Testament League, published a commemorative New Testament for armed forces personnel, particularly for those men and women who served in World War II.

A special highlight of ABS’ work, in partnership with others, was the first publication ever of a complete book of the Bible translated in Gullah, a Creole language spoken mostly by African-American people in the southeastern coastal region of the U.S. The Gullah translation of the Gospel of Luke was a culmination of years of work by the Sea Island Translation Literacy Team in cooperation with the Summer Institute of Linguistics and Wycliffe Bible Translators.

Many others thirst for the Bible message, but the language of the Bible can be difficult to read and understand. The translation of the Old Testament into the Contemporary English Version (CEV) was completed during 1994; the complete CEV Bible will be published in June 1995. This will make it possible for many people to read and understand the message of the Bible more clearly.

Working with Bible societies around the world, ABS touched millions of lives—and will touch many more in the years to come—with God’s message of forgiveness, hope, and eternal peace. Throughout the world, each translation of Scripture is done—as closely as possible—in the language which speaks to the heart and in the words people understand best. The number of languages with at least one book of the Bible translated grew to 2,092, an increase of thirty languages from a year earlier.

Through ABS’s continued partnership with the Reformed Church in America, opportunities for Bible Society work continued to increase around the world. Bible Societies were established in Cambodia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and the Central Asian Republics of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. A large proportion of Bible Society Scriptures distributed in Central/Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union were printed locally in these areas, and the Bible Society in Russia established a distribution depot in Siberia. Generous support from Christians in the U.S. and elsewhere helped to make possible the distribution of almost 3.2 million Bibles, New Testaments, and Children’s Bibles in the former Soviet Union.

The Amity Printing Press in China produced its eight millionth Bible since production began in late 1987. Plans are made to print another 2.56 million Bibles in 1995 and to install another printing press to help meet the immense demand for Scriptures in China.

The United Bible Society (UBS) helped to fund the production of thirty thousand New Testaments in Vietnam. To give spiritual comfort to the millions of people who fled the civil war in Rwanda, UBS provided Scripture cassettes and recorders to refugee camps. ABS of Brazil began construction of a bindery to help it meet the demand for Bibles among the rapidly growing churches in Brazil.

ABS wishes it could say with great certainty that windows of opportunity currently open will remain open. However, no one can predict what the future holds, here in the U.S. or elsewhere. That is why ABS labors with great intensity in its task and does so with great
appreciation for those who join with ABS in this enterprise. The society is deeply encouraged by the commitment of the RCA to be a partner with ABS. The RCA’s partnership with ABS helps make available the Scriptures, the source of hope.

REPORT OF THE BIBLE LEAGUE (FORMERLY WORLD HOME BIBLE LEAGUE)

Those with the vision given by God’s Spirit saw the Lordship of Jesus Christ evidenced all around the world in 1994. While the news media in North America lurch from one political crisis to another, reporting on the terrible sufferings of people in Eastern Europe, Central Africa, and Latin America, the Bible League (TBL) saw new life and new joy even in the most desperate circumstances. It seems that even the flame of God’s Spirit can look like the fires of hell to those who are spiritually blind.

During 1994 TBL counted, where it can confirm reports, more than 119,000 people who came to Christ as a result of TBL’s Scripture placement efforts and the faithfulness of TBL’s ministry partners. More than 1,250 new churches were established. At least 650,000 people seriously studied God’s Word for the first time. These numbers, even though only partial results, have more to do with God’s effort than TBL’s. In many parts of the world, the fires of revival burn a path ahead of TBL. The Bible League can do little more than fan the flame and try to keep up.

It is always a privilege for TBL to be able to thank the churches and members of the Reformed Church in America for their continued prayer and financial support. During 1994 God richly blessed TBL’s efforts, not only with wonderful results, but also with an increased income of $2.2 million. This increase was given to TBL by more than twenty thousand new ministry partners. The RCA is also one of many wonderful ministry partners supporting TBL’s worldwide Scripture placement ministry.

Another highlight is TBL’s partnership with Wycliffe Bible Translators. In 1989 TBL published the 300th Wycliffe Language New Testament. Six years later, in 1994, TBL published the 400th Wycliffe Language New Testament, a New Testament for the Barai speaking people of Papua, New Guinea. This landmark celebrates TBL’s thirty-sixth year of partnership with Wycliffe Bible Translators. While TBL and Wycliffe Bible Translators are distinct and separate organizations, TBL and Wycliffe have depended upon each other since 1962 to fulfill their respective and particular callings. With Wycliffe, TBL has published Scriptures in over 550 languages. The results of this ministry are marvelous as people are brought from darkness into light.

In April 1994 TBL published the Matses New Testament. The Matses people were one of the fiercest tribes in the Amazon, notorious for killing their own baby girls as well as for killing men in other villages in order to steal those men’s wives. At the present time, over two hundred Matses people are involved in regular Bible study. One of the Matses men has memorized thirteen of the apostle Paul’s letters. After receiving a copy of the New Testament, the chief of the Matses tribe challenged his people by saying, “Now that God’s Word is here, you have no excuse for not living as God wants you to. You can read it for yourself.” Today there are over 250 Matses believers determined to win all of their tribe for Christ. Such are the results when God’s Word is brought to bear on life.
It is TBL's hope and prayer that the members of the RCA will continue to place a very high value on the Word of God in their own personal daily lives as well as in their communal worship lives. It is also TBL's hope and prayer that the RCA will continue partnering with TBL as together TBL and the RCA bring the light of the world to a world that is sometimes very dark. Please pray often with TBL that the light will overcome the darkness.

RESULTS OF BIBLE DISTRIBUTION IN SPECIFIC COUNTRIES IN 1994

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number of People in Bible Study</th>
<th>Number of Cell Groups</th>
<th>Number of New Church Members</th>
<th>Number of New Churches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>28,760</td>
<td>1,017</td>
<td>6,796</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>1,896</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>963</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberia</td>
<td>4,222</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1,515</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameroon</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>90,536</td>
<td>8,776</td>
<td>382</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>60,265</td>
<td>5,874</td>
<td>7,442</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>6,070</td>
<td>629</td>
<td>1,581</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>15,800</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>4,474</td>
<td>829</td>
<td>1,425</td>
<td>36</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bolivia</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>1,449</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>540</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>3,156</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>384,784</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>49,213</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>17,877</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>2,630</td>
<td>1,900</td>
<td>8,500</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>2,400</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>879</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>2,076</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>2,930</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>13,167</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>7,327</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>44,738</td>
<td>2,544</td>
<td>22,197</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belarus</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moldova</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kazakhstan</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTALS</strong></td>
<td><strong>689,889</strong></td>
<td><strong>24,270</strong></td>
<td><strong>119,941</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,252</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Scripture Distribution Summary

**Fiscal Year 1993**  
**September 1, 1993 — August 31, 1994**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Continent/Country</th>
<th>Special Edition Bibles*</th>
<th>Bibles</th>
<th>Testaments</th>
<th>Portions</th>
<th>Selections</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S.A.</td>
<td>5,054</td>
<td>46,499</td>
<td>526,124</td>
<td>631,390</td>
<td>177,885</td>
<td>1,386,952</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>24,620</td>
<td>49,573</td>
<td>11,370</td>
<td>85,711</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>58,175</td>
<td>22,215</td>
<td>500,044</td>
<td>737,392</td>
<td>631,217</td>
<td>1,957,043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>9,660</td>
<td>51,489</td>
<td>186,401</td>
<td>273,874</td>
<td>369,843</td>
<td>891,267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Indies</td>
<td>3,695</td>
<td>33,642</td>
<td>67,471</td>
<td>171,212</td>
<td>1,666,673</td>
<td>1,942,693</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>50,337</td>
<td>5,705</td>
<td>2,537</td>
<td>58,622</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Europe</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>81,696</td>
<td>91,358</td>
<td>1,773,656</td>
<td>4,112</td>
<td>1,950,823</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.I.S.</td>
<td>139,411</td>
<td>373,799</td>
<td>638,782</td>
<td>1,556,653</td>
<td>128,500</td>
<td>2,837,145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>58,101</td>
<td>11,306</td>
<td>63,608</td>
<td>20,753</td>
<td>153,773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>18,500</td>
<td>111,602</td>
<td>79,294</td>
<td>301,700</td>
<td>74,713</td>
<td>585,809</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>35,063</td>
<td>197,640</td>
<td>360,907</td>
<td>1,410,373</td>
<td>5,465,248</td>
<td>7,469,231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>120,071</td>
<td>497,982</td>
<td>152,512</td>
<td>413,500</td>
<td>60,000</td>
<td>1,244,065</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>414</td>
<td>16,924</td>
<td>38,240</td>
<td>510</td>
<td>56,172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>536</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>2,540</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3,952</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islands</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>2,018</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2,312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Translations</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>32,150</td>
<td>8,158</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>40,308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grand Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>390,137</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,475,951</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,748,848</strong></td>
<td><strong>7,437,580</strong></td>
<td><strong>8,613,362</strong></td>
<td><strong>20,665,878</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*This special category of Bibles includes study Bibles as well as children’s story Bibles.

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### REPORT OF WORDS OF HOPE

**A Time of Transition**

The Rev. Dr. William Brownson proclaimed the gospel as president and broadcast minister of Words of Hope for twenty-two years until his retirement on September 9, 1994. His successor is the Rev. David Bast. Bast is the youngest son of the late Rev. Dr. Henry Bast, radio minister for Words of Hope (then Temple Time) from 1952 until 1972. A graduate of Hope College and Western Theological Seminary, Bast served RCA congregations in Hamilton, Michigan; South Holland, Illinois; and Grand Rapids, Michigan, before coming to Words of Hope.

**Fiftieth Anniversary**

Words of Hope’s fiftieth year of gospel broadcasting will be celebrated with anniversary banquets in Grand Rapids, Michigan, on September 7, 1995, and in Sioux Center, Iowa, one week later on September 14, 1995.
Progress Toward World-Reach

World-Reach, a drive to develop twenty-five additional foreign language broadcasts during the period 1990-95, is Words of Hope's special contribution to the World by 2000 effort.

New Languages: Since its report to the 1994 General Synod, Words of Hope has added three more World by 2000 broadcast languages. Each day over FEBC/Philippines, Makassarese listeners living along the southern coast of Indonesia's Sulawesi Island are now able to hear gospel broadcasts for the first time in their own language. Broadcasts in Russia's Chuvash language were also launched this year over a local radio station in Cheboksary; the programs are aimed at nearly two million speakers in that Muslim republic.

Words of Hope's newest outreach is to the Banjara people of southern India. These twenty million Lamani-speaking people, scattered throughout central India, are one of the oldest tribes in India and have lived a nomadic existence for centuries. Although Banjaras are nominally Hindu, much of their religious practice is animistic, and the Banjara people try to appease the spirits through animal sacrifices and special festivals. However, the Banjara people evidence an openness to the gospel, and the new Bharosare Wathe broadcasts are receiving a strong response.

Africa: For years, the Republic of South Africa broadcast pro-apartheid propaganda over 500,000-watt shortwave transmitters near Johannesburg, South Africa. With the dismantling of apartheid, these transmitters are no longer needed for the purpose of broadcasting pro-apartheid propaganda. The South African government agency SENTECH has now negotiated a contract with a group of missionary radio organizations who will place five hours of gospel programming on these high-powered transmitters every night. This represents an answer to prayers for a new opportunity for Words of Hope to resume its successful Twi broadcasts to Ghana that have been off the air since the destruction of radio station ELWA in Liberia's civil war.

The most extraordinary response to Words of Hope broadcasts continues to be from the country of Mozambique. Since 1990 when Words of Hope began broadcasting in Mozambique's Lomwe language over Trans World Radio in Swaziland, more than 170 new congregations have been started by listeners to these nightly Words of Hope programs! Pastors in Mozambique testify that thousands of Lomwe listeners have accepted Christ through these broadcasts. More recently, gifts to the World-Reach campaign have enabled Words of Hope to launch broadcasts in Mozambique's Makhuwa language. Within months, several new congregations were spawned by that radio outreach as well.

Bariba was one of Words of Hope's earliest World-Reach projects. This project targeted Nigeria and the neighboring Republic of Benin. Words of Hope has seen abundant evidence of rapid church growth in Benin these past few years, and looks with growing expectancy for a great harvest of believers in the days ahead.

Russian Transmitters: Since 1988 the most concentrated target area for Words of Hope's World-Reach expansion efforts has been the Himalayan region of northern India, Nepal, Tibet, and Bhutan. When a new option materialized for reaching the Himalayas by using one of the transmitters of the former Radio Moscow network, Words of Hope switched seven Himalayan broadcasts to the Russian facilities. Evidence clearly indicates that the facilities' superior signal coverage and expanded schedule is attracting an ever-growing audience.

Global Consultation on World Evangelism '95 (GCOWE '95)

Words of Hope staff members, the Rev. David Bast and Lee DeYoung, and the chairman of the Words of Hope Board of Directors, the Rev. Ronald Geschwendi, attended the Global
Consultation on World Evangelism in Seoul, Korea, May 16-26, 1995. Over four thousand delegates from around the world met to discuss plans for reaching the whole world with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

**Expanding Services to Congregations**

Words of Hope has expanded its cassette ministry by offering audio recordings of its weekly English programs to interested congregations and individuals. For years, Words of Hope has supplied free subscriptions for each radio message in tract form. Now the ministry has added audio cassettes to the free subscription options it offers.

Bimonthly lists of each week's Words of Hope program topic are also available free of charge to each congregation. The lists provide readily usable material for a congregation's bulletin and/or newsletter announcements.

Words of Hope has also expanded the number of ways readers can access its daily devotional guide. While the pocket-sized booklets remain the most widely used medium, the daily devotional guide has been offered on audio cassette for several years at an annual subscription rate of $15. Now Words of Hope's daily devotions are accessible electronically via the Internet computer network. Internet users can access each day's devotional reading with an automatic hypertext link to the corresponding Scripture passage at the following address: http://www.calvin.edu/christian/woh/.

**A Word of Thanks**

Words of Hope expresses deep gratitude to the RCA regional synods, classes, congregations, and members who have so faithfully supported this ministry through prayers and gifts this past year. During 1994, $680,618 was received from RCA congregations in regular giving and $323,706 in special gifts, which included $260,241 contributed for the World-Reach campaign.

➤The Rev. David Bast, president and broadcast minister of Words of Hope, addressed the Synod. Synod viewed a video presentation about the Words of Hope ministry. <

**REPORT OF PRM INTERNATIONAL**

PRM International has completed twenty-seven years of ministry. Formerly known as Portable Recording Ministries, PRM began in 1967 under God’s leading to pioneer the availability and use of compact, portable tape equipment and audio cassettes as tools of evangelism. Several missionaries and laypeople from the Reformed Church in America have been instrumental in PRM’s ministry since its inception. PRM’s entire overseas effort is totally dependent on voluntary prayer and financial support.

Since 1967 PRM has provided audio equipment and technical assistance to churches in North America at low cost on a nonprofit basis. Many RCA missionaries have used PRM's help extensively. PRM has also served missionaries and national Christians from hundreds of other mission organizations and churches in over 160 countries.
PRM's original and highest priority, especially overseas, remains the effective cassette communication of the Bible. This urgent priority stems from the large number of people who cannot read printed Scripture in their own language. Among some language groups as many as 95 percent cannot receive God's Word through reading. They must hear it!

However, few complete Scripture recordings existed overseas prior to 1983. Since then, PRM has been the pioneer and largest producer of complete New Testaments and portions on cassettes, completing over 160 languages to date. PRM's U.S. staff and some fifty skilled and dedicated overseas national staff form an effective team committed to produce and provide God's Word on cassette tapes in each language where these recorded Scriptures are most needed.

Over the years, a number of RCA missionaries have served in direct or volunteer assignments with PRM, including Jeannette Veldman, Wilma Kats, the Rev. Harvey and Lavina Hoekstra, Jean Walvoord, Jack and Deborah Swart, and Paul Hoekstra. Each missionary filled key roles in PRM's ministry in Africa and Asia. Through their sixty-six total years of service with PRM, Scripture recording work overseas began and developed to its present scale. PRM is grateful to these missionaries and to the RCA for this long and close partnership.

Paul Hoekstra, appointed in 1986 as an RCA missionary assigned to PRM, has served as PRM's director for Asia since 1989. Several recording and distribution centers serve the Asia region, including recording studios located in India, Bangladesh, and Singapore. From these strategic locations and other distribution centers, the work of recording the New Testament in the key languages of this vast region continues. PRM's ministry in Singapore began in 1987 under Hoekstra's leadership. There is continuing growth in Scripture recording, duplication, and distribution of Scripture cassettes in thirty-seven languages throughout Southeast Asia. In 1994 Scripture cassette distribution doubled in the Singapore area. Complete New Testaments have been recorded in more than ninety Asian languages, with portions in fourteen others.

In 1979 PRM initiated a small tape ministry in India. Today PRM's India team of skilled and dedicated nationals is led by its own national director and carries a full schedule of recording and distributing Scripture cassettes in the Bangalore facilities, which were completed in 1988. Focusing on cassette distribution to villages, Scripture cassettes have been produced to date in fifty-seven languages, understood by some 90 percent of India's population. However, there are more than seven hundred languages in India. At least one hundred of these languages still need to be recorded.

PRM's tape ministry began in Africa in 1967, with the first equipment and tapes going to several RCA missionaries then serving in Ethiopia. Soon thereafter other RCA mission locations in Africa received similar PRM tape ministry assistance. PRM has responded throughout the succeeding years to increasing requests in Africa for portable tape players, solar panels, recorded tapes, etc. Between 1967 and 1982 direct projects were established in more than twenty African countries.

PRM's first complete New Testament recording in Africa was produced in 1983 for the Maasai people. As requests increased, the original rented facilities in Nairobi, Kenya, were soon outgrown; and another facility, providentially obtained in 1988, is now inadequate. Funds are being sought to expand this facility, and the start of construction is anticipated in late 1995. Nevertheless, despite the inadequate facility, the dedicated Kenya staff has expanded production to provide Scripture cassettes in sixty languages for use throughout Africa.

While serving with PRM in Africa, Jack and Deborah Swart originated and developed the concept of placing local church cassette library packages in villages. To date more than 220 of these cassette libraries have been placed in villages throughout Kenya and in neighboring
countries. These compact libraries have enabled thousands of people—most unable to read—to hear the Word of God in their own language, the prime purpose of PRM’s ministry.

A highlight during 1994 was the visit to the U.S. for the first time by PRM’s Africa director, Tesfahun Agidew, and PRM’s India director, the Rev. P.A. Sundara Rajan, and his wife, Priya. These directors were accompanied by Paul Hoekstra. Each of these national directors shared with people in the U.S., their first-hand experiences of reaching people in their respective countries with the gospel through Scripture cassettes. These directors also presented the urgent needs for Talking Scriptures in their respective regions of the world.

Another special feature in 1994 was the unexpected need and unique opportunity to minister among the Rwanda refugees in camps located in Tanzania. This outreach, initiated by PRM, was fulfilled through cooperation with two other international organizations. The need and enthusiastic desire of thousands of Rwanda refugees to hear the Scripture tapes prompted a spontaneous coordinated response of providing 250 listening centers with cassette players, solar panels, and Scripture cassettes in the Kinyarwanda language. These tapes have been in continual use among the 500,000 Rwanda refugees in Tanzania, resulting in many commitments to the Lord. In 1995 PRM anticipates providing 350 more listening stations among the 800,000 Rwanda refugees encamped in Zaire.

Audio cassettes have become a proven means for people to hear the Scripture and other messages in their own language. In fact, for half the world’s people yet unable to read adequately, the Scripture on cassettes may be the only way they can receive it meaningfully, listen repeatedly, and even memorize God’s Word. PRM rejoices in God’s evident use of this avenue to transform lives and bring spiritual growth to thousands.

Providing Scripture cassettes in the hundreds of translated languages still needed represents a staggering task, but one which God can accomplish through the support, prayer, and partnership of many within the RCA, who together with others, enable this work to continue toward its God-given goal.

From the Report of the General Secretary

P-1 was referred to the Advisory Committee on Evangelization and Church Growth and the Advisory Committee on World Mission.

In response to P-1 (p. 39), the advisory committee recommended:

R-9.
To instruct the General Synod Council Mission Services Committee/Unit and the General Synod Council Evangelism and Church Development Services Committee/Unit, along with the African-American council, the American Indian Council, the Council for Hispanic Ministries, and the Council for Pacific and Asian American Ministries, to establish specific projects and cooperative efforts in order to help strengthen Reformed Church in America congregations in living out new models of mission and evangelism within changing realities of North American culture. (ADOPTED)
REPORTS ON FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Report of the General Synod Council's Finance Services Committee

1996 INCOME PROJECTIONS BASED ON ASKINGS DEVELOPED BY PARTICIPANTS IN THE GENERAL SYNOD MISSION PROGRAM

It is the responsibility of the General Synod Council (GSC) to provide, for consideration by the 1995 General Synod, a projection of anticipated income to be received during 1996 from RCA congregations in support of General Synod mission programs. Formerly referred to as the General Synod Mission Budget, this “budget” incorporates the mission askings for the following agencies: the General Synod Council; the Board of Pensions; New Brunswick and Western theological seminaries; together with the Theological Education Agency; and Central, Hope, and Northwestern colleges.

The projection of askings for General Synod mission programs seeks to accomplish the following objectives:

1. To provide guidance for local congregations as they review their pattern of giving to the programs of the General Synod.

2. To coordinate the fund-raising planning of the participants in the General Synod mission program.

3. To provide mission income expectations for the participants in the General Synod mission program.

In formulating projections for the coming year, it is customary to begin with a review of the pattern of giving in prior years. A twenty-year study of the actual giving to General Synod mission programs is listed below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Increase/ (Decrease)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>$5,467,660</td>
<td>(13,770)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>5,836,015</td>
<td>368,355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>5,825,510</td>
<td>(10,505)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>5,828,315</td>
<td>2,805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>6,113,927</td>
<td>285,612</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>6,293,549</td>
<td>179,622</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>6,719,137</td>
<td>425,588</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>7,414,801</td>
<td>695,664</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>7,475,351</td>
<td>60,550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>7,786,412</td>
<td>311,061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>8,492,421</td>
<td>706,009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>8,798,145</td>
<td>305,724</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>9,107,414</td>
<td>309,269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>9,080,684</td>
<td>(26,730)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>8,881,055</td>
<td>(199,629)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>8,920,780</td>
<td>39,725</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>8,826,733</td>
<td>(94,047)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>9,261,023</td>
<td>434,290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>9,150,196</td>
<td>(230,152)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>8,734,015</td>
<td>(416,181)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Schedule 1 attached shows the pattern of giving to each of the above-named groups between 1990 and 1994, the askings agreed upon for 1995, and the requested askings for 1996.
## SCHEDULE 1

INCOME PROJECTIONS BASED ON ASKINGS (OPERATING AND CAPITAL) SUBMITTED BY PARTICIPANTS IN THE GENERAL SYNOD MISSION PROGRAM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>GPC/GSC</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designated</td>
<td>$6,514,183</td>
<td>$6,371,066</td>
<td>$6,688,466</td>
<td>$6,073,851</td>
<td>$6,224,954</td>
<td>$7,172,590</td>
<td>$7,045,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCWS-Disaster Relief</td>
<td>88,862</td>
<td>312,352</td>
<td>351,153</td>
<td>609,101</td>
<td>234,563</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undesignated</td>
<td>372,623</td>
<td>314,253</td>
<td>280,992</td>
<td>479,356</td>
<td>379,583</td>
<td>500,000</td>
<td>355,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>6,975,668</td>
<td>6,997,671</td>
<td>7,320,611</td>
<td>7,162,308</td>
<td>6,839,100</td>
<td>7,672,590</td>
<td>7,400,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Board of Pensions** | $95,501 | $130,213 | $133,383 | $293,001 | $211,745 | $260,000 | $260,000 |

| **Boards of Theo. Ed.** |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |
| New Brunswick Seminary | $320,453 | $288,787 | $403,114 | $247,459 | $268,476 | $600,000 | $300,000 |
| Western Seminary       | 348,802  | 346,817  | 379,961  | 452,086  | 443,947  | 360,000  | 450,000  |
| Theological Edu. Agency | 60,408   | 51,564   | 41,880   | 58,973   | 57,472   | 58,000   | 60,000   |
| **Total**              | 729,663  | 687,168  | 824,955  | 758,518  | 769,895  | 1,018,000| 810,000  |

| **Colleges**           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |
| Central                | $269,064 | $232,032 | $205,235 | $183,270 | $194,012 | $260,000 | $200,000 |
| Hope                   | 354,150  | 235,420  | 298,823  | 347,832  | 262,850  | 245,000  | 275,000  |
| Northwestern           | 496,734  | 544,229  | 478,016  | 405,267  | 456,413  | 500,000  | 500,000  |
| **Total**              | 1,119,948| 1,011,681| 982,074  | 936,369  | 913,275  | 1,005,000| 975,000  |

**Note:** Figures do **not** include income from assessments.
R-1.
To approve the 1996 income projections based on askings developed by participants in the General Synod mission program totaling $9,445,000 as allocated on Schedule 1. (ADOPTED)

MARTHA ANTOINETTE QUICK FUND

The Martha Antoinette Quick Fund was established under the will of the Rev. Abraham Mesler Quick. Receipt of the fund was reported to the General Synod by the Board of Direction in 1934 (MGS 1934, pp. 601 ff). The will directs that the fund be held “IN TRUST, and safely invested and the income only arising therefrom to be used and applied for the purposes of benevolence and church extension as may be specified from time to time by the said General Synod or its duly authorized and appointed authorities.” For many years the funds were distributed to the boards of the church “in accordance with the schedule or percentages recommended to the churches for distribution of benevolent contributions” (MGS 1934, p. 629).

The General Synod of 1958 took note of the testator’s “special interest and concern...for church extension” (MGS 1958, p. 21) and allocated 50 percent of the income for the work of church extension. It was further noted that “the reasonable use of the income from this fund might well serve to relieve the boards or institutions of the church from the pressure of the demands of special projects” (MGS 1958, p. 21). Since in that year, there were special appeals for increased support from the colleges, the other 50 percent was allocated for that purpose.

Since 1958 these two general principles (a special interest in church extension and allocation of the balance for special projects) have usually been followed. Fifty percent of the income from the Quick Memorial Fund has thus traditionally been allocated for the work of church planning and development; 20 percent has been given to Hope, Central, and Northwestern colleges for scholarship funds; and 20 percent to New Brunswick and Western theological seminaries for student aid grants.

Beginning in 1984, 10 percent of the Quick Fund earnings have been allocated to the Theological Education Agency (TEA) in California. In the first year, the monies were used to fund the initial feasibility studies; in subsequent years, the monies were utilized for other purposes such as student aid grants and the psychological testing of students.

While recognizing the fact that the Quick Fund allocations are to be considered as “traditional” rather than “permanent,” the General Synod Executive Committee (GSEC) when reviewing this matter in 1986 agreed that, unless there were exceptional circumstances, TEA should be integrated into the regular allocation process on an equal basis with the seminaries in the future. In this regard, the TEA Board of Trustees has again cited a continuing need for financial assistance.

The principal balance of the Quick Fund as of December 31, 1994, stood at $1,191,591 with distributions split among the various recipients during 1994 amounting to $72,312.

➢ The advisory committee recommended to amend R-2:

R-2.
To allocate the 1996 income from the Martha Antoinette Quick Memorial Fund as follows:

50 percent for the church planning and development work of the General Synod Council; and
FINANCIAL SUPPORT

20 percent to Central, Hope, and Northwestern colleges for scholarship funds (60 percent to be divided equally among the three colleges and 40 percent to be divided on the basis of student enrollment); and

20 percent for student aid grants at New Brunswick and Western theological seminaries; and

10 percent to the Theological Education Agency for [operating expenses] student aid grants and the psychological testing of students. *(ADOPTED AS AMENDED)*

Reason: The use of funds allocated to the Theological Education Agency for student aid grants, and particularly for psychological testing, more accurately reflects actual use of the monies and the intention of the Martha Antoinette Quick Fund.

REPORT ON SPECIAL APPEALS

Each year the General Synod Council (GSC) receives a report from the treasurer on all special appeal campaigns directed toward RCA congregations in accordance with GSC policy (GSC Handbook, VIII-6). As defined by that policy, a special appeal is “a fund-raising campaign that is outside of the normal year-to-year budget-making processes conducted by assemblies, agencies, or institutions to support their regular operational needs. A special appeal may be conducted to provide funding for special capital or nonrecurring personnel or program requirements” (GSC Handbook, VIII-6, p. 1).

In addition to the GSC, which is responsible for monitoring all special appeal campaigns directed toward RCA congregations, the contents of this report have been shared with the Staff Consulting Group which acts as coordinator and arbitrator for the scheduling of these campaigns.

General Synod Council — $9.8 by '98 Fund Drive

In 1990 the General Synod approved the 98 by '98 church building program (MGS 1990, p. 320). The fund-raising portion of this program has been named $9.8 by '98. The goal is to raise $9.8 million by the year 1998. The money is to be used for Church Building Fund loans to new congregations to finance their first units ($7.35 million or 75 percent), for the recruitment and training of new church development pastors and for resources which will enhance the ministry of new congregations ($98 million or 10 percent), and for revitalizing urban, rural, and small membership congregations ($1.47 million or 15 percent).

The actual fund raising for the campaign was divided into two phases. The leadership phase (gifts in the range of $100,000 and above) and major gifts phase (donations ranging from $10,000 to $99,000) began in June of 1993 and continues through the end of the campaign. The campaign collection phase will take place during a three-year period beginning in 1995 and extending to 1998. The campaign will focus primarily on RCA congregations and interested individuals. Everett Hicks is campaign director.

*Addition is in light-face type; deletion is enclosed in brackets.*
Regional Synods of the Mid-Atlantic and New York — The Warwick Center

The regional synods of the Mid-Atlantic and New York have launched their campaign to raise $6 million to complete The Warwick Center renovation work, which was begun with PPIM funding. The collection period is ongoing and will continue through 1995. The campaign is focusing on the RCA congregations and individuals in the two regional synods.

Regional Synod of Mid-America — Manitoqua Ministries

Manitoqua Ministries launched a special fund drive in 1992 to raise $800,000 for capital improvements. The solicitation phase took place during the last six months in 1992, with the collection phase taking place during the next three years. The five classes in the Regional Synod of Mid-America have been targeted by the campaign.

New Brunswick Theological Seminary

Asian-American Program

New Brunswick Theological Seminary launched a campaign in 1992 to raise $600,000 to inaugurate a program to meet the needs of the Asian-American church community. The funds will be applied to staffing and operations over the next several years. Targeted donors of this project are RCA Korean congregations and selected foundations.

Endowment Fund Drive

In 1993 New Brunswick Theological Seminary began a major effort to raise the level of its endowment funds to $10 million. In order to accomplish this goal, the seminary needs to raise an estimated $4 million. The seminary has designated May 30, 1996, as the target date for reaching its endowment goal, coinciding with the 250th birthday of the seminary’s founder, John Henry Livingston. The fund-raising efforts for this project are targeted almost exclusively toward individuals.

Northwestern College — Call to Commitment—Expanding the Vision

In October 1991 Northwestern launched a major capital fund drive totaling $15.5 million to provide necessary improvements to college facilities and to strengthen its endowment. Some of the projects included in the campaign are the following: new intercollegiate athletic center, restoration of Zwemer Hall, expansion of cafeteria, renovation of Van Peursem Hall, and cash gifts to the Northwestern Endowment.

Funds will be solicited over a five-year period ending December 1995. Friends and alumni will be asked to consider a five-year commitment. The campaign is directed to alumni, friends, corporations, and foundations. Limited appeal will be made to RCA congregations in the geographic area of the college.

Hope College — Hope in the Future

Hope conducted a major fund-raising effort with an overall goal of $50 million. The campaign was directed toward adding to the college’s endowment, strengthening its academic program, enhancing student financial aid, strengthening its Christian commitment, and facility renovations. The campaign took place over the course of three years and concluded in 1994. The campaign had a national scope. Funds were solicited from the college’s constituent groups, including the Reformed Church in America. The college exceeded its goal.
Central College — Agenda for Leadership

In September 1990 Central launched a $7.6 million campaign to raise funds for a new academic building as well as for other needs of the campus. The fund drive is aimed at alumni, businesses, foundations, etc. There are no direct appeals to RCA congregations. RCA members who are Central College alumni are, however, included in the solicitation list. The campaign is currently in the collection phase.

Board of Pensions — General Fund

The Board of Pensions again made a year-end appeal in 1994 to RCA individuals for its General Fund, which provides grants and other forms of benevolent assistance to RCA retirees. Recently, the General Fund has been operating at a deficit due to an increased demand from retirees requiring assistant grants. The General Fund’s appeal does not fall within the definition of a special campaign because it is an attempt to bolster the Board of Pensions’ normal operations. It is reported here for information and to give a broader overview of various appeals affecting the fund-raising base of the RCA.

Others

Although not within the jurisdiction of officially recognized agencies, assemblies, colleges, or seminaries of the Reformed Church in America, the following entities will be soliciting funds from RCA churches. They are included here for information.

Camp Geneva has launched a $1.8 million capital fund drive. The money will be used to construct a much-needed building to provide office space, meeting facilities, and additional overnight lodging rooms. The focus of the campaign is on RCA churches, individuals, area businesses, and foundations in the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes.

Words of Hope launched a fund drive to raise $5 million by 1995. The monies will be used for five pioneer broadcasts per year for five years to unreached language peoples in the Indian subcontinent, Indonesia, parts of Asia, Africa, and Russia. The fund drive is targeted on Words of Hope’s present support base. The four RCA synods located in the west and midwest as well as individuals, businesses, and foundations are being approached by the campaign.

From the Report of the General Synod Council’s Stewardship and Communication Services Committee

Stewardship and Communications Services (SAC) is responsible for the program areas of stewardship and communication. The Rev. E. Wayne Antworth serves as director and is responsible for administration, coordination, and supervision.

STEWARDSHIP

The mission of the stewardship unit of Stewardship and Communication Services is:

To promote the personal and spiritual growth of the members of the RCA through stewardship education.
To provide financial resources for the ministry of the RCA through fund raising, gift planning, and stewardship education.

STEWARDSHIP EDUCATION

Stewardship education programs and resources are designed to foster new attitudes toward Christian stewardship. Stewardship education is an urgent priority for RCA congregations and for the denomination. Beginning January 1, 1995, SAC hired Larry J. Humme on a one-third contract to coordinate stewardship education and annual giving programs for the RCA. Humme is also responsible for the development of a stewardship associate network to assist RCA congregations in the delivery of stewardship services.

Stewardship Education Magazine

In the spring of 1995 a new stewardship periodical was introduced to all RCA pastors free of charge. This stewardship piece is a semiannual periodical published by the Presbyterian Church (USA) entitled A Stewardship Education Magazine for Congregational Leaders. By introducing RCA pastors and worship leaders to this new resource, it is the intent of the Office of Stewardship Education to increase the number of stewardship-related periodicals available to RCA congregations.

Tithing Resource Packet

The Spiritual Discipline of Tithing resource packet includes print and audiovisual materials for worship, reflections on the culture, Bible study, and the sharing of personal attitudes and experiences concerning money and giving. Individuals who go through the program are invited to join other tithers in the RCA in the spiritual discipline of tithing. This year the material was updated to include not only models for a retreat format, but also a new six-week adult study course. This adaptation of the program to include an adult study course will allow flexibility for congregations to use the tithing program as part of their adult Christian education program.

Steward’s Life Material

The Steward’s Life material was developed in conjunction with the stewardship statement approved by the 1984 General Synod (MGS 1984, R-4, p. 244). The Steward’s Life material includes the stewardship statement, a study guide designed for a four-week study course, and bulletin covers. A companion elementary children’s course, My Life: A Steward’s Life, was produced in 1992. Also available are stewardship education materials to assist small-membership congregations, a handbook to encourage Christians to develop and use good money management principles, and annual stewardship theme materials.

ANNUAL GIVING

The purpose of the annual congregational giving program is to assist congregations in their fund-raising efforts. Many congregations are faced with either limited or diminishing financial resources. Many pastors and congregations are not well prepared to address the financial concerns of their congregation. The annual congregational giving program assists congregations in budget planning, goal setting, annual giving campaigns, and capital campaigns.

Assisting congregations with annual giving programs is staff intensive. With the exception of the one-third time position of coordinator of stewardship education and annual giving, there is currently no budget or staff allocated specifically to assist congregations in their annual giving programs. One of SAC’s goals is to develop funding sources so that staff and resources can be provided to congregations.
Consecration Sunday Material

The Consecration Sunday program is currently the most popular annual giving program. It is used by over two hundred RCA congregations. This program emphasizes the need of the giver to give rather than the congregation’s need to receive financial support for a church budget. Any congregation with questions about the Consecration Sunday program should call Larryl Humne in the RCA Lansing, Illinois, office or the regional synod mission stewardship staff.

Consecrating Stewards, by Earl Miller of the United Church of Christ, contains the vital components of the Consecration Sunday program, as well as additional biblical and worship resources to enhance the program. It emphasizes proportionate giving and challenges Christians to increase the percentage of what they give to God as grateful stewards. Consecrating Stewards can be ordered from the RCA Distribution Center for $8 (U.S.) and $10.40 (Canadian).

DIRECT GIVING

Each year RCA congregations and individuals generously support the RCA and its programs. A large percentage of this financial support is designated as Partnership-In-Mission (PIM) shares that underwrite the RCA’s worldwide mission programs. Offerings and special appeals like Mission of the Month and One Great Hour of Sharing are also sources of income for Mission Services. Additional funds contributed through assessments support programs in Congregational Services and Evangelism and Church Development Services of the General Synod Council.

The Ad Hoc Committee on Services, Structures, and Funding, in its report to the 1992 General Synod (MGS 1992, pp. 42-80), recommended the RCA strengthen its funding sources through the solicitation of financial gifts from individuals (MGS 1992, R-26, p. 71). This recommendation has been partially implemented in the development of a direct giving program. Five special mailings have been sent to RCA members asking for their individual financial contributions. These contributions have totaled approximately $608,000.

The most frequently asked question about the direct giving program relates to whether the Church Herald name and address database used for its every-family distribution plan is also used for fund-raising purposes. Direct giving guidelines adopted by the General Synod Council in 1994 indicate the Church Herald’s list is not to be used for the RCA direct giving program if a congregation submits in writing a request restricting its members from direct giving appeals. A separate list has been developed for the purpose of direct giving appeals. This separate list is assembled from a variety of other sources—including the consistorial report form—to gather names and addresses of RCA members. There are also provisions in the direct giving guidelines for individuals and congregations to ask that their names be deleted from the direct giving list.

Another concern expressed is that special appeals and direct giving mailings are often a surprise to RCA pastors, consistorys, and congregations. It was suggested that it would be helpful if a list of special appeals could be sent periodically to all RCA congregations. A letter listing the 1994 year-end appeals was sent to all RCA congregations in September 1994. SAC agreed to do this annually. The following is a list of special financial appeals for 1994:

**Lenten Appeal.** The 1994 Lenten appeal sought support for a “Lenten Fast,” sharing in world hunger relief.

**Advent Packet.** Congregational Services produces each year a special Advent packet that includes a child’s Sunday school Christmas offering. The 1994 Christmas offering went toward the purchase of a van for the Macy, Nebraska, American Indian congregation.
Children’s Christmas Fund. The Board of Pensions sends a special appeal each year at Christmastime, requesting contributions to benefit the dependent children of RCA deceased ministers.

Special Thanksgiving Offering. The General Fund of the Board of Pensions gives annual assistance grants to RCA ministers, missionaries, and their spouses who retired before the RCA Annuity Fund could be of much financial benefit. Many of these people live well below the poverty level. In 1993 the General Fund gave assistance grants that totaled about $650,000. The 1993 year-end direct giving appeal was designated for the General Fund. In September 1994, RCA congregations received a mailing asking that a special Thanksgiving offering be taken to offset the deficit the General Fund has experienced the past several years and to ensure continuation of assistance grants to those in need.

Special Project Appeal. Mission Services asks RCA congregations to consider extra gifts to under-funded RCA projects at the time these congregations allocate year-end benevolence contributions. A mailing sent in the fall of 1994 sought support for the purchase of missionary vehicles not funded from regular Mission Services budget support. Many non-RCA mission organizations send special appeals to congregations at year-end. This information from the RCA places RCA projects before RCA consistories and congregational mission committees for their prayerful consideration.

Year-End Direct Giving Appeal. The 1994 year-end appeal was sent to approximately twenty-six thousand RCA individuals and families. This appeal sought financial support for start-up costs of six couples appointed for missionary service. One-time gifts and long-term Partnership-In-Mission support from individuals need to be raised before these missionaries can begin their work.

CAPITAL CAMPAIGNS

Congregational Campaigns

The coordination of capital campaigns is also the responsibility of SAC. This includes providing consultation and support for RCA congregations undertaking capital campaigns. During 1994 three RCA congregations were assisted by the director of Stewardship and Communication Services in the development and implementation of capital campaigns. These congregations raised a total of approximately $1,700,000 in pledges for refurbishing and building expansion. The goal is to expand these services by creating a network of consultants throughout the RCA who can assist congregations.

$9.8 by ’98

The 1990 General Synod approved plans for the 98 by ’98 church growth plan (MGS 1990, p. 313-20), challenging the Reformed Church in America to establish ninety-eight new congregations by 1998. This plan was an outgrowth of the On the Way program, which called for a ten-year emphasis on evangelism and growth within the RCA and was presented to the 1986 General Synod (MGS 1986, pp. 246-55).

The RCA embarked upon this renewal program because new congregations offer unique opportunities to reach people for Christ. A majority of the members of new congregations are received by confession or reaffirmation of faith. Each RCA regional synod has committed its full support to this outreach program. As of March 1, 1995, forty-two new RCA congregations had been organized under the 98 by ’98 program, and forty-six new church starts were in various stages of development. An additional forty-one sites have been identified for potential development.
The $9.8 by '98 fund-raising campaign is one of several components of the 98 by '98 church growth plan. Originally, the $9.8 by '98 campaign had one goal, which was to raise money to increase the capital of the Church Building Fund (CBF). (The CBF makes low-cost loans to new congregations ready to construct their first facilities.) The 1990 General Synod, however, expanded the focus of the campaign (MGS 1990, p. 320) by adding the following two goals: 1) support for recruitment and training of new church development pastors and other resource support for new church start congregations (10 percent), and 2) support for revitalizing urban, rural, and small membership churches (15 percent).

The allocations of the $9.8 by '98 campaign are:

- $7,350,000 (75 percent) for Church Building Fund loans to new congregations seeking to finance their first units.
- $980,000 (10 percent) for the recruitment and training of new church development pastors and for resources to enhance the ministry of new congregations.
- $1,470,000 (15 percent) for revitalizing urban, rural, and small membership churches.

Andrea Van Beek, an attorney in Orange City, Iowa, and Jerrald Redeker, a retired banker from Holland, Michigan, are respectively the chair and vice-chair of the $9.8 by '98 campaign. Additionally, a campaign steering committee has been meeting twice a year to decide on policy and other issues relating to the implementation of the campaign.

The actual fund raising for the campaign was divided into two phases. The leadership phase (gifts in the range of $100,000 and above) and the major gifts phase (donations ranging from $10,000 to $99,000) began in June of 1993 and continues through the end of the campaign. A list of 672 potential donors was developed and is still being expanded as additional prospects are added and as actual solicitation calls are made. Total pledges from this source as of March 1, 1995, were slightly over $1.95 million. The goal is $3 million for these two phases.

The congregational phase of the campaign began in January 1995. It was preceded by a series of informational meetings conducted in over seventy RCA locations in the U.S. and Canada to familiarize RCA pastors and lay leaders with details regarding the $9.8 by '98 campaign and its goals. These meetings, held during the spring and summer months of 1994, were in response to suggestions from a number of RCA pastors and lay leaders that there should be more communication and input about the campaign with the church at large before the campaign actually began.

The informational meetings were followed with actual presentations made to RCA consistory. It is estimated that well over 85 percent of the RCA congregations have been visited by members of the campaign staff or by recruited volunteers. Where the necessary equipment was available, an illustrative video about the campaign has been a featured part of the presentation.

In addition to the production of several videos, the $9.8 by '98 campaign has been intentional in its use of publicity in all media formats available in the denomination. The $9.8 by '98 Newsletter shares fund drive news with pastors and laypersons. Bulletin inserts are provided to RCA congregations on a periodic basis. Articles and ads have appeared in the Church Herald and Pioneer Christian Monthly. Campaign items have been included in RCA Today. Additionally, campaign news articles have been included in regional synod publications.

Pentecost Sunday, June 4, 1995, was set aside as $9.8 by '98 Sunday, a time when RCA congregations were asked to renew their commitment and support of the campaign with its strong emphasis on evangelism and on reaching more people for Christ. This was also a time
for appraising the status of the campaign in order to provide an updated report on the number of RCA congregations supporting the campaign and the financial outlook of the campaign for presentation to the 1995 General Synod. The active solicitation period for receiving pledges and establishing target goals for RCA congregations is expected to continue into the fall of 1995, but it is to terminate before year-end 1995.

The campaign collection phase takes place during a three-year period beginning in 1995 and extending to 1998. Many congregations have opted to support the campaign by taking up a series of special offerings. However, this has made it difficult to predict precisely what revenue will be forthcoming from this source.

By launching the church growth plan and the accompanying denominational $9.8 by '98 campaign, the Reformed Church in America has responded in a positive manner to the biblical mandate of the Great Commission. The unchurched will hear the message of reconciliation in Christ only if others share their faith journeys. One way of sharing that message is through the community of Christians who make their spiritual home in the RCA (see also the New Church Development Report, "$9.8 by '98" section in the Report of the General Synod Council's Evangelism and Church Development Services in the Evangelization and Church Growth section).

GIFT PLANNING

The Office of Gift Planning is charged with keeping the various methods of making a gift to the church before the members of the RCA. In order to accomplish this goal, the Office of Gift Planning uses several methods to communicate the benefits of gift planning to the members and friends of the RCA.

The Office of Gift Planning publishes a newsletter called Options for the Future. Each issue of this newsletter features a member of the RCA who has made a planned gift. The feature then expands on the way similar gifts may be made. Each issue includes a tear-off response form, which is used extensively by those receiving the newsletter.

The office has a large supply of literature on the value of having a will and how gifts can be made. These materials are sent on request and are also distributed at workshops and displays.

In 1994 the office had one full-time staff person, the coordinator, the Rev. Norman J. Tellier, and one half-time staff person, Larryl Humme. Both of these staff persons give presentations on estate planning and/or financial planning to groups in RCA congregations. In addition, they offer presentations on endowments to deacons, consistorys, and other decision-making bodies. The presentation on endowments suggests RCA congregations establish endowment funds and guidelines for the use of gifts or bequests prior to the receipt of contributed funds.

Tellier, as a CFP® licensee, is available to members and friends of the RCA for help in estate and financial planning. (CFP® and CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER® are federally registered marks of the Certified Financial Planner Board of Standards, Inc.)

In January 1995 Larryl Humme’s responsibilities for gift planning transferred to stewardship education. As a result, the Office of Gift Planning will be hiring a part-time gift planner to work in the midwest. It is anticipated this gift planning person will begin in September 1995.

1994 was also the first year of the integration of G.I.F.T.S. into the Office of Gift Planning. G.I.F.T.S. began in 1987 as an independent foundation to do gift planning for members and friends of the RCA. In 1993 the G.I.F.T.S. board of directors agreed to integrate its work with that of the Reformed Church in America. This resulted in a gift planning partnership with several organizations related to G.I.F.T.S. The following organizations are currently part of the gift planning partnership:
Central College
Hope College
Northwestern College
New Brunswick Theological Seminary
Western Theological Seminary
Regional Synod of the Great Lakes
Regional Synod of the Heartland
Regional Synod of Mid-America
Bethany Home, Ripon, California
Calvary Rehabilitation Foundation, Phoenix, Arizona
Elim Christian School, Palos Heights, Illinois
Hope Haven Inc., Rock Valley, Iowa
Reformed Bible College, Grand Rapids, Michigan
Rest Haven Christian Services, South Holland, Illinois
Words of Hope, Grand Rapids, Michigan
Marble Collegiate Church, New York, New York

The Office of Gift Planning has become an affiliate member of the Council of Reformed Charities.

During 1995 a major change takes place with the incorporation of the RCA Foundation. The General Synod Council is recommending to the 1995 General Synod the incorporation of the RCA Foundation and adoption of bylaws (see "RCA Foundation, Inc," from the Report of the General Synod Council's Stewardship and Communication Services Committee in the Church Order section). At the current time the foundation will consist only of the Office of Gift Planning. It is hoped, however, that a full range of foundation services will be available to RCA congregations and institutions in coming years. These services will also include management of endowment funds.

The work of the Office of Gift Planning resulted in the following life income gifts during 1994:

These gifts were designated as follows:

The congregations of the RCA are asked the number and amount of bequests and planned gifts received by them each year. In 1993 RCA congregations reported receiving 251 bequests for a total of $6,772,694 and twenty planned gifts for a total of $191,055. The planned gifts came in the form of trust distributions, annuities, life insurance, and securities. Total bequests and planned gifts reported by RCA congregations amounted to $6,963,749.

The distribution of these gifts by regional synods is as follows:

G.I.F.T.S. established a fund which allows donors to make a gift at anytime. The gift is then distributed to charitable organization(s) at a later date. This is especially helpful for donors who wish to make a gift in the current year, but have not yet decided how they want it distributed. This fund will continue in the RCA Foundation as the GIFTS Philanthropic Fund. In 1994 $16,487 was received.

The office also promotes the RCA Building and Extension Fund investment notes. Promotion is done by Church Herald ads, publicity material, and personal contacts. The office is also responsible for obtaining state registrations and issuing new and rollover notes.

The Office of Gift Planning administers the Van Bunschoten Society. This society recognizes those who have made a planned gift. The planned gift may be in the form of a designation in a will, a life income gift, or some other means. Any part of the RCA, except the colleges and seminaries, may be the beneficiary of the gift. The society has over two hundred fifty members and holds it annual dinner at General Synod.
The General Synod Council, at its October 1993 meeting, voted to have the following Summary of the Van Bunschooten Bequest (adopted by the 1937 General Synod) read at the General Synod meeting as part of the report of the Advisory Committee on Financial Support:

THE VAN BUNSCHOOTEN BEQUEST
(A Summary for Voluntary Use in Classes)

At a meeting of General Synod in New York City, June 9, 1814, Dominie Elias Van Bunschooten, one of the advisory members, walked up the aisle and laid down on the table ten bonds amounting to $13,800 and $800 in cash and asked Synod to accept the gift for the education of young men for the ministry. On January 10, 1815, in his 77th year, Dominie Van Bunschooten went home to his reward and was buried in the churchyard of the First Reformed Church of New Brunswick. In his last will and testament he added over $3,000 to his former donation, making a total of more than $17,000, a princely gift for those days. (Additions of income have increased the principal to $20,000.) Dominie Van Bunschooten thus had the honor of making the first substantial contribution for assisting young students of theology. His example has been followed from time to time by others, thus realizing his desire as expressed in the bequest “that he might be an humble pattern for others to copy after.” It would be impossible to catalogue all the results that have flowed from these donations. For more than a century they have made possible the education of candidates for the ministry, for the work both at home and abroad. All honor to him and the other liberal donors who have followed his example (MGS 1937, pp. 8-9).

In honor of Dominie Elias Van Bunschooten, the Van Bunschooten Society has been formed in the Reformed Church in America to honor those who have included the Reformed Church in America in their wills.

From the Report of the General Synod Council’s Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee

REPORT OF THE AD HOC COMMITTEE TO STUDY ASSESSMENT ISSUES/DENOMINATIONAL FUNDING

INTRODUCTION

The Classis of Mid-Hudson sent the following overture to the 1994 General Synod:

to direct or authorize the study of General Synod assessments in the last ten years in relationship to the cost of living, for report with recommendations, and if possible, to propose guidelines on future General Synod assessment increases to the 1995 General Synod (MGS 1994, p. 346).

In response, the 1994 General Synod voted:

To direct the General Synod Council’s Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee to study issues surrounding the General Synod assessment in order that the
larger issue of classical/congregational ownership of denominational financing and direction are addressed, for report to the 1995 General Synod (MGS 1994, p. 347).

In his report to the October 1994 General Synod Council, the general secretary reflected on denominational funding and underscored the need “to take a fresh look at our financing of denominational services, and in particular, at the real needs of our smaller congregations living out their lives in areas of economic hardship.” The general secretary then recommended the General Synod Council appoint an ad hoc committee to study issues surrounding the General Synod assessment in order to initiate an “ongoing discussion about what we decide together as a gathered family of fellowship, and how we decide to fund those activities which we do undertake.”

In response, the General Synod Council authorized the moderator of GSC, in consultation with the general secretary, to appoint an eight-member Ad Hoc Committee to Study Assessment Issues/Denominational Funding. The moderator of the GSC, in consultation with the general secretary, appointed the following members to the ad hoc committee:

Louis Benes (Chair) Allan Janssen
Raymond De Does Calvin Rynbrandt
Glenn DeMaster Sally Tapley
Robert Hoffmann Gerald Verbridge

The Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson attended all ad hoc committee meetings. The Rev. David Schreuder served as the staff resource person.

The ad hoc committee met on January 4-5, 1995; February 7-8, 1995; and March 14-15, 1995.

As the ad hoc committee began its assignment, it became clear that it would require information from a variety of sources. The summary of the ad hoc committee’s findings are in section II of this report. It also became increasingly clear that deeper and broader-ranging issues are evident when one examines assessments. While this is evident in section II, this report begins with the theological issues that underlie the occasional ferment and sometimes quite real pain that assessments evoke.

This ad hoc committee’s report presents recommendations in sections III, IV, and V. These sections also discuss communication of financial information, how decisions are made in the RCA, and the method of formulating assessments respectively.

It is helpful to emphasize at the outset that all the recommendations are focused by the ad hoc committee’s theological conviction that the entire RCA share in both the deliberations resulting in policy and the responsibility for the actions taken. A code word for the ad hoc committee’s recommendations paraphrase the above 1994 General Synod’s mandate: rather than speak of “ownership,” the ad hoc committee thinks in terms of “responsibility.”

I. THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

The 1994 General Synod vote to study issues surrounding the General Synod assessment suggests that the work of this ad hoc committee was not to focus primarily on exploring new ways of paying for denominational programs. The RCA has wrestled long with that question (see MGS 1980, pp. 220-26; MGS 1981, pp. 252-55; MGS 1987, pp. 260-65 and 269-72; MGS 1988, pp. 345-53; MGS 1989, pp. 278-80; MGS 1990, pp. 370-77; and MGS 1992, pp. 446-52. See also the paper, “History of Assessments in the RCA,” available from the Office of Historical Services and RCA Archives at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, New Brunswick, New Jersey). Instead, the 1994 General Synod’s instruction stimulated the ad hoc committee to ask how the RCA, as the General Synod, comes to decisions that include financial implications.
The task force began, then, by examining how the RCA makes decisions when it gathers as the General Synod. It is first a question of polity. For the Reformed tradition, polity is a way of living out the church's confession.

The church is fundamental to a Reformed understanding of the faith. Scripture employs a variety of metaphors to describe the church as a whole or a body within which members receive life and purpose and to which they commit themselves in love. While individual church members are not themselves members of the denomination, the congregations, consistorys, and classes do participate in the life of the church in its local, national, and universal expressions.

The church governs its common life through its assemblies. The assemblies, as bodies of office-holders, give expression to the church as a gathered people; indeed, decisions are made by assemblies, not by individuals.

Furthermore, Reformed churches have historically held to their version of "subsidiarity" in the relation of assemblies to each other. The church order of Dort outlined the relationship:

In those Assemblies, ecclesiastical matters only shall be transacted, and that in an ecclesiastical manner. A greater Assembly shall take cognizance of those things alone which could not be determined in a lesser, or that appertain to the churches or congregations in general, which compose such an assembly (The Articles of Dort, Article XXX).

It is crucial that the higher assembly (General Synod in the case of the RCA) not displace lower assemblies. At the same time, the General Synod needs to be understood as a gathering of the lower assemblies; the classes together determine the direction and the funding of the larger church. The General Synod does not function as a convention of delegates. Thus the ad hoc committee asked: how can the General Synod act as a gathered body of the classes in responsible deliberation?

The 1994 General Synod mandate speaks of "classical/congregational ownership of denominational financing and direction." The ad hoc committee asked the question in terms of responsibility rather than ownership. How can the General Synod, as the gathered church, take full responsibility for its decisions? How do the constituent assemblies share in that responsibility? If the lower assemblies can understand themselves as full partners in decisions that entail financial support, the question of how the church "pays" for its programs will be well on its way to resolution.

The question before the task force was not simply how the "greater" assembly could reflect the will of the "lesser" assemblies; nor was it how the General Synod could more effectively communicate its needs. The question for the RCA is: How can the denomination act as an expression of the church as it comes to decisions as a body that on the one hand ministers in primary responsibility to its Lord and on the other hand functions as a genuine people whose members take full share in its decisions?

The suggested issues and recommendations in this report reflect the ad hoc committee's fundamental conviction that God has called the RCA together to live and act as a people who are responsible to God and to one another.

II. SUMMARY OF INFORMATION GATHERED

The ad hoc committee gathered information from a variety of sources. As noted in section I, there is a long history of discussions on assessments in the RCA. It was clear to this ad hoc committee that it could not solve a problem that has troubled the denomination throughout its entire history.
The ad hoc committee also examined several statistical tables supplied by the treasurer of the RCA. The ad hoc committee examined these statistics to answer two questions. First, do increases in assessments cause membership decline? Second, how do increases in assessments affect total denominational giving?

While the evidence is scarcely conclusive, the statistics do suggest that RCA membership does appear to decline with assessment increases. Although increased assessments resulted in an increase in total funds received, the amount of RCA contributions remained flat. Placed against the modest inflation of the past few years, this signals a decline in real income. However, the ad hoc committee refrains from a strong conclusion that assessments represent the cause of this "flattening." Other causes may, of course, be present.

The ad hoc committee appreciates the considerable information received from a variety of people and assemblies across the RCA. Members of the ad hoc committee also solicited a variety of informal responses. In addition, the Classis of Muskegon distributed a survey on assessments that garnered responses from a large number of RCA classes.

What did the committee hear? Perhaps surprisingly, the ad hoc committee discovered that RCA congregations and classes hold a basic loyalty to the larger church. Most viewed assessments as a fair share of what each classis (and in turn each congregation) contributes to the greater life of the RCA.

Nonetheless, several concerns emerged:

1. **The Church Herald**

   It is important to place this issue at the beginning not because the ad hoc committee heard an outcry against the General Synod assessment for the *Church Herald*, but because it provided the most recent occasion for a significant increase in the assessment. Indeed, most agree that the *Church Herald* is an improved and attractive magazine.

   It became clear, however, that the deeper concern over the General Synod assessment for the *Church Herald* revolved around how the decision was made by the 1992 General Synod to assess for distribution of the *Church Herald* to every RCA household (*MGS 1992*, R-2, pp. 198-9). The 1992 General Synod could legitimately decide at one session to raise the assessment significantly for one category. Little discussion preceded the 1992 General Synod decision; and the General Synod did not enjoy sufficient time to assess the impact of its decision on the denomination as a whole. Also, since the General Synod assessment could be leveled by a simple majority, what would happen to the weaker classes and churches? Could and did the 1992 General Synod delegates possess sufficient deliberative time and information to make a responsible decision?

2. **Impact of assessments on local congregations**

   While most RCA members with whom this ad hoc committee spoke agreed that assessments cause a significant impact, these people also believed assessments represent a way of belonging to the larger church.

   Nonetheless, increasing assessments put special strains on RCA congregations. Some congregations are experiencing increased competition for dollars between denominational and local ministries. Some RCA congregations existing on the margin of survival have curtailed local ministry to meet higher assessment requirements.
Other RCA congregations report that increased assessments has not meant a threat to survival, but it has meant reducing or eliminating programs that could not be sustained because of the burden of increased assessments.

RCA clergy reported a serious and continuing trend of “purging” church membership rolls in order to lower the assessment cost. The ad hoc committee heard this “purging” has gone so far that some RCA congregations are discouraging people from becoming members so as not to increase the congregation’s budgetary requirements. Some boards of elders report they spend every meeting “paring” the rolls.

On the whole, however, most RCA congregations reported assessments have little negative impact when viewed in the context of their total church budgets.

3. Need for clear communication.

While this ad hoc committee emphasizes that communication entails a two-way conversation, it became clear to the ad hoc committee that communication among the denomination, lower assemblies, congregations, and members is an urgent issue.

RCA members and office-holders at all levels require clear and concise information from the denomination, information that provides a common basis of knowledge from which decisions and responses can emerge.

At the same time, members of RCA congregations, consistories, pastors, classes, and regional synods all need an accurate perception that their voices are heard. This does not mean agreement on any or all issues. Rather, no part of the body is to be alienated through lack of power.

In summary, the ad hoc committee heard a readiness for open, transparent, honest dialogue not only on assessments as such, but on the issues that underlie the various funding strategies used to support denominational programs.

III. COMMUNICATION OF INFORMATION

On the basis of theological perspective and summary of information outlined above, the following sections present a variety of recommendations. The recommendations the committee offers do not solve the “problem of assessments.” Rather, the committee presents the recommendations as modest proposals by which the RCA can share in its responsibilities.

As has been made clear, the ad hoc committee was united in its conviction that discussions of financial issues cannot proceed without an open and transparent sharing of information. From the General Synod to the pew, the Reformed Church in America needs to communicate the financial situation of the denomination as a whole.

The ad hoc committee suggests this goal be accomplished by several means: print media, interpretation to classes by members of the General Synod Council, and the presence of denominational staff at classis meetings.

The advisory committee recommended to amend R-3:

R-3.
To instruct Stewardship and Communication Services [to prepare and] to distribute to consistories, classes, and congregations, a financial brochure, Family Finances, that clearly and simply describes how the Reformed Church in America financially supports its ministry. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED) *

*Addition is in light-face type; deletion is enclosed in brackets.
Reasons:

1. The brochure has already been produced.

2. Insertion of the title, "Family Finances," clarifies the financial brochure referred to in R-3. <

(At its March 1995 meeting the General Synod Council voted to request its members to interpret to their respective classes how the Reformed Church in America financially supports its ministry. The General Synod Council also requested sufficient financial information be provided to them by Stewardship and Communication Services in order to help interpret the RCA's financial status to RCA classes.)

(The General Synod Council, at its March 1995 meeting, voted to instruct the general secretary to require attendance of a denominational staff representative once a year at respective classis meetings.)

As for the presence of denominational staff at classis meetings, the ad hoc committee stresses that it cannot be overemphasized that denominational staff would attend not to sell denominational programs or budgets or to promote. Instead, the purpose for their presence would be to provide opportunity for fresh and open dialogue between the classes and staff of the General Synod Council.

The annual stated clerks' meeting offers a ready and effective forum for communicating information through the classical administrative personnel often closest to assessment issues within classes. It is often not clearly understood, for example, that the General Synod assesses neither congregations nor their members. The General Synod assesses classes. The classes, in turn, need not assess on the same basis as the General Synod; in fact, some classes use a variety of assessment formulas. Simply sharing this information on different assessment formulas used by classes can free other classes to rethink how they assess.

(At its March 1995 meeting the General Synod Council voted to request the general secretary or appropriate RCA staff to interpret the financial brochure on denominational funding at the June 1995 stated clerks' meeting. The General Synod Council also voted to distribute a list describing how various classes assess.)

IV. THE PROCESS OF DECISION-MAKING

While clear and forthright communication is necessary, it does not by itself resolve the issues raised by assessments. How the RCA comes to decisions in such a manner that all parties to the discussion share in the outcome is far more crucial. Thus, the ad hoc committee examined how General Synod works at its annual meeting.

In recent practice the report of the Board of Directors is presented to the General Synod early in the week; the General Synod Council presents a first draft of an assessment budget, subject to revision through programs added (or, more rarely, deleted) during the General Synod meeting; and General Synod votes, usually on the final day of its meeting, on the budget and assessment for the following year. It is the sense of the ad hoc committee that many first-time General Synod delegates lose their way through the process. Furthermore, as programs are added throughout the week, the final General Synod assessment amount takes on an air of inevitability.

Could the General Synod "open up" its process, and thus become more transparent as to the implications of its actions? That is, could it more responsibly deliberate on the financial implications of its actions? The ad hoc committee deems a few adjustments to the General Synod's process would be helpful.
(In response, the General Synod Council, at its March 1995 meeting, voted to include as part of the Report of the Board of Directors presented at General Synod a clear and understandable picture of the financial condition of the Reformed Church in America. The General Synod Council also voted to instruct the moderator of its Finance Services Committee to discuss thoroughly and interpret clearly in the opening General Synod Council report to General Synod the General Synod Operational Budget. Finally, the General Synod Council voted to move the vote on the General Synod assessment from the final session to an earlier time on the General Synod’s agenda.)

It is also crucial that delegates have clear understanding of financial implications of actions taken by General Synod. Proposals sounding attractive and helpful may require a financial support that is either difficult or unwise. Can the delegates, for example, weigh the cost of a proposed new mission effort against a proposal for the publication of a new liturgy? Can General Synod’s procedures be improved so that the delegates can vote with a clear understanding of the implications of their vote?

R-4.
To reaffirm the action of the 1990 General Synod:

To request that all recommendations and overtures presented at General Synod which would affect the rate of assessments include an approximation of the costs involved and the impact on assessments (MGS 1990, R-5, p. 388, and MGS 1993, R-3, p. 412); and further,

to extend this request to the president and the general secretary for their respective reports. (ADOPTED)

When delegates vote on the General Synod’s budget and consequent assessment, the entire budget is “on the table.” Any part may be amended by the General Synod. Thus, every item is reviewed each year. However, delegates seldom recognize this opportunity.

The ad hoc committee deemed it crucial that the variety of items comprising the budget be carefully reviewed each year and that it be made clear to the classes and congregations that budget items (and the assessments that support them) do not become “locked in” year after year.

The ad hoc committee proposes a sunset provision for all General Synod budget items. For example, the General Synod Council could devise a process by which the various categories of the General Synod budget are carefully and fully reviewed every two or three years.

(At its March 1995 meeting the General Synod Council voted to review and study intentionally the General Synod Operational Budget for recommendation to the General Synod. The General Synod Council also voted to request its Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee develop a deliberate review process for the continuation, discontinuation, or revision of each part of the General Synod budget supported by assessments on a regularly scheduled basis.)

The advisory committee recommended:

R-5.
To affirm the decision of the General Synod Council, at its March 1995 meeting, to request its Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee to develop a deliberate review process for the continuation, discontinuation, or revision of each part of the General Synod budget supported by assessments; and further,
FINANCIAL SUPPORT

To request the General Synod Council present a report to the 1996 General Synod on the review process developed. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The advisory committee believed this is a very important process and wanted to ensure full implementation within the next year.

The ad hoc committee notes the General Synod does not vote on two assessed items: the assessment for the administration of theological education and the assessment for the General Fund of the Board of Pensions. This ad hoc committee finds no reason why these assessments should be exempt from the regular and deliberate review of the General Synod and the General Synod Council.

(At its March 1995 meeting the General Synod Council voted to include the amount assessed for the administration of theological education and the amount assessed for the General Fund of the Board of Pensions be formally adopted by the General Synod.)

In the theological reflections section (I) of this report, the ad hoc committee judged it of signal importance that the classes and their delegates realize that they share in the responsibility for General Synod’s actions through the votes cast by classical delegate representatives. This understanding is enhanced through the simple procedure of gathering classis delegations prior to the meeting of the General Synod. The ad hoc committee is not recommending the classes gather their delegates to instruct them in how they should vote on decisions before the General Synod; the office-bearers are, by the nature of Reformed polity, free to vote as guided by the Spirit and the Word. Nonetheless, such a gathering can prepare delegates to the implications of decisions that will be made at the General Synod.

R-6.
To request classes, prior to the General Synod meeting, to assemble their General Synod delegates for the purpose of orientation on delegate responsibilities; and further,

to review the General Synod workbook at this gathering and to discuss other preparations necessary for attendance as delegates at General Synod meetings. (ADOPTED)

V. PROPOSED FORMULAS

While the ad hoc committee did not see its primary function as solving the “payment issue,” the ad hoc committee explored the basis on how classes are assessed as another of the issues surrounding assessments.

The ad hoc committee deliberated over the question of the fairness of assessments to both larger and smaller congregations. The committee examined statistics prepared by the RCA treasurer that indicated the effect of granting certain “deductions” for various numbers of members listed as “active-confirmed.” The ad hoc committee also considered the argument that larger congregations are unfairly assessed. Upon further reflection, however, the ad hoc committee reminded itself that the General Synod does not assess congregations in any case. As stated earlier, the assessment is leveled on classes. The question of “caps” for larger congregations or “deductions” for smaller congregations is a matter to be decided by the classes.

In that context, the ad hoc committee is of firm conviction in the following two matters:

1. First, while it is clear that the General Synod assesses classes and not congregations, the perception persists that the congregation (that is, the consistory), at the most local
level of polity, is assessed by the General Synod at the denominational level. In part, this perception persists because the General Synod assesses on a “per active-confirmed member” formula which most classes “pass through” to the congregation.

2. The practice of assessing on the basis of “active-confirmed members” has had unintended pastoral results. This report noted above that boards of elders consistently “purge” their rolls, not for the purpose of discipline, but to lower the assessment obligation of their respective congregations. Further, measuring congregational size and strength on a “per active-confirmed member” basis deflects from a Reformed understanding of the congregation as a gathering of families.

The ad hoc committee strongly urges the General Synod to discontinue its practice of basing assessments on the basis of “active-confirmed members.” A new formula could resolve both issues outlined above.

The ad hoc committee further suggests the General Synod Council explore methods of assessing that measure the relative strengths of the classes within the RCA. In so doing, each classis can be assessed on its ability to contribute to the greater church.

On request from the ad hoc committee, the RCA treasurer prepared several assessment formula models for the ad hoc committee’s examination. Each model presented weighed the relative strength of the various classes for the purposes of calculating assessments. For example, the General Synod could assess the classes proportionally by the amount given for congregational purposes (line 22 of the Consistorial Report Form); or the General Synod could take into account various measures of the strength of the classes, such as average worship attendance, total membership, number of households, and total giving. All of these could be combined in a variety of formulas.

The advisory committee recommended to amend R-7:

R-7.
To instruct the General Synod Council Finance Services Committee to develop a new formula for assessing the classes based on a proportion not directly derived only from “active-confirmed members” as reported by the classes, for a progress report to the 1996 General Synod meeting; and further,

to instruct the General Synod Finance Services Committee to present a final report to the 1997 General Synod. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)*

Reason: The amendment to R-7 gives the General Synod Finance Services Committee adequate time to receive input from various sources and to give full consideration to this important issue. <

(At its March 1995 meeting the General Synod Council voted to request the stated clerks, at their June 1995 meeting, to review various alternative formulas for assessments. The General Synod Council also voted to request that stated clerks propose any alternative formulas to the General Synod Council by January 1, 1996.)

VI. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GENERAL SYNOD AND CLASSES

This report has emphasized the importance of all segments of the RCA sharing in the work of ministry in mutual responsibility. This mutuality finds practical expression in the relationship between General Synod and the various classes. At its bluntest, the General Synod assesses the classes. Among the “issues surrounding the General Synod assessment,”
the relationship between the greater assembly—the General Synod—and the lesser assemblies—the classes—displays most acutely the difficulties that assessments can provoke.

In response to financial hardship rooted in assessments, the General Synod provided a process for relief from the assessment (MGS 1989, R-4, p. 329, and MGS 1991, R-5, p. 344). This process has been utilized and has provided a way for the General Synod to extend itself to classes that have proven need. The ad hoc committee encourages the continuation of this process and applauds initiatives by the General Synod Council to increase the funds available for this purpose. This is a concrete way for the RCA to practice mutual support.

In 1994, however, another and more difficult problem arose when the Classis of Muskegon and the Classis of North Grand Rapids did not pay their General Synod assessment because a larger congregation in each classis refused to remit their portion of the classical assessment. Unfortunately, this placed each classis at odds with the General Synod. The 1994 General Synod did not seat the delegates from both classes (MGS 1994, pp. 6-7, pp. 48-9, 69), and the classes found themselves caught between a local consistory and the General Synod. The ad hoc committee asked: Is there a way for the General Synod and the classes to work together in such cases?

The ad hoc committee can offer neither an immediate nor easy answer to this question. The ad hoc committee is encouraged by the efforts of the general secretary to work pastorally with the classes involved. The ad hoc committee also urges the General Synod to work openly and supportively with the classes to alleviate such problems. At the same time, the classes are encouraged to communicate with dispatch with the General Synod when such difficulty arises in order for a partnership to develop, so far as possible, and so that mutual distrust and recrimination may be avoided.

VII. CONCLUSION

It is clear to the ad hoc committee that the pain which assessments evoke for some parts of the RCA is tied to issues far deeper than either the ability or the willingness to pay. Financial questions move the RCA not only to the heart of how to live together as a people, but how the denomination understands its mutual life in Christ. The ad hoc committee rejects a radical individualism by which local congregations absolve themselves of responsibility for sisters and brothers throughout the RCA (and the world). The ad hoc committee also rejects a mass approach that views congregations as little more than appendages to a denominational body. The RCA must remain both local and global, in a word responsible to our one Lord and for one another.

PAYMENT OF CANADIAN ASSESSMENT IN U.S. DOLLARS

The RCA treasurer requested clarification from the General Synod Council (GSC), at its October 1993 meeting, on whether payment of the General Synod assessment by RCA Canadian congregations is to be in Canadian or U.S. dollars. After review by the Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee, the GSC voted:

To note the RCA policy is to pay all General Synod assessments in U.S. dollars; and further,
to allow the RCA Canadian churches to receive a discount equal to two-thirds of the currency differential in 1994; and further,

to allow the RCA Canadian churches to receive a discount equal to one-third of the currency differential in 1995; and further,

to establish the differential rates of currency on January 1, 1994, for the calendar year 1994 and on January 1, 1995, for the calendar year 1995.

Following the October 1993 GSC meeting the treasurer of the Classis of Ontario sent a communication to GSC requesting reconsideration of this policy. The treasurer noted the Classis of Ontario has been paying its General Synod assessment in Canadian dollars for over thirty-five years.

At its January 1994 meeting the Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee met with the three GSC Canadian representatives from the Classis of Ontario, Classis of British Columbia, and Classis of the Canadian Prairies. During the discussion it was noted that there has not been a consistent or clear practice in Canada on payment of the General Synod assessment in Canadian or U.S. dollars. Some Canadian congregations have paid the assessment in U.S. dollars to their respective classes and others have paid in Canadian dollars.

In its report presented to GSC, the Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee submitted a recommendation to allow the RCA Canadian congregations to pay the General Synod assessment at a 50 percent currency differential rate. The rationale of the committee was:

1. This is a compromise and an effort at trying to work together to reach a solution that is a “win-win” for all parties concerned.

2. The hope is that this will eliminate the need to revisit this issue each year, even if the Canadian dollar ever becomes higher than the U.S. dollar.

3. This is an effort to standardize the accounting procedures across all the RCA Canadian classes and to have a consistent standard for payment by RCA congregations.

In response, GSC adopted the following recommendation prepared by its Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee for presentation to the 1994 General Synod:

R-5.
To note the RCA policy is to pay all General Synod assessments in U.S. dollars; and further,

to allow the RCA Canadian churches to pay (per calendar year) General Synod assessments at a 50 percent currency differential rate established each January 1 by the RCA treasurer, effective January 1, 1995.

Upon recommendation of the advisory committee, the following was substituted for the above R-5 and the 1994 General Synod voted:

To refer R-5 to the General Synod Council’s Policy and Planning, and Administration Services Committee, in consultation with the RCA Canadian classes and the RCA Office of Finance, for further study and report to the 1995 General Synod (MGS 1994, p. 345).
At its October 1994 meeting, the GSC Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee consulted with the GSC Finance Services Committee. Both committees agreed, by consensus, to recommend GSC resubmit to the 1995 General Synod the above recommendation presented at the 1994 General Synod.

R-8.
To note the RCA policy is to pay all General Synod assessments in U.S. dollars; and further,

to allow the RCA Canadian congregations to pay (per calendar year) General Synod assessments at a 50 percent currency differential rate established each January 1 by the RCA treasurer, effective January 1, 1996. (ADOPTED)

Overtures

Approval of Assessments

1. The Classis of Muskegon overtures General Synod to prepare amendments to the Government of the Reformed Church in America and/or The Bylaws of the General Synod, and/or the Special Rules of Order of the General Synod (Book of Church Order) to require all General Synod votes on General Synod assessments be approved by a two-thirds vote of a quorum present; and further,

   to require all General Synod votes on new General Synod assessments (for ministries or programs not previously funded by assessments) be approved by a two-thirds vote of a quorum present and recommended to the classes for approval by a majority vote in two-thirds of the classes; and further,

   to present a report on approval of General Synod assessments (as described above) at the 1996 General Synod.

Reasons:

1. The easy adoption of General Synod assessments by General Synods in recent years has resulted in the quadrupling of General Synod assessments in ten years. Since 1987, General Synod assessments have increased from $6.50 per active-confirmed member to $23.72 per active-confirmed member in 1995.

2. This rapid increase in General Synod assessments, and especially the addition of General Synod assessments for new programs, has placed a substantial burden on RCA congregations and has resulted in considerable discontent.

3. This assessment burden has met significant resistance and resulted in two RCA classes not paying in full their 1993 General Synod assessment. Representatives from these two classes were then not seated as delegates at the 1994 General Synod (MGS 1994, pp. 6-7, 48-9, 69).
4. These two classes are at an impasse with their congregations. The recourse of these two classes seems to be:

To continue to be disenfranchised by the General Synod.

To require some congregations to pay the assessments that other congregations refuse to pay.

To ask the offending churches to leave the denomination.

5. The requirement of a two-thirds vote on General Synod assessments is reasonable; it is already practiced in some classes for classical assessments.

6. The requirement of approval of new General Synod assessments by two-thirds of the classes is also reasonable; it is similar to what is required for the approval of revisions and amendments to the Book of Church Order. In fact, even one pronoun revision in the Book of Church Order requires approval by two-thirds of the classes.

7. Since the classes are required to collect the General Synod assessments from the congregations within their bounds, it seems wise and fair that the approval of two-thirds of the classes should be required to approve new General Synod assessments.

The advisory committee recommended:

R-9. To instruct the Commission on Church Order to prepare an amendment to the Book of Church Order to require that all new assessments approved by the General Synod—if they are for ministries or programs not previously funded by assessments, and if they exceed by 5 percent the prior year’s total General Synod assessment—be approved by a majority vote in two-thirds of the classes; and further,

to present a report on approval or disapproval of new General Synod assessments at the following year’s General Synod. (APPROVED)

Reason: The congregations, through their respective classes, are entitled to a vote on major increases of General Synod assessments that affect local congregation budgets.

2. The Classis of Illiana overtures the General Synod to prepare amendments to the Government of the Reformed Church in America and/or The Bylaws of the General Synod, and/or the Special Rules of Order of the General Synod (Book of Church Order) to require all General Synod votes on General Synod assessments be approved by a two-thirds vote of a quorum present; and further,

to require all General Synod votes on new General Synod assessments (for ministries or programs not previously funded by assessments) be approved by a two-thirds vote of a quorum present and recommended to the classes for approval by a majority vote in two-thirds of the classes; and further,

to present a report on approval of General Synod assessments (as described above) at the 1996 General Synod.
Reasons:

1. The easy adoption of General Synod assessments by General Synods in recent years has resulted in the quadrupling of General Synod assessments in ten years. Since 1987, General Synod assessments have increased from $6.50 per active-confirmed member to $23.72 per active-confirmed member in 1995.

2. This rapid increase in General Synod assessments, and especially the addition of General Synod assessments for new programs, has placed a substantial burden on RCA congregations and has resulted in considerable discontent.

3. This assessment burden has met significant resistance and resulted in two RCA classes not paying in full their 1993 General Synod assessment. Representatives from these two classes were then not seated as delegates at the 1994 General Synod (MGS 1994, pp. 6-7, 48-9, 69).

4. These two classes are at an impasse with their congregations. The recourse of these two classes seems to be:

   To continue to be disenfranchised by the General Synod.

   To require some congregations to pay the assessments that other congregations refuse to pay.

   To ask the offending churches to leave the denomination.

5. The requirement of a two-thirds vote on General Synod assessments is reasonable; it is already practiced in some classes for classical assessments.

6. The requirement of approval of new General Synod assessments by two-thirds of the classes is also reasonable; it is similar to what is required for the approval of revisions and amendments to the Book of Church Order. In fact, even one pronoun revision in the Book of Church Order requires approval by two-thirds of the classes.

7. Since the classes are required to collect the General Synod assessments from the congregations within their bounds, it seems wise and fair that the approval of two-thirds of the classes should be required to approve new General Synod assessments.

The advisory committee recommended:

R-10.
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reason: Overture 2 is identical to Overture 1. The General Synod adopted R-9 above in response to Overture 1. (See p. 354.)

Exemption from Assessments

3. The Classis of New Brunswick overtures General Synod to exempt a newly-organized RCA congregation following the year of its organization from payment of assessments to classis, regional synod, and the General Synod for a five-year period.
Reason: Newly-organized congregations assume a large financial burden which often exceeds the perceived ability of their members to provide adequate support. A five-year exemption from payment of assessments helps ease this burden.

The advisory committee recommended:

R-11. To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. Overture 3 may be out of order since the General Synod assesses classes, not congregations.

2. The possibility of assessment relief is available through classes or by application by the classes to the General Synod for assessment relief (see MGS 1991, R-5, p. 344).

3. Newly organized congregations do not pay assessments for the first two years since General Synod assessments are based on membership figures from two years before the congregation was organized. No membership statistics are available prior to organization.

4. Since new congregations often take one to two years to organize, these congregations do not pay General Synod assessments during this time.

5. Paying assessments is often a means of becoming familiar with RCA programs and developing a sense of identification and a sense of belonging with the denomination.

From the Report of the President

P-3 was referred to the Advisory Committee on Financial Support.

In response to P-3 (p. 30), the advisory committee recommended:

R-12. To instruct the General Synod Council to develop a plan for funding theological education for RCA students that will solicit funds from various sources other than congregations so ordained leadership candidates can participate in the teaching church program while at the same time obtaining a seminary education; and further,

...to instruct the General Synod Council to submit this plan to the 1996 General Synod for adoption. (ADOPTED)
Report of the Commission on Theology

The Commission on Theology met in two regular sessions during the past year: September 30 and October 1, 1994, at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan, and February 3-4, 1995, at New Brunswick Theological Seminary in New Brunswick, New Jersey.

MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN RELATIONS

The 1994 General Synod received an earlier draft of the paper, “Christian Witness to Islam,” and responded to it with general appreciation (MGS 1994, pp. 348-59). However, in the course of discussion of the paper in the Advisory Committee on Theology and on the floor of General Synod a number of technical problems and inaccuracies were noted. The General Synod therefore referred the paper back to the Commission on Theology “for further precision of expression” and requested a report to the 1995 General Synod (MGS 1994, p. 358). In response to this request, the Commission on Theology submits the following revised paper and accompanying recommendation.

CHRISTIAN WITNESS TO MUSLIMS:
AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ISSUES

Introduction

The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews states:

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds (Heb. 1:1-2).

This, indeed, is the essence of the Christian faith as revealed in the Bible. What, then, shall be a Christian witness to a people who believe that God’s self-revelation took place in a different way?

Simply by bearing the name “Christian,” every believer is a witness to Christ whether he or she wants to be or not. Hence, bearing witness is not a choice for a Christian. The Scriptures are full of this challenge, opportunity, and duty. “God so loved the world”—all of it, all people in it including Muslims”—that he gave his only Son” (John 3:16). One of Christ’s last words before he ascended into heaven gives Christians believers the responsibility of carrying that love to everyone in all the world (Acts 1:8). Failure to bear witness is failure to obey Christ’s command.

Yet, one cannot talk about a witness to Muslims unless one has some understanding of Islam. In spite of the fact that the Reformed Church in America has had work in Muslim lands for over a century, and Islam is found in practically every one of the RCA’s mission fields, as well as in the United States and Canada, there is still much ignorance of Islam and hostility toward Muslims. Such ignorance and hostility are born of misunderstanding, apathy, and cultural differences.

Yet it is increasingly clear that this ignorance and hostility are deeply damaging to the church’s mission. With the presence of so many Muslims in North America now, including areas in which RCA congregations are located, it is crucial for the RCA to have a more
intelligent witness to its Muslim neighbors. This paper will address: 1) Islamic Origins and Fundamentals, 2) Similarities and Differences between Islam and Christianity, and 3) Foundations of Christian Witness. An annotated bibliography follows this paper for those who want to do further study.

1. Islamic Origins and Fundamentals

Islam had its historical origins among the Arab people. Ethnically, the Arabs are Semites like the Jews. Arabs consider themselves to be children of Ishmael, son of Abraham by Hagar. This means that Muslims, Jews, and Christians share a common sense of spiritual descent from Abraham.

According to the Christian Scriptures, Ishmael was born when Abraham was eighty-six years old. Abraham loved Ishmael dearly. When Abraham was promised a son by Sarah, his response was, “O that Ishmael might live in your sight” (Gen. 17:18). God promised to make a great people from Ishmael (Gen. 16:10). Ishmael received the sign of the covenant, circumcision, when he was thirteen years old, at the time when Abraham’s whole household was circumcised (Gen. 17:23-27). While Ishmael and Hagar had to leave Abraham’s house, they apparently were not far away, since Ishmael joined Isaac in burying their father (Gen. 25:9).

The sacred Scripture of Islam, the Qur’an (or Koran), traces the roots of the Arab people back to Abraham through Ishmael. According to a widely accepted tradition in Islam, Ishmael rather than Isaac was the “gentile son” whom Abraham was told to sacrifice (see Surah 37:83-113). Another tradition holds that Abraham and Ishmael built the Ka’aba, the present center of pilgrimage in Mecca (Surah 2:122-125). According to Islamic belief, Abraham shared his faith in the one God with this son whom he loved, and this faith continued among at least some of the Arab people (the hanifs, or monotheistic prophets and reformers).

Historically, Islam as an organized religious system stems from the life and ministry of the prophet Muhammad, who was born in 570 A.D. in Mecca, an important commercial city on the Arabian peninsula. In 595 he married a widow, Khadija, owner of a caravan business. Estranged from the polytheistic religion of his clan, Muhammad began to seek the solitude of a cave outside of Mecca for meditation. About 610, during his meditations, he began having what he believed were revelations from the one true God. Because of hostility from the citizens of Mecca, he left Mecca for Medina in 622, in what was called the Hijrah, or migration. This date marks the official beginning of the Islamic calendar. In 630 Muhammad returned in triumph to Mecca, where he died in 632.

In Islam, Muhammad is considered to be a prophet and an apostle or messenger, following in the line of all the prophets of Judaism and Christianity. He was, in their view, the “seal” of all the prophets, confirming their message and providing its definitive interpretation (Surah 10:38). He is not considered divine and is not worshiped in Islam. Muhammad’s greatest miracle was receiving the Qur’an in Arabic, the full revelation of God, dictated to him by the angel Gabriel.

According to Islam, the Qur’an fulfills, completes, and supplants the Old and New Testaments. Muslims consider it as the direct word of God, and hence as beyond the limitations of human history. The orthodox Muslim view of the Qur’an is probably a stronger view of verbal inspiration than any inerrantist view held in evangelical Christianity. God is the one who speaks in the Qur’an; its underlying theme is the oneness of God. Muslims believe that the Qur’an reveals the will of God for their lives.

After Muhammad’s death, his followers found that there were important matters not explicitly dealt with in the Qur’an. Traditions (hadith) were then collected by believers
concerning what they had heard Muhammad say and what they had seen him do. These were carefully checked as to the credibility of the witnesses involved. While they do not have the validity of the Qur'an, which is regarded as the very word of God, they do have a secondary validity because they come from the mouth or actions of the one who was used by God at this point in history as God's messenger. These two sources, then, the Qur'an and the Hadith, constitute the major sources from which Muslims derive the religious law (shariah), their rule of faith and practice.

Muslims believe that their religion was directly revealed by God; and it is incumbent upon Christians who live and talk with Muslims to be sensitive to their beliefs regarding Muhammad, the Qur'an, and the origins of Islam. On the other hand, historians discern in Islam a synthesis of elements from Judaism, Christianity, and pre-Islamic Arabic religion. Without denying the profound originality and genius of Muhammad, one should also consider some of the historical influences which shaped the Qur'an and which influenced the rise and rapid spread of Islam.

There were many Christians and Jews in Arabia at that time, and it is evident from the Qur'an that Muhammad was familiar with some forms of both Christianity and Judaism. One of his wives and an intimate friend were Christians. He traveled throughout the area in charge of his wife Khadija's caravan business. In these travels he may have lodged in Christian monasteries, a common place for travelers to stay. Muhammad's familiarity with Judeo-Christian Scriptures and themes probably originates in these types of contact.

Islam spread rapidly in a region where Christianity had been strong. Certainly one reason for this was the weakness of the church. Christianity was deeply divided at that time, especially over the issue of the person and work of Christ. A series of schisms and excommunications had greatly weakened the church and obscured its central message. In this situation, the teaching of Muhammad could be seen as a restoration of the power and simplicity of Judeo-Christian monotheism. He offered a message that was strong and clear: there is no deity except the one true God, a God who has sent his revelations to the world through his prophets and apostles. In the Qur'an, Muhammad proclaimed, God has now set forth his definitive instructions for faith and practice, both in the religious life and in the secular world.

After Muhammad's lifetime, armies under the banner of Islam began a series of conquests which would spread Islam from the Atlantic to the borders of China within a century. These conquests were aided by political instability in the Christian world. The Christian Byzantine Empire, which controlled much of what is now the Arab world, had been at war with Persia for many years. The empire had been oppressive, conscripting soldiers for its army and taxing the people heavily. The Muslim invasions, therefore, seemed to offer these Byzantine subjects a way to escape oppression.

Eventually, Muslim armies conquered a vast region which had been predominantly Christian, including Syria, Palestine, Egypt, North Africa, and Spain. Christians and Jews, the so-called "people of the book," were tolerated by the Muslim authorities, and significant Christian communities have survived to the present day in some of these regions. Gradually, however, Islam and the Arabic language became dominant.

During the Middle Ages, European Christians acting on both political and religious motivations attempted to invade and conquer Palestine. The ensuing struggle, known in the West as the Crusades, stretched over two centuries. It ended in defeat for Christendom and dramatically heightened the hostility between the Muslim and Christian worlds. Understandably, many Muslims came to see the Crusades as the first in a long series of imperialistic attacks on their civilization and religion.
Conflict continued on the borders of the Christian and Muslim worlds. Spain, reconquered by Christians during the late Middle Ages, continued to have a significant Islamic minority until the Muslims were expelled in 1609. The remnants of the Byzantine Empire were destroyed in 1453 by the Ottoman Turks, who also took control of much of the Arab world. The Turkish Empire eventually dominated much of Southeastern Europe before it began to recede in the eighteenth century; its weakening led European nations in turn to establish colonial dominance over Islamic peoples. Many of the political and ethnic conflicts of the present—Cyprus, Bosnia, Azerbaijan—have their roots in the religious divisions between Christians and Muslims in this border region.

Since Muhammad’s death, Islam has spread throughout the world. In modern history, much of this growth has occurred not through conquest but through peaceful missionary efforts. Estimates for the number of Muslims today range from six hundred million to one billion, meaning that one out of every five or six people in the world is a Muslim. (In comparison, the number of Christians is estimated at 1.5 billion.)

The Arabs today are a minority in the world of Islam, with the Arabic language a minority language, even though it is the language of the Qur’an. The majority of Muslims today come from Asia, especially from Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, China, and the former Soviet Union. Through immigration, Muslims have become a significant presence in Europe as well as in North America, where they may soon constitute the largest non-Christian religious group. Some of the growth of Islam in North America is also due to conversion, particularly in the African-American community, where highly disciplined forms of Islam have enjoyed significant success in dealing with the problems of urban poverty.

The majority of Muslims subscribe to Sunni Islam, which recognizes the full authority of the Hadith, or traditions concerning Muhammad. The largest non-Sunni group is Shi’ite Islam, which is dominant in Iran and strongly represented in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. The Shi’ites tend to place more emphasis on divinely guided spiritual leaders (imams), and look forward to a future in which religious and temporal leadership are completely reunited. On most fundamental issues, however, Sunni and Shi’ite Muslims are in accord.

2. Christianity and Islam: Similarities and Differences

In order to witness effectively to Muslims, it is important to have some familiarity with the Qur’an. Translations are available in inexpensive paperback editions in most bookstores. (See the bibliography for recommended editions.) One should approach the Qur’an with an open mind, understanding that it differs from the Bible in its style, subject matter, and arrangement. The Qur’an refers frequently to persons and events from the Bible, although these references in the Qur’an may differ in some respects from the corresponding accounts in the Bible.

Understanding the beliefs and practices of another religion is a complex process requiring patience, empathy, and objectivity. The temptation exists to view that religion exclusively through the lens of one’s own faith. This can produce a very inaccurate picture, in which points of resemblance are over-emphasized, and beliefs central to the other religion are obscured. Nonetheless, one can make a beginning effort to understand Islam by noting some important points of similarity and difference between Muslim and Christian beliefs.

Important similarities between Islam and Christianity include the following:

A. Revelation. Both claim to be religions revealed by the one true God. For Muslims, of course, it is the Qur’an which is God’s final revelation to humankind, revealed to Muhammad by the angel Gabriel.
B. Monotheism. Islam is one of the three great monotheistic religions, along with Judaism and Christianity. The basic tenet of Islam is monotheism, the worship of the one true God. The Arab word for God, Allah, is used by both Arabic-speaking Muslims and Christians to refer to the one true God. (Linguistically, the word is related to the Hebrew words El and Elohim.) At the same time, one must realize that the Islamic perception of the identity and activity of God is not entirely the same as the Christian perception. In Islam, as in Christianity, God is the creator and sustainer of the universe and all that is in it. God is all-knowing and all-powerful. God will be the judge on the day of judgment, granting eternal life to believers and condemning unbelievers to hell. God is the forgiver of sins, merciful and compassionate. Yet Islam teaches that God demands complete obedience and submission, or surrender (the meaning of the Arabic word “Islam”) to God’s revealed will as it is found in the Qur’an and the Hadith.

C. Prophets. The Qur’an has a high regard for the prophets who came before Muhammad, including the patriarchs in the Old Testament, and Jesus and John the Baptist in the New Testament. It adds the names of other prophets from the Arabic tradition. These are all men whom God chose to bring his messages or guidance (huda) to the peoples of the world. God chose a few prophets to be his special messengers or apostles. A messenger is a prophet to whom God has “sent down” a book. According to Islam, God sent down the Torah to Moses, the Psalms to David, the Gospel to Jesus, and the Qur’an to Muhammad.

The Qur’an gives a special place to Jesus. It states that he was born of the Virgin Mary, without a human father. He was the greatest prophet and teacher before Muhammad. He did many miracles, healing the sick and raising the dead, miracles which even Muhammad did not do. Jesus is in heaven today with his human body; he will return at the end of history to vindicate Islam and usher in the final judgment. Jesus is called “the Messiah” in the Qur’an; other names are “Son of Mary,” “the Messenger of God,” “a word from God,” and “a spirit from God.”

D. The five pillars. Surrender to God is made possible through sincerely practicing the five pillars of Islam. Some of the ideas behind these pillars are common to Judaism and Christianity. They provide contact points for dialogue between Muslims and Christians.

The first pillar is witness. A believer must make public confession of his or her faith in God and Islam before credible witnesses. For the Muslim this means to “bear witness that there is no deity except the one true God, and that Muhammad is his messenger.”

The second pillar is worship, or prayer. After ritual washing, the believer recites prescribed prayers and verses from the Qur’an while facing in the direction of the Ka’aba in Mecca. There are instructions for the position of the body at various points in the worship. This worship is to be offered five times every day. There is time allotted for personal prayers at the conclusion of the worship experience, but they are not mandatory. While worship is possible anywhere, the recommended place is the mosque or masjid.

The third pillar is fasting during the month of Ramadan, the month in which Muhammad began receiving his revelations. During this month, a Muslim is forbidden to take anything into his or her body from dawn to sunset. Much time should be spent in the contemplation of God, worshiping God, and reading or listening to the Qur’an.
The fourth pillar is the giving of alms to the poor, especially during the month of Ramadan. This practice emphasizes that the believer's possessions must also be submitted to God by being shared with the poor.

The final pillar is the pilgrimage (hajj). If possible, all Muslims should make the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their lifetime. Preferably, this should be done in the pilgrimage month, arriving in time to observe the first ten days of the month in Mecca.

Along with these five pillars, there is a strong emphasis in the Qur'an on doing good deeds and living a righteous life, walking the straight path which God has revealed. Whatever Christians may think of the origin and nature of Islam, it is evident that there are many sincere, upright Muslims who are sincerely seeking to serve the One they know as God.

While there are a number of similarities between Islam and Christianity, there are also basic differences which people must eventually deal with, whether in evangelization or in dialogue. Christians can retain the respect of those who differ with them only as Christians truly know their own faith and are able to explain it to others. This means that Christians understand others' beliefs in addition to their own, and how others' beliefs differ from their own.

Important differences between Islam and Christianity include the following:

A. Revelation. Christians believe that the Bible came into being over a span of centuries through the Spirit of God dwelling within the writers, inspiring them, yet working through their own personalities. Although the original text of the Bible is written in Hebrew and Greek, the Bible is given for all people in all ages, and should therefore be translated into all languages in order that everyone can understand and profit from its message. This revelation became incarnate in Jesus, the "Word made flesh," so that Christians understand the Bible as finding its fulfillment and meaning in Christ.

Muslims believe that the Qur'an was revealed in Arabic to one person over approximately twenty-two years, dictated to Muhammad by the angel Gabriel. Muhammad recited it word for word to his followers, who wrote it down. After the death of Muhammad, the messages were eventually brought together in a single book. Muslims believe that it is impossible to translate the Qur'an exactly into any other language. What Christians would regard as a translation of the Qur'an would be called by Muslims an "interpretation" or a paraphrase. In Islamic worship services, the Qur'an is to be read only in Arabic.

From these differences in the concept of revelation, one can easily understand why the proliferation of translations of the Bible raises questions in the minds of Muslims as to the authenticity of the Bible. Because languages continually change, Christians feel translations of the Bible must be updated in order to convey the ideas that God gave to the original writers. The Muslim believes that the ideas of the Qur'an remain clear only as the original Arabic words are retained.

B. Trinity. Muslims reject the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, holding it to be an unacceptable qualification of the monotheism which is central to Islam. In fact, many Muslims understand the doctrine in a way which is closer to "tri-theism" than to a declaration of the "tri-unity" of the one God, which, of course, offends the powerful Islamic conviction of the oneness of God. Apparently for this reason, among the ninety-nine beautiful names for God in Islamic tradition, the term "Father" is never used, and the term "Son of God" is never used for Jesus.
The Holy Spirit is mentioned frequently in the Qur'an as an instrument of God's revelation to his messengers. But the Spirit is not understood in Islam as a personal presence within all believers, empowering them to live faithfully before God.


D. Human sinfulness and redemption. Another major difference between Islam and Christianity lies in the Muslim view of the human predicament and its solution. According to the Qur'an, humans were created weak and imperfect. God then sent his prophets in order to guide them on “the straight path” which would lead them to Paradise. This path includes becoming a Muslim and practicing the five pillars of the faith. As long as a person does this, and does not become a worshiper of more than one god, he or she will enter into Paradise.

There appears to be no word for, or idea of, “sinfulness” in Arabic. According to Islam, although Adam was weak at creation, humans are not “born in sin.” Basically, to sin is to wander from the straight path, or to commit mistakes. When one sins he or she must ask God’s forgiveness, seek to make amends for the wrong done, and return to the straight path. There does not seem to be the sense of alienation between God and humanity as a consequence of sin which Christianity expresses in its doctrine of original sin.

Since Islam’s view of the human predicament is more optimistic than Christianity’s, it should not surprise Christians that Islam sees no need for a divine act of redemption. Hence, for Muslims the death of Jesus has no saving significance. Through the mercy of God, individuals can be saved by means of the five pillars.

This is illustrated where the Qur'an (4:157), describing the persecution of the prophets, says about Jesus, “They slew him not nor crucified him, but it appeared so to them.” The Arabic in the last part of the sentence is ambiguous, and Muslim scholars disagree on its interpretation: either the crucifixion happened with the one crucified appearing to be Jesus, or the crucifixion only appeared to happen. The main point is that Islam feels no need for a savior or redeemer. It was not, in their view, necessary for Jesus to die in this way. On the other hand, as Cragg says, “Christianity must hold on to the central Christian conviction, as the heart of its scripture and liturgy, of the God whose sovereignty fulfills itself in the love that comes, suffers, and reconciles, in the measures we can identify in Jesus and the cross” (*The Arab Christian*, p. 293).

E. Religion and state. Islam makes no separation between religion and the state. It is a complete way of life, including politics, culture, economics, and all other aspects of life. Islam in its pure form is not a state religion, but rather a theocracy, a religious state. Christians and Jews have continued to live under Islam as *dhimmis*, or tolerated minorities; they are allowed to have their own laws and courts and to carry on their own affairs without interference from the state. But the ideal situation, in the Islamic view, is one in which religious and political power are closely linked. Many of the movements in contemporary Islam which are described as “fundamentalist” are attempting to move the Islamic world closer to that ideal.
Islam and Christianity are both monotheistic religions worshipping one God; many of the words and ideas are the same. Yet the two are not one, and nothing will make them one. Christians and Muslims fail to understand each other's religion in their own integrity when one says that both religions are following the same path in their worship of this one God. People of both faiths will profit, however, as they become better acquainted with one another and seek to live together in love and peace, respecting each other's faith while giving witness to their own.

3. Foundations of Christian Witness

How then shall Christians witness to their Muslim neighbors in the light of Christ's statement, "You are my witnesses"?

A. A Question of Balance

Christians today often find themselves divided between two conceptions of witness, one focusing on evangelization, the other on dialogue. Witness through evangelization assumes that the eventual goal of sharing one's faith with another is to convert the other to Christianity. This approach takes very seriously Christ's command to "make disciples of all nations." It assumes that religions are not all fundamentally the same or equally valid, and that the gospel is the answer to the deepest spiritual needs of every individual and every culture.

The emphasis on evangelization captures important aspects of the mission which Christ gave to the church. Without it, Christianity is seen as a mere product of the culture rather than as a proclamation of God's universal truth and love. Yet, it may also present Christians with temptations:

The temptation to assume that one's culturally shaped version of Christianity is equivalent to the gospel itself.

The temptation to manipulate any encounter with non-Christians so that the Christian message will prevail.

The temptation to forget that it is God, not Christians, who regenerates, saves, and sanctifies, and that Christians must await God's work while avoiding pressure and manipulation.

Some Christians have reacted to these temptations by expressing their witness through the model of dialogue. These believers want to see Christian witness expressed in a nonmanipulative and generous way, which respects the integrity and freedom of the other. For too long, they argue, Christian witness has been used as a tool of dominance by western imperialism; now it is time for Christians to listen as well as speak, to learn as well as teach.

This perspective also captures an important element of the attitude required of Christ's followers—that they offer the gospel in a way which reflects Christ's nonviolent and self-sacrificial love. In view of the history of conflict and colonialism which has shaped relations between Christians and Muslims, this is a vital insight. Yet here, too, there are temptations to be avoided:

The temptation of an easy relativism, which assumes that whatever anyone believes is "right" for them.
The temptation to see evangelization only in coercive terms, and in the context of western imperialism.

The temptation to neglect the universal scope of God's gracious act of reconciliation in Christ.

A balanced view of Christian witness will incorporate both evangelization and dialogue. It will lead Christians to obey the command of Christ to share the gospel with the whole world, even while treating the convictions of others with understanding and respect. It will teach Christians to be sensitive to the ways in which the Christian mission can be perceived by others as coercive and dominating, without losing confidence in the goodness of God's purpose in Christ for all people and all nations. What follows is an attempt to provide guidance for Christians who seek to provide a balanced witness to the good news of Jesus Christ.

B. Witness through Evangelization in Word and Deed

Offering an authentic witness to the Christian faith in the contemporary world is never an easy task. But it is made more difficult by the fact that both here in North America and around the world, the media, especially through movies and videos, as well as newspapers and books, present a false picture of Christianity. Just as most North Americans know about Islam only from the media, even so, most Muslims also know Christianity in the same way. Christians are combating a strong foe in North America, which presents a very warped picture of Christ and Christianity, as well as of Islam.

Compounding this problem is the negative witness provided by the behavior of Americans, whom most people around the world consider as “Christians.” It is taken for granted that Americans do what they do because they are Christians, just as most Americans think Palestinians, Iranians, Saudis, etc., do what they do because they are Muslims. Of course, neither supposition is accurate.

This means that the first challenge for Christians bearing witness to Muslims is to counteract negative or inaccurate stereotypes of the Christian faith which may exist in the minds of Muslims (as well as dealing with the stereotypes of Islam which exist in the minds of Christians). If such stereotypes are to be overcome, it will not be by words but by example. The way in which Christians live their lives will have a far greater impact on the fruitfulness of their witness than the words they use to express their beliefs. In fact, apart from their lives, their words are of little effect.

The greatest example in witness is the person of Christ. Christ came to proclaim and demonstrate God's love for all people. Christ lived that same love as God's Word incarnate, so that people could see and experience it. Surely one of the main things that attracted people to Jesus was his life among them. Jesus challenged them to believe in him because of the works he did (John 10:37-38). In order to witness to Christ, then, Christians must witness as Christ did, embodying Christ's love in their lives.

The book of Acts says of the apostles that people “recognized that they had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13b, RSV). Being with Jesus made a difference. Their lives were different since they had submitted to Christ. They became credible witnesses because they were different. This has to be the basis of one's Christian witness, especially in the Muslim world. Most Muslims are content with the life they have in Islam. Do Christians have anything better to offer them? Do Christians show this in their relationships with them? Are Christians loving, forgiving, caring people? Do Christians have something in their personal lives that Muslims do not have in Islam? Only in the context of such a living witness can Christians meaningfully share their reasons for living as they do.
If Muslim friends indicate an interest in reading the Bible and especially the New Testament, it would probably be best to read with them, or give them, the Gospel of Luke first. Luke starts with the annunciation to Elizabeth and Zechariah, the annunciation to Mary, and the birth of Jesus—all of which are mentioned in the Qur'an. Of course, other elements of the Gospel may be disturbing for Muslims, particularly references to Jesus as the Son of God. Remember that an abstract discussion of the Trinity or the divinity of Christ at this point will not help a Muslim reader to understand and appreciate the character of Jesus as portrayed in the Gospel of Luke. Also, remember that the Muslim denial of these doctrines is intended to avoid an idolatrous confusion of the world with its Creator—a goal that Christians share.

After having established a good relationship and understanding of one another, other parts of the New Testament may be explored. Meaningful dialogue will come about only when there is mutual confidence. This can then lead to discussions of more complex issues such as sin and salvation, the person of Christ, and the Trinity. These discussions should be respectful of Muslim convictions, but should also serve as an opportunity to express the heart of the Christian faith—"God has spoken to us by a Son," not merely communicating with humankind but entering into our reality and triumphing over the sin and despair of the human predicament.

C. Witness through Dialogue

Christian-Muslim dialogue refers to conversation between individuals or groups about the beliefs and practices of the two religions, as well as about issues of common concern to the Christian and Muslim communities. An important goal of dialogue is to help people of one faith understand people of another faith, not as exotic "foreigners," but as neighbors who share many hopes, concerns, and interests. Another goal is to learn more about one's self through opening one's self to the insights and responses of others.

Genuine dialogue is not a substitute for the proclamation of the gospel, but rather a special form of witness with distinct goals. It does not require glossing over one's beliefs in order to avoid offense to the other. Rather, it requires honest sharing of basic convictions from both faiths in order to come to a better mutual understanding. Members of each religion must respect the other for who they are and what they believe. Dialogue is not argument, and the participant in dialogue must set aside any intent to "win." To be effective, there must be an openness on the part of both sides to ask and answer honestly questions about the deep matters of each other's faith.

Group dialogue is valuable in bringing people together for a better understanding of each other's religion and their own. It can also lead to the opportunity to work together to meet common social needs. Muslims are as disturbed as Christians are by crime, terrorism, the collapse of public morality, the conflict between science and religion, the decline of education, and so forth. These are all common concerns in which Christians and Muslims can be involved together, since these concerns pertain to problems faced by both.

It is important, of course, for Christians who enter into dialogue to know the Christian faith and to have a thorough knowledge of the Bible. Those Christians who have the opportunity to engage in dialogue should first ask themselves whether they can clearly explain the Christian life and salvation to someone who has never heard it. It is especially important to be able to discern what is essential to the Christian faith, as distinguished from elements which are peripheral or cultural. In addition, Christians in dialogue need at least a basic understanding of Islam. This requires some familiarity with the Qur'an and with the history of Islam. Christians must be aware of those things
that will offend Muslims as well as those things on which there is agreement. Eventually, basic differences must be dealt with, including theological matters such as the divinity of Christ, human sinfulness, the cross, and the Trinity. Christians must also be prepared to deal with social issues such as the relationship between religion and politics. These differences should not be evaded, although there is no need to emphasize them at the beginning of the dialogue. When they do arise, Christian participants should make it clear that they respect the sincerity and the concerns of their dialogue partners even if they cannot agree.

Few have the opportunity to be involved in group dialogue. However, personal dialogue is open to all who have contact with Muslims where they live and work, and this may prove to be more challenging, enjoyable, and beneficial than group dialogue. As Christians caring for other people, Christians may often have the opportunity to begin the dialogue. It is an opportunity to reach out in the name, the spirit, and the love of Christ. As the parable of the Good Samaritan makes clear, Christians must not merely say, but also demonstrate, that Christians are neighbors to Muslims in their midst.

Conclusion

The world draws closer every day. Those whom we thought at one time were far away have become our neighbors. The Scriptures encourage Christians to show their love for God by loving their neighbors (1 John 4:20-21). The greatest gift Christians have to share with Muslims is the life and peace that comes through faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Christians should not hesitate in sharing this precious gift with Muslims. Yet the gift must be shared in a way which reflects the mind of Christ, “who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant” (Phil. 2:6-7, RSV). As Christians serve their Muslim neighbors in Christ’s love, the Holy Spirit will open up opportunities for genuine and effective witness.

Annotated Bibliography


**R-1.**

To commend the paper "Christian Witness to Muslims: An Introduction to the Issues" for educational purposes in congregations, institutions, and agencies of the Reformed Church in America; and further,

*to encourage congregations, institutions, and agencies of the Reformed Church in America to put its principles into action.* (ADOPTED)

➢ The advisory committee recommended:

**R-2.**

To urge the General Synod Council Evangelism and Church Development Services Committee/Unit to identify models of ministry that use the principles outlined in the paper, "Christian Witness to Muslims"; and further,

*to commend these models to RCA congregations.* (ADOPTED)

Reason: The advisory committee was aware of ministries that utilize these principles and believed R-2 is an excellent way to inform and help RCA congregations implement these principles. <
ORDINATION AND THE LAYING ON OF HANDS

The Bylaws of the General Synod state that the responsibilities of the Commission on Theology include not only the study of theological matters referred to it by the General Synod, but also those "initiated within the commission itself" (Book of Church Order, Chap. 3, Part I, Art. 5, Sec. 8.b). The following paper and recommendations received an impetus from an inquiry directed to the commission from an RCA classis. However, the scope of the paper and its recommendations reflects the judgment of the commission that this topic is one which merits consideration in the Reformed Church in America as a whole.

CONCERNING THE PRACTICE OF THE LAYING ON OF HANDS IN THE ORDINATION SERVICES OF THE REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA

Introduction

The Commission on Theology prepared this paper in response to an inquiry concerning whether or not elders should be allowed to participate in the laying on of hands in the ordination service of those called to the ministry of Word and sacrament. Although it was tempting to offer a simple "yes" or "no" answer, the commission believes that this inquiry raises fundamental theological concerns which deserve the consideration of the whole church. The inquiry provides an opportunity to explore the following: 1) the place and purpose of the service of ordination to office in the Reformed tradition; 2) the meaning of the laying on of hands in such services; 3) the relationship between the several offices of the Reformed Church in America (deacon, minister, elder); and 4) the relationship of these offices to the ministry of the whole people of God. Although the inquiry which prompted this paper concerned only the laying on of hands in service of ordination for ministers of Word and sacrament, the commission presents recommendations which can be used to guide the church's practice of the laying on of hands in all ordination services.

1. In the Reformed tradition, the service of ordination is understood as part of a larger process.

To begin, it is helpful to gain perspective on the place and purpose of the service of ordination. In the Reformed tradition the service of ordination to any of the church's offices takes place at the end of a larger process. Without the larger process a service of ordination cannot take place. The process begins in God's initiative, that is, in God's call of and bestowal of spiritual gifts on persons to serve in the ordained offices of the church. God's call is made manifest and efficacious through the call of the whole people of God. This pattern is clear in the stories of the early church. When the work of the ministry became too much for the twelve apostles to bear alone, they directed the whole community of disciples to select from among themselves seven who were of "good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom" who could share in the leadership of the church (Acts 6:1-6). The whole community identified those among them who were already full of the Spirit and the wisdom of God, those already set apart and equipped by God for the work of ministry.

In the RCA it is the responsibility of the whole congregation prayerfully and thoughtfully to discern God's prior calling in their election of elders and deacons. Following their election, the names of elders and deacons are published over several weeks in order to ensure that the calling of the congregation truly reflects God's calling. At the end of this process, undertaken by the whole congregation, those elected for the first time are ordained to the offices of elder and/or deacon.
The Reformed understanding of call as a process which begins in God's initiative and is finally affirmed and effected through the service of ordination is undoubtedly made clearest in the case of those who are called to the office of minister of Word and sacrament. Persons who believe themselves to be called to this office must receive the affirmation of a local church through the consistory; be welcomed into the care of a classis; engage in supervised ministerial preparation; be tested through the public examination of gifts, learning, and overall fitness for ministry; be called by God's people to a particular ministry within the universal ministry of the church; and finally, be confirmed by the Holy Spirit through the church in the solemn and celebratory service of ordination.

The service of ordination to office in the RCA is a public affirmation of God's work in calling and equipping a person to serve. The service completes the church's own critical task of discerning and calling those whom God has set apart to minister in the offices of the church. Through the service of ordination, those called are publicly authorized by the church to begin their labors as elders, ministers, and deacons with the commission of Jesus Christ, the blessing of God, the empowering of the Spirit, and the support of the church.

2. The service of ordination in the Reformed tradition has always been a public worship service characterized by a variety of practices, such as fasting and prayer, preaching, exhortation concerning the office, public questioning of the ordinand and the congregation, the offering of the right hand of fellowship, and/or the imposition of hands.

Again, as established above, the service of ordination to office is but one part of a larger process which begins in God's call and continues through the discernment, preparation, calling, and authorization of God's church. In the Reformed tradition the orders for ordination themselves included many parts. One can find remarkable consistency of practice in these early Reformed orders. Fasting and prayer, preaching, exhortation concerning the office, and public questioning of the candidate(s) for ordination served to edify, instruct all present, and confirm the intent of God to set the candidate apart, the desire of the candidate to be set apart, and the wisdom of the church in discerning and making visible God's own desires and purposes.

Concerning the necessity of the laying on of hands as part of the ordination service, the earliest orders for the ordination of ministers in the Reformed tradition illustrate that there was no apparent agreement on the matter. Some thought it was essential, while others thought it better to omit the practice so as not to introduce the kinds of superstition which they cited in the Roman Catholic sacrament of ordination. John Calvin believed the practice was biblical and could even serve as a helpful outward sign of ordination, yet his own Genevan "Ordinances" excluded the gesture in order to avoid promoting superstitions among the people. In John Knox's Genevan Form of Prayer, there is "a procedure for the election and examination of ministers, elders, and deacons, but there is no ritual for their ordination or installation." It appears that, for Knox, "the election itself was regarded as the initiatory act."
In one of the most fully developed sixteenth century Reformed directories for the election and installation of pastors, the instruction is that "all the Elders put their hands on the head of the candidate, giving prayer to God that he will send his Holy Spirit that he may be able faithfully to serve in this ministry, to the glory of his name and the edification of his church." In the case of the ordination of elders, following their interrogation, "the Pastor and all the Elders laid their hands on their heads" and the pastor invoked the Holy Spirit on them. Similarly, in the case of deacons, the pastor and elders laid hands on those being ordained and invoked the Holy Spirit. In another early Reformed order developed for Dutch refugees in London, the form for the ordination of ministers directs that following the main prayer and Lord's Prayer, the presiding "Minister of the Word with the other Ministers" lay hands on the heads of the chosen, invoking on them "the Spirit's enlightenment, strength, and government."

It appears that in some Reformed orders for ordination, the offering of the right hand of fellowship by elders and ministers to the newly ordained minister served as a sign of consent and a worthy substitute for the laying on of hands.

Where the laying on of hands was included in the service of ordination, there is evidence of diversity on the question of who could be included in this gesture. As was shown above, in some of the early Reformed orders the entire presbyterian eldership, elders and ministers together, participated in the laying on of hands in the ordination of ministers, elders, and deacons. Other orders directed that only ministers of the Word participate. Over time, some Reformed orders, which once allowed for the whole eldership to participate in the laying on of hands, began to restrict this gesture only to "preaching elders" or ministers, allowing the other elders to participate in the ordination service only through prayers and exhortations.

It is not clear why the practice shifted over time, but it is regrettable. Calvin and other reformers feared that the rite of the laying on of hands would introduce confusion and superstition among the people. They were anxious not to suggest that those laying on hands transmitted the office and/or Spirit of God. They wanted instead to present ordination as an act of the whole church. That is why some, to avoid confusion, eliminated the ritual action from the service of ordination altogether. By restricting to ministers a ritual action which had once belonged to ministers and elders together, some early Reformed orders obscured the more broadly representative nature of ordination and may have thereby introduced the very superstitions they had hoped to avoid.

3. The liturgy for the ordination of ministers of the Word and sacrament in the Reformed Church in America has always included the laying on of hands, although there have been changes concerning who should participate in this liturgical gesture.

Turning from this general survey of Reformed practice concerning the laying on of hands to the practice in the RCA, the commission finds both constancy and change. This section examines the forms for the ordination of ministers of Word and sacrament. The section which follows this section focuses on the forms for the ordination of elders and deacons. There is not, nor has there ever been, in the RCA's liturgy a form for the ordination of those elected to the office of professor of theology.

The 1767 "Form for Ordaining the Ministers of God's Word" prescribed that either the minister who questioned the ordinand, or another minister, if present, "shall lay his hands on his [the ordinand's] head" while praying for the enlightening of the Spirit, the strengthening of God's hand, and the governing of the ordinand's ministry. By 1814 the liturgy prescribed that the presiding minister, "and other ministers who are present shall lay their hands on his head," while the presiding minister says the prayer as above.
In his *Notes on the Constitution of the Reformed Church in America*, William Demarest explained concerning the laying on of hands that “ministers alone fulfill this duty for the classis in the procedure laid down by the church, as especially qualified for it by their holding the office to which the candidate is now admitted.” In this explanation Demarest granted that ministers lay their hands on the ordinands on behalf of the whole classis, which always acts on behalf of the whole church, but restricts the action to ministers because they alone occupy the office.

The rubric authorizing only ministers to participate in the laying on of hands remained unchanged until 1952, when the liturgy included this proviso: “Since ordination to the Ministry is a prerogative of a Classis, ordinarily only ministers of the ordaining Classis will take part in the laying on of hands.” It is not altogether clear what is meant by the use of the word “ordinarily.” One might conclude that sometimes ministers from another classis or even another denomination might be invited to participate. Or, one might conclude that sometimes elders and ministers of the ordaining classis might be welcomed to share in this liturgical and pastoral action. Unfortunately, there are no documents available which might help one to understand the intent in this change of wording. Regardless of the original intent, one can conclude that this change in the rubric accompanying the laying on of hands opened the door to the possibility that other ministers and elders might be invited by the classis to join in this action and the prayer for the Spirit which accompanies it.

The next major change in practice was rubricated in the liturgy presented at the 1982 General Synod and approved the following year. Following the interrogation of the candidate by the presiding officer of the classis, which could be either a minister or elder, the liturgy directs that “the presiding officer shall ask the members of the classis to come forward. Those the classis shall invite may join in the laying on of hands.” At the very least, this direction has elders and ministers standing around the kneeling candidate. But, it is hard to imagine why all these folks would be invited forward at this point in the service if not to participate in the laying on of hands, elders and ministers together. The added direction that “those the classis shall invite may join in the laying on of hands” appears to apply to persons who are not members of the classis. Although it is not absolutely clear, the 1983 liturgy appears to welcome both ministers and elders of the classis to share in the laying on of hands, along with others that the classis may invite from the larger church.

However, when the 1983 liturgy was published in 1987 in *Worship the Lord*, the direction read: “the presiding officer shall ask the ministers of classis to come forward,” presumably as above, to join in the laying on of hands, along with “those the classis shall invite.” What happened between 1983 and 1987 which resulted in this change to the liturgy? The commission does not know. In 1988 the Classis of South Grand Rapids and the Particular Synod of Michigan, assuming that the published change was simply an error, presented overtures in which they requested that the liturgy be corrected to read as approved by the 1983 General Synod (*MGS* 1988, pp. 221-22). They received assurances from the persons responsible for the printing of the church’s liturgical resources that the error would be corrected. As of the fall of 1994, this error appears not to have been corrected in current editions of the *Liturgy and Confessions*.

If it is assumed that the liturgy approved in 1983 has been subsequently printed with an error in the invitation to those who may lay on hands, and further, that the error will be corrected, one can say with some certainty that the intent of the 1983 liturgy for the ordination of ministers of the Word and sacrament was to invite elders and ministers together to participate in the laying on of hands. This change in practice would align the RCA with its Presbyterian brothers and sisters who share with the RCA a presbyterian church order, but who more clearly hold together the offices of minister and elder by referring to the former as the “teaching elder” and the latter as the “ruling elder” and by including both in the laying on of hands when persons are ordained to either office. These offices together constitute the
eldership of the church, and therefore there is every reason in the RCA for these two types of elders—ministers and elders—to participate together in laying hands on those ordained to either office.

4. The liturgy for the ordination of elders and deacons in the Reformed Church in America has not always included the laying on of hands, but now does.

Although John Calvin pointed to the example of the New Testament church to argue that the laying on of hands is an appropriate and even helpful sign of ordination for those elected to the church's offices, and the most fully developed early orders for Reformed ordinations included the laying on of hands for those ordained as ministers, elders, and deacons, the RCA's liturgies from 1767 to 1904 did not include the gesture. Where one might expect to find it, following the interrogation of those who have been elected, there is only this simple prayer: “The Almighty God replenish you all with his grace that you may faithfully and fruitfully discharge your respective offices. Amen” (Liturgy, 1767-1860). The prayer is followed by exhortations to the elders, deacons, and congregation.

The laying on of hands in the service for the ordination of elders and deacons first appeared in the 1904 edition of the liturgy. Here it was presented as an option which may be exercised by the presiding minister, but which was not considered “essential to full and proper ordination” (Liturgy, 1904). Accompanying the laying on of hands in the service for the ordination of ministers, there is a prayer for the Holy Spirit to enlighten, strengthen, and govern the ordained. In the service for elders and deacons, the original prayer disappears, and in its place appears this directive and declaration: “Take thou name authority to exercise the office of Elder (or Deacon) in the Reformed Church in America: in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. In the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church, I now declare you to have been ordained and to be duly installed in your offices of Elders and Deacons, and I now commend you to the grace of God in the discharge of all your duties” (Liturgy, 1904). Then follows a benediction.

No changes were made to this liturgy until 1968. In the 1968 revision of the liturgy, the laying on of hands became a requirement which is fulfilled by the presiding minister. No longer is it stated that this gesture is not considered “essential to full and proper ordination.” Also included in the 1968 service for the ordination of elders and deacons is the prayer for the Spirit which accompanies the laying on of hands in the service of ordination for ministers. However, in the case of elders and deacons, the prayer does not accompany the laying on of hands. Instead, the prayer is offered just prior to the “ordination and installation” section of the service, which includes the laying on of hands along with the directive given in previous liturgies.

In 1983 the service for the ordination of elders and deacons brought together the laying on of hands, the prayer for the Spirit, and the declaration of ordination. These same elements are found in the service for the ordination of ministers, although in slightly different order. Since 1983 this service of ordination indicates that those persons who have been ordained to the same office should be invited to lay their hands on those being ordained.

The commission’s survey of the actual practice of the laying on of hands in the RCA’s liturgies for ordination demonstrates that there has been confusion in the RCA’s history concerning this gesture. Why has it always been practiced in the ordination of ministers, but only since 1904 in the ordination of elders and deacons, although there is biblical and historical support to do it in all cases? Why is it that ministers are invited to lay hands on those being ordained to any office, while the current published liturgies only allow elders and deacons to lay hands on those being ordained to the same office?

In part, the questions raised above are connected to one's understanding of what is actually being done when hands are laid on those being ordained. It is little surprise that the RCA's own practice has been somewhat confused. The question of precisely what is signified by the laying on of hands has long been debated in the church universal, and there remains today a great diversity of opinion on the matter.

The practice of the laying on hands in the early church found its roots in the practice of Israel. Among the Israelites, the gesture was most frequently found in the context of the presentation of animals for sacrificial offering. Those presenting large sacrifices placed a hand on the head of the animal in order to signify to the priest that this offering was being presented on their behalf. Similarly, in placing their hands on the Levites (Num. 8:10), the Israelites showed that these persons were "their offering" to God and that the benefits of the Levites' service would accrue to them. Following God's instruction, Moses placed two hands on Joshua's head in order to set him apart as the new leader of Israel (Num. 27:23). The gesture served to make clear to the people that Joshua was the leader designated by God. In all of these instances, the laying on of hands demonstrates "who or what is the focus of the ritual action." The action also makes clear the important bond between the one who lays on hands and the one who is thereby set apart.

In the New Testament the laying on of hands functions similarly, as a way of setting apart certain persons to specific tasks (Acts 6:6). Where the laying on of hands is done for the purpose of setting apart leaders for the church's ministry, it is done by the apostles and is accompanied by prayer (Acts 6:6). Some elders were set apart by the community's appointment, their prayers, and fasting, without the laying on of hands by anyone (e.g. Acts 14:23). In the case of Timothy, the laying on of hands which he received from the council of elders (1 Tim. 4:14) and the apostle Paul (2 Tim. 1:6) served to set him apart and to pass on to him a gift from God. This may be a reference to the gift of the Spirit or the gift of the continuing ministry of Jesus Christ.

The New Testament by itself does not provide one with a clearly articulated theology concerning the laying on of hands in relation to the designation of church leaders, nor a consistently articulated practice. The available examples are few and diverse. In order to arrive at his own understanding of the matter, Calvin relied on the witness of the Old and New Testaments together and concluded: "The apostles...signified by the laying on of hands that they were offering to God him whom they were receiving into the ministry.... In this way they consecrated the pastors and teachers, and the deacons." In this simple and appealing explanation Calvin says nothing about the transmission of the Spirit or the office through the gesture, nor about the relationship between the laying on of hands and the notion of apostolic succession which was being debated all around him.

In the tradition of the Catholic Church, apostolic succession is understood as the succession of bishop to bishop, in an unbroken chain which reaches all the way back to the first apostles. It is believed that the true teaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ is guaranteed by the long unbroken chain of properly ordained bishops who lay their hands on those being ordained to office in the church. This notion of apostolic succession created serious difficulty for the reformers.

Practically speaking, it was difficult to insist that one was a part of the apostolic chain when in fact one had broken with the Catholic Church and had been ordained outside the chain of bishops which reached back to the apostles. So, rather than locate the guarantee of apostolic succession in the hands of bishops, the reformers preferred to speak of apostolic succession in terms of faithfulness to the teachings of the apostles. They were interested in maintaining
the unbroken succession of the true doctrine originally derived from the apostles. They were convinced that this doctrinal succession did not depend on the handing on of doctrine in a formal line, from predecessor to successor, beginning with the apostles through a line of bishops.

The reformers believed that the succession of apostolic doctrine was assured in two ways. From one perspective, they taught that those who preach and teach the true doctrine of Christ are the true successors of Christ, regardless of whether or not they are part of an unbroken chain formed by the laying on of hands and the transmission of apostolic authority. Doctrinal succession was carried on by "all those in the official ministry of the church who, from the earliest to the latest, had held forth the same Word of God, deriving it...from Christ and the Apostles, from the most authentic sources available to them at any time, and of course, from the Scriptures in so far as they might be known." Those who do not preach and teach the true doctrine of Christ are not in the succession, but their failure does not break the succession. This Reformed view of true doctrinal succession reflects a high view of the office of ordained ministry which is responsible for the "pure preaching of the gospel" and "the pure administration of the sacraments" (Belgic Confession, Art. 29).

But this perspective on the ordained ministry was bound to another, equally important. The reformers also trusted that the succession of pure apostolic doctrine was vouchsafed in the very existence of the whole church. They confessed that the church which was created by Christ would always continue through "the succession of true Christians, generation after generation." They believed "that the Son of God through his Spirit and Word, out of the entire human race, from the beginning of the world to its end, gathers, protects, and preserves for himself a community chosen for eternal life and united in true faith" (Heidelberg Catechism, A. 54). The whole church, not just a part of it, could bear witness to the risen Christ through its life and doctrine, thereby claiming for itself continuity with the apostolic doctrine as the most authentic form of apostolic succession.

Within this dual perspective of Reformed tradition, one sees that the succession of apostolic doctrine in the church depends on the pure teaching and preaching of the gospel which cannot occur apart from the ordained ministry. Reformed theology teaches that the continuity of the true church is maintained, in large part, "through the gift of the ordained ministry." But this continuity within the ordained ministry flows out of the succession of the church, the succession of true Christians from generation to generation. The succession of the church and its ministry from the apostles to the present does not depend on unbroken chains of individuals, nor on the power, perfection, infallibility, or faithfulness of the church. Rather, "the decisive point is always the faithfulness of Christ who remains with his church" and makes it faithful.

It is the continuous presence of the risen Christ through the Spirit within the ministry of the whole church, from the apostles until now, which guarantees the continuity of the church's ministry with the ministry of Christ. On the matter of apostolic succession, the commission concludes that in the gesture of the laying on of hands there is symbolized the continuity of apostolic teaching within the ministry of the whole church which is confessed in the lives of all God's people and dependent on the particular gifts of the church's ordained offices which flow from the ministry of the whole church.

6. The laying on of hands in the Reformed tradition also signifies God's blessing of and God's setting apart of the one being ordained.

It is God who calls, nurtures, blesses, and ordains the church's ministry. As partners in this work, God is pleased to use the church to make manifest what God has already done. In the service of ordination, the church prays for God's blessing and lays hands on those being ordained in an act of blessing. The laying on of hands finds its meaning in the prayer for God's
grace and the Spirit's presence in the lives of those called to office. The ordination prayer and the laying on of hands together present an appeal for and an affirmation of God's blessing. In the service of ordination, the prayer for God's grace is an essential act of intercession on behalf of those called and ordained by God. Joined to this prayer, the laying on of hands makes visible the reality of God's call, blessing, and Spirit on those set apart to serve.

7. Who then shall participate in the laying on of hands in the various services of ordination in the Reformed Church in America?

Classes and the Service of Ordination for Ministers of Word and Sacrament

In the case of the ordination of ministers of Word and sacrament, all those who are members of the classis, both ministers and elder delegates, should be invited to join in the laying on of hands. The classis oversees the entire process of call, preparation, examination, election, and ordination for ministers. Elders and ministers of Word and sacrament together take responsibility for discerning and fulfilling God's will in relation to every person who presents himself as a candidate for ordination to ministry of Word and sacrament. Together elders and ministers receive ministerial candidates into the care of the classis, together they pray for and nurture candidates, together they guide and examine candidates, together they judge whether candidates are gifted and fit to assume their ministries within the Reformed Church in America, together they approve and participate in the candidate's service of ordination.

This shared responsibility of elders and ministers at the classis level reflects and grows out of their shared responsibility for the preaching and teaching of the true gospel, for the pure administration of the sacraments, and for the proper practice of discipline on behalf of the whole church. Without the elder, the minister cannot complete his or her calling. Without the minister, the elder cannot complete his or her calling. Given their mutual responsibility in the life of the church, within the local congregation and the classis, it is improper to exclude either ministers or elder delegates from any activity through which such responsibility is properly exercised and demonstrated. Therefore, both should lay hands on those being ordained to the office of minister of Word and sacrament.

Consistories and the Ordination of Elders and Deacons

In the case of the ordination service for elders and deacons, all who are members of the consistory of the church in which these officers are being ordained should be invited to participate in the laying on of hands. The consistory is responsible to oversee the entire life of the congregation. Among its many duties, it is called to supervise the process of the election of elders and deacons to membership in the consistory. It is given both spiritual and administrative oversight in these matters and is expected to seek the wisdom and guidance of the Spirit, among its members and in the congregation as they elect new leaders. Given the consistory's responsibility to oversee the entire process of nurturing and electing elders and deacons, it is fitting that all members of the consistory participate in every part of this process which concludes in the service of ordination and includes the laying on of hands.

The Whole Church and the Ordination of all Officeholders

Further, the commission concludes that classes and consistories should be encouraged to invite other persons from the RCA, unordained and ordained, along with unordained and ordained persons from other denominations, to participate with all the members of the classis or consistory in the service of ordination, including the gesture of laying hands on those who have been called.
This conclusion grows out of two Reformed convictions. First, the laying on of hands in services of ordination is linked to prayer and God's blessing. The symbolic action does not signify the transmission of office. Second, ordination is an act of God and the whole church. This second point has been made at several previous points, but it bears elaboration. Although the service of ordination and the laying on of hands mark the entrance of those being ordained into the company of those who hold the same office in the church, the service ought not suggest some mysterious rite of initiation into a guild of office holders. Every service of ordination is a public service and celebration which bears witness to the fact that ordination is an act of the church universal—all Christians, both unordained and ordained—in the church around the corner and on the other side of the world. Those who are ordained to the church's several offices exercise their ministry out of the call of the whole church and on its behalf. Officeholders serve as representatives of the whole people of God.

Representation and Participation in Services of Ordination

The RCA has a representative form of government. This means that when consistories and classes act, they act not for themselves but as representatives of those who have elected them. These representative governing bodies make decisions and act on behalf of the whole. When elders, deacons, and ministers of Word and sacrament lay hands on a candidate for ordination, they do so representing the whole church.

This is in keeping with the understanding of RCA government and is in many ways appropriate. There are numerous occasions when the only possibility is to act in precise keeping with these principles of representation. However, there are ways in which RCA practice in services of ordination has obscured this representative principle.

This is most clearly the case at classis ordination services. Very often the classis invites all ordained ministers who are present to come forward and join in with the ministers of classis in the laying on of hands. While these ministers participate as representatives of the larger church they serve, it might appear that they are allowed to participate in the laying on of hands because they hold the same office as the one being ordained. It might be perceived that they are invited forward because they represent the office of minister of Word and sacrament, not because they represent the ministry of the whole people of God, unordained and ordained together. This perception obscures the unbreakable link between the laying on of hands and the prayer for God's grace which is offered by the church.

Moreover, elders, deacons, and unordained people often do not feel represented in services of ordination, although they may be present in large numbers. They feel particularly excluded during the laying on of hands. The commission has said in this paper that the laying on of hands is a symbolic act in which the church affirms what God has done and expresses faith in what God will do in the life of the one being ordained. It does this through the prayer which is lifted up with the laying on of hands. Here God blesses and promises blessing through the prayers of God's people. God acts through human actions. God touches through human hands. Here the careful process of call and ordination comes to completion.

Since ordination is an act of the whole church, and since the laying on of hands finds its only meaning in the act of prayer which accompanies it, broad participation in the service of ordination, whenever possible and appropriate, can helpfully remind the gathered church of these realities.

It is important that any service of ordination be marked by dignity and proper decorum. Since classes and consistories are responsible for services of ordination, they are the ones who have responsibility to invite others to participate. In addition to the participation of their own membership, classes and consistories may wish to invite specific individuals to participate in the entire service of ordination as representatives of all the church's offices, the laity, and
When classes and consistories invite other baptized Christians, unordained and ordained together, to lay their hands on the heads of those being ordained and to pray for them, the invitation signals three important realities. First, those who hold office in the church and serve on consistories and in classes have unique responsibilities for the church's ordained ministry, and they serve as representatives of the whole church. Second, it makes clear that the one being ordained will be effective in ministry only by the grace and blessing of God and the prayerful support of God's people. Third, it is a vivid reminder that the whole church is responsible in various ways for the recognition and nurturing of the gifts of those who are elected by God to engage in the servant ministry of the church through the offices of deacon, elder, and minister of Word and sacrament. This responsibility precedes the service of ordination and continues after the service is complete. It is by the Spirit's presence and power that the shared ministry of all believers becomes the ministry of the risen Christ for the sake of the world.

8. If a broad representation of people shares in the service of ordination, it is good for the members of the classis or consistory to extend the right hand of fellowship to the new office holder.

In some early Reformed church orders, the gesture of extending the right hand of fellowship served as a worthy substitute for the laying on of hands. In both classes and consistories, the action signals a theology of shared ministry and unique responsibility for the one ministry of Jesus Christ who is the only head of the church. This is entirely in keeping with its biblical usage in Galatians 2:9. The action also implies consent on all sides to support one another in order to further the ministry of the whole church. Along the way, this support may be expressed through such things as intercessory prayers, the sharing of concerns and wisdom, and cooperation in particular programs. Particularly where the right hand of fellowship serves as a welcome into the membership of classis, it also signals the minister's consent to submit to the authority of the classis and to share in its particular responsibilities, including the care and discipline of its ministers.

If the liturgical gesture of offering the right hand of fellowship is practiced along with broadly representative participation in the laying on of hands accompanied by prayer, the liturgies for ordination in the RCA might more clearly demonstrate that ordination does mark the office bearers' entrance into a ministerial collegium and into the governing structures of the church. Offering the right hand of fellowship also demonstrates that the whole process of ordination is the work of the whole people of God in confirmation of God's prior gracious action and in trust of more grace for ministry through the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit in the church.

Bibliography


Notes:


4 Meeter, p. 401.


6 Pollanus, p. 229, (English translation for this paper by Daniel J. Meeter).

7 Pollanus, p. 231, (English translation for this paper by Daniel J. Meeter).

8 Meeter, p. 406. The author is delineating the practice presented in Micron’s *Christlicke Ordinancian,* 1554.

9 Ainslee, p. 156.

10 Ainslee, p. 189.

11 Ainslee, p. 190.


The commission recommends:

**R-3.**
To commend the paper, “Concerning the Practice of the Laying on of Hands in the Ordination Services of the Reformed Church in America” for study and use in the Reformed Church in America; and further,

to instruct the Commission on Worship to examine the Liturgy of the Reformed Church in America in light of this paper and to recommend appropriate changes. (ADOPTED)

**R-4.**
To adopt the following revision to the *BCO*, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 12, for recommendation to the classes for approval (addition is underlined):

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Sec. 12. A consistory shall recognize as valid only such ordination to the office of elder or deacon in another denomination as is able to meet the following conditions: intended to be within and to the ministry of the catholic or universal church; performed by a duly organized body of Christian churches, and by the authority within such body charged with the exercise of this specific power, accompanied by prayer and the laying on of hands; and further.

and further,
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to adopt the following revision to the *BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 11, Section 5, for recommendation to the classes for approval (addition is underlined):

*Sec. 5.* The classis shall appoint a time for the ordination service of the candidate. An interval of at least fifteen days following the candidate’s examination shall be allowed before the service of ordination takes place. The service shall be conducted by the classis in regular or special session with proper solemnity. A sermon suitable to the occasion shall be preached, and the promises, direction, explanations of duty, and prayer with the laying on of hands shall be according to the office for ordination in the church’s Liturgy. A certificate of ordination, signed by the president and the stated clerk of the classis, shall be given and the minister so ordained shall be enrolled as a member of the classis.

and further,

to adopt the following revision to the *BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 12, Section 1, for recommendation to the classes for approval (addition is underlined):

*Sec. 1.* A classis shall recognize as valid only such ordination in another denomination as is able to meet the following conditions: intended to be within and to the ministry of the catholic or universal church; performed by a duly organized body of Christian churches, and by the authority within such body charged with the exercise of this power, accompanied by prayer and the laying on of hands. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The RCA’s theology of ordination does not regard the laying on of hands as having significance apart from the prayers of the whole church for the ordinand. The *Book of Church Order* ought not to suggest otherwise by separating the laying on of hands from prayer.

**MATERIALS FOR THE STUDY AND DISCUSSION OF HOMOSEXUALITY:**

**A PROSPECTUS**

**INTRODUCTION**

Homosexuality is an issue which Christ’s church cannot avoid. The challenge arises not because developments within the larger culture in North America make it unavoidable, but rather because the pastoral and theological issues surrounding homosexuality raise fundamental concerns for the church’s identity, its sense of what it means to obey God and to minister to people in a broken world. Yet, it is an issue that people often attempt to avoid, because it involves difficult and uncomfortable questions about sexuality, and because for many,
atti...des about homosexuality and toward homosexual people are deeply visceral in nature. If Christians are to confront this issue in an honest, informed, and biblical way, however, Christians must learn to open their hearts to God's Word, and in that light to set aside their own assumptions and to listen and talk with each other.

The General Synod of the Reformed Church in America has dealt with the issue of homosexuality several times in recent history. In 1978 the Commission on Theology submitted a paper to the General Synod entitled "Homosexuality: A Biblical and Theological Appraisal." General Synod voted to make the paper available to the churches for study (MGS 1978, pp. 229-40). In 1979 a companion paper from the commission, "Christian Pastoral Care for the Homosexual," was similarly recommended for study, on the grounds that "the report is biblically sound, positive in spirit, and will become a valuable resource to pastors and elders in the discharge of their pastoral responsibilities" (MGS 1979, pp. 128-35). Hence, these papers, while not adopted as the official position of the denomination, did elicit favorable response from two General Synods.

In 1990, responding to an overture which proposed that General Synod adopt the 1978 report "as the official position of the RCA on the subject," General Synod instead voted "to adopt as the position of the Reformed Church in America that the practicing homosexual lifestyle is contrary to Scripture, while at the same time encouraging love and sensitivity toward such persons as fellow human beings" (MGS 1990, R-11, p. 461). At the same time, General Synod voted to "instruct the Commission on Theology to conduct a new study on homosexuality" (MGS 1990, R-12, p. 461), and commended the 1978 and 1979 General Synod papers to the churches as "pastoral advice until such time as a subsequent study...is approved by General Synod" (MGS 1990, R-13, p. 461).

The Commission on Theology appointed a task force in 1992 to help it consider the issue. The task force recommended to the commission that rather than producing a new study, the church should initiate a process of study and reflection at the congregational level. It also proposed an outline for such a study, in which the 1978 and 1979 reports represented the current denominational position.

Acting on this recommendation, the commission submitted to the 1994 General Synod a proposal "to urge RCA congregations, classes, and regional synods to enter into a season of discovery and discernment guided by study, prayer, listening, and discussion, aimed at relating to homosexual persons in ways that are more faithful to Christ," using material to be prepared by Congregational Services staff, in consultation with the commission. After extensive discussion in the Advisory Committee on Theology and on the floor of General Synod, the following substitute motion was unanimously approved by General Synod (MGS 1994, pp. 375-76):

To adopt the following resolution:

The General Synod of the Reformed Church in America recognizes and confesses that the Reformed Church in America has failed to live up to its own statements regarding homosexuality in 1978 (MGS 1978, pp. 229-40), 1979 (MGS 1979, pp. 128-35), and 1990 (MGS 1990, R-11, p. 461). Few in the Reformed Church in America have creatively and lovingly spoken with persons with a homosexual orientation about the truths of Scripture and the hope of the gospel. Many have participated in or tolerated forms of speech and behavior which humiliate and degrade such persons. Many of the churches within the Reformed Church in America have not provided an environment where persons have felt the acceptance and freedom to struggle with hard issues involving sexual orientation. Many Reformed Church in America members have shown no interest in listening to their heartfelt cries as they struggle for self-acceptance and dignity. For all these wrongs, this General Synod expresses its humble and heartfelt
repentance, and its desire to reflect the love of Christ to homosexual persons. In all that
this General Synod does, it seeks to obey the whole of Scripture, demonstrating in its
own life the same obedience it asks from others. It calls itself and the whole church to
a greater faithfulness to Christ in relationships with persons of homosexual orientation.

To this end, the General Synod calls the church to a process of repentance, prayer,
learning, and growth in ministry. This process will be guided by the basic biblically-
theological framework presented in the previous statements of the General Synod in
1978 (MGS 1978, pp. 229-40), 1979 (MGS 1979, pp. 128-35), and 1990 (MGS 1990,
R-11, p. 461).

The same substitute motion also instructed the Commission on Theology to develop three
resources (MGS 1994, p. 376):

1. A study guide...[based on] the 1978 and 1979 statements of General Synod on the
church and homosexuality. This study guide will include updating of these reports
only with respect to factual material.

2. A process of reflection for RCA congregations who are seeking to increase their
sensitivity and awareness of the ways in which persons of homosexual orientation have
wrongly suffered in our churches and in our society.

3. A collection of models for ministry to persons of homosexual orientation...which are
in harmony with the Reformed Church in America's stated positions [which say a) that
homosexual practice is wrong, and b) that the church must reach out in love and
compassion to persons of homosexual orientation].

The commission was further instructed to submit these materials to the 1995 General Synod
for its approval prior to their distribution (MGS 1994, p. 376).

As the commission discussed the 1994 Synod mandates, three areas of concern emerged.
First, it became clear that there was not adequate time for the careful completion of this entire
mandate before the 1995 General Synod. Secondly, the commission felt that the 1994
Synod's statement that the 1978 and 1979 reports should be updated "only with respect to
factual material" (MGS 1994, p. 376) was ambiguous. The commission believed that its
work would benefit from the opportunity to confer with the General Synod on exactly the
scope of updating which was appropriate. Finally, there was some concern over the
possibility that significant funds might be invested in the production of materials on a
controversial topic which might not then be approved by the 1995 General Synod, resulting
in a waste of precious resources.

In response to these three concerns, the commission decided to produce a prospectus for the
materials requested by the 1994 Synod, rather than to engage in the full production of
materials. This course of action is intended to keep good faith with the 1994 Synod's desire
that the theology of the materials be approved by General Synod. It also allows the
commission the opportunity to test its understanding of what is centrally important about the
1978, 1979, and 1990 General Synod statements on homosexuality which should guide the
production of materials. Finally, this course of action allows the RCA to move ahead with
investing in the production of materials, with the confidence that the materials will be
distributed and that these will reflect the mind of the denomination. It should be understood
that the commission does not submit this paper as a new position on homosexuality for the
denomination, but rather as part of the process of the production of educational materials
mandated by the 1994 General Synod.
The following is an outline of the assumptions and the content of the materials which will be produced to fulfill the 1994 General Synod mandates. The first section attempts to distill from the previous statements of the RCA on the subject of homosexuality a set of clear parameters to guide the production of the RCA study materials mandated by the 1994 General Synod. Though many sentences and passages from the 1978 and 1979 reports are reproduced verbatim, this first section does not attempt to reproduce every detail of the earlier statements, since some of the data and terminology used in these statements is no longer current. Nor does it set out extensively to rethink or revise these statements, though at some points it seeks to clarify the arguments contained in them. The aim is to make available to members of the RCA a digest of the earlier statements to serve as a basis for further discussion, and to define the pastoral and theological parameters which will guide the production of RCA study materials to fulfill the 1994 General Synod mandates. The second section sketches out in broad form the basic outline which the materials will follow.

Section I: Guiding parameters for RCA study materials on homosexuality (drawn from 1978-1979 RCA General Synod statements, MGS 1978, pp. 229-40 and MGS 1979, pp.128-35)

A. Homosexual behavior is not God's intended expression of sexuality.

Although the Bible gives relatively little attention to the issue of homosexuality, those texts which do refer to homosexual activity are clear in their condemnation of the practices they describe. Some of the passages which are cited to make the case against homosexuality do not in themselves justify a blanket condemnation of homosexuality (e.g., Gen. 19:4-11, the story concerning the men of Sodom). Nonetheless, two passages in the Old Testament clearly prohibit such conduct (Lev. 18:22 and 20:13). Some argue that this prohibition is a result of the need to avoid the “cultic prostitution” practiced by neighboring peoples and is therefore no longer relevant to people today. While this argument has been contested, it is true that these prohibitions appear in a context where there are many commands which Christians no longer regard as binding in light of the broader witness of Scripture and the gospel of Christ. Hence, their status must be weighed by how the issue is dealt with in the New Testament.

The clearest passage in the New Testament bearing on this issue is found in Romans 1:26, 27. Here, the apostle Paul is arguing that human sinfulness is rooted in one's exchanging the worship of God for the worship of the created order. Because this rebellious exchange disrupts the vertical relationship between God and humans, it results in a parallel disruption in one’s horizontal relationships with each other. Homosexual behavior is one symptom of the “exchange” of natural for unnatural relationships, although not the only one, nor necessarily the most serious. The censure of homosexual behavior is rooted in Scripture’s strong sense of a natural, created order for human life, which in the arena of human sexuality is manifested in the differentiation and complementarity of the sexes. Human sexuality is created for heterosexual expression, since both male and female appear when humankind is created, and since each is complemented and completed only by the other.

B. Homosexuality is no more nor less serious than other forms of human sinfulness.

The fact that heterosexuality is normative according to Scripture does not mean that there is any excuse for singling out persons of homosexual orientation for extraordinary censure or rejection. All human sexuality has been injured by the fall of humanity, and no one may presume that his or her sexual orientation and conduct, by themselves, merit special praise or blame. The compulsive fear and loathing which homosexuality arouses in modern society, therefore, should not lead heterosexuals to place those who struggle with homosexuality beyond the pale of God’s grace. While calling homosexuals to repentance, the church must
itself repent of its revulsion and fear. The Holy Spirit works among those whose mutual
dependency upon God's grace is acknowledged and shared. Only in that climate of grace are
persons freed to face themselves honestly and to become open to the transforming love of
Christ as it becomes embodied in the fellowship of believers.

C. There are varied and complex causes of homosexual orientation and behavior; hence, simplistic analyses and solutions should be questioned.

Modern research into the phenomenon of homosexuality has introduced the concept of
sexual orientation. This means that for some people, homosexual behavior arises out of a
basic orientation toward members of the same sex. This orientation is not consciously chosen
and is generally a matter over which the individual has no control. For people with a
homosexual orientation, homosexual attraction does not occur as a deliberate perversion of
a heterosexual instinct, but rather is simply discovered or realized in the process of sexual
maturation.

The causes of homosexual orientation are still a matter of research and debate in a number
of fields, including biology and psychology. There is no consensus regarding the causes of
homosexuality, but there is consensus that the causes are to be found in factors over which
the individual has no direct control. Various theories point toward genetics, hormonal
functioning, psychosocial development in infancy or early childhood, or some combination
of these factors. Such homosexual orientation has not lent itself easily to medical or
psychotherapeutic redirection. Some Christian ministries report success in helping persons
of homosexual orientation to redirect their sexual orientation and their habits of sexual
expression, while other Christian ministries report that the problems involved in redirecting
sexual orientation seem more intractable.

Recognition of this reality means that the church must learn to deal differently in its pastoral
strategies with persons who, apart from or even against their own choice, find themselves
having a homosexual orientation. Scripture does not directly address the problem of
homosexual acts which emerge in accord with one's conscious sexual orientation and not
against it. Most of the texts which address homosexuality focus simply on behaviors which
are or are not appropriate.26 Although this does not mean heterosexuality is less binding as
a norm, one must recognize that individuals cannot be blamed for having inclinations over
which they have neither control nor choice. Homosexual orientation should be understood
as a result of the general problem of evil, rather than of the sin of specific individuals. How
a person acts with regard to such orientation is, of course, a matter of personal responsibility.

D. Any expectations for persons of homosexual orientation to experience wholeness
should be shaped by both the hope and the realism of the Christian life.

The position of a person with a homosexual orientation in our society is painfully difficult.
Trapped in a sexuality one did not choose, and which many in society and the church regard
as disgusting, one must cope with the feeling of being unclean and false. Guilt, self-loathing,
and a fear of close relations may become a part of one's life. The resulting loneliness may
lead one to expect instant, unqualified approval from others, and to suffer despair when it is
not forthcoming. Preoccupation with one's homosexuality—or sexuality at all, for that
matter—may hinder development of a well-rounded character.

Nevertheless, among those who live with a homosexual orientation, there is a wide spectrum
of behavior and psychological responses. Some show a much better pattern of adjustment
than others. In particular, there is a wide divergence in the degree of sexual responsibility
which is shown by homosexual persons living an active sexual life (as there is, of course,
among heterosexuals). The church must adopt a different pastoral strategy toward those
homosexuals who become involved only with another adult in the context of a long-term, affectionate relationship, as distinct from those who engage in promiscuous “one-night stands.”

In any case, the homosexual person needs the same thing that all Christians need in order to experience God’s grace: gracious acceptance of the person and an understanding of the call to repentance and the process of sanctification. This process of sanctification must always be viewed in light of the “already-not yet” tension within Scripture. The Spirit of God is moving in the lives of all Christians to lead them toward greater faithfulness and conformity to Christ. At the same time, Scripture is equally clear that this movement is a life long process, often full of failures and dormant times, as well as growth and victory. No one reaches sinless perfection in this life, though all can expect the grace of God to be at work in their lives, accomplishing more than one might ask or imagine.

This doctrine frees the church both from denial and from despair. Christians need not deny the difficulties many homosexual persons experience in coping with or trying to change their sexual orientation and behavior. Nor need Christians despair of God’s grace. Rather, Christians live in hope, trusting that the Spirit of God has many ways, both great and small, of forming Christ in them. This hope frees the church, as a healing fellowship, to accept the homosexual person in his or her homosexual orientation, even though it cannot condone the behavior which may result from that orientation. Without such acceptance, the homosexual person is left with the choice of leaving the fellowship, wearing the mask of heterosexuality, or suffering condemnation. Most choose the mask. The effect is to leave the homosexual feeling hypocritical, unwanted, unknown, and in fear of exposure. Sadly, Christian congregations often seem more concerned with “instant righteousness” or the appearance of righteousness than with the patient, often painful process of sanctification.

That process begins with genuine, responsible self-confrontation before God; it is thwarted by self-deception, self-justification, and self-concealment. Unfortunately, these destructive patterns of behavior, so tempting for homosexuals in contemporary society, are reinforced by the difficulty which Christians have in dealing openly with each other about their struggles. The church must learn once more that healing and growth in the personal realm is never smooth, effortless, and error-free. All Christians must be willing to join the homosexual in seeking the hope and help all need in order to become the persons God knows and intends all to be.

The church should expect its members to be open to new possibilities. The homosexual must not place a ceiling on the capacity for growth. This means letting go of the myth of incurability, while at the same time avoiding a facile, overly optimistic view toward change and healing. In order to make this attitude possible, the church must itself be a welcoming place to wrestle with the issues of sexual orientation and behavior, inviting all its members to a deeper wholeness guided by the truth of Scripture.

E. Homosexual persons should be accorded their full measure of human and civil rights.

Approval of homosexual orientation or acts is not a prerequisite to firm support of basic civil rights for homosexual persons. Sexual conduct is primarily an ethical question and not the concern of criminal law, except when sexual acts are committed against minors, or when they involve public decency, rape, or prostitution. Criminal laws to deter such acts are in force and applicable to both heterosexual and homosexual persons. Statistical evidence denies any allegation that homosexual persons are more inclined to commit violent crimes than heterosexual persons. Further statistical comparisons indicate, for example, that a child is no more likely to be seduced by a homosexual teacher or youth worker than by a heterosexual in the same role. Therefore, legislation specifically directed against homosexual persons is
unnecessary and constitutes a prejudicial attempt to legislate private morality. At the same time, civil rights for homosexuals do not include a right to special protections or privileges for homosexuals which are unavailable to all citizens.

Sincere concern is sometimes expressed by parents and other adults concerning the possible negative effects of homosexual role models on children and adolescents. While this concern is valid in instances where homosexuality is espoused or flaunted, parents should recognize that negative sexual role models abound in this permissive and promiscuous society. Human sexuality is debased and exploited in advertising, in the media, and on the street in many unseemly ways. Inevitably, young people observe some persons who act out their sexuality in an irresponsible manner. Although youth cannot be isolated from such influences, they do need guidance in discerning right from wrong and making moral judgments in sexual matters. Here the teaching ministry of the church as well as the healthy sexual modeling and nurturing role of parents in the Christian home are crucial to a child's maturing sexual awareness and identity. The church should also respond to the need for a constructive Christian social witness in matters of sexual values and conduct. Concern for youth is better expressed in these positive ways than through blanket, discriminatory sanctions against all persons of one sexual orientation.

While the commission cannot affirm homosexual behavior, at the same time the commission is convinced that the denial of human and civil rights to homosexuals is inconsistent with the biblical witness and Reformed theology.

Section II: A prospectus of study materials to fulfill 1994 General Synod mandates (MGS 1994, p. 376)

The commission proposes a five-part series, each part to include three components:

a) theological reflection in the light of Scripture and contemporary scientific research,
b) encounter with lived experience of homosexual persons, their friends, and their families, and
c) reflection on models and strategies for the church's ministry to and with persons of homosexual orientation.

The educational goals of the study materials are:

1. To explore the Reformed Church in America's existing theological and pastoral guidance regarding homosexuality.

2. To encourage reflection on how churches and individuals may more faithfully live out this guidance.

3. To assist church members in shaping attitudes and actions in ways which inform their life and practice.

4. To stimulate new ventures in Christian ministry by exploring various models and strategies for ministry to and with persons of homosexual orientation.

The suggested outline is as follows:

Part 1: God's creation and human sexuality.

Explores the goodness of creation, including sexuality, and its distortion by sin.
Explores the difficulties Christians have dealing with problems in the area of sexuality within the context of the church.
Develops a biblical understanding of the divine intention for human sexuality.
Identifies the church as the community which has not fully arrived, but continues on the way to sexual wholeness as God intended it.
Part 2: Is homosexuality wrong?

Exploration of key passages, focusing on Leviticus 18 and 20, Romans 1, 1 Corinthians 6, and 1 Timothy 1.
Introduction to the notion of sexual orientation and its impact upon ethical reflections regarding homosexuality.
Reflection upon the usefulness and limits of the moral distinction between homosexual orientation and homosexual behavior.
Moral positions vs. judgmentalism.
The meaning of forgiveness and acceptance for homosexual persons.

Part 3: Homosexuality and the Christian life.

The Reformed doctrine of sanctification and homosexuality.
An honest assessment of reorientation therapies.
Models for the church’s wrestling with the possibilities and limits of transformation.

Part 4: The church: a safe place for sinners.

The problem of bigotry and intolerance.
The church’s response to brokenness.
Models for being gracious and truthful in welcoming persons of homosexual orientation into the life of the church.

Part 5: Homosexuality and society.

Issues of human and civil rights for homosexuals.
Christian responses to the gay rights political agenda.
The church as the model of a new community.

The Commission on Theology proposes this prospectus outline as the framework for fulfilling the 1994 mandates given to the commission, and requests that the 1995 General Synod give final authorization for the production of educational materials guided by this prospectus.

Romans 1:26-27 is an exception, since it refers to men “giving up natural intercourse with women” and being “consumed with passion for one another.” Yet this language probably reflects the common understanding in other Jewish and Graeco-Roman texts that homosexual desire was the result of insatiable lust, unsatisfied with only heterosexual relations. It is a matter of debate among exegetes as to whether this text directly speaks about persons of a homosexual orientation for whom homosexual attraction may be the only form of sexual attraction they have ever experienced, and who therefore cannot be said to have “given up natural intercourse with women” for homosexual relationships. Though the text clearly condemns homosexual behavior, it is not clear that it has in view the kind of orientation some people experience and report today.

The commission recommends:

R-5.
To instruct the Congregational Services Unit through its Office of Education, in consultation with the Commission on Theology, to provide materials and resources in keeping with the above prospectus outline in order to enable RCA congregations, classes, and regional synods more fully to fulfill the 1994 General Synod’s call to repentance, prayer, learning, and growth in ministry to and with persons of homosexual orientation (MGS 1994, p. 376). (ADOPTED)
Upon recommendation of the advisory committee, the following was substituted for R-5:

To affirm the Reformed Church in America’s position of effective pastoral concern and ministry to those who struggle with homosexuality; and further,

to speak clearly as a denomination to the truth of God’s Word; and further,

to refer the prospectus on homosexuality to the Commission on Theology and direct the commission to:

1. Strengthen the emphasis on the transforming power of the gospel; and

2. Work within the framework of the previous actions of General Synod in 1978 (MGS 1978, pp. 229-40, 1979 (MGS 1979, pp. 128-35), and 1990 (MGS 1990, pp. 460-62); and

3. Make explicit the biblical implications for pastoral ministry to persons of homosexual orientation as these implications relate to membership, sacraments, and office;

and further,

to direct the Commission on Theology to submit a revised prospectus to the 1996 General Synod. (NOT ADOPTED) (YES-80, NO-94)

Reason: There exists considerable ambiguity in the prospectus as presented.

THE USE OF SCRIPTURE IN MAKING MORAL DECISIONS

The Commission on Theology received approximately a dozen communications from the RCA in response to the vote of the 1994 General Synod commending the commission’s paper, “The Use of Scripture in Making Moral Decisions,” for study and encouraging RCA congregations to send comments and suggested revisions to the Commission on Theology. The 1994 General Synod also requested in the same vote to have the commission submit a revised paper to the 1995 General Synod (MGS 1994, p. 369). The communications spanned a wide range of resources to the paper. The responses taken together did not disclose any clear direction for emendation and resubmission of the paper, and the commission does not at this time intend to submit a revised version of the paper.

WORK IN PROGRESS

There are no new projects formally being initiated by the commission at this time, though several possibilities are being explored.
REPORTS ON WORLD MISSION

Report of the General Synod Council’s Mission Services Committee

The theme of the 1995 General Synod is “Evangelism in a Changing World.” The reality of the changing world is ever-present in the Mission Services program. The following changes occurred since July 1993, when Mission Services was established by General Synod: 1) three regions where the RCA is in mission underwent sufficient disruption that required fourteen RCA missionaries to relocate; 2) twelve RCA missionaries retired from mission service and each retirement required an evaluation with the RCA’s national partners to determine if a replacement was in order or if the national church could assume the missionary role; 3) three RCA missionaries resigned and five relocated to other mission work; and 4) the RCA appointed fourteen new missionaries. These new appointments were made in response to the 1993 General Synod request that Mission Services move ahead with appointments as a way to challenge the RCA to grow in its cross-cultural mission outreach (MGS 1993, R-8, pp. 445-46).

All these changes during this two-year period mean that almost half of the missionaries in the RCA mission program experienced dramatic shifts or are new. The coming decade does not show promise for a more stable international scene. Nonetheless, the RCA continues to reach out with the good news of Jesus Christ and is faithful to the Great Commission.

AFRICA

The Church of Jesus Christ has been living and witnessing in Africa for nearly two thousand years. The newest technology is now being used to spread the gospel, with the hope of covering the whole continent by the end of this century. In reality, however, most people outside Christ are still being touched most effectively by the changed life they see in a family member or friend.

KENYA

For years RCA missionaries were witnesses among the Orma people of Kenya. Then the shiffo came to rob, steal, and threaten the lives of the local people and missionaries. Reluctantly the missionaries left. Two years have passed with no hope of return. One missionary couple moved to the fringes of a neighboring city to maintain contact with the Orma people and, since word of the missionaries’ arrival spread, the Orma people are coming to visit. What had once been silent observation by the Orma people has now become a cascade of conversation. The Orma people feel free to not only listen, but to question and respond to what they observed in earlier years. What was once thought to be an evangelistic failure among the Orma people is now beginning to bear fruit. Evangelism outside the culture’s location, but still in the culture’s context is “evangelism in a changing world.”

Alcohol controlled the life of a Pokot woman, and she nearly killed her husband in a drunken rage. Sober and alone, with no husband, money, or self-respect, she decided to see if the message that changed people’s lives in West Pokot might provide hope for her. She talked to some Pokot believers about this new faith, and after much thought, gave her life to Christ. Her body bears the scars of her former life, but her eyes shine brightly as she speaks of how Jesus changed her life. Evangelism among a changing people is “evangelism in a changing world.”

Three volunteers help in Kenya by tutoring the elementary children of RCA missionaries located in remote areas.
MALAWI

The people of Malawi desperately need the basic necessities of life. RCA world mission program associates work with the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC) to meet these needs. Seeds are provided and fruit trees are planted so food can be raised. Small children are examined and immunized in medical clinics. Self-help groups are organized for women whose husbands work in the mines, often away from home. A “cup of cold water” in the name of Jesus is “evangelism in a changing world.”

SUDAN

Nile Theological College is located in Khartoum, Sudan. This college is a Christian witness in the midst of an Islamic-controlled country. Three RCA missionaries (working under a partner church) teach in the college and the Theological Education by Extension (TEE) program. Threats to limit the work of the church in Sudan occur publicly or are rumored almost daily. In spite of war, persecution, and hunger, the church in Sudan continues to grow. Evangelism education in a war-torn country is “evangelism in a changing world.”

An RCA volunteer is currently working (under the direction of the New Sudan Council of Churches) in a northwest Kenyan village. From this village, supplies are sent into southern Sudan, which continues to suffer in a civil war.

> The advisory committee recommended:

R-1.
To direct the General Synod Council Mission Services Committee/Unit to explore ways to highlight and help the Reformed Church in America to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary in 1998 of RCA mission in Sudan. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. R-1 demonstrates the RCA’s solidarity with and support for brothers and sisters in the Sudan.

2. R-1 celebrates with the Church in Sudan the massive faith movement to Jesus Christ.

> The Rev. Dr. Paul Hostetter prayed for the Church in Sudan.

ETHIOPIA

For twenty years the RCA has labored in medical mission in Ethiopia, both during times of a sympathetic government and when the government has been hostile toward Christians. With a partner church, the Mekane Yesus, healing of the body, mind, and spirit is holistically offered. Every year trained health workers graduate and return to their villages with skills that bring health and healing to remote areas. This past year two new RCA missionaries were added in the area of education. Every year the secondary school of Aira trains hundreds of young people to work and witness across the entire country of Ethiopia. Evangelism practiced holistically is “evangelism in a changing world.”

ASIA

Much of the world’s attention in recent years has centered on Europe, Africa, and the Middle East because of the major changes occurring in those regions. Caring eyes also focus on Asia, the world’s largest continent where half of the world’s population dwells and where change
is rampant. The plight of Asian migrants and refugees is cause for great concern. Watchful
eyes note in this continent the imbalance of trade between countries, the development of
China’s market economy, Taiwan’s desire for acceptance in the United Nations, the
Philippines’ struggle with a huge foreign debt, the devastating typhoons and volcanic
eruptions in the Philippines, North Korea’s nuclear activity, the massive earthquake in Kobe,
Japan..... All these events draw the church into concerned response. Evangelism of
concerned responses to events, issues, and problems is “evangelism in a changing
world.”

SINGAPORE

Portable Recording Ministries International (PRM) has a World Cassette Outreach office at
the Bible House in Singapore. Although this office is small, it houses an adequate recording
studio for producing Scriptures on cassette. Indigenous workers record and distribute
thousands of cassette tapes. During 1994 up to 43,000 cassette tapes of the Bible in eighteen
languages were produced and distributed by this small office. The Singapore office works
cooperatively with sister recording agencies in Indonesia, India, and Bangladesh (see also
the report of PRM International in the Evangelization and Church Growth section).

 Evangelism and the uses of technology in a technological age is “evangelism in a
changing world.”

INDIA

India is a vast land with a rich heritage of service from RCA missionaries. India is an area
where the RCA has turned over almost all its mission work to the local church and
community. The RCA, however, continues to provide funds for leadership development in
areas of agriculture, technical training, and home economics. The RCA also provides funds
for developing and strengthening Christian ministry to villages through the Vellore and
Rayalaseema Dioceses. The RCA is specifically involved in mission service through three
persons: 1) a doctor at the Kodaikanal School who also provides medical leadership in the
community through the Van Allen Hospital; 2) his wife who works with KOPEDEG, a
developmental group whose aim is to help meet the physical and emotional needs of women;
and 3) a teacher at the Kodaikanal International School who serves as a world mission
program associate.

An RCA volunteer currently serves at Woodstock School, a mission school in northern India
begun in 1854.

HONG KONG

The RCA’s partner in Hong Kong is the Hong Kong Christian Council (HKCC), under the
direction of general secretary, the Rev. Dr. Tso Man King. This past year another door
opened for broadcasting. A new three-minute radio spot, Good News, aired before the eleven
o’clock evening news. A new textbook, Man on a Mission—The Life and Work of Jesus the
Christ, was designed and edited. English-medium schools in Hong Kong use this textbook
for teaching religious studies to secondary school students. New tools for evangelism
prepared for people within and outside the church, affording opportunities to meet
Jesus, is “evangelism in a changing world.”

PHILIPPINES

The sturdy, grey jeep bounced over the roadless ground, making its way across the terrain
of hardened volcanic lahar. As far as the eye could see, the once-green lush farmland was
now a barren wasteland. After crossing the lahar turf (a shortcut), the jeep headed northward
on the main concrete roads to the towns of Urbiztondo, Real, Galarin, and Sawat. At each
location, Filipino Christian Service Group (CSG) members warmly greeted the visiting American guests and the host missionaries. At Urbiztondo the aroma of freshly baked rolls filled the air. The small bakery, established as an income-generating project, provided income for twenty needy families. At Real, CSG members explained their health, sanitation, family planning, and Bible study programs. A community rice thresher was displayed in Galarin, while an irrigation project was the focus in Sawat. The CSG irrigation system enables area farmers to plant an additional crop each year, sparing them from a few months of hunger. Evangelism-reaching out through self-help programs—is “evangelism in a changing world.”

JAPAN

Seirei Welfare Community in Hamamatsu, Japan, has a huge campus covering many city blocks. It provides care homes for the elderly and the disabled, a hospice center, a college of nursing, a high school, and the largest general hospital in the prefecture (district). Founded by Christians, the aim of the community is to give loving care and healing to the sick and shut-ins. The RCA is providing the first community chaplain. This unique position is almost unheard of in Japan, where less than 1 percent of the population is Christian. Evangelism-reaching out through word and deed—is “evangelism in a changing world.”

TAIWAN

A July 1994 report from Taiwan noted: “Only eleven signed up for the college student Bible and theology camp, but it all came off! The students really delved into the Gospel of Mark, discovering....” The setting was a camp. It could have been a retreat, a school club activity, or a classroom. Evangelism-studying the Bible and discussing theology—is “evangelism in a changing world.”

TEACHERS

Work with secondary students and those in higher education has long been a priority for RCA mission in Asia. Both career missionaries and volunteer teachers strongly influence the lives of young people in Hong Kong, Japan, the Philippines, China, and Taiwan. The number of RCA career missionary teachers has decreased, but the dire need for Christian teachers prevails. Currently twenty-six RCA volunteer teachers serve in Asia to help meet that need. Evangelism through dedicated and committed teachers is “evangelism in a changing world.”

LATIN AMERICA

ECUADOR

The first time a street child in Ecuador hears about the love of Jesus Christ may be through street evangelism done by the children and staff of the Prince of Peace Home in Guayaquil, Ecuador. Wilmer was a street child who, at the age of twelve, came from the streets to the children’s home. He says, “I came to the foundation and they gave me food, a place to stay, love, but most of all they gave me Jesus Christ.” Today he is nineteen years old, has completed high school, is enrolled in a Bible school, and plans to become a pastor. Through the touching of this one life, many other lives are touched as well. Evangelism—an act of love among street children—is “evangelism in a changing world.”

An RCA volunteer is working for one year at the Prince of Peace home, teaching English and doing general education tutoring.
HONDURAS

The hospital in Ahuas is different from hospitals in the U.S. and Canada. The families of patients stay on the hospital grounds, cook all the food for the patients, and provide bedside care. There is tremendous opportunity for the physicians and the ninety-year-old hospital chaplain to reach out for Christ. This is done through daily worship and bedside prayers. The chaplain tells stories of hundreds of people who have been led to the Lord at the hospital in Ahuas. **Evangelism through ministry to families in stress is “evangelism in a changing world.”**

Through its two world mission program associates, one a physician from Mexico and the other a Miskito Indian physician, the RCA serves patients who come to the Cauquiria clinic. One doctor reports, "A woman of advanced age came to us with a severe heart condition. I told her family that they had to obtain a boat and take her to a hospital. She said, ‘I am a Christian, and I believe that if you pray for me, God will help me to heal.’ I knew the gravity of the problem. I could do nothing, but her faith encouraged me. I prayed for her, and the next day her heart was beating like that of a fifteen-year-old girl.” **Evangelism through healing ministries is “evangelism in a changing world.”**

NICARAGUA

A mobile health unit led by an RCA world mission program associate travels up the Wawasang River in Nicaragua. As the unit arrives at a clinic location, people gather on the ground and on rickety benches. The health unit personnel present a simple message of the gospel, lead hymn singing, and pray. As the Bible is opened, a young man’s eyes light up. He was formerly a unit leader in the Contra Army. He asks, “Is that a Bible? I love to listen to the Word of God even though I’m not a believer.” **Evangelism through village health programs is “evangelism in a changing world.”**

VENEZUELA

The new Presbyterian congregation, La Iglesia de Esperanza, the Church of Hope in Caracas, Venezuela, continues to overflow with new people who have become involved in various ministries of the church such as the Family Counseling Center or the ministry of prayer. RCA missionaries serve as full-time pastors of the new congregation. Judee is a new member who lives in a small apartment at the bottom of a dark, narrow stairway in a nearby barrio, an impoverished area, of Caracas. She came to Caracas several years ago from her indigenous tribal area in the southern rain forests, where her family worked in the mines. Like millions of other people around the world she came to the lure and promise of the city. Judee has been disappointed because there are few jobs, housing is scarce, and expenses are high. She and her two daughters have found faith and hope in Jesus Christ through the Esperanza congregation. The Esperanza church is the fastest-growing Presbyterian congregation in the presbytery and is challenging the other congregations to reach out as well. **Evangelism through church growth is “evangelism in a changing world.”**

The heart of theological training for church leaders in Venezuela is the Evangelical Seminary in Caracas. Eduardo Garcia Jorgez, general director of the Bible Society of Venezuela, said, “Until the Evangelical Seminary of Caracas came on the scene, our city lacked an institution offering practical training in pastoring, group leadership, and particularly in developing new strategies for evangelizing Caracas. I see the evangelical seminary offering the church of Caracas the trained leadership it so badly needs.” The RCA has a missionary presence at this seminary. **Training others for evangelism in their own community is “evangelism in a changing world.”**
EUROPE AND THE FORMER SOVIET UNION

ESTONIA

The Christian gospel has a receptive audience in Eastern Europe. As of March 1, 1995, the RCA has its first missionaries in Estonia. Working with Estonian Christians through the Estonian Evangelization Alliance, these RCA missionaries are helping to train nationals in church planting. New churches are starting throughout Estonia, and a vision is arising that may result in Estonian Christians sending missionaries to the former Soviet Union. **Evangelism through training new church planters in Eastern Europe is “evangelism in a changing world.”**

FORMER SOVIET UNION

The 1994 General Synod voted:

To request Mission Services, in consultation with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and other potential partners, to continue its exploration for a viable long-term mission approach with a partner church in the former Soviet Union; and further,

...to include as part of that exploration a challenge to the Reformed Church in America to consider the goal of placing with a partner church a team of five to ten persons in one of the republics of the former Soviet Union in 1996 (MGS 1994, R-1, p. 383).

Mission Services has begun exploring partner relationships through the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the World Council of Churches that will enable the RCA to send missionaries and support to former Soviet Union areas. Potential partners include the Hungarian Reformed Church, the Reformed Church in Slovakia, the Evangelical Reformed Church Union in Russia, and Mission: Ukraine. Plans are to complete partnership arrangements and to begin sending volunteers in 1995 and to send missionaries in 1996. **Evangelism through mission efforts with partner churches is “evangelism in a changing world.”**

THE MIDDLE EAST

For more than a century the RCA has been present in the Middle East. Doctors, nurses, teachers, and, more recently pastors, have provided care, concern, healing, and Christ's love to indigenous people and expatriates alike. The admiration and respect for this RCA mission work is shown by many people living in this region. There is an openness and appreciation for RCA missionary personnel.

The 1994 General Synod voted:

...to request Mission Services, in the light of this opportunity, to commit increased resources, if raised, for evangelization in the region (MGS 1994, R-2, p. 385).

The required 1995 Mission Services budget reductions, due to the shortage of 1994 receipts, have made it difficult to move ahead in the Middle East. Opportunities still exist, and Mission Services has placed Middle East programs in an "if-raised" category which provides an opportunity for the RCA to respond to the 1994 General Synod challenge.
BAHRAIN

Led by RCA missionaries, the National Evangelical Church of Bahrain houses seven different language congregations and many other groups who use it for worship and Bible study. The growth in the various congregations has led the church to consider and plan for a new building project. The church has recently added another RCA missionary to its staff as director of youth and Christian education. The church is looking for a seminary student with international ministry interests to join them. An RCA volunteer assists with the church work as well.

The American Mission Hospital, an historic RCA mission program, is again in a strong medical and financial position. Staffed through the years, in part, by RCA missionaries, it now has RCA missionaries in the positions of chief medical supervisor and chief hospital administrator.

Opportunities for English teachers at the Al Raja School are available. The K-12 school has 850 students and an RCA missionary as school superintendent.

KUWAIT

Each week approximately 1,200 English-speaking persons worship, engage in Bible studies, and participate in other activities at the National Evangelical Church of Kuwait. In addition, thirty-one different language groups use the facilities for their own language worship services. The church is under the leadership of an RCA missionary couple. A seminary student with international ministry interests is being sought to join in the ministry of this church.

OMAN

An RCA pastor and family also serve as leaders in the Protestant Church in Oman. They oversee two English-speaking congregations. More than six hundred people worship in four different services each week. Nine other congregations use the facilities in the cities of Ruwi and Ghala, with nineteen nationalities represented. The Al Amana Conference Center provides Theological Education by Extension (TEE) for future Christian leaders in that part of the world.

Opportunities abound in Oman. There is a crying need for a missionary to go into the interior to minister to those who are served by the ninety-six health clinics dispersed throughout the country. There are thousands of expatriates in Oman for whom the good news is waiting to be lived and taught. Land has been given for another church building in the city of Sohar. The Christians in Sohar now worship in an apartment.

Right now the Middle East provides rich opportunities for evangelism. Evangelism—ministry to aliens and strangers in foreign lands—is “evangelism in a changing world.”

MIDDLE EAST COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

One of the most exciting developments in the Middle East was the invitation for an RCA missionary to work as the communication director for the Middle East Council of Churches. The Middle East Council of Churches represents 90 percent of all Christians in the Middle East. This enables the RCA to provide a significant influence among the Christian community at large in its ministry in the Middle East.
APPALACHIA

“We never thought we’d own a home at all but now we have a brand new one, thanks to all you people.” This comment was made by a couple just moving into a home built for them by RCA volunteers in Kentucky. Appalachia is often considered the “third world” of the U.S. The RCA serves in this region through Jackson County Ministries (JCM), the Commission On Religion in Appalachia (CORA), and Coalition for Appalachian Ministry (CAM). World mission program associates, JCM staff members, and RCA volunteers serve in Appalachia through summer Bible camps, through work with at-risk youth, and through participation in congregational outreach programs, sick and shut-in calling programs, home health care, home repair and building, and community self-help projects. Evangelism through service programs and projects is “evangelism in a changing world.”

CHIAPAS

The struggle between the Mexican government and the Zapatista rebels caused much trauma and tension in 1994. The unrest complicated the work of RCA missionaries in several ways. Three RCA missionary families had to either relocate completely or temporarily leave their locations due to the unrest. Additionally, the chaotic situation created nineteen thousand refugees from the jungle areas. All RCA missionaries in Chiapas have been involved with national church efforts to meet refugees’ needs and to offer encouragement to the Indians in their losses of land and homes due to the rebellion. The RCA Mission Services staff asked RCA missionary counselor Harry Miersma to help the Chiapas RCA missionaries deal with their stress experienced during this time of turmoil. The RCA missionaries in Chiapas need the continued prayers of the RCA. (Miersma works for Wycliffe Bible Translators in the Huntington Beach, California, Wycliffe Center and is underwritten by the RCA. He is available to counsel RCA missionaries as requested by Mission Services.) Evangelism under persecution is “evangelism in a changing world.”

Change is occurring in Chiapas in other ways. National Christians are taking more responsibility for leadership. The new technology in computer-assisted dialect adaptation is speeding up Bible translation. What once took years to do, can now be done in a few days. RCA missionaries are providing the leadership training for this new technology in Chiapas. Evangelism through new technology is “evangelism in a changing world.”

The Tzeltal Bible School at Buenos Aires was taken over by Zapatista rebels in April 1994. The government promises to return the Bible school in the near future, but it will need to be rebuilt since most of it was destroyed. After a wonderful graduation service in June 1994, the board of the Juan Kempers Theological Seminary announced that due to financial hardships caused by the Zapatista rebellion, fall 1994 classes would be suspended. Strong reaction from students, faculty, and congregations resulted in reconsideration of the board’s decision. However, the seminary still did not open for the 1994-95 school year. Most of the students transferred to seminaries in Mexico City or Villahermosa. Despite the revolution, evangelism continues.

Training in the Bible schools and literature production continue to be a major part of the RCA missionary task. New translation work is under way among the Amatenango, Tzotzil, Oxchuc, and Spanish churches. Hymnbooks, theology, history, liturgy, and the Bible are all part of the translation process. Evangelism through the printed page is “evangelism in a changing world.”
NATIVE AMERICAN CONGREGATIONS

Most of the American Indian congregations that relate to Mission Services have experienced pastoral and staff changes. Besides these changes, there have been other changes. Apache Reformed Church elected its first Comanche consistory member; a significant move to include other tribes in the leadership of the church. This church has also been involved in mission outreach, assisting other churches in the Classis of Red River and the White Eagle Nazarene Church in Ponca City, Oklahoma. This is a healthy sign. Recipients of mission work becoming involved in evangelizing others is "evangelism in a changing world."

SOUTHERN NORMAL SCHOOL

Southern Normal School (SNS) had significant changes this past year. The school has new status as an independent college preparatory school related to, but not owned by, the Reformed Church in America. The RCA remains heavily represented on the Board of Trustees of the school and the SNS Foundation. The school was featured in an article in the New York Times in September 1994 and is experiencing increased enrollments. While finances remain a critical concern, foundations and businesses have given several grants. The support of the RCA, both with its prayers and its dollars, is necessary to the future success of Southern Normal School. Moving from a position of dependence on the RCA to independent status with continued RCA support and participation is "evangelism in a changing world."

MISSION TO INTERNATIONALS

There are over two thousand international students on the campus of Oklahoma State University in Stillwater. Many students are from countries where the gospel cannot be shared openly by foreigners. But many of these bright students are returning to their countries with a commitment to share their newfound faith. Evangelism through work with international students is "evangelism in a changing world."

ONTARIO SHELTER FOR WOMEN

In Welland, Ontario, the RCA does crisis counseling with battered and abused women. The RCA also works with women who suffer from problem pregnancies, post-abortion syndrome, and prenatal and postnatal bereavement. The ministry recently moved out of a church building and into a refurbished house. Plans for developing a similar center in Burnaby, British Columbia, have been put on hold for the present time. Evangelism through caring for those who have been abused is "evangelism in a changing world."

WAY OUT MINISTRIES

Way Out Ministries reaches out to the drug and gang culture in Hawaiian Gardens, California. Many lives have been changed through the Way Out Ministries program. The ministry reaches beyond youth to adults as well. Evangelism through working on city streets is "evangelism in a changing world."

VOLUNTEER SERVICES

Since its inception, the RCA Volunteer Services Program has been a part of Mission Services. With the dramatic growth in recent years of RCA volunteerism, this inclusion in Mission Services has proven to be very wise. Although volunteers cannot and should not replace long-term missionaries, they can and do make a significant contribution to the ongoing mission work of the RCA.
Long-term RCA volunteers serve in the areas previously mentioned, but also most noticeably in inner cities of North America in youth work, children's programs, homeless shelters, and AIDS/HIV-positive programs.

Short-term RCA volunteers serve not only in North America, but also in locations such as Ecuador, Honduras, Russia, Hong Kong, and China. Short-term RCA volunteers provide services such as repair and maintenance, cooking, cleaning, sewing, building, medical work, teaching English, disaster response, tutoring general subjects, and working with gang members.

RCA volunteer work groups provide invaluable service. They not only provide labor, but also cover the expenses of the materials for the projects they undertake.

The RCA Office of Volunteer Services sent out over 1,500 volunteers in 1994. In addition, hundreds more return to sites of previous service on behalf of the RCA Office of Volunteer Services or, on their own, make arrangements to return to previous sites of service. Evangelism through volunteer service is "evangelism in a changing world."

COOPERATIVE MINISTRY WITH CONGREGATIONAL SERVICES AND STEWARDSHIP AND COMMUNICATION SERVICES


REFORMED CHURCH WORLD SERVICE

In the past year, Reformed Church World Service (RCWS) provided blankets, food, clothing, medical supplies, building material, seeds to grow food, doctors, carpenters, agronomists, hydrologists, electricians, pastors, trauma counselors, trucks to transport emergency supplies, community disaster coordinators, and much more. These acts of mercy took place in New Jersey, the Carolina Coasts, South Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Texas, California, Chiapas, the Caribbean, Columbia, the Philippines, Japan, China, Southeast Asia, Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania, Rwanda, Mozambique, the Balkan countries, the former Soviet Union, and the Netherlands. Individuals, families, and RCA congregations give gifts to RCWS to fund these services and supplies.

FINANCES

RCA congregational support of its RCA mission program in 1994 remained about level with 1993 support. Unfortunately, the costs to maintain the RCA mission program at its current level still requires an increase of about 5 percent annually. The 1993 General Synod voted:

> to ask the Mission Services Unit to appoint ten new missionaries as a challenge to the denomination to increase its reach beyond its own borders (MGS 1993, R-8, pp. 445-46).

This will prove to be difficult if current funding levels continue. Missionary Services reduced its 1995 budget by $290,000 from its original 1995 budget. The 1996 budget is $63,880 below the originally intended 1995 budget.
The world is changing, and it still stands in desperate need of the Savior. The challenge lies before the RCA. Must a lack of finances squelch the efforts of world evangelism?

➢ The advisory committee recommended:

R-2.
To request that all RCA congregations make a concerted effort to sustain and increase their mission fund giving in 1996 by 5 percent. (ADOPTED)

Reason: In the light of the emphasis of this General Synod on “Evangelism in a Changing World,” the advisory committee recognized the need to raise RCA mission giving levels in order to support appropriate programs at both the national and international levels.

CONCLUSION

The report of Mission Services reflects only a part of the mission program of the Reformed Church in America. Readers of this report may have noticed that names of RCA mission personnel were not mentioned, although RCA partners in mission were frequently mentioned. RCA mission personnel are, however, central to every RCA mission segment mentioned above. Without RCA mission personnel, the stories would not be written.

In conclusion, the names and fields of service of all RCA missionaries, world mission program associates (WMPA), and long-term volunteers (vol) serving on behalf of the RCA follow:

AFRICA

Ethiopia
Dr. Harvey and Margaret Doorenbos
Richard and Donna Swart
Merle and Karen Vander Sluis

Kenya
Emery and Sharon Blanksma
Delvin and Debbie Braaksma
Lawrence and Linda McAuley
William and Carolyn Overway (vol)
Roger and Susan Scheenstra
The Rev. J. Roger and Carolyn Schrock (WMPA)
Kenneth and Connie Shingledecker
Leah Wissink (vol)

Malawi
Rowland and Jane Van Es Jr. (WMPA)

Sudan
The Rev. Peter and Patricia Ford
Jay Harsevoort (vol)
Barbara Kapenga

ASIA

China
Ellen Bylsma (vol)
Daniel Gosnell (vol)
Michael Knust (vol)
Kathleen Lowe (vol)
Donna Matzek (vol)
Rachel Oakhill (vol)
Brenda Rempe (vol)
Matthew Roggen (vol)
Robyn Wiersema (vol)

Hong Kong
The Rev. Wendell and Amerentia Karsen
Shanti Rhoades (vol)

Japan
Gail Beran (WMPA)
Vincent Boraas (vol)
Harris Bras (vol)
Grace Chang (vol)
Kimberly Courson (vol)
Kathleen Harris (vol)
The Rev. Wayne and Miho Jansen
David Kennedy (vol)
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<tr>
<th>Location</th>
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<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>Daniel and LaDonna DeVries</td>
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<td>The Rev. Dr. Rowland and Judy Van Es</td>
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<td>Singapore</td>
<td>Paul Hoekstra</td>
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<td>David and Charlene Alexander</td>
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<td>David and Margaret Cole (vol)</td>
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<td>Judy Estell</td>
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<td>The Rev. Dr. Martin Wang (WMPA)</td>
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<td>CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICA</td>
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<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>Amy Albright (vol)</td>
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<td>Honduras</td>
<td>Dr. Angelica Juarez (WMPA)</td>
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<td>Drs. Norvelle and Gerard Rudy (WMPA)</td>
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<td>Nicaragua</td>
<td>Dr. Bernardeth Kelly (WMPA)</td>
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<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>The Rev. Douglas and Aleta Shepler</td>
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<td>The Rev. Robert and Helen Wierenga</td>
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<td>EASTERN EUROPE</td>
<td>The Rev. James and Beth Harrison</td>
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<td>INDIA</td>
<td>Dr. Bruce and Tamar DeJong</td>
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<td>Rani VandeBerg (WMPA)</td>
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<td>William Walck (vol)</td>
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<td>MIDDLE EAST</td>
<td>Dr. Paul and Rebecca Armerding</td>
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<td>Gary Brown</td>
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<td>James Cornell (vol)</td>
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<td>Cheryl Daniel</td>
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<td>The Rev. John and Lynne Hubers</td>
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<td>Edward and Pamela Ryan</td>
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<td>Bahrain</td>
<td>The Rev. Lewis and Nancy Scudder</td>
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<td>Kuwait</td>
<td>The Rev. Jerry and Jacquelyn Zandstra</td>
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<td>Oman</td>
<td>The Rev. Roger and Adilee Bruggink</td>
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<td>The Rev. Martin and Emilie Weitz</td>
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<td>NORTH AMERICA</td>
<td>American Indian</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The Rev. Darrell and Dawn Dalman</td>
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<td>The Rev. William and Peggy De Boer</td>
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<td>The Rev. George and MaryAnne Montanari</td>
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<td>Duane and Carol Peterson (vol)</td>
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<td>The Rev. Robert and Linda Schut</td>
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<td>Canada</td>
<td>Debi Logtenberg (WMPA)</td>
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<td>Mexico</td>
<td>The Rev. James and Sharon Heneveld</td>
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<td>The Rev. Sam and Helen Hofman</td>
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<td>Dr. Moises and Lupe Ocampo (WMPA)</td>
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<td>Brian and Donna Renes</td>
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<td>Donald and Brenda Schout</td>
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<td>The Rev. Alan and Sue Schreuder</td>
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<td>The Rev. Vernon and Carla Sterk</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
United States

The Rev. Charles and Rieneke Ausherman
Barry and Terry! Bruce (WMPA)
Kirsten Lipovac (vol)
John and Alice MacLean (WMPA)
Bradley Marner (vol)
Harry and Patricia Miersma

Holly Nollen (vol)
The Rev. Thomas and Elizabeth Stewart (WMPA)
Denise Van Zee (vol)
The Rev. Roger Vegdahl (WMPA)
The Rev. Dr. Harold and Neva Vogelaar
Paula Wells (vol)

CHANGES IN MISSIONARY PERSONNEL

Appointments

Barry and Terry! Bruce were appointed as world mission program associates with Way Out Ministries in Hawaiian Gardens, California.

The Rev. Darrell and Dawn Dalman were appointed as missionaries in Winnebago, Nebraska.

The Rev. Abraham and Sayuri Kist-Okazaki were appointed as missionaries in Japan.

Resignations/Completions of Service

Jeanette Beagley-Koolhaas was appointed as a missionary in 1983. Her husband, Alan Beagley, was appointed in 1987. They served in Taiwan until 1994.

Molly Beaver was appointed as a missionary in 1984. She served in Africa from 1984 to 1994.

Carol and Randy Braaksma were appointed as world mission program associates in 1992. They served in China from 1992 to 1994.

The Rev. David and Nancy Crump were appointed as missionaries in 1987. They served in Winnebago, Nebraska, from 1987 to 1994.

The Rev. Christine Dyke was appointed as a missionary in 1993. She served in Macy, Nebraska, from 1993 to 1995.

Eugene and Arlene Meerdink served as missionaries in Chiapas, Mexico, from 1966 to 1971. They were reappointed as missionaries in Chiapas in 1984 and served until 1994.

Retirements

The Rev. John and Phyllis Bandt were appointed as missionaries in 1964. They served in the Philippines from 1964 to 1971. They were reappointed as missionaries in Dulce, New Mexico, in 1989. They served in Dulce, New Mexico, from 1989 to 1994.

The Rev. Charles and Donna Johnson were appointed as missionaries in 1992. They served in Oman from 1992 to 1994.
Volunteer Services Assignments

Africa: Leah Wissink
William and Carolyn Overway
Jay Harsevoort

China: Daniel Gosnell
Matthew Roggen
Ellen Bylsma
Brenda Rempe
Robyn Wiersema
Kathleen Lowe

Hong Kong: Shanni Rhoades

Japan: Philip Van Oort
Erinn Raymond
Kimberly Courson

Middle East: James Cornell

Taiwan: David and Margaret Cole

U.S.: Kentucky — Denise Van Zee
Paula Wells
Michigan — Kirsten Lipovac
New Jersey — Bradley Marner
New York — Holly Nollen

Deaths

Harriet Brumler died on April 9, 1994. She served as a missionary in India from 1937 to 1964.

Barbara L. Wyma died on July 30, 1994. She and her husband, David, served as missionaries in Taiwan from 1979 to 1990.

Mary Verona Bruins Allison died on September 2, 1994. She served in the Middle East from 1934 to 1970.

Bertha Cody died on September 29, 1994. She served as a missionary at the Annville Institute in Annville, Kentucky from 1949 to 1969.

Deane Kots died on December 22, 1994. She served as a missionary in Jackson County, Kentucky, from 1929 to 1942.

➢ The Rev. Dr. Theodore Wilde, director of World Mission for the Moravian Church in North America, addressed the Synod.<

Report of the Task Force on South Africa

The Reformed Church in America has a history of fraternal relations with the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa going back to 1840. In 1950 the General Synod addressed a letter to the Dutch Reformed Church in which the General Synod declared for the first time its firm opposition to the practice of segregation in the church (see MGS 1950, pp. 117, 312). In 1967 a similar letter was sent again (see MGS 1967, pp. 204-06, 211-12). The Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa took this so seriously that it published a book called *A Plea for Understanding: A Reply to the Reformed Church in America*. In 1969 the General Synod appointed an Ad Hoc Committee on South Africa (MGS 1969, p. 162). In 1972 the General Synod recommended that “nonwhite” South African students be invited to study at RCA seminaries (MGS 1972, p. 234). At the same time, the General Synod attempted to keep communications with the Dutch Reformed Church open in order to have some influence. Increasing familiarity of the RCA with the South African scene revealed that political apartheid was simply a larger version of what the Dutch Reformed Church had long been practicing; that is, the enforced separation of different “races” into different denominations: the Dutch Reformed Mission Church for “coloureds” (mixed-race), the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa for “blacks” (native Africans), the Reformed Church in Africa for “Asians” (Indians), and the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa for “whites,” exclusively. White pastors, however, were free to serve in any of the denominations.

In 1976 the General Synod began to establish contacts with the nonwhite churches in South Africa (MGS 1976, pp. 214-15). Soon this came to be one of the key strategies of involvement by the RCA in South Africa. The 1979 General Synod set up the Task Force on South Africa on the recommendation of the Black Council of the Reformed Church in America. The task force, which included representation from the Christian Action Commission, General Synod Executive Committee, General Program Council, and minority councils, was formed to assist the Black, Coloured, and Indian people of South Africa in “nonviolent liberation struggle and to make recommendations to the appropriate body of the church for action” (MGS 1979, R-17, p. 92).

By 1981 the RCA had entered into “direct ecumenical relationships” with the “black” and “coloured” churches, and the RCA invited them to send delegates to General Synod (MGS 1981, pp. 134-35). The RCA began to see itself increasingly as a partner with these churches in their struggle, such as when in 1982 the RCA joined other members of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) in declaring apartheid to be a heresy (see MGS 1982, pp. 88-91, 136-40). In 1985 the General Synod received the *Confession of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church 1982*, the so-called “Belhar Confession” (MGS 1985, pp. 267-68). This confession reputed the division of the church on racial or economic grounds, and so supported their “state of confession” (*status confessionis*). The Task force on South Africa sponsored exchanges, correspondence, and political pressure on the U.S. government, and the general divestment of RCA investments from firms doing business in South Africa.

In 1992 the Task Force on South Africa sponsored a delegation of RCA leaders to attend the first joint Synod of the two nonwhite denominations (the Dutch Reformed Mission Church and the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa) which were attempting to unite as one nonracial denomination. (A vote was taken at a Uniting Synod held April 14-17, 1994 and this vote created the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa). In the same year the RCA broke off all correspondence and contact with the white Dutch Reformed Church until such time as it entered the uniting church.

The Task Force on South Africa held its final meeting on February 17, 1995, at the Interchurch Center in New York City. The task force seeks closure to these years of involvement with South African Reformed churches by inviting General Synod delegates to celebrate the union of the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (black) and the Dutch Reformed...
Mission Church (colored/mixed race) which took place in April 1994. The Rev. Ray Timms, moderator of the Task Force on South Africa, represented the RCA at the opening synod of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa, which took place in the Capetown suburb of Bellville, an event which anticipated South Africa’s first democratic elections by a week. The Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa continues to dialogue with the Reformed Church in Africa (Indian/Asian), which is not yet part of this new denomination.

Anticipating a need for a coordinated approach in the RCA to the new democratic South Africa, the Task Force on South Africa makes the following recommendations:

R-1.
To request the Commission on Christian Unity to consult with the appropriate offices of the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa (URCSA), with the input of the African-American Council, to develop a plan for correspondence and continuing relationships between the respective assemblies and congregations of the RCA and the URCSA. (ADOPTED)

R-2.
To request the General Synod Council Mission Services Committee to explore with the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa a procedure for annual presentation and review of opportunities for partnership in ministry and program. (ADOPTED)

R-3.
To request the General Synod Council Mission Services Committee, through its Office of Volunteer Services, to explore possibilities for short- and long-term volunteer opportunities in Southern Africa; and further,

to request the General Synod Council Mission Services Committee, through its supervisor of RCA mission programs in Africa, to explore possibilities for short- and long-term volunteers from South Africa to serve in the U.S. and Canada. (ADOPTED)

The 1995 General Synod marks the final appearance before the RCA of the Task Force on South Africa. It is the prayerfully considered view of the task force that although its work is ending, a new era is dawning for ecumenical relations with the RCA’s colleagues in Southern Africa. This new era holds the promise for a deepening understanding of issues of justice and reconciliation, not only in South Africa but also in the United States and Canada.

From the Report of the General Secretary

P-1 was referred to the Advisory Committee on Evangelization and Church Growth and the Advisory Committee on World Mission.

In response to P-1 (p.39), the Advisory Committee on World Mission consulted with the Advisory Committee on Evangelization and Church Growth to prepare R-9 on p. 329. The Advisory Committee on Evangelization and Church Growth presented R-9 to this General Synod for adoption (see p. 329).
### NOMINATIONS

#### Report of the Commission on Nominations

The Commission on Nominations submitted for consideration and election the following names:

Note: *indicates a final term  
#indicates an official nomination from the body listed

#### GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL

 Class of 1996

Marvin Tinkleenburg ........................................... Classis of Minnesota

 Class of 1998

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Classis</th>
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<tr>
<td>John Bowen</td>
<td>Classis of Columbia-Greene#</td>
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<td>*Harry De Bruyn</td>
<td>Classis of Chicago#</td>
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<td>*Hans de Waard</td>
<td>Classis of Ontario#</td>
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<tr>
<td>*Michaёl Edwards</td>
<td>Classis of New York#</td>
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<td>*Victor Eimicke</td>
<td>At-Large</td>
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<td>*John Elliott, Jr.</td>
<td>Classis of Rockland-Westchester#</td>
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<td>*L'anni Hill-Alto</td>
<td>At-Large</td>
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<tr>
<td>*Carolyn Jones-Assini</td>
<td>Classis of Schenectady#</td>
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<td>Rodney Koopmans</td>
<td>At-Large</td>
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<tr>
<td>*Peter Manting</td>
<td>Classis of Muskegon#</td>
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<td>*Larry Martinsen</td>
<td>Classis of Cascades#</td>
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<td>Daniel Meeter</td>
<td>Classis of Greater Palisades#</td>
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<td>*Nancy Miller</td>
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<td>*Calvin Rynbrandt</td>
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<td>*Arthur Schind</td>
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<td>*Sara Smith</td>
<td>Classis of Brooklyn#</td>
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<td>David Sterk</td>
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<td>*Steven Vander Molen</td>
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<td>*Wayne Van Regenmorter</td>
<td>Classis of Pleasant Prairie#</td>
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<td>*Anthony Vis</td>
<td>Vice President of General Synod</td>
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#### BOARD OF TRUSTEES, NEW BRUNSWICK THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

 Class of 1996

Allan Ramirez-MonCayo ...................................... NBTS#

 Class of 1997

Louis Ruprecht ............................................. NBTS#  

 Class of 1998

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<tr>
<td>*Roland Euwema</td>
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<td>*Eunice Folkerts</td>
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<td>*Ann Hesselink</td>
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<td>Carol Kuhlthau</td>
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<td>*John Stokes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diane Tice</td>
<td>Regional Synod of Albany</td>
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<tr>
<td>*Frederick Wezeman</td>
<td>Regional Synod of Mid-America</td>
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<td>Beverly Bell Winslow</td>
<td>Regional Synod of New York</td>
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BOARD OF TRUSTEES, THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION AGENCY

Class of 1997
Sherwin Broersma ............................................. Regional Synod of New York

Class of 1998
Barbara Nauta .................................................... TBA#

BOARD OF TRUSTEES, WESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Class of 1997
Ronald Sikkema ............................................... Regional Synod of Canada
Wayne Vander Byl ............................................ Regional Synod of Albany

Class of 1998
Marc de Waard ............................................... Regional Synod of the Far West
Alfredo Gonzales ............................................ WTS#
Ronald Hartgerink .......................................... WTS#
Andrea Kragt ................................................ WTS#
*Barbara Liggett ............................................... Regional Synod of the Great Lakes
*Craig Neckers .............................................. WTS#
Lynn Smith .................................................. WTS#
*Andrea Van Beek ........................................... WTS#
*Carol Wagner .............................................. WTS#

EDITORIAL COUNCIL OF THE CHURCH HERALD

Class of 1998
Philip Bakelaar ............................................... Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics#
*David Dehmers ............................................. At Large
Mark Lemmenes ............................................... Regional Synod of the Great Lakes#
Peter Paulsen .............................................. At Large

COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN ACTION

Class of 1998
Donald De Young
Frederick Mueller
Marian Patterson

COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN UNITY

Class of 1998
Richard Brihn
Genevia Gana

COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Class of 1998
Carol Bechtel-Reynolds
L'Anni Hill-Alto
Robert Olson

COMMISSION ON CHURCH ORDER

Class of 1998
Allan Janssen

COMMISSION ON HISTORY

Class of 1998
Jennifer Reece
COMMISSION ON JUDICIAL BUSINESS
Class of 1998
Donald DeVries ................................................. Regional Synod of the Far West#
Nancy Schoep .................................................... Regional Synod of Albany#
Larry Schuyler .................................................. Regional Synod of the Great Lakes#

COMMISSION ON NOMINATIONS
Class of 1996
Jesus Garcia ........................................................ Council for Hispanic Ministries#
* Harold Korver ................................................... Past President of General Synod

Class of 1998
* Peter Berry ..................................................... Regional Synod of Albany#
Calvin Bensema .................................................. Regional Synod of the Far West#
* Harry Pofahl ..................................................... Regional Synod of the Great Lakes#
* Glenda Vetter .................................................... Reformed Church Women's Ministries#

COMMISSION ON THEOLOGY
Class of 1998
Johnny Alicea-Baez
* James Brownson
Paul Fries
* Earle Hall

COMMISSION FOR WOMEN
Class of 1998
Nancy Cooper
* Norma Schouten
Carole Walker

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES
Class of 1998
* Mary De Jong .................................................. Commission on Christian Unity#
* Christine Dyke ................................................ Commission on Christian Unity#
I. John Hesselink .............................................. Commission on Christian Unity#
* Grace Terry .................................................... Commission on Christian Unity#
Anthony Vis ..................................................... Commission on Christian Unity#

WORLD ALLIANCE OF REFORMED CHURCHES
Class of 1998
Douglas Fromm ............................................. Commission on Christian Unity#
* Kathie Van Hoven ........................................... Commission on Christian Unity#

BUILDING AND EXTENSION FUND
Class of 1998
Robert Carlson ................................................. At Large
Linda McLane .................................................... General Synod Council

CENTRAL COLLEGE
Class of 2001
Mary Andringa
Robert Vanderlinden
HOPE COLLEGE
Class of 1999
*K. Kermit Campbell
*Frederick Kruithof

NORWESTERN COLLEGE
Class of 1998
Elizabeth Campbell

R-1.
To elect the above-mentioned nominees to the respective General Synod agencies and commissions as listed. (ADOPTED)

R-2.
To elect Audrey Den Herder, moderator of the Commission on Nominations, for the 1995-96 term. (ADOPTED)
EDITORIAL REPORT

In accordance with *The Special Rules of Order of the General Synod*, Chapter 3, Part II, Article 3, Section 2, all proposed amendments to the *Book of Church Order (BCO)* which have been approved shall be referred to the corresponding delegate from the Commission on Church Order, in consultation with the general secretary, for final wording and report back to the Synod.

Of the *BCO* amendments approved at this meeting, one required additional attention by the General Synod: R-19 on pp. 246-47.

**R-1.**

To approve the following editorial change for R-19, pp. 246-47 (proposed addition is underlined):

To add an additional "constitutional inquiry" question in the *Book of Church Order (BCO)* for identification of leaders in the congregation; and further,

**to adopt the following revision of the BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 1, for recommendation to the classes for approval...** (ADOPTED)
REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE OF REFERENCE

REFERRAL OF AMENDMENT TO THE BOOK OF CHURCH ORDER

The Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 13, Section 15 amendment (see proposed amendment #1 on p. 51) allowing ministers from other denominations to hold temporary membership in a classis, but not be allowed to vote or participate in judicial sessions, is in conflict with another section of the Book of Church Order (see pp. 51-52 for full explanation). At its February 1995 meeting, the Commission on Church Order requested the 1995 General Synod refer this proposed amendment #1 to the Commission on Church Order for further study and report to the 1995 General Synod.

➢ The Committee of Reference recommended:

R-1. To refer the revision of the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 13, Section 15—adopted by the 1994 General Synod (MGS 1994, R-1, pp. 218-19) and approved by two-thirds of the classes (p. 51)—to the Commission on Church Order for further study and report to the 1996 General Synod. (ADOPTED)<

REFERRAL OF PRESIDENTIAL PROPOSAL

P-4 was referred to the Committee of Reference.

➢ In response to P-4 (p. 30), the Committee of Reference recommended:

R-2. To direct the general secretary to designate a denominational volunteer who will assist in educating pastors, youth leaders, Christian educators, camp directors, college chaplains, and others on how to identify and encourage persons who have potential for pastoral leadership. (ADOPTED)<

OVERTURES

The Committee of Reference received the following overtures for consideration and recommendation to the General Synod:

Overtures

Limit General Synod Meeting Sites to RCA College Campuses

1. The Classis of California overtures General Synod to instruct the General Synod Council to plan and schedule General Synod meetings exclusively at RCA colleges beginning in 1996.

Reasons:

1. The estimated savings costs could easily exceed $100,000 per annum.

2. The cooperation of the RCA colleges in hosting previous General Synod meetings has been excellent. Use of the RCA colleges for General Synod meetings has resulted in efficient and consistent planning arrangements. Less pressure and demands on
General Synod staff has occurred with the use of RCA colleges for General Synod meetings.

The Committee of Reference recommended:

R-3.
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The Committee of Reference was persuaded that R-5 on p. 50 accomplishes the intent of Overture 1, but allows for more flexibility than what Overture 1 permits.

(The General Synod adopted R-5 on p. 50.)

2. The Classis of Muskegon overtures General Synod to consider scheduling General Synod meetings each year at either Hope College, Central College, or Northwestern College.

Reasons:

1. A demonstration of good stewardship in the use of General Synod assessment monies would be well received by the classes and congregations of the Reformed Church in America.

2. Holding General Synod on RCA college campuses would reflect a real effort to reduce costs for General Synod meetings.

3. Holding General Synod on RCA college campuses contributes to the financial resources of the RCA colleges and provides resources to communities in which many RCA members live.

4. Holding General Synod on RCA college campuses provides visibility for the RCA colleges and heightens the appreciation and awareness of General Synod participants for the RCA colleges and the colleges’ excellence in operations/facilities and education.

The Committee of Reference recommended:

R-4.
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reason: Overture 2 is similar to Overture 1. The Committee of Reference was persuaded that R-5 on p. 50 accomplishes the intent of Overture 2, but allows for more flexibility than what Overture 2 permits.

(The General Synod adopted R-5 on p. 50.)

Relocation of RCA Headquarters Office

3. The Classis of Wisconsin overtures General Synod to study the feasibility of relocating the current headquarters of the Reformed Church in America at the Interchurch Center in New York City to a more geographically and demographically central location in the U.S., e.g. Chicago, Illinois; and further, to set a target date of no later than 1998 for a possible relocation of the headquarters, for report to the 1996 General Synod.
Reasons:

1. A more centrally located RCA headquarters office in the U.S. will better represent the geographical distribution of RCA membership throughout North America.

2. The economic climate has changed since the General Synod in 1987 last reviewed the relocation of the RCA headquarters (*MGS* 1987, pp. 245-56). The RCA could benefit financially with a new report.

3. A more centrally located RCA headquarters office in the U.S. will most likely reduce the costs of office operations, employee salaries and benefits, etc.

The Committee of Reference recommended:

**R-5.**

To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. The Committee of Reference reviewed a report on office relocation for RCA headquarters presented at the 1987 General Synod (*MGS* 1987, pp. 245-56). The 1987 General Synod voted:

   To instruct the General Program Council and the General Synod to continue to disperse its staff, to the extent possible, to the various regions of the church (*MGS* 1987, R-6, p. 256).

   Since 1987, the 1987 General Synod instruction (*MGS* 1987, R-6, p. 256) has been implemented and continues to expand. Currently, one-third of denominational staff is located in the New York City RCA headquarters, one-third of denominational staff is located in the RCA Michigan Regional Center in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and one-third of the denominational staff is located in various other regions of the RCA—Orange City, Iowa, Corona, California, Tarrytown, New York, Schenectady, New York, and Lansing, Illinois.

2. Location of more denominational staff in other existing RCA regional offices is currently under consideration.

3. The RCA shares ownership of the Interchurch Center which means RCA office space cost at the Interchurch Center is in effect paid to the RCA as one of the Interchurch corporation members.

4. As a partner-owner of the Interchurch Center, RCA office space cost is well below commercial rental rates—not only in New York City, but in many cities throughout the U.S.

5. There are no cost-of-living adjustments for denominational staff living in different geographical regions of the U.S.

1996 GENERAL SYNOD OPERATIONAL BUDGET

The Committee of Reference reported the cost effect of four items added to the 1996 General Synod Operational Budget by this General Synod.
### Item Budget Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Budget</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased Membership Size of General Synod (R-6, p.51)</td>
<td>$55,000</td>
<td>$.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic Service Cost</td>
<td>$8,800</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish Translation of the Book of Church Order (R-11 Substitute, p. 95)</td>
<td>$4,000</td>
<td>$.03</td>
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<tr>
<td>Basic Service Cost</td>
<td>$460</td>
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<tr>
<td>Appoint a Task Force to Study Effectiveness of Distribution of Church Herald to Every RCA Household and Explore Alternative Funding (p. 160)</td>
<td>$8,000</td>
<td>$.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic Service Cost</td>
<td>$1,280</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in Ministry Events for RCA Women (R-28 Substitute, p. 282)</td>
<td>$6,000</td>
<td>$.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic Service Cost</td>
<td>$960</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(The above four items were included in the 1996 General Synod Operational Budget adopted by this General Synod. See pp. 53-56.)

### LEAVES OF ABSENCE

All requests for leaves of absence were reviewed and found to be acceptable.

### RESOLUTIONS

The Committee of Reference presented the following resolutions:

**R-6.**

**WHEREAS** the delegates and guests of General Synod have been warmly received by Ramapo College; and

**WHEREAS** the beautiful setting, hospitality, meals and meeting space have contributed to the welfare of the delegates;

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that the one hundred eighty-ninth General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Mahwah, New Jersey on the sixteenth day of June 1995, expresses its heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Robert Scott, president of Ramapo College; Pinese Harris, coordinator of college events and conferences; and her assistant Janet Williams; Mike Ricciardi, assistant athletic director; and his assistant Ben Allen; J. Karl Eichmuller, director of the food service; the security officers and all other staff. (ADOPTED)
R-7.
WHEREAS the delegates' accommodations were graciously arranged and managed in a most efficient way;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred eighty-ninth General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Mahwah, New Jersey on the sixteenth day of June 1995, expresses its appreciation to Dana Stukenborg, corporate sales manager at the Sheraton Crossroads Hotel. (ADOPTED)

R-8.
WHEREAS the Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics graciously hosted the delegates of the one hundred eighty-ninth General Synod; and

WHEREAS the members of churches of the Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics provided transportation for and hospitality following Sunday worship; and

WHEREAS these kind people hosted the delegates of General Synod at The Warwick Center;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred eighty-ninth General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Mahwah, New Jersey, on the sixteenth day of June 1995, expresses its sincere appreciation to the Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics, its member churches and to the Rev. Everett Zabriskie, the Rev. Eugene Roberts, and Caroline Babinsky. (ADOPTED)

R-9.
WHEREAS the transportation specialists graciously and generously gave of their time and energies to attend to the delegates' transportation needs;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred eighty-ninth General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Mahwah, New Jersey, on the sixteenth day of June 1995, expresses from the soles of the delegates' feet their most sincere thanks to all who drove vans. (ADOPTED)

R-10.
WHEREAS the delegates and guests of the one hundred eighty-ninth General Synod were challenged and given a vision for evangelism in a changing world;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred eighty-ninth General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Mahwah, New Jersey, on the sixteenth day of June 1995, expresses its gratitude and appreciation, with prayers for God's blessings, to the Rev. Dr. John Perkins. (ADOPTED)

R-11.
WHEREAS the Rev. John Paarlberg coordinated a most inspiring Sunday evening worship service; and
WHEREAS the North Reformed Church in Newark, New Jersey welcomed the delegates and guests to their house of worship;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred eighty-ninth General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Mahwah, New Jersey, on the sixteenth day of June 1995, commends the Rev. John Paarlberg for the richness and diversity of the worship and expresses its appreciation to all who planned and coordinated the worship service including Marilyn Van Houten, to all participants in the worship service, to Alfred Fedak for his service as organist and the gift of a special hymn written for this occasion, and to North Reformed Church. (ADOPTED)

R-12.
WHEREAS the Rev. Dr. Charles Van Engen through serving as our worship leader in an impassioned way caused delegates to consider evangelism in a changing world; and

WHEREAS the Rev. Frederick Herwaldt and Diane Falk generously offered their time and talent in music and song;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred eighty-ninth General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Mahwah, New Jersey on the sixteenth day of June 1995, extends its sincere gratitude and appreciation for their daily worship leadership. (ADOPTED)

R-13.
WHEREAS the Rev. Harold Korver presided with good humor and grace during his tenure as president of General Synod and focused the church on leadership for the future;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred eighty-ninth General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Mahwah, New Jersey, on the sixteenth day of June 1995, expresses its thanks to almighty God for the dedicated service of Harold Korver. (ADOPTED)

R-14.
WHEREAS the Rev. Dr. I. John Hesselink, vice-president of General Synod, has faithfully discharged his duties this past year;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred eighty-ninth General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Mahwah, New Jersey, on the sixteenth day of June 1995, expresses its gratitude to I. John Hesselink and pledges to him its prayers during his term as president of the General Synod. (ADOPTED)

R-15.
WHEREAS the Rev. Anthony Vis has been elected vice-president of the General Synod;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred eighty-ninth General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Mahwah, New Jersey, on the sixteenth day of June 1995, expresses
its congratulations and commends Anthony Vis to God's care. (ADOPTED)

R-16. WHEREAS moderators and vice-moderators of the various advisory committees, staff members and resource persons facilitated the work of the advisory committees and the General Synod with diligence, efficiency and attention to detail;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred eighty-ninth General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Mahwah, New Jersey, on the sixteenth day of June 1995, expresses its thanks for their careful and conscientious service. (ADOPTED)

R-17. WHEREAS the many elder delegates offered their keen insight and practical wisdom to the deliberations of the General Synod; and WHEREAS many did so at the cost of sacrificing personal vacation time;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred eighty-ninth General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Mahwah, New Jersey, on the sixteenth day of June 1995, enthusiastically expresses its thanksgiving to God for the dedication and love for the church of its elder delegates. (ADOPTED)

R-18. WHEREAS Ken and Beth Van Prooyen have tirelessly and generously given of their vacation time to serve the General Synod as sound technicians for the past twenty years;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred eighty-ninth General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Mahwah, New Jersey, on the sixteenth day of June 1995, expresses its thanks to Ken and Beth Van Prooyen for their dedicated service. (ADOPTED)

R-19. WHEREAS the staff of the Reformed Church in America who are present at the General Synod have given of themselves with enthusiasm, graciousness, and generosity;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred eighty-ninth General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Mahwah, New Jersey, on the sixteenth day of June 1995, expresses its appreciation, affirmation and offers its prayers for God's blessings upon these staff persons. (ADOPTED)

R-20. WHEREAS the Rev. Frederick Mold, Jr. has served the one hundred eighty-ninth General Synod as its parliamentarian with skill, competence, dignity, and sensitivity;
THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred eighty-ninth General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Mahwah, New Jersey, on the sixteenth day of June 1995, offers him our deepest thanks. (ADOPTED)

R-21.
To express its enthusiastic appreciation for the members of the various General Synod commissions, councils, and agencies who are completing their terms of service this year, having served the Lord and the church faithfully in their respective capacities. (ADOPTED)

The following persons have completed their service this year:

**General Synod Council**
- Warren Burgess
- Herman Gruis
- John Stokes
- Stanley Vander Aarde

**Western Theological Seminary**
- Philip Schuiling
- Eloise Van Heest

**Commission on Christian Action**
- Steven Hoogerwerff
- Germaine Phellebon-Smith

**Commission on Christian Unity**
- Daniel Meeter
- J. Christian Quello
- Sara Smith

**Commission on History**
- Bernita Babb

**Commission on Theology**
- George Cruz
- Norman Kansfield

**National Council of Churches**
- Douglas Fromm
- Eugene Heideman

**World Alliance of Reformed Churches**
- Carol Wagner

**African-American Council**
- Henry Baker
- Nisha Hitchman
- Mary Jernigan
- Velva Montgomery

**Council for Pacific and Asian American Ministries**
- King Ng

**Theological Education Agency**
- Chester Droog
- Rufus Mc Clendon

**Editorial Council of the Church Herald**
- Leonard Kalkwarf
- Nancy Lorenzen
- Cecil Martens

**Commission on Christian Worship**
- Donald Lindskoog

**Commission on Church Order**
- Ronald Geschwendt

**Commission on Judicial Business**
- Allan Janssen
- Henry Smitter
- Douglas Van Gessell

**Commission on Nominations**
- David Dethmers

**Commission for Women**
- Dena Ketcham

**Building and Extension Fund**
- Bruce Neckers
- Kenneth Shaffer

**Central College Board of Trustees**
- Robert Bedingfield

**Hope College Board of Trustees**
- Betty Duval

**Council for Hispanic Ministries**
- Claudia Alarcon
- Luis Artegao
- Milagros Cabrera
- Luis Perez
Reformed Church Women's Ministries
Audrey Den Herder
Annette Janssen
Joyce Vermeer

American Indian Council
Tommy Johnson
Judy Manwell
ELECTION OF OFFICERS

The Rev. Dr. I. John Hesselink, Albertus C. Van Raalte professor of systematic theology at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan and General Synod professor of theology, was elected president. The Rev. Anthony Vis, pastor of the Meredith Drive Reformed Church in Des Moines, Iowa was elected vice-president.

III. CLOSE OF GENERAL SYNOD
CLOSE AND ADJOURNMENT

President Harold Korver presented president-elect I. John Hesselink with the traditional bell and gavel and the presidential cross.

The 189th General Synod concluded its business and adjourned at 5:45 p.m., eastern time on Friday, June 16, 1995, to meet in Orange City, Iowa, June 8-14, 1996.

Harold J. Korver, President
I. John Hesselink, Vice-President
Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, General Secretary