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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1995-1996

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THE GENERAL SYNOD OF THE REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA CONVENED IN ITS ONE HUNDRED NINETIETH REGULAR SESSION AT NORTHWESTERN COLLEGE IN ORANGE CITY, IOWA, ON SATURDAY, THE EIGHTH DAY OF JUNE, A.D. ONE THOUSAND NINE HUNDRED AND NINETY-SIX, AT 7:00 P.M., CENTRAL TIME, AND ADJOURNED ON FRIDAY, THE FOURTEENTH DAY OF JUNE, A.D. ONE THOUSAND NINE HUNDRED AND NINETY-SIX AT 9:15 P.M., CENTRAL TIME.

THE THEME OF THE SESSION OF THE GENERAL SYNOD WAS GOD'S PEOPLE TRANSFORMED: A LIVING SACRIFICE.

I. FORMATION OF THE SYNOD

OPENING OF SYNOD

The Synod opened on Saturday evening, June 8, 1996, with a worship and communion service. Participants in the service included: The Rev. Dr. I. John Hesselink, president of the General Synod; the Rev. Anthony Vis, vice-president of the General Synod; the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, general secretary; the Rev. Richard Otterness, pastor, Trinity Reformed Church, Rochester, New York, preaching; the Rev. Curtis Miller, bishop of the Western Iowa Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and representing Ecumenical Ministries of Iowa; and the Rev. James Schoon, pastor, New Hope Community Church, Fremont, California, and the Rev. Janet Johnston, pastor, Lebanon Reformed Church, Lebanon, New Jersey, celebrants. The Rev. Timothy Brown, Henry Bast professor of preaching and director of church vocations at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan, presided as worship leader for the daily worship services during the week of Synod (Monday-Friday, June 10-14, 1996). In addition to the Rev. Timothy Brown, other participants in the daily worship services included: The Rev. Dr. Carol Bechtel Reynolds, associate professor of Old Testament, Western Theological Seminary, Holland, Michigan, and the Rev. John Chang, pastor, Grace Christian Church, Staten Island, New York.
WORSHIP

Saturday Evening
Opening Worship and Communion Service—The Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson
The Rev. Dr. I. John Hesselink
The Rev. Janet Johnston
The Rev. Curtis Miller
The Rev. Richard Otterness
The Rev. James Schoon
The Rev. Anthony Vis

Closing Prayer—The Rev. Edward Schreur

Sunday Afternoon
Opening Prayer—Elder Irene Buron
Closing Prayer—The Rev. Robert Jackson

Sunday Evening
A worship service was held at First Reformed Church in Orange City, Iowa. Participants in the service included: The Rev. Dr. I. John Hesselink, president of the General Synod; the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, general secretary; the Rev. Steven Vander Molen, pastor, First Reformed Church, Orange City, Iowa; Anita Bomgaars, member, First Reformed Church, Orange City, Iowa; the Rev. Donald De Glopper, pastor, Trinity Reformed Church, Orange City, Iowa; Marilyn Vander Kooi, member, Trinity Reformed Church, Orange City, Iowa; the Rev. Harlan Van Oort, pastor, American Reformed Church, Orange City, Iowa; Jan Wilbeck, member, American Reformed Church, Orange City, Iowa; James Bultman, president, Northwestern College, Orange City, Iowa; and the Rev. Matthew Floding, chaplain, Northwestern College, Orange City, Iowa.

Monday Morning
Daily Worship Service—The Rev. Timothy Brown
Closing Prayer—The Rev. Karen Jacobsma Patterson

Tuesday Morning
Daily Worship Service—The Rev. Timothy Brown

Tuesday Afternoon
Opening Prayer—The Rev. Darrell Dalman
Closing Prayer—The Rev. Robert Schut

Wednesday Morning
Daily Worship Service—The Rev. Timothy Brown
Closing Prayer—The Rev. Wayne Jansen

Wednesday Afternoon
Opening Prayer—The Rev. David Hensley
Closing Prayer—Elder Salley Tapley

Wednesday Evening
Opening Prayer—The Rev. Gary Roozeboom
Closing Prayer—The Rev. Robert Hoffman

Thursday Morning
Daily Worship Service—The Rev. Timothy Brown
Closing Prayer—The Rev. Eun Soo Lee
Thursday Afternoon
   Opening Prayer—Elder Barbara Hartgerink
   Closing Prayer—The Rev. Alan Baker

Friday Morning
   Daily Worship Service—The Rev. Timothy Brown
   Closing Prayer—The Rev. James Lester

Friday Afternoon
   Opening Prayer—Corresponding Delegate Barbara Boss
   Closing Prayer—The Rev. Stephen Breen

Friday Afternoon
   An installation service for the new officers of General Synod and a communion service were held in Christ Chapel at Northwestern College in Orange City, Iowa. Participants in the Service included: the Rev. Dr. I. John Hesselink, president of the General Synod; the Rev. Anthony Vis, president-elect of the General Synod; the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, general secretary; and the Rev. Timothy Mulder, moderator of the Commission on Christian Worship.
ROLL CALL OF SYNOD

Regional Synod of Albany

Sophie Mathonnet-Vander Well, 415 Main Ave, Wynantskill, NY 12198

Classis of Albany

MINISTERS

Arvin Schoep, PO Box 186, Clarksville, NY 12041
Ronald Stockhoff, 66 Bloomingdale Ave, East Greenbush, NY 12061

ELDERS

Doris Neese, 11 Gail Ave, Albany, NY 12205
Clifford Southworth, 1674 S Old Post Rd, Castleton, NY 12033

Classis of Columbia-Greene

MINISTERS

John Bowen, 291 Rte 4, Hudson, NY 12534
James Ribbans, 23 Kinderhook St, Chatham, NY 12037

ELDERS

Daniel Herrick, 130 Hudson Ave, Chatham, NY 12037
Thomas Wright, 5 Greendale Rd, Hudson, NY 12534

Classis of Montgomery

MINISTERS

Russell Camp, 68 W Main St, St. Johnsville, NY 13452
Edward Schreur, 1228 Teall Ave, Syracuse, NY 13206

ELDERS

Irene Euron, 53 Alexander St, Little Falls, NY 13365
Shirley Hermann, 109 Kristen Rd, North Syracuse, NY 13212

Classis of Rochester

MINISTERS

Nicholas Vander Weide, 3637 County Road 150, Interlaken, NY 14847
Conley Zomermaand, 30 Long Pond Rd, Rochester, NY 14612

ELDERS

Quentin Bensink, 8617 E Main St, Clymer, NY 14724
Ralph Umphrey, Oak Ridge Manor, 31 Birch Cir, Williamson, NY 14589
Classis of Schenectady

MINISTERS

Craig Hoffman, 224 N Ballston Ave, Scotia, NY 12302
Richard Klaver, 5 Katherine Dr, Burnt Hills, NY 12027
Thomas Ondra, 2131 Central Ave, Schenectady, NY 12304

ELDERS

Peter Brownsey, 4401 Old River Rd, Schenectady, NY 12309
Barbara Draffen, 1 Somerset Ln, Scotia, NY 12302
Frederick Esmond, 4 Cotton Ct, Clifton Park, NY 12065

Classis of Schoharie

MINISTERS

Scott Crane, 103 Langley Rd, Amsterdam, NY 12010
Karen Jacobsma Patterson, 169 Switzer Hill Rd, Fonda, NY 12068

ELDERS

Marilyn Kimball, 5 East St, PO Box 621, Fonda, NY 12068
William Morehouse, 5636 Crooked St, Broadalbin, NY 12025

Regional Synod of Canada

Arthur Vander Meulen, 1638 30th Ave SW, Calgary, AB T2T 1P4

Classis of British Columbia

MINISTERS

Leslie Clark, 7475 Clark Crescent, Lantzville, BC V0R 2H0
Robert Jackson, 2048 Van Horne Dr, Kamloops, BC V1S 1G3

ELDERS

Elsie Braithwaite, 5435 W Island Hwy, Qualicum Beach, BC V9K 2E8
Peter Gemser, 35232 Henry Ave, Mission, BC V2V 6S6

Classis of Canadian Prairies

MINISTERS

Thomas Schultz, 1040 Beach Ave, Winnipeg, MB R2L 1E6
Ronald Opmeer, 3701 Canyon Rd, Athabasca, AB T9S 1J6

ELDERS

Jacob Vos, Box 3533, Leduc, AB T9E 6M3
Theodore Dykstra, 11 Lancaster Crescent, St Albert, AB T8N 2N9
Classis of Ontario

MINISTERS

Jeff Kingswood, 170 Clarke St, Woodstock, ON N4S 7M7
Siebrand Wilts, 82 Stirling MacGregor Dr, Cambridge, ON N1S 4T1

ELDERS

Barton Strong, 23 Glenview Ct, Hamilton, ON L9C 6H7
Dirk Vanderhey, 3 Aiken St, St. Catharines, ON L2N 1V7

Regional Synod of the Far West

James Schoon, 40645 Fremont Blvd #10A, Fremont, CA 94538

Classis of California

MINISTERS

Alan Baker, St Cornelius Chapel, USCG Support Center, Governors Island, NY 10004
Ned Beadel, 3166 E Palmdale Blvd, #107, Palmdale, CA 93550
Glenn De Master, 12141 Lewis St, Garden Grove, CA 92640
Henry Haga, 12926 Robin Ln, Chino, CA 91710
Robert A. Schuller, 29251 Camino Capistrano, San Juan Capistrano, CA 92675
Charles Van Engen, 948 S Bradish Ave, Glendora, CA 91740
Paul Veenstra, 301 East J St, Chula Vista, CA 91910

ELDERS

Estella Ahmann, 3231 1/2 National Ave, San Diego, CA 92113
Timothy Gambles, 5726 Eileen Ave, Los Angeles, CA 90043
Frederick Kaminer, 1522 Conestoga, Redlands, CA 92373
LeLand McLaughlin, 1217 Essex St, Glendora, CA 91740
Richard Van Dam, 31B0 Cottonwood Ave, San Jacinto, CA 92582
Robert Wilson, 6655 Burke Ct, Chino, CA 91710

Classis of Cascades

MINISTERS

Charles Kleinhesslelink, 602 E 2nd St, Nooksack, WA 98276
David Korsen, 2318 Birch Bay Lynden Rd, Custer, WA 98240

ELDERS

Gene Assink, 6503 Bell Rd, Yakima, WA 98901
John Koning, 1871 E 2900 South, Wendell, ID 83355

Classis of Central California

MINISTERS

Donald Christensen, 3936 Dale Rd, Modesto, CA 95356
Duane Laran, 724 W 2nd St, Ripon, CA 95366
ELDERS

Norman Kreiser, 5850 Maracaibo Dr, San Jose, CA 95120
Preston Stegena, 545 Mills Rd, Sacramento, CA 95864

Classis of Rocky Mountains

MINISTERS

Steven Brooks, 7920 Lexington Dr, Colorado Springs, CO 80920
David Dethmers, 6228 S Carr Ct, Littleton, CO 80123

ELDERS

Michael Holland, 7920 Lexington Dr, Colorado Springs, CO 80920
Albert Perez, 8471 Franklin St, Denver, CO 80229

Classis of the Southwest

MINISTERS

Keith Krebs, 4530 W Thunderbird Rd, Glendale, AZ 85306
Robert Schut, Box 188, Mescalero, NM 88340

ELDERS

Anne Hughes, 941 S Coral Key Ct, Gilbert, AZ 85233
Carol Swedlund, 4804 S Lund Ct, Prescott, AZ 86303

Regional Synod of the Great Lakes

Richard Veenstra, 17432 N Shore Estate Rd, Spring Lake, MI 49456

Classis of Holland

MINISTERS

Carl Balk, 14221 Essenburg Dr, Holland, MI 49424
David Bruininks, 235 W 17th St, Holland, MI 49423
Keith Derrick, 133 E 34th St, Holland, MI 49423
Carol Bechetel Reynolds, 101 E 13th St, Holland, MI 49423
Steven Stam, 134 W 12th St, Holland, MI 49423

ELDERS

Jerry Assink, 1863 Lakeview Dr, Zeeland, MI 49464
Marilyn De Boer, 345 Home Ave, Holland, MI 49424
William Douma, 1732 Lakeview Dr, Zeeland, MI 49464
Arn Jannenga, 1383 Natchez, Holland, MI 49424
Lois Schreur, 19 E 35th St, Holland, MI 49423

Classis of Lake Erie

MINISTERS

James Medendorp, PO Box 266, McKee, KY 40447
Michael Weber, 1920 W 65th St, Cleveland, OH 44102
ELDERS

Donald Brush, 1028 McLean, Royal Oak, MI 48067
Frederick Musson, 271 Mildred, McKee, KY 40447

Classis of Muskegon

MINISTERS

Ronald Amos, 2030 Shettler Rd, Muskegon, MI 49444
Lloyd Arnoldink, 8637 Old Channel Trl, PO Box 244, Montague, MI 49437
Roberto Jara, Jr., 423 W Randall St, Coopersville, MI 49404

ELDERS

Irvin Boersen, 15918 Stanton St, West Olive, MI 49460
Timothy Essenberg, 4012 Armanda, Muskegon, MI 49444
Wilma Winkels, 323 Terrill, Grand Haven, MI 49417

Classis of Northern Michigan

MINISTERS

Thomas Jasperse, 223 Lake Ave #8, Traverse City, MI 49684
Patrick Shetler, 271 E State St, Grant, MI 49327

ELDERS

Robert Moolenaar, 1106 Trinity Ct, Midland, MI 48640
Walter Parker, 415 N Stone Rd, Hesperia, MI 49421

Classis of North Grand Rapids

MINISTERS

David Baak, 38 W Fulton, Grand Rapids, MI 49503
Thomas Bartha, 7239 Thornapple River Dr, Ada, MI 49301
Raymond Steigenga, 72 S Main St, Casnovia, MI 49318

ELDERS

Walter Boerman, 7293 Davies Dr, Rockford, MI 49341
Donald Boeskool, 2634 Borglum NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49505
Sally Tapley, 3924 Courtyard Pl SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546

Classis of South Grand Rapids

MINISTERS

Louis Benes, 3316 Burlingame Ave, SW, Wyoming, MI 49509
David Breen, 2900 Baldwin St, Hudsonville, MI 49426
Howard Moths, 2795 Rosewood St, Jenison, MI 49428
Brian Tayler, 1684 RW Berends Dr SW #6, Wyoming, MI 49509
Donald Topp, 316 Hampton Dr SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49506
Richard Vander Klok, 7897 Emberly Dr, Jenison, MI 49428
ELDERS

John Bont, 3589 84th St, Calendonia, MI 49316
Harry Glupker, 5118 Ridge Ct, Hudsonville, MI 49426
Neil Huizenga, 2187 Radcliff Ave SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546
Thomas Manetsch, 2836 Chateau Way, Holt, MI 48842
Kathie Van Hoven, 2527 Chatham Woods Dr, Grand Rapids, MI 49546
Donald Zuverink, 2422 85th St, Byron Center, MI 49315

Classis of Southwest Michigan

MINISTERS

Roy Ackennann, 5350 N 25th St, Kalamazoo, MI 49004
Sandra Elfring, 2810 Duke St, Kalamazoo, MI 49008
Jack Klunder, 206 N Maple St, Hopkins, MI 49328
James Lester, 1316 Barney Rd, Kalamazoo, MI 49004

ELDERS

Leonard Batts, 2014 Helen Ave, Portage, MI 49002
Ronald Bush, 6449 Trotwood St, Portage, MI 49002
Jerry Haagsma, 8838 Dolphin, Portage, MI 49002
Barbara Hartgerink, 77140 Winding Creek Cir, South Haven, MI 49090

Classis of Zeeland

MINISTERS

Richard Baukema, 5162 Ottogen St, Holland, MI 49423
Scott Lokers, 2340 Riley St, Jamestown, MI 49427
Bruce Osbeck, 2559 M-40 N, Allegan, MI 49010
John Schmidt, 225 E Central Ave, Zeeland, MI 49464
Stephen Simon, 10376 Felch St, Holland, MI 49424

ELDERS

Norman Barkel, 257 100th Ave, Zeeland, MI 49464
Warren Dalman, 3273 Greenvale Ct, Hudsonville, MI 49426
Gerry Klaver, 1179 Sorento Ct, Holland, MI 49423
Donald Pyle, 10074 Foxwood Trl, Zeeland, MI 49464
Abraham Van Stedum, 4930 Eisenhower Ct, Hudsonville, MI 49426

Regional Synod of the Heartland

James O'Connell, Jr., 1400 W Frankford Rd, Carrollton, TX 75007

Classis of Central Iowa

MINISTERS

Jay Braband, 1861 NW 80th Pl, Clive, IA 50325
David Hensley, Box 128, Otley, IA 50214
James Lemmenes, 1220 E 7th St, Pella, IA 50219
Roger Punt, 301 9th Ave, Box 216, Sully, IA 50251
ELDERS

Jane Brown, 5128 Meredith Dr, Des Moines, IA 50310
Howard Cowles, 1022 E Shawnee, Des Moines, IA 50313
Larry Dougherty, 1213 S 11th Ave E, Newton, IA 50208
Donald Morrison, Central College, Central Hall #101, Pella, IA 50219

Classis of Central Plains

MINISTERS

Darrell Dalman, Box D, Winnebago, NE 68071
Bruce Kuiper, 400 SW Lake Village Blvd, Blue Springs, MO 64104

ELDERS

Thomas Miller, 400 Emt Vernon, Blue Springs, MO 64014
Harris Van Oort, 644 S 124th Ave, Omaha, NE 68154

Classis of Dakota

MINISTERS

Frank Boerma, 1210 Thresher Dr, Dell Rapids, SD 57022
Truman Raak, 1330 Main Ave S, Brookings, SD 57006
Jack Ritsema, 610 Sandy Lake Ct, San Antonio, TX 78222
Gregory Van Heukelom, PO Box 257, Willow Lake, SD 57278

ELDERS

Keith Ligtenberg, PO Box 91, Canistota, SD 57012
Warren Weeldreyer, 46768 286th St, Lennox, SD 57039

Classis of East Sioux

MINISTERS

Gary Roozeboom, 1101 7th St, Sheldon, IA 51201
Steven Vander Molen, 420 Central Ave NW, Orange City, IA 51041
Raymond Weiss, 222 Arizona Ave SW, Orange City, IA 51041

ELDERS

Bud De Groot, 1419 Elm Ct, Sheldon, IA 51201
Edgar DeVries, 1210 Kahler Ct, Sheldon, IA 51201
Gerrit Wiekamp, 701 Petrich Ave, Sanborn, IA 51248

Classis of Minnesota

MINISTERS

Gordon Bloemendaal, 1204 Hampshire, Luverne, MN 56156
LeRoy Boender, 434 Main St, Box 308, Leota, MN 56153
Wendell Breneman, 5811 Timberhurst, San Antonio, TX 78250
David Poppen, 230 W Maple St, Box 278, Edgerton, MN 56128
ROLL OF GENERAL SYNOD

ELDERS

Stanley Hoekstra, 19130 15th St SW, Blomkest, MN 56216
Wendell Mensink, RR 2 Box 171, Preston, MN 55965
Norman Slagter, 202 S 6th St, Montevideo, MN 56265

Classis of Pleasant Prairie

MINISTERS

John Foster, 408 Edgewood Rd NW #104, Cedar Rapids, IA 52405
William Peake, 402 2nd St, Box 414, Buffalo Center, IA 50424

ELDERS

Darwin Hill, 503 Akir St, Latimer, IA 50452
Hinderene Van Raden, 622 9th St, Box 444, Allison, IA 50602

Classis of Red River

MINISTERS

Dale Assink, 3141 Sebring Dr, Plano, TX 75023
John Buteyn, Jr., 5333 Independence Pkwy, Plano, TX 75023

ELDERS

Susan Fischer, 2310 Lawnmeadow Dr, Richardson, TX 75080
Gary Tibbits, 3629 NW 65th, Oklahoma City, OK 73116

Classis of West Sioux

MINISTERS

Carl Boersma, 1863 3rd Ave SE, Sioux Center, IA 51250
Stephen Breen, 3626 370th St, Orange City, IA 51041
Mark De Witt, 44 10th St SE, Sioux Center, IA 51250
Wayne Sneller, 317 Main St, Box 102, Maurice, IA 51036

ELDERS

John Kooima, 810 3rd St, Box 600, Hull, IA 51239
Kenneth Kooima, 2027 12th St, Rock Valley, IA 51247
Herbert Remmerde, 2691 340th St, Rock Valley, IA 51247
Gary Te Stroete, 1204 3rd Ave SW, Sioux Center, IA 51250

Regional Synod of Mid-America

Peter Semeyn, 6600 W 127th St, Palos Heights, IL 60463

Classis of Chicago

MINISTERS

Stanley Craig, 2080 W Golf Rd, Mt Prospect, IL 60056
Donald Den Hartog, 1420 Meyers Rd, Lombard, IL 60148
ELDERS

William Bonnema, 10728 S Laramie Ave, Oak Lawn, IL 60453
Bernie Swaagman, Sr., 8583 Spruce Dr, Orland Park, IL 60462

Classis of Florida

MINISTERS

Johnny Alicea-Baez, 5236 Indian Hill Rd, Orlando, FL 32808
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Kenneth Sampson, 101 Farber Rd #1A, Princeton, NJ 08540

ELDERS

Charles Knight, 2821 Mayflower St, Sarasota, FL 34321
Daniel Rushing, 8102 Portsmouth Ct, Orlando, FL 32818

Classis of Illinois

MINISTERS

William Bouwer, 1657 Heather Dr, Munster, IN 46321
William Donkersloot, 1718 N 15th St, Lafayette, IN 47904
Mark Prestriedge, 24755 Country Ln, PO Box 247, Crete, IL 60417
Scott Rees, 13097 Allisonville Rd, Fishers, IN 46038

ELDERS

David Gray, 3112 Chicago Rd, South Chicago Hts, IL 60411
Gary Hall, 1106 Hedgewood Dr, Lafayette, IN 47904
David Schortinghuis, 6204 E 55th Pl, Indianapolis, IN 46226
Allen Slickers, 2409 Lafayette Dr, Lafayette, IN 47905

Classis of Illinois

MINISTERS

Herman Gruis, 306 S Cherry St, Morrison, IL 61270
Robert Hoffman, 2986 N German Church Rd, Oregon, IL 61061
James Stralow, 505 3rd Ave, Forreston, IL 61030

ELDERS

Richard Goodrich, 315 10th St PO Box 476, Pecatonica, IL 61063
Donald Hamstra, 203 Pine St, Morrison, IL 61270
Frank Vandermyde, 702 Glenwood Dr, Morrison, IL 61270

Classis of Wisconsin

MINISTERS

David De Kuiper, N3145 State Hwy 32, Sheboygan Falls, WI 53085
Robert Hekhuys, 410 W Brown St, Waupun, WI 53963
Dale Matthews, N109 W15737 Prophet Ct, Germantown, WI 53022
Matthew Soeter, 163 E 18th St, Fond du Lac, WI 54935
Ronald Van Der Werff, Box 207, Friesland, WI 53935
ROLL OF GENERAL SYNOD

ELDERS

William Eichstadt, 198 M West St, Waupun, WI 53963
Paul Elenius, N3145 Hwy 49, Waupun, WI 53963
Roger Knipple, 2030 Samson St, Wisconsin Rapids, WI 54494
Glenn McGrew, N91 W16875 Laurel Ln, Menomonee Falls, WI 53051
Wayne Tavs, Box 412, Brandon, WI 53919

Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantic

Eugene Roberts, 34 Dutchtown Rd, Belle Meade, NJ 08502

CLASSIS OF DELAWARE-RARITAN

MINISTERS

Janet Johnston, PO Box 458, Lebanon, NJ 08833
Ronald Kelley, 23 Church St, High Bridge, NJ 08829
Paul Van Elk, 124 Old York Rd, Bridgewater, NJ 08807

ELDERS

John Morrow, 1191 Evergreen Dr, Bridgewater, NJ 08807
Cynthia Ramsay, 2 Powderhorn Rd, Flemington, NJ 08822
Irene Wiegand, 55 Burdsal Ave, Richboro, PA 18954

CLASSIS OF GREATER PALISADES

MINISTERS

David Cooper, 284 Old Tappan Rd, Old Tappan, NJ 07675
Darwin De Haan, 272 Whiteman Ave, Fort Lee, NJ 07024
David Groeneveld, 26 Anderson St #3, Hackensack, NJ 07601

ELDERS

Winifred Calabrese, 127 Bell Ave, Saddle Brook, NJ 07662
Robert Munschauer, 431 Brae Burn Rd, Ho-Ho-Kus, NJ 07423
Olive Yaeger, 430 62nd St #10J, West New York, NJ 07093

CLASSIS OF NEW BRUNSWICK

MINISTERS

Elie Brunemeyer, 214 Huntington Ave, Pine Beach, NJ 08741
Charles Morris, Box 57 Rt 537 W, Colts Neck, NJ 07722
Barnabas Roczy, 179 Somerset St, New Brunswick, NJ 08901

ELDERS

Elizabeth Jordan, 71 Baldwin Ln, Willingboro, NJ 08046
James Van Wyk, 6 Ventnor Dr, Edison, NJ 08820
Steven Whitehead, 126 Spring Lake Garden Apts, Spring Lake, NJ 07762
Classis of Passaic Valley

MINISTERS

Joseph Gardner, Jr., 21 Pleasant View Dr, North Haledon, NJ 07508
Mark Heijerman, 360 Farifield Rd, Fairfield, NJ 07004
Bruce Hoffman, 116 Ravine Ave, Wyckoff, NJ 07481
Linda Powell, 483 Ferry St, Newark, NJ 07105

ELDERS

Lorilyn Bridgeforth, 101 S 10th St, Newark, NJ 07107
Arlene De Bonis, 1650 Hemlock Farms, Hawley, PA 18428
Eric Farrar, 241 22nd Ave, Paterson, NJ 07513
George Post, 43 Edward Ct, Clifton, NJ 07011

Regional Synod of New York

Arthur Hessinger, 16 Frieda Ln, Wantagh, NY 11793

Classis of Brooklyn

MINISTERS

Daniel Ramm, 82 Mackay Pl, Brooklyn, NY 11209
Carlos Rivera, 26 St Paul's Dr N, Hempstead, NY 11550

ELDERS

Ruth Blankschen, 421 W 56th St #3A, New York, NY 10019
Joseph Grant, Jr., 181 Maplewood Ave, Hempstead, NY 11550

Classis of Mid-Hudson

MINISTERS

Rodney Koopmans, 55 Main St, Fishkill, NY 12524
Richard Rockwood, 173 Main St, Box 746, Saugerties, NY 12477
Gary Sissel, PO Box 261, Gardiner, NY 12525

ELDERS

Diane Aversano, 84 Peak Rd, Stone Ridge, NY 12484
Roger Swart, PO Box 154, Mount Marion, NY 12456
Ellen Terwilliger, 117 Stone Dock Rd, High Falls, NY 12440

Classis of Nassau-Suffolk

MINISTERS

Jonathan Beyer, 380 Lakeland Ave, Sayville, NY 11782
Thomas Harris, 58 Penbrook Dr, Stony Brook, NY 11790
ROLL OF GENERAL SYNOD

ELDERS

Henry Kelley, 271 Belvedere Dr, Oakdale, NY 11769
Charles Ripel, 24 Acorn Ln, Stony Brook, NY 11790

Classis of New York

MINISTERS

John Chang, 991 Woodrow Rd, Staten Island, NY 10312
William Hanousek, 400 E 67th St, New York, NY 10021
Eun Soo Lee, 2561 Hone Ave, Bronx, NY 10469

ELDERS

Sylvia Simpfendorfer-Ishmael, 401 E 65th St, New York, NY 10021
Hattie Mitchell, 100 Pitt St #7B, New York, NY 10002
Joseph Zeigler, 62 Tuxedo Rd, Montclair, NJ 00742

Classis of Orange

MINISTERS

Owen Bechtel, 149 Fletcher Dr N, Newburgh, NY 12550
Keith Tamlyn, PO Box 54, Walkill, NY 12589

ELDERS

Maynard Lancaster, PO Box 53, Cuddebackville, NY 12729
Leonard Lowe, 5713 Rt 209, Ellenville, NY 12428

Classis of Queens

MINISTERS

Jong-Duk Kim, 137-70 Northern Blvd, Flushing, NY 11354
Stephen Schwander, 54-02 217th St, Bayside, NY 11364

ELDERS

Annie Lee Phillips, 159-29 90th Ave, Jamaica, NY 11432
Jacob Puthenparambil, 143-11 Roosevelt Ave, Flushing, NY 11354

Classis of Rockland-Westchester

MINISTERS

Thomas Danney, 37 Clinton Ave, Nyack, NY 10960
John Vanden Oever, 361 Ferdon Ave, Piermont, NY 10968

ELDER

Edwin Olsen, 51 Summit Dr, Hastings-On-Hudson, NY 10706
New Brunswick Theological Seminary

GENERAL SYNOD PROFESSORS OF THEOLOGY

John Coakley, 17 Seminary Pl, New Brunswick, NJ 08901
Paul Fries, 18 Maple St, Lebanon, NJ 08833

Western Theological Seminary

GENERAL SYNOD PROFESSORS OF THEOLOGY

James Brownson, 101 E 13th St, Holland, MI 49423
Stanley Rock, 101 E 13th St, Holland, MI 49423
ROLL OF GENERAL SYNOD

CORRESPONDING DELEGATES

GENERAL SECRETARIES EMERITUS
Marion de Velder
Edwin Mulder

COMMITTEE OF REFERENCE
Louis Benes
John Buteyn, Jr.
Wesley Grauberg-Michaelson
I. John Hesselink
Harold Korver
Stephen Norden
Phyllis Palsma
Gerald Verbridge
Anthony Vis

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Gerald Verbridge

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(students)
Stephen Hanson
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GENERAL SYNOD/JUNE 1996

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James Bultman

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David Dethmers
Christina Van Eyl

REFORMED CHURCH WOMEN'S MINISTRIES
Helen De Boer
Sherry Vander Eyk

AFRICAN-AMERICAN COUNCIL
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Bernice Mast

COUNCIL FOR HISPANIC MINISTRIES
Irving Rivera

COUNCIL FOR PACIFIC AND ASIAN AMERICAN MINISTRIES
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COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN ACTION
Donald Cronkite

COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN UNITY
Timothy Boeve

COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN WORSHIP
Timothy Mulder

COMMISSION ON CHURCH ORDER
William Bouwer

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Jennifer Reece

COMMISSION ON JUDICIAL BUSINESS
Donald De Vries

COMMISSION ON NOMINATIONS
Audrey Den Herder

COMMISSION ON THEOLOGY
James Brownson

COMMISSION FOR WOMEN
Gloria McCanna

REGIONAL SYNOD OF ALBANY

REGIONAL SYNOD OF CANADA
Janet McKay
Babette Moerman
ROLL OF GENERAL SYNOD

REGIONAL SYNOD OF THE FAR WEST
Margaret Self
Lisa Teague

REGIONAL SYNOD OF THE GREAT LAKES
Barbara Boss
Ruth Wilson

REGIONAL SYNOD OF THE HEARTLAND
Ruth Kuck
Peggy Pierson

REGIONAL SYNOD OF MID-AMERICA
Helen Madderom

REGIONAL SYNOD OF THE MID-ATLANTICS
Fran Schell

REGIONAL SYNOD OF NEW YORK
Su Cheng Chang
Lula Thomas

ECUMENICAL DELEGATES

CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
Aldon Kuiper

EVANGELICAL COVENANT CHURCH
Kenneth P. Carlson

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA
H. George Anderson
Curtis Miller

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
John Thomas

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST IN JAPAN
Sadao Ozawa

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE PEOPLE

PARLIAMENTARIAN
Andrea Van Beek

WORSHIP LEADER
Timothy Brown

CHAPLAIN
Thomas Marsden

PERSONNEL AND EVALUATION COMMITTEE
Harry De Bruyn
TASK FORCE ON STANDARDS FOR THE PREPARATION FOR THE PROFESSIONAL MINISTRY IN THE RCA
James Cook

TASK FORCE TO REVISE DISCIPLINARY AND JUDICIAL PROCEDURES
John De Koster

TASK FORCE TO STUDY CHURCH HERALD DISTRIBUTION AND FUNDING
John Buteyn, Jr.

OFFICIAL OBSERVERS

CENTRAL COLLEGE
Sheri Achterhof
Timothy Ten Clay

HOPE COLLEGE
Jen Salls

NORTHWESTERN COLLEGE
Benjamin Van Engelenhoven
Julie Vermeer

SOUTHERN NORMAL SCHOOL

GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL MISSIONARIES
Wayne and Miho Jansen
Robert and Linda Schut

SEMINARIAN SEMINAR
Philip Arnold (TEA)
Joshua Blunt (WTS)
Anthon Bouw (TEA)
Chris Dorn (WTS)
Daniel Griswold (TEA)
Kevin Hart (NBTS)
Suzanne Hart (NBTS)
David Lantz (TEA)
Steve McNary (TEA)
Joan Mitchell (NBTS)
Robert Mitchell (NBTS)
Mark Robertson (TEA)
Paul Rosa (NBTS)
MINUTES AND JOURNAL

The Acts and Proceedings of the 189th regular session of the General Synod were read by title.

The General Synod officers approved the journal of actions for the meetings held on Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday (June 8-14, 1996).

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:

- Philip Arnold
- Joshua Blunt
- Anthon Bouw
- Audrey Den Hender
- Chris Dorn
- Suzanne Hart
- David Lantz
- Steven McNary
- Joan Mitchell
- Robert Mitchell
- Stephen Norden
- Phyllis Palsma
- Mark Robertson
- Paul Rosa

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 “God’s People Transformed: A Living Sacrifice.” The Rev. Dr. Donald Saliers was the featured speaker on Sunday evening, Monday evening, and Tuesday afternoon. Saliers is professor of theology and liturgies and director of the Masters in Sacred Music program at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. The Rev. Terry MacArthur, in consultation with the Commission on Christian Worship, was the worship planner and choir director for the 1996 General Synod worship services. MacArthur is a United Methodist missionary on assignment as the worship consultant with the World Council of Churches in Geneva, Switzerland. As part of his work, MacArthur collects worship resources, prayers, and music from Christians all over the world for use in ecumenical worship services.

On Saturday evening, General Synod participants met in plenary session. This session began with an opening worship and communion service. The Rev. Richard Otterness, pastor of the Trinity Reformed Church in Rochester, New York, preached the sermon, “God’s Priesthood Transformed.” The Rev. Dr. J. John Hesselink, president of General Synod, then presented his report, “A Reformed Manifesto for the Twenty-First Century.”
On Sunday morning, General Synod participants worshiped in RCA churches in the Orange City, Iowa area.

On Sunday afternoon, General Synod participants met in plenary session and the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson presented his report. At various times during the report, participants met in small groups to discuss questions accompanying the report. Near the conclusion of this report, there was a live demonstration of the RCA web site on the World Wide Web, part of the Internet, presented by Kristi Naber, electronic media specialist for the RCA.

On Sunday evening, General Synod participants worshiped at First Reformed Church in Orange City, Iowa. The Rev. Dr. Donald Saliers gave the sermon, “Joining Christ’s Liturgy: Body and Soul.” There was also recognition of the 125th anniversary of First Reformed Church.

On Monday evening, the Rev. Dr. Donald Saliers gave a keynote address, “Worship Come to Its Senses: Humanity at Full Stretch.” Following the address, General Synod participants met in small discussion groups.

On Tuesday afternoon, a video, Liturgy and Life: A Reformed Understanding of Worship, was presented. Following the video, General Synod participants attended liturgy and worship workshops and dialogue groups.

On Tuesday evening, the Rev. Dr. Donald Saliers gave a concluding reflection, “What I Have Seen and Heard.” The Rev. Terry MacArthur led the participants in a hymn singing, “Songs of the World Church.”

Ecumenical Breakfast—Wednesday morning

On Wednesday morning, delegates were provided information on Lutheran-Reformed relations and the Formula of Agreement. The Formula of Agreement is between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Reformed Church in America, and the United Church of Christ, and the intention and purpose of the formula is to assist these four denominations of Reformation heritage to enter into full communion. (This proposal for full communion is scheduled to be presented to the 1997 General Synod by the Commission on Christian Unity. For a description of full communion, see the Formula of Agreement document, p. 3, see MGS 1995, pp. 164-65, or see p. 192.) There was a panel discussion. Members of the panel were Bishop H. George Anderson of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Rev. Dr. James Ryan, executive director of Ecumenical Ministries of Iowa, the Rev. John Thomas of the United Church of Christ, the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, the Rev. Douglas Fromm, the Rev. Timothy Boeve, and the Rev. Dr. Paul Fries of the Reformed Church in America.

Ecumenical Greetings—Wednesday morning

The General Synod received greetings from Bishop H. George Anderson of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. (See pp. 199-204 for the content of the greetings presented by Bishop H. George Anderson.)

Ecumenical Luncheon—Wednesday noon

On Wednesday at noon, there was an ecumenical luncheon. The Rev. Aldon Kuiper of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, the Rev. Kenneth Carlson of the Evangelical Covenant Church, and the Rev. Dr. James Ryan, executive director of Ecumenical Ministries of Iowa, gave greetings.
The Rev. Douglas Fromm, RCA associate for ecumenical relations, discussed the ecumenical network in the RCA. Each RCA classis has appointed an ecumenical liaison. The purpose of this ecumenical network is to provide a ready means of communication and information-sharing between RCA classes and the Commission on Christian Unity.

Fromm also discussed RCA ecumenism and ecumenical relationships. There was then discussion about the paper, “An Ecumenical Mandate for the Reformed Church in America” (see pp. 184-97).

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. Jennifer Reece. It is titled The Americanization of a Congregation, and it is written by the Rev. Dr. Elton Bruins.

Recognition of Fiftieth Anniversary of Church World Service and Reformed Church in America Response to Hurricane Marilyn Disaster in Virgin Islands—Wednesday evening meeting

A video, A Celebration of Help and Hope, commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of Church World Service, was presented.

The Rev. Jeffrey Gargano, pastor of St. Thomas Reformed Church in the Virgin Islands addressed the Synod about the Hurricane Marilyn disaster in St. Thomas and St. Croix. Synod viewed an RCA Today video and slides on the destruction caused by the hurricane to the St. Thomas Reformed Church building and parsonage and on the repair work completed by many RCA volunteers. RCA volunteers in attendance at the 1996 General Synod who worked in St. Thomas were then recognized by Synod.

Reception for Missionaries, RCA Volunteers, the Rev. Jeffrey Gargano and family, New Church Development Pastors; and Celebration of Fiftieth Anniversary of Church World Service—Wednesday evening

Following the Wednesday evening meeting, a reception was held for missionaries, the Rev. Jeffrey Gargano and his family, and new church development pastors. A cake commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of Church World Service and ice cream were served.

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) Bible Presentations—Thursday afternoon

The Rev. Dr. James Cook, RCA representative on the Bible Translation and Utilization Committee of the National Council of Churches, presented New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) translations of the Bible to the president of General Synod, the Rev. Dr. I. John Hesselink; the vice-president of General Synod, the Rev. Anthony Vis; and the vice-president elect, the Rev. Dr. Charles Van Engen.

Ecumenical Greetings—Thursday afternoon

The General Synod received greetings from the Rev. Sadao Ozawa of the United Church of Christ in Japan. Accompanying the Rev. Ozawa were the Rev. Isamu Munesue and the Rev. Ken-Ichiro Tsubaki also of the United Church of Christ in Japan.

Picnic and Variety Show—Thursday evening

Following the Thursday afternoon meeting, Synod delegates and guests attended a picnic in the city park in downtown Orange City. Following the picnic, there was a variety show, Dit en Dael in Oranjestad (This and That in Orange City), in Christ Chapel on the campus of Northwestern College.
ADVISORY COMMITTEES

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CHRISTIAN ACTION

Moderator: Sandra Elfring (Southwest Michigan)
Vice-moderator: Linda Powell (Passaic Valley)

Ministers:
Johnny Alicea-Baez (Florida)
Eljie Brunemeyer (New Brunswick)
Robert Hekhuis (Wisconsin)
Jack Klunder (Southwest Michigan)
James O'Connell, Jr. (R S of the Heartland)
Ronald Opmeer (Canadian Prairies)
Truman Raak (Dakota)
Edward Schreur (Montgomery)
Stephen Schwander (Queens)
Siebrand Wilts (Ontario)

Elders:
Diane Aversano (Mid-Hudson)
Ronald Bush (Southwest Michigan)
Timothy Gambles (California)
Michael Holland (Rocky Mountains)
Gerry Klaiver (Zeeland)
Robert Munschauer (Greater Palisades)
Edwin Olsen (Rockland-Westchester)
Albert Perez (Rocky Mountains)
Ellen Terwilliger (Mid-Hudson)
Harris Van Oort (Central Plains)
Steven Whitehead (New Brunswick)
Gerrit Wiekamp (East Sioux)

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AND DISCIPLESHIP

Moderator: Janet Johnston (Delaware-Raritan)
Vice-moderator: Karen Jacobsma Patterson (Schoharie)

Ministers:
Ned Beadel (California)
Frank Boerma (Dakota)
Steven Brooks (Rocky Mountains)
Keith Krebs (Southwest)
James Lester (Southwest Michigan)
Charles Rucker (Florida)
Stephen Simon (Zeeland)
Steven Starn (Holland)
Brian Tayler (South Grand Rapids)
Raymond Weiss (East Sioux)

Elders:
Eric Farrar (Passaic Valley)
Jerry Haagsma (Southwest Michigan)
Neil Huizenga (South Grand Rapids)
Glenn Mc Grew (Wisconsin)
Doris Neese (Albany)
Cynthia Ramsay (Delaware-Raritan)
James Van Wyk (New Brunswick)
Irene Wiegand (Delaware-Raritan)
Oliver Yaeger (Greater Palisades)
Donald Zuverink (South Grand Rapids)
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CHRISTIAN HERITAGE AND COMMUNICATIONS

Moderator: Sophie Mathonnet-Vander Well (R S of Albany)
Vice-moderator: Glenn De Master (California)

Ministers:
Dale Assink (Red River)
David Breen (South Grand Rapids)
David Bruininks (Holland)
John Buteyn, Jr. (Red River)
Darwin De Haan (Greater Palisades)
David Dethmers (Rocky Mountains)
Joeceph Gardner Jr (Passaic Valley)
Charles Kleinhesselink (Cascades)
James Lemmenes (Central Iowa)
Dale Matthews (Wisconsin)
Kenneth Sampson (Florida)
Paul Veenstra (California)

Elders:
Leonard Batts (Southwest Michigan)
Ruth Blankschen (Brooklyn)
Peter Brownsey (Schuylkill)
Timothy Essenberg (Muskegon)
Irene Eenon (Montgomery)
Harry Glupker (South Grand Rapids)
Henry Kelley (Nassau-Suffolk)
Kenneth Kooima (West Sioux)
Donald Pyle (Zeeland)
Herbert Remmerde (West Sioux)
Carol Swedlund (Southwest)

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CHRISTIAN UNITY

Moderator: David Baak (North Grand Rapids)
Vice-moderator: John Chang (New York)

Ministers:
Ronald Amos (Muskegon)
Donald Christensen (Central California)
Thomas Danney (Rockland-Westchester)
Keith Derrick (Holland)
Paul Fries (New Brunswick Seminary)
Jong-Duk Kim (Queens)
William Peake (Pleasant Prairie)
James Ribbans (Columbia-Greene)
Richard Rockwood (Mid-Hudson)
Thomas Schultz (Canadian Prairies)
Robert Schut (Southwest)
Gregory Van Heukelom (Dakota)

Elders:
Walter Boerman (North Grand Rapids)
Elsie Bruithwaite (British Columbia)
Winifred Calabrese (Greater Palisades)
Bud De Groot (East Sioux)
William Eichstadt (Wisconsin)
Peter Gemser (British Columbia)
Anne Hughes (Southwest)
LeLand McLaughlin (California)
Hattie Mitchell (New York)
Walter Parker (Northern Michigan)
Kathie Van Hoven (South Grand Rapids)
Hinderene Van Raden (Pleasant Prairie)
GENERAL SYNOD/JUNE 1996

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Moderator: James Schoon (RS of the Far West)
Vice-moderator: Michael Weber (Lake Erie)

Ministers: 
Thomas Bartha (North Grand Rapids)
Darrell Dalman (Central Plains)
Robert Hoffman (Illinois)
Robert Jackson (British Columbia)
Bruce Osbeek (Zeeland)
Carol Bechtel Reynolds (Holland)
Barnabas Rocze (New Brunswick)
James Stralow (Illinois)
John Vanden Oever (Rockland-Westchester)
Arthur Vander Meulen (RS of Canada)
Paul Van Elk (Delaware-Raritan)

Elders:
Gene Assink (Cascades)
Donald Boeskool (North Grand Rapids)
Warren Dalman (Zeeland)
Barbara Draffen (Schenectady)
Paul Elenius (Wisconsin)
Shirley Hermann (Montgomery)
Daniel Herrick (Columbia-Greene)
Leonard Lowe (Orange)
George Post (Passaic Valley)
Charles Ripel (Nassau-Suffolk)
Allen Slickers (Illiana)
Bernie Swaagman Sr (Chicago)

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CHURCH ORDER

Moderator: Craig Hoffman (Schenectady)
Vice-moderator: Stephen Breen (West Sioux)

Ministers: 
Lloyd Arnoldink (Muskegon)
Richard Baekema (Zeeland)
Louis Benes (South Grand Rapids)
William Bouwer (Illiana)
Russell Camp (Montgomery)
Henry Haga (California)
William Hanousek (New York)
Richard Klaver (Schenectady)
Rodney Koopmans (Mid-Hudson)
Duane Laman (Central California)
Howard Moths (South Grand Rapids)
David Poppen (Minnesota)
Patrick Shetler (Northern Michigan)
Raymond Steigenga (North Grand Rapids)

Elders:
Estella Ahmann (California)
Howard Cowles (Central Iowa)
Larry Dougherty (Central Iowa)
Theodore Dykstra (Canadian Prairies)
Susan Fischer (Red River)
Roger Knipple (Wisconsin)
John Morrow (Delaware-Raritan)
Norman Slagter (Minnesota)
Roger Swart (Mid-Hudson)
Ralph Umphrey (Rochester)
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CHURCH VOCATIONS

Moderator: Peter Semeyn (R S of Mid-America)
Vice-moderator: Conley Zomermaand (Rochester)

Ministers:

Alan Baker (California)
Owen Bechtel (Orange)
Gordon Bloemendaal (Minnesota)
Wendell Brenneman (Minnesota)
John Coakley (New Brunswick Seminary)
David Cooper (Greater Palisades)
Daniel Ramm (Brooklyn)
Jack Ritsema (Dakota)
Eugene Roberts (R S of the Mid-Atlantics)
Stanley Rock (Western Seminary)
Arvin Schoep (Albany)
Robert A. Schuller (California)
Wayne Sneller (West Sioux)
Donald Topp (South Grand Rapids)
Richard Veenstra (R S of the Great Lakes)

Elders:

Donald Brush (Lake Erie)
Marilyn De Boer (Holland)
Arlene De Bonis (Passaic Valley)
William Douma (Holland)
Stanley Hoekstra (Minnesota)
Annie Lee Phillips (Queens)
David Schortinghuis (Illiana)
Preston Stegenga (Central California)
Dirk Vanderlely (Ontario)
Abraham Van Stedum (Zeeland)
Jacob Vos (Canadian Prairies)

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON EVANGELIZATION AND CHURCH GROWTH

Moderator: Charles Morris (New Brunswick)
Vice-moderator: Jane Brown (Central Iowa)

Ministers:

Jonathan Beyer (Nassau-Suffolk)
LeRoy Boender (Minnesota)
Carl Boersma (West Sioux)
Jay Braband (Central Iowa)
Donald Den Hartog (Chicago)
William Donkersloot (Illiana)
John Foster (Pleasant Prairie)
Ronald Kelley (Delaware-Raritan)
Eun Soo Lee (New York)
Gary Roozeboom (East Sioux)
Gary Sissel (Mid-Hudson)

Elders:

Edgar DeVries (East Sioux)
Fred Esmond (Schenectady)
Richard Goodrich (Illinois)
Joseph Grant, Jr. (Brooklyn)
Frederick Kamper (California)
Marilyn Kimball (Schoharie)
John Koning (Cascades)
Maynard Lancaster (Orange)
Keith Ligtenberg (Dakota)
Wendell Mensink (Minnesota)
Robert Wilson (California)
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Moderator: Herman Gruis (Illinois)
Vice-moderator: Keith Tamlyn (Orange)

Ministers:
John Bowen (Columbia-Greene)
Scott Crane (Schoharie)
David Korsen (Cascades)
James Medendorp (Lake Erie)
Scott Rees (Illiana)
Matthew Soeter (Wisconsin)
Richard Vander Klok (South Grand Rapids)
Nicholas Vander Weide (Rochester)
Ronald Van Der Werff (Wisconsin)

Elders:
Irvin Boersen (Muskegon)
Lorilyn Bridgeforth (Passaic Valley)
Arthur Hessinger (R S of New York)
Darwin Hill (Pleasant Prairie)
Thomas Miller (Central Plains)
Robert Moolenaar (Northern Michigan)
Donald Morrison (Central Iowa)
Frederick Musson (Lake Erie)
Lois Schreur (Holland)
Clifford Southworth (Albany)
Wayne Tavs (Wisconsin)
Richard Van Dam (California)

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THEOLOGY

Moderator: John Schmidt (Zeeland)
Vice-moderator: Carlos Rivera (Brooklyn)

Ministers:
Roy Ackermann (Southwest Michigan)
James Brownson (Western Seminary)
Mark Heijerman (Passaic Valley)
David Hensley (Central Iowa)
Jeff Kingswood (Ontario)
Bruce Kuiper (Central Plains)
Scott Lokers (Zeeland)
Mark Prestriedge (Illiana)
Ronald Stockhoff (Albany)
Charles Van Engen (California)

Elders:
Jerry Assink (Holland)
Norman Barkel (Zeeland)
Quentin Bensink (Rochester)
David Gray (Illiana)
Barbara Hartgerink (Southwest Michigan)
Elizabeth Jordan (New Brunswick)
William Morchouse (Schoharie)
Gary Te Stroete (West Sioux)
Gary Tibbits (Rde River)
Frank Vandermyde (Illinois)
Warren Weeldreyer (Dakota)
Wilma Winkels (Muskegon)
Joseph Zeigler (New York)
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON WORLD MISSION

Moderator: Barton Strong (Ontario)
Vice-moderator: Steven Vander Molen (East Sioux)

Ministers:

Carl Balk (Holland)
Leslie Clark (British Columbia)
Stanley Craig (Chicago)
Mark De Witt (West Sioux)
David De Kuiper (Wisconsin)
David Groeneveld (Greater Palisades)
Thomas Harris (Nassau-Suffolk)
Bruce Hoffman (Passaic Valley)
Roberto Jara, Jr. (Muskegon)
Thomas Jasperse (Northern Michigan)
Thomas Ondra (Schenectady)
Roger Punt (Central Iowa)

Elders:

William Bonnema (Chicago)
John Bont (South Grand Rapids)
Gary Hall (Illiana)
Donald Hamstra (Illinois)
Charles Knight (Florida)
Sylvia Simpfendorfer-Ishmael (New York)
Arn Jannenga (Holland)
John Kooima (West Sioux)
Norman Kreiser (Central California)
Thomas Manetsch (South Grand Rapids)
Jacob Puthenparambil (Queens)
Daniel Rushing (Florida)
Sally Tapley (North Grand Rapids)
Thomas Wright (Columbia-Greene)

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

Upon recommendation of the Committee of Reference, the two following items were not accepted as new business:

1. "Declaration of Life" document opposing capital punishment; and

2. Evangelism to the unchurched.

These two items were not accepted as new business since these items could have been brought to General Synod through the church’s agencies or assemblies.

Upon recommendation of the Committee of Reference, the following item was accepted as new business and referred to the Advisory Committee on Christian Action (see pp. 119-21):

Consideration of a response by the 1996 General Synod to the destruction of houses of worship in the southern region of the U.S.
REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT

A REFORMED MANIFESTO
FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

I. INTRODUCTION: THE CHALLENGES WE FACE

As the Reformed Church in America nears the end of this millennium and looks toward the twenty-first century, it faces a number of challenges, some of which are peculiar to our time. Some of these challenges are not new: secularism, moral relativism, self-centered individualism, a consumer mentality, the breakdown of the family, and an increasingly impersonal society. All of these evils are aided and abetted by the influence of the popular media, particularly television, which panders to our baser instincts.

But there are also some relatively new concerns: an increasing cynicism about government and a general distrust and lack of respect for authority, whether in the classroom, the political arena, or the church. Another characteristic of our time is an uneasiness about the future. No longer are jobs secure or companies loyal to faithful employees; the family farm is becoming a thing of the past, and our schools and urban areas have become dangerous places to live. As a result, many of our citizens in North America are fearful as they face the future. Once again we may be living in what the poet W.H. Auden described as “an age of anxiety.”

There are also some new phenomena which are not necessarily bad but which pose new challenges for the church as well as for our society in general: greater pluralism and diversity, both ethnically and religiously, and new technologies, particularly the computer and the internet—the information highway—which are revolutionizing the ways in which we learn, do business, and communicate with each other. Ours is “a strange new world,” fraught with dangers as well as with exciting new possibilities.

II. THE CORE PROBLEM AND THE REQUIRED RESPONSE

I believe that the core problem we face is an intellectual one which has profound theological implications. In an editorial, “Idols of the Century,” in First Things, James Neuchterlein quotes Gertrude Himmelfarb’s remark that in today’s postmodernist intellectual world the “animating spirit is a radical relativism that rejects any idea of truth, knowledge, or objectivity.” Neuchterlein then comments: “That unease is hardly misplaced. There is indeed much to be feared from a world in which the only true statement is that there are no true statements.”

This may sound rather abstract and heavily intellectual. But this is the root problem of many of the problems that the church of Jesus Christ faces today: a relativism which undermines the authority of Scripture and renders the confessions and creeds of the church ineffectual because it makes them appear irrelevant. Another way of stating the problem is that in certain circles of the church—particularly in mainline denominations—the overriding criterion in settling an issue or formulating a policy is not scriptural fidelity but political correctness.

More generally, even in evangelical circles, issues are often decided by what feels right. Choices are made on the basis of personal preference, not on the confessions of the church or on Scripture.
Our response must not be a knee-jerk reaction to the challenges of our time and what some people believe is a crisis in the church. Rather, we must go back to our Reformation roots in order to face the future with a fresh vision of what it means to be the church of Jesus Christ in the twenty-first century.

I am convinced that we can do this and be truly Reformed and relevant at the same time. Or, to put it a little differently, we can be both Calvinian and contemporary. (By “Calvinian” I mean indebted more to the Genevan reformer than to later strands of Calvinism.) This means, among other things, that we will reflect on the challenges of our time biblically and theologically. This has always been one of the strengths of the Reformed tradition—that we take theology seriously, convinced that right thinking will result in right living.

In the words of a recent Presbyterian statement:

Presbyterians [i.e., Reformed people] are Christians who know that theology matters, that faith seeks understanding, and that men and women are called to serve God with mind as well as heart. Our tradition was born in the theological ferment of the Reformation and its foundation is its historic affirmations or confessions of faith. We invest our energy, intelligence, imagination, and love in the task of thinking theologically; expressing ourselves theologically; teaching, preaching, and learning theologically.

III. PRESCRIPTION FOR A REFORMED RESPONSE

We may have our theology straight and be more or less Reformed, but that still does not settle the relevancy issue. In view of the formidable challenges we face, what can we do to confront the issues of our time in a constructive, meaningful way? It is always easier to describe the malady than come up with a cure.

I have already suggested indirectly that one thing we must do if we are to be a faithful and effective church is to preach and teach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27, RSV). It is another matter to act on it.

It is at this point where we must take seriously the role of the Spirit as well as that of the Word. Here the answer to Question 123 of the Heidelberg Catechism might well be our guiding motif. “Thy kingdom come” means, first of all, “Rule us by your Word and Spirit in such a way that more and more we submit to you.”

The specific question facing us is: Where is the Spirit leading us today as a Reformed Church? It is not always easy to discern the leading of the Spirit, but we cannot expect such guidance if we do not pray for it and then are not open to it when the Spirit speaks to the church.

A cliché these days is that “we must be seeker-sensitive.” There is some validity in that. We must understand the people to whom we seek to witness. But that doesn’t mean that we resort to all the latest fads in order to attract people to our services. Nor does it mean that we try to remove the offense of the gospel by softening its sharper edges. The message of the cross will always be a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles, a scandal both to secular hedonists on the one hand, and to intellectual despisers of religion on the other.

In the last analysis, we must not be market-driven but Spirit-driven. The Pentecostals, Assemblies of God, and Vineyard churches have responded to the leading of the Spirit in their way. Is there another way which does not deny the gifts of the Spirit but which seeks to take seriously the total scriptural witness of the Spirit? From a Reformed
perspective may it not be preferable to speak of a kingdom-oriented theology of the Spirit? Such a theology would not divorce the Spirit from the Word and make experience the norm but would be incarnational in Christ and the church. It would be more open, more flexible, yes, even more radical than anything we have thus far envisioned. Such an openness would give new life to a slogan we love to repeat but are hesitant to enact, namely *semper reformanda*—“always reforming”—but in accordance with the Word and the Spirit.

This, I submit, could mean the following for the Reformed Church in America. If we are to be a church that is catholic and evangelical as well as Reformed, it means:

**A. A Greater Inclusivity**

We may never be a “popular” church that appeals to all classes of society. The Reformed faith in some ways is un-American. That is, it does not emphasize the individual, free choice, and “doing your own thing.”

Nevertheless, we must be much more intentional in reaching beyond our Anglo-Saxon, Dutch-American borders. This means more than simply intensifying our efforts to reach people of Hispanic, African-American, Native American, and Asian backgrounds. We must be flexible enough to accommodate to some of their cultural patterns and not force them to become “just like us.” I have spent considerable time with our racial/ethnic councils and find there a desire to become truly Reformed. But, they ask, can’t some adjustments be made in our liturgy and worship to allow them more freedom and yet make them feel they are part of the family?

**B. A Reform of Worship**

By this I do not mean an overhauling of our whole inheritance when it comes to worship, but rather a greater variety of liturgical forms that would speak to the needs of seekers and those of various cultural and ethnic backgrounds. However, this means that those new church starts—and some older traditional churches which have thrown out the baby with the bath water—must be encouraged, if not required, to utilize one of these forms of worship and not simply to “do their own thing.”

We have chaos in the Reformed Church in America today when it comes to worship. There is little commonality when one moves from one church to another, even in western Michigan. Our eastern churches are often more Reformed than those in the West and in sections of Canada.

I am convinced that we can devise liturgies that are faithful to our Reformed understanding of worship but which are more contemporary than our present ones. Toward this end we need new worship resources. If “music gives theology wings” and if our hymns more than our sermons shape our faith and piety, then it is imperative that we find some way of unifying our praise of God in song. Fewer than 10 percent of our congregations use our official hymnal, *Rejoice in the Lord*. The Hymnbook is still the most widely used hymnal in our churches, but after that there is no uniformity at all, not even in given areas of the church. Worship resources provided by our Commission on Christian Worship could include some alternative worship forms and some of the best praise choruses, gospel hymns, and new and varied songs that reflect our cultural and ethnic diversity. This would help to bring about some reform and upgrading of our worship.

The form such resources might take must be left open and should take advantage of the new technologies available to us.
P-1.
To instruct the Commission on Christian Worship to produce worship resources which include supplemental forms of worship and hymns, songs, and choruses which reflect our faith and speak to our time; and further,

to instruct the Commission on Christian Worship to submit the first of such resources to the 1998 General Synod.∗∗∗

C. New Approaches to the Mission of the Church

If mission is one, an old theme which our general secretary, Wesley Granberg-Michaelson has enunciated in a fresh way, then we will not play off overseas missions against the local congregation as a missiological entity. Our Lord’s mandate to proclaim the gospel in Jerusalem, Samaria, and the ends of the earth means that mission begins at home, where we are. That means both evangelistic outreach and social service. Samaria suggests the culturally or ethnically diverse group that may be in our own neighborhood. Today’s call to witness to the ends of the earth means not only sending missionaries to Chiapas and Africa, the Middle East and the Far East, but also relating to churches in Canada, the United States, and overseas on a congregation-to-congregation basis, in addition to relationships that already exist. This should mean much more than exchanging ecumenical delegates from time to time or having area secretaries attend meetings of those overseas churches. It may not be feasible for a small congregation to establish a relationship with a sister church in Muscat, Oman, or Dumaguete, Philippines, but a classis could do this. This would strengthen not only the local congregation of classis in this country but also the related church overseas. A healthy mission partnership involves the mutual sharing of gifts and resources.

D. A Brief Statement of Faith

We are a confessional church, but we don’t take our confessions seriously, whether it’s the Apostles’ Creed or the Heidelberg Catechism, to take the two which are most widely used. What we need is a brief confessional statement similar to that of the Presbyterian Church, USA, one which is short enough to be printed on the back of a bulletin or used as a bulletin insert. Our Song of Hope is an excellent contemporary statement, but it is rather long and has not found widespread acceptance in our churches. We need something that is brief, understandable, and expressive of our common faith. Such a statement would introduce newcomers to the Reformed Church in America and help to bring about closer unity in the family of God. A sample model statement prepared by me follows:

A Brief Reformed Credo

Preface

The Reformed Church in America, along with much of Christendom, confesses its faith through the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds and also accepts the Athanasian Creed. The following brief confession only highlights certain themes of the Reformed tradition. For our view of election, the nature of faith, church and sacraments, etc., one should consult the three RCA Standards of Unity—the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort.
I

We believe that the God of the covenant, the one covenant of grace, is revealed to us in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and supremely in Jesus Christ. This covenant God has “called us out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9) to be a holy community; seeking the lost, serving the needy, and praying for the coming of the kingdom. This covenant-making and covenant-keeping God, revealed to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, calls us out of our isolation and rebellion into a fellowship of love. To that love we are to respond with confession, adoration, deeds of love and mercy, and witness at home and abroad to a hurting and dying world.

II

We believe in God, the Father Almighty, the creator of all that is, who is holy and righteous but gracious in his sovereignty and gentle in his majesty. This sovereign Lord of all reaches down in compassion to a lost world in his beloved Son, Jesus Christ, God with us. We trust in this God who has not only the universe but also each of us in his hands.

III

We believe in Jesus Christ, the way, the truth and the life, who is grace and truth incarnate, the only savior and the hope of the world. In his atoning death and resurrection we have wholeness and real life, life with an eternal dimension. By faith in this Christ, we are reconciled, made right with God, and set free from the powers of sin and death. We look forward to Christ’s return in glory, in judgment, and in grace. Then all of God’s purposes for creation will be consummated in the new heaven and new earth.

IV

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the source and giver of life, who draws us into vital union with Christ and is our guarantee of the life to come. The Spirit is our counselor and guide who moves and empowers us to walk in the ways of peace and to seek justice for the oppressed. We pray that we may be filled with the Spirit so that we may manifest the gifts and graces of the Spirit individually and in our life together as the people of God.

V

We believe, but so often we falter and fail: so help us, dear Lord, in our unbelief and have mercy upon us. We are grateful that you are faithful even when we are faithless. Transform and renew us by your Word and by your Spirit that we may be increasingly conformed to the image of your Son; and with the saints of the ages we acknowledge your dominion and power, your holiness and justice, your goodness and grace, now and evermore.

Amen!

P-2.
To instruct the Commission on Theology to produce a brief statement of faith, utilizing the above model, for report to the 1997 General Synod.
IV. I HAVE A DREAM

I would like to express my vision for the Reformed Church in America in the form of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s famous “I Have a Dream” speech. I have shared this vision with many members of our denomination as I have journeyed throughout much of North America. I have benefited from the counsel and suggestions of many friends, and hence the “dream” is not mine alone but in many ways a team effort.

I have a dream:

1. Of a Reformed Church in America that is known for its love of God and neighbor which is demonstrated in faithful witness to the gospel of Christ and compassionate service to a hurting humanity.

2. Of a Reformed Church in America that is a confessional church that takes seriously its own confessions and is keen to confess its faith in fresh and relevant ways in a pluralistic society.

3. Of a Reformed Church in America that takes seriously the authority of Scripture, the Word of God written, read, and preached in all of its fullness and diversity. This involves, among other things:
   a. A fidelity to the gospel—that Jesus Christ is the savior of the world, the way, the truth and the life.
   b. That the language we use to speak of God will be scriptural, expressing on the one hand the variety found in Scripture, but on the other hand the willingness to address God as Father, as we are taught by none less than our Lord himself.
   c. That our ethical decisions, whether in regard to homosexuality, abortion, euthanasia, or capital punishment on the one hand, and racism and economic justice on the other, will be both biblically grounded and appropriately compassionate.
   d. That we will follow the example of our Lord, who treated women with respect, and of the apostle Paul, who welcomed women as colaborers and gave thanks in particular for Phoebe, a deacon. We can, and should, do no less (see Romans 16).

4. Of a Reformed Church in America that is alive to the Word and the Spirit, a motif found both in Scripture and in our confessions. This means that we will be open to, and seek, all the gifts of the Spirit and will pray that we may be continually filled with the Spirit and thereby be bold to witness to our faith and be fruitful in manifesting the graces of the Spirit—love, joy, and peace—in order to build up and strengthen the body of Christ. However, being a people of the Word, we will always test the spirits to see whether they are from God.

5. Of a Reformed Church in America that is a missiological church. This means that our witness begins in our own backyard—to both unbelievers and nominal Christians and also to the hungry and the homeless. But we must not stop there, for there are still untold millions who have never heard the gospel and live in fear and despair. The world is our parish.
6. Of a Reformed Church in America that is an ecumenical church, fostering strong and meaningful ties with other churches throughout the world, especially those with whom we share a special history and tradition. This must be carried out not just by church leaders but also through exchanges between member schools and congregations.

7. Of a Reformed Church in America that recognizes that unity, like charity, begins at home. This means that we will bear each other’s burdens, first of all with sister congregations, sharing our gifts and resources. It also means that we will cooperate more and more with our sister denomination, the Christian Reformed Church, and others such as the Evangelical Covenant Church and Church of the Brethren.

8. Of a Reformed Church in America that seeks to discern and encourage the gifts of all its members while at the same time looking out for potential leaders in its midst.

9. Of a Reformed Church in America that not only proclaims the gospel boldly and winsomely but also takes seriously its teaching ministry so that it may “present everyone mature in Christ” (Col. 1:28).

10. Of a Reformed Church in America that reflects the ethnic diversity of our continent, a rainbow church that rejoices in and celebrates the heritage of all its peoples as a gift of the Spirit.

11. Of a Reformed Church in America that lives out as fully as possible the Reformed marks of the church: the pure preaching of the Word, the proper administration of the sacraments, and the discipline of the Word. This means:

   a. Preaching the whole counsel of God: personal salvation and growth in the Spirit and also justice in the public arena and civic holiness; and worship that is God-centered and also related both to personal and social needs.

   b. A celebration of the sacraments that magnifies the unfathomable grace of God in the baptism of an infant and the real presence of the risen Christ in the celebration of Holy Communion.

   c. Exercising church discipline for both the honor of Christ, mutual accountability to one another, and the restoration and healing of those who have fallen away.

12. Of a Reformed Church in America that is a praying church, not only in times of crisis, but one that gives thanks always and in every place for the goodness and grace of God.

13. Of a Reformed Church in America that nurtures and equips a people of God who live out their faith in lives marked out by wholeness and holiness and who seek to relate that faith to every facet of their vocation and community life.

14. Of a Reformed Church in America that has a vision of a holy God, yet loving Father, who is high and lifted up, a sovereign God who is Lord of the nations and of time and space, through the end of this century and into the twenty-first century, until our Lord returns in glory and God shall be all in all.
NOTES:


2 The Introduction to Resolution VIII, adopted by the 206th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, USA, 1994.

I. John Hesselink

**Upon recommendation of the Committee of Reference, P-1 was referred to the Advisory Committee on Christian Worship and P-2 was referred to the Advisory Committee on Theology.

FAR EAST TRIP

At the January 1996 General Synod Council meeting, the president presented his report on his visit in November and December 1995 to the countries of Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Indonesia, and the Philippines. The president requested this report be distributed at the 1996 General Synod meeting and included in the 1996 Minutes of the General Synod. This report follows.

REPORT ON FAR EAST TRIP

Introduction

The president of the General Synod frequently takes a trip overseas to visit one or more of the countries where the Reformed Church in America has missionaries and has an ecumenical relationship with an area church. Initially I had a difficult time making a decision where to go, for it was tempting to go to a part of the world where I had never been, such as the Middle East or Africa. Eventually, however, I felt led to go to the Far East, even though my wife and I had served as missionaries in Japan for twenty years and had returned periodically to lecture, teach, and preach. There were long-standing invitations to visit churches and seminaries in Korea, Taiwan, and Indonesia. But more importantly, church leaders in Indonesia and Korea had recently contacted me concerning the possibility of developing stronger ties with the RCA and with some of our RCA educational institutions. Moreover, in other countries—Japan, Taiwan, and the Philippines—the RCA has a significant missionary presence.

The Western Theological Seminary administration had graciously lightened my teaching responsibilities during the first two terms, so it was possible to leave just before the end of the first term (November 15, 1995) to take advantage of the break between terms and Thanksgiving vacation and return December 10, 1995, shortly after the beginning of the second term. This was also a good time to visit countries like the Philippines and Indonesia, where the winter temperatures are “only” 80-85 degrees fahrenheit.

My principal objectives were threefold: 1) to visit RCA missionaries in those areas insofar as time permitted; 2) to contact church leaders in several of those countries to bring greetings and discuss closer cooperative relationships; and 3) to visit Christian colleges and seminaries and engage in theological dialogue. All of these goals were wonderfully realized, along with several serendipitous encounters and experiences.

I wouldn’t recommend this kind of trip to most people—five countries in less than a month and some major trips within those countries—but it was exhilarating as well as exhausting. Above all, it gave me an even greater appreciation for the work and witness of RCA missionaries, both past and present, and for what God is doing in that part of the world. My
hope and prayer is that at least a portion of my vision may be caught by those with whom I have the opportunity to share this story. Unfortunately, for the sake of relative brevity, I cannot share many of the anecdotes and stories which would make this report livelier.

The Impact of RCA Missionaries

As a former missionary, I have a fairly good understanding of what it means to live and witness overseas. However, each country has its peculiar challenges, frustrations, and rewards. Missionaries in Chiapas, Mexico, or the Sudan, or Ethiopia experience dangers and hardships, the likes of which missionaries in Japan or the Middle East do not experience. However, missionaries in Japan and the Middle East wrestle with difficult languages and resistance to the gospel unknown in most other parts of the world.

To be more specific, in Japan, Taiwan, and the Philippines, the RCA has missionaries whose dedication, commitment, and impact is immeasurable. In Japan, I was fortunate in being able to enjoy Thanksgiving day with Ron and Ruby Korver, who graciously hosted a Thanksgiving dinner for all the RCA missionaries and associates in the Tokyo-Yokohama area. Thirty-six people were in attendance. A few of those present were veteran missionaries, but a majority of them were young, recent college graduates teaching English in various schools in the area. Young or old, they all testified to God’s grace in their lives and the joy and satisfaction they find in their work. But as I ate with them and had in-depth conversations with them, I also learned of the price they pay, especially those who are permanent members of faculties. The hours are very long, the office facilities very crowded, and the language is always a formidable foe. At the same time, here is a marvelous opportunity, for there is a great need for Christian teachers in Japanese Christian schools. The cost to the RCA in such cases is minimal because their salaries are paid by the Japanese schools.

For the most part that cannot be said of the Rev. Gordon and Evon Laman, who are at Tokyo Union Theological Seminary, where I taught for twelve years. Their house on the seminary campus is very small, but the environment is pleasant and the seminary facilities are quite adequate. However, despite some physical problems and an overload of responsibilities, the Lamans minister in a wonderful way without complaint. One of the joys of my two days on the campus was speaking in a class taught by Gordon that uses as its text my book, On Being Reformed. The last half of the period was spent with students asking me questions about various subjects in the book.

The Rev. Rowland and Judy Van Es teach at the divinity school of Silliman University in the Philippines (a one and one-half hour plane trip from Manila). The hardships they experience are of a different sort: a depressing political situation with corruption and abject poverty, and a hot and humid climate with no air conditioning in either their home or their old junker of a car. (However, the car is a relatively new luxury for them.) I spent three days with the Van Eses and their Philippine colleagues and was moved by their commitment and compassion. I was able to visit only Judy Estell while in Taiwan. Here, too, I was moved by her dedication and determination. Her husband, William, went to Taiwan as an RCA missionary in 1958. He spent his whole career teaching at Yu-Shan Theological College for the tribal peoples, who live mostly in mountain areas in eastern Taiwan. His first wife died of cancer, and he later married Judy, who was serving as a missionary in another part of Taiwan. Then Bill died in 1990 of a heart attack, leaving Judy with a large family. The youngest children are away at boarding school, so Judy is alone most of the time. But she loves the people and her work—teaching English and music at the seminary and leading Bible studies in her home and at a prison—and has no thoughts of leaving Taiwan.

The impact of such people—and others whom I have not named—is incalculable. In those countries I visited where the RCA has missionaries, the church and seminary leaders I met were unstinting in their praise and appreciation of the contribution of our RCA missionaries.
And that contribution and impact lives on long after those people have gone on to glory. In Korea, for example, Presbyterian Church leaders revere the name of Horace G. Underwood, a New Brunswick Theological Seminary graduate who was a pioneer missionary in Korea representing the American Presbyterian Board. (The RCA did not have the funds at that time.) In Japan the contributions of early RCA missionaries are too many to list here, but one is particularly noteworthy: the Kaigan Church on the shores of Yokohama, the first Protestant church in Japan. This was the fruit of the efforts of James Ballagh, an RCA missionary, who received on confession of faith and baptized several young men who were studying English with him—and this at a time when becoming a Christian was still punishable by death.

You have heard it before, but it bears repeating. The RCA may be a small denomination, but its influence and contributions around the world are great. The number of RCA missionaries serving in Asia has been radically reduced, partially because of economics, partially because in countries like India it is difficult for missionaries to enter the country, and partially because some national churches such as the United Church of Christ in the Philippines are no longer requesting missionaries. (However, wanted or not, one of the Presbyterian churches in Korea claims to have over one thousand Korean missionaries in the Philippines!) Unfortunately, the country where they are most needed—Japan—is about the most expensive place in the world to support missionaries.

**Strengthening the Ties That Bind Us Together**

What is particularly desired by most national churches in this new era is stronger ties with churches in North America and Europe. In this regard my visits to Korea and Indonesia were particularly significant, since the RCA has no missionaries in Korea or Indonesia. The RCA, however, has had contacts with churches in both countries, particularly with the Presbyterian Church in Korea.

Now the leading Presbyterian college and seminary in Korea wants to establish formal ties with Hope College and Western Theological Seminary, which would involve an exchange of students and professors. Heretofore most of their ties have been with Presbyterian institutions in the United States, although New Brunswick Theological Seminary has had some contact with them. I had a very fruitful visit with their president, Dr. Jung Woon Suh, and have shared his invitation with Dr. John Jacobson, Jr., president of Hope College, and with the faculty and administration of Western Theological Seminary.

The Rev. Dr. Willy Roeroe, president of the Christian Evangelical Church in Minahasa, a district in the northeastern corner of Suwalesi (the Celebes), was my host during the four days I was there. My contact with him was through a recent Th.M. graduate of Western Theological Seminary who is on the faculty of Tomohon University. Five other Western Theological Seminary Th.M. graduates are also on this theology faculty. Dr. Roeroe had indicated that he is very interested in formalizing a relationship with the RCA. Evidence of his seriousness in this matter was the fact that he arranged for two meetings with me and the leaders of that church. During the second meeting they came up with a list of several concrete ways in which we could cooperate with each other. One of the proposals revolved around possible exchanges of scholars and students between Tomohon University, where the largest number of majors are theology and Christian education, and their counterparts in the RCA. This would be a natural relationship, for both the RCA and the Christian Evangelical Church have a Dutch heritage and share a similar Reformed and evangelical outlook. In addition, there are already strong ties between the theological faculty of Tomohon University and Western Theological Seminary.

I should also mention the RCA's very strong ties with the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan. The RCA missionary presence has been strong, although the numbers are no longer great; but the RCA has an able friend and ally in the person of the Rev. Dr. C. S. Yang, general
secretary of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan and the Council of Churches. He did his Th.M. studies at Western Theological Seminary in 1984-85 and since then has had frequent contact with the RCA.

This type of relationship represents the wave of the future. At the January 1996 General Synod Council meeting, I recommended that the RCA begin in earnest to explore this possibility of a formal relationship with the Evangelical Church in Minahasa, Indonesia. At its March 1996 meeting, the General Synod Council instructed the general secretary to appoint an Ad Hoc Committee on Ecumenical Partnerships to study establishing "ecumenical partnerships" with church communions throughout the world.

Theological Dialogue and Encounters

Given my particular calling and expertise, it was natural and stimulating for me to contact not only church leaders and missionaries, but also theological schools where the RCA has special ties. As a result, in many places I was warmly received and welcomed, not so much because I was president of General Synod, but because I was recognized and known as a Reformed theologian. This enabled me to have entreé and opportunities that would not normally be afforded a visitor from abroad. Thus, I was invited to lecture on John Calvin in Seoul, Korea, sponsored by the Institute for Calvinistic Studies; to share in teaching a class based on my book, On Being Reformed, at Tokyo Union Theological Seminary; to lecture at the Yu-Shan Theological College in Taiwan on “The Spirit of the Reformed Tradition” (their choice of a subject); lead in chapel at the Taiwan Theological Seminary in Taipei, where my interpreter was the Rev. Dr. Martin Wang, former RCA pastor in Flushing, New York, and now an RCA world mission associate; and to lecture on “Developments and Trends in Modern Theology” at Silliman University Divinity School in the Philippines. I gave no lectures in Indonesia because it was examination week at Tomohon University. However, I had several opportunities to engage in serious theological dialogue with several theologians, particularly with my host, the Rev. Dr. Rococo, who is also on the theological faculty and has his doctorate from the University of Mainz in Old Testament with Christoph Barth. In each of these countries I was entertained at a dinner party by the whole theological faculty or key representatives, and the conversations usually became quite serious and challenging.

A key issue in Taiwan, the Philippines, and Indonesia is the indigenization or contextualization of the Christian faith. In all these countries theology came to them from the West with its European trappings. The present generation of theologians is trying to relate the gospel more directly to their local culture without ending up with a compromise of the fundamentals of the faith or a cultural Christianity—a danger for North Americans as well. A specific case is the concern of some of my Taiwanese theological friends about an attempt on the part of another faction in Taiwan to substitute Chinese culture for the Old Testament as a proper background for the gospel.

I had no special wisdom for the theologians with whom I discussed these issues, some of them old friends and former students, others new acquaintances with whom there was a remarkable rapport. However, they seemed to appreciate the fact that someone with a similar theological background was willing to spend time with them and share their concerns. This is ecumenicity of a different sort. These contacts will prove valuable for years to come. They are one more way of making visible the catholicity of the church.

Incidentally—but not so incidental—there is another wonderful form of the catholicity of the church: our hymnody. My first Sunday overseas I worshiped in the largest church in the world, the seven-hundred-thousand-member Yoho Full Gospel Church in Seoul, Korea. It was Thanksgiving Sunday, and my heart was strongly warmed as they opened the service with a hymn I had learned in Sunday school in Grand Rapids, Michigan: “Bringing in the
Sheaves.” This experience was repeated in Ageo, Japan, the Rev. Toru Akiyama pastor, where I preached; and in Taiwan, the Philippines, and Indonesia. In the last three countries the congregations also sang tribal or indigenous hymns, but their hymnals were not very different from the RCA’s, so in Indonesia we celebrated Advent by singing “O Come, O Come Emmanuel.”

There is a lesson to be learned here in an ecclesiastical climate where the magic word is “contemporary.” If we sing only contemporary music, we not only cut ourselves off from the church of the ages but also from the church around the world.

### The Cross and the Power of the Gospel

Satisfying as all those theological conversations were, nothing moved me so much as the evidences of the mighty acts of God in the first and last countries I visited, namely, Korea and Indonesia. Of the five countries I visited, I had first-hand knowledge only of Japan. There the church struggles to hold its own in a land dominated by Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples. What a thrill, then, to approach Seoul at night as we came from the airport and have pointed out to me a red cross on the horizon, and then several more as we entered this city of twelve million people. Soon lit red crosses could be seen everywhere. Church steeples in Korea are tall, and many of them have crosses which are framed by red neon lights. One might have reservations about the aesthetics of such crosses, but aesthetics pale into insignificance at the way the church in Korea is growing at an amazing rate and already dominates the landscape.

The same is true in the district of Minahasa, Indonesia. The country as a whole is Muslim, but Minahasa is 85 percent Christian, so that wherever one goes, particularly in the villages, large church buildings are prominent and their crosses tower over everything else.

As I marveled at this sight in Korea and Indonesia, I could not help giving thanks to God for the power of the gospel; and I also recalled the lines of a familiar hymn:

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In the cross of Christ I glory
Tow'ring o'er the wrecks of time.
All the light of sacred story
Gathers round its head sublime.
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I. John Hesselink
REPORT OF THE GENERAL SECRETARY

OUR THEME

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect (Rom. 12:1-2).

Our denominational theme for the next three years, “God’s People Transformed,” is taken from this passage in Romans. Surely these verses speak directly to the issues facing the Reformed Church in America as we look from today to the end of the twentieth century.

OUR CHALLENGE

This is our challenge these next three years: We need to engage with discernment all the social and cultural changes of our time so that our congregations may be effective witnesses to the gospel of Jesus Christ; yet we need to learn how not to be conformed to the pressures of our time, but, rather, to be a transforming presence within our society.

The Word became flesh. And the gospel always must take on flesh. It is not a sterile, abstract proposition, but a living reality. Thus, the message of the gospel is communicated through the tools of culture—language, music, art, and shared customs, celebrated in communities of faith. This takes a particular form in Orange City, Iowa, and another form in the Bronx, New York. It has one expression as the Crystal Cathedral, in Garden Grove, California, and another in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico.

When the church is living in mission, it understands clearly its need to be related creatively to the culture. Last month I listened to young aboriginal people at the Yu-Shan Theological College and Seminary in Taiwan as they sang powerful Christian songs taken from their indigenous languages, musical style, rhythm, and instruments. The gospel has been made flesh in their culture. The church has been planted in its local soil and has grown fruitfully.

At the same time, the gospel must never be captive to any culture. Rather, the Word judges, critiques, and challenges the expressions of every culture with the vision of the kingdom of God. J.B. Phillips translates Romans 12:2 this way: “Don’t let the world squeeze you into its own mold.” In every age and place the church is faced with the challenge of communicating to and through culture, yet distinguishing itself from various values and patterns of culture. In this way the church can become like salt, light, and leaven, living with a faithfulness to the gospel which can transform the culture.

MAJOR TRENDS IN CULTURE

What does this challenge look like for us? What are the major trends in culture which can have a decisive effect on our churches and on the shape of our witness? Let me briefly suggest a few which deserve our attention.

UNCHURCHED AND MATERIALISTIC CULTURE

First, and most obvious, North American society is becoming an unchurched culture. This past year I was told the story of young children newly brought to church who gathered in a room with a cross on the table. One of the kids said, in all seriousness, “Why is that addition sign on the table?” The majority of North America’s younger generation now grows up...
without experiencing the church as a social institution in which their families participate and which shapes their lives. The Christian faith has been replaced by secular materialism as the dominant religion of our land.

**INDIVIDUALISTIC CULTURE**

Further, people are becoming more individualistic and less supportive of social and community activities. It’s a trend evident all over the social landscape. Membership in groups such as the PTA, the League of Women Voters, and service organizations like the Lions Club and the Elks Club has been rapidly declining. In fifteen years the Jaycees have lost 44 percent of their members.

The groups which are growing are those that you join and participate in largely by mail, like the American Association of Retired Persons. Or groups that focus on individual needs, such as the growing number of twelve-step and other support groups. Consider one rather unique and striking example: Robert Putnam has found that between 1980 and 1993 the total number of people who go bowling increased by 10 percent (to nearly eighty million, as many as go to church). But those who belong to bowling leagues declined by 40 percent. We are even bowling alone.

And simply consider this fact. Last year, for the first time, more money was spent by Americans at fast food restaurants than at regular restaurants. Eating out is now done more for convenience than for social fellowship.

**SINGLE ISSUES OVER COMMON GOOD IN THE CULTURE**

The more isolated Americans become from community engagement, the more shrill their political and social rhetoric has become. Direct mail and radio talk shows—both deeply impersonal means of communication—become the means of political discourse, augmented by sound bites on newscasts and thirty-second political ads. Politicians seek to win elections by attacking their adversaries. Few seem to worry about the “common good.” Society’s capacity to build community and reconcile diversity seems weak.

**ECONOMIC INEQUALITIES IN THE CULTURE**

Economic inequalities in North America are increasing. In the United States the bottom 40 percent of families have less income today than they had twenty years ago. With these alarming trends comes the popular political expectation that churches and voluntary organizations should play a far more substantial role, as contrasted to government, in responding to the neediest and most vulnerable members of society. We do not know what impact this may have upon church budgets and social structures.

**SPIRITUAL HUNGER IN THE CULTURE**

In the midst of North America’s radical secularization, a striking spiritual hunger is evident—and growing. We observe it in popular books, in music, and in the incredible array of curious spiritual quests that seem to be thriving. People may be captivated by the consumer society, but many are not inwardly satisfied. They sense their emptiness and want to be filled.

In short, we live in a society which builds external shells of secularism, ruling out of bounds spiritual perspectives and convictions. But beneath the surface, religious curiosity and sincere commitment to faith are present, exerting a steady influence.
How, then, are we to respond to these trends which are characterizing our modern culture? Some are dangerous, and they need to be opposed intentionally. Others give welcome opportunities for communicating and demonstrating the gospel. How, in response to trends like these, between now and the century’s end, can the Reformed Church in America live out our obedience to Paul’s word, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed”?

**OUR RESPONSE**

Our response can be framed by these biblical injunctions: “Go and tell,” “Come and see,” and “Abide in my love.”

**“Go and Tell”**

When Jesus ascended, the disciples were told to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Jerusalem and Judea was their neighborhood, their turf, their comfort zone, Samaria, in contrast, was threatening territory, a region separated by historic cultural tensions, and an area they would rather avoid.

The Reformed Church in America hears this same call to mission. We are called to our Judea, to our Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. We are to proclaim the gospel of God’s love and grace, known to us through his only Son, Jesus Christ, and to make disciples.

Calling others into relationship to Jesus Christ means calling them into the church, into local congregations. Being part of the body of Christ has concrete meaning. When the General Synod Council (GSC) met on retreat in January 1996, we invited George Barna to speak with one of our GSC committees. He shared research showing that when people make a new commitment of faith to Jesus Christ, if they do not become members of a congregation within several weeks after that commitment, in most cases their faith withers away and dies.

The gospel’s truth is communicated through congregations whose life is a missionary presence within the culture.

**Beginning New Churches**

During the Spring Sabbath weekend in St. Louis, Missouri, in April 1996, I met with our new church pastors. Our hotel was across the street from the St. Louis landmark, the Arch, which marks the site of the beginning of the Lewis and Clark expedition. Our new church development pastors are the Lewis and Clark expedition of the RCA. They are exploring uncharted cultural territory, often in great isolation. They have to innovate, experiment, and rely on ingenuity. They have limited resources, and—in the words of a current book about Lewis and Clark—they display “undaunted courage.”

Several years ago the RCA put together a strategy for starting ninety-eight new churches by 1998. As of today, seventy-five proposed church starts have been accepted into this plan. Some have been organized. Others are being developed. Some have worked hard to get started, but failed. Some are now lively and vital churches.

In the past three years, about one-half have been Hispanic and Asian-American congregations. This has been providential. It wasn’t specifically projected that way, but it demonstrates how new churches bring gifts of diverse vitality to our fellowship.

The $9.8 by ‘98 fund drive, which has been raising money for Church Building Fund loans, for revitalizing urban, rural, and small-membership congregations, and for training new church development pastors, has reached nearly $7 million in contributions and pledges. We have two more years for every RCA congregation to make a response to this challenge and to help meet our goal.
Nevertheless, the new churches we have started have simply replaced other churches which have closed. Now we need a vision and strategic direction for new churches which will take us into the next century. Moreover, we need more pastors who hear the particular call to engage in this exploratory ministry of starting new churches.

Where will we seek to plant such new congregations? How will we undertake this? Who will lead these explorations? Further, what will these new congregations be like? Will they be located only in our Judea, or will they also be planted in our Samaria? Let’s be honest. The Reformed Church in America’s Samaria has been the center of the city. Too often we have bypassed, neglected, and fled the cities. Today we must undertake a renewed commitment to our presence in our major metropolitan areas.

Further, can we continue to expand the ethnic diversity that is becoming a source of deep spiritual enrichment for the whole of the RCA? In our vision for new church development, will we commit ourselves to congregations that are Hispanic, Taiwanese, Korean, Indian, and African-American, as well as those of our cultural Judea?

Therefore, let us take a careful look from 1998 to the year 2005 and ask: Where will we be called to go and make disciples and plant new churches? In this search our racial/ethnic councils should join with our Mission Services and Evangelism and Church Development Services committees and staff to lead us into our future. Therefore, I offer this first recommendation:

P-1.

To instruct the General Synod Council’s Evangelism and Church Development Services Committee and Mission Services Committee, in cooperation with the racial/ethnic councils, to develop a vision and implementation plan for new congregations from 1998 to 2005, with special attention to urban areas; and to develop a variety of models for these new congregations in different economic, cultural, and ethnic settings, for report to the 1997 General Synod.*

“Come and See”

We are instructed not only to “Go and tell,” however; but also to “Come and see.” Early in the Gospel of John (1:35-42), two curious onlookers were directed toward Jesus. He asked them, “What are you looking for?” and they replied, “Where are you staying?” Jesus said, “Come and see.” These two weren’t looking simply for intellectual or theological answers. They didn’t engage Jesus in debate. Rather, they wanted to be with him, to experience life together, to be part of a living, worshiping community. So they stayed with Jesus, in this first community centered around Christ, and then announced that they had found the Messiah. One was Andrew, and the other, though not named, was probably John.

Many people today are like those two founders of the church. They hunger for a place of real community. They don’t want just to be told about faith. They want to be shown. They want to experience a life of faith. In part, this is a reaction against the impersonal, technological, fast-paced sound-bite culture.

People like to be entertained and are fascinated with technology. Yet, they have needs for relationship and community, which reflects how the Creator made us.

Sociologists like to name and describe generations. I’m on the older edge of the “baby boomers.” Ahead of me are the “boosters.” And behind me is a generation called the “busters.” Listen to this description of them, from a church leader’s newsletter:
The first postmodern generation, busters, have been shaped by the emergence of a global economy, the end of the Cold War, revolutions in information and technology, dysfunctional families, environmental pollution, and the crises of addictions, AIDS, violence....Key issues center around personal identity and establishing and maintaining relationships that result in meaningful community. ("Generation to Generation," Netfax, a newsletter of the Leadership Network, Jan. 11, 1996.)

The busters ask, "Where do you live?" And they want to come and see. Are our congregations ready to invite them, to receive them, to offer them a welcoming, loving, open community, shaped by the love of Christ shared among us? Congregations are revitalized by deepening their community with one another. A loving community attracts others. "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35).

Those of the "buster" generation who "come and see" also want a community in which they can engage in honest and open discourse about the Christian faith. This can happen only in communities that know who and whose they are, communities where adults are engaged in learning together the depth and breadth of our faith and then living it with each other, with their families, and in the world.

**Revitalizing and Renewing Congregations**

Many of our congregations are revitalizing, renewing, turning around, and discovering new life. The regional synods, in fact, have all identified examples of such congregations. We have about forty-two congregations which have recently and dramatically moved from the doldrums into new ministry and life. Such revitalization is measured not just by the size of the congregations, but also by their overall health—their sense of community, their vitality in worship, their evoking of gifts, and their sense of mission. These are the four marks of the revitalized congregation.

We know well our failures—those churches which close, the new church starts that fail, the congregations which are stagnated and uninspired. But we need to study and learn from our successes, and especially from those congregations which have become revitalized in ministry, mission, and community. Those are places where people have learned what Jesus meant when he said to those first disciples, "Come and see." Therefore I offer this recommendation:

**P-2.**
To instruct the General Synod Council's Evangelism and Church Development Services Committee, in cooperation with the Council of Field Secretaries and the Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee, to engage in a study of revitalized congregations, with the intent of proposing specific plans and strategies for such revitalization that can be implemented through the General Synod Council in cooperation with regional synods and classes.**

**"Abide in My Love"**

When our Lord was facing arrest and death, he talked to and prayed with his disciples about their love for one another. He had called them into a new community, which was marked by the willingness to wash one another's feet, to serve each other, to share with one another God's love. His last spoken commandment, in John 15:12, is that we are to love one another. And he promised that we as his disciples will bear fruit if we abide in this love (vs. 5).

Nurturing such a community which depends on this love and becomes a witness to society is a difficult task in today's culture. We live in a time of fragmentation. Living as one body and maintaining unity in the Spirit goes against culture's contemporary tides.
Yet, our Reformed tradition and polity is built around community. We believe that congregations are guided, not by a single person, but by a group of those who are gifted and called to serve as elders and deacons. Our ministers of Word and sacrament belong to one another and also to elders in the classis. The classis is to be a place of belonging, nurture, dialogue, care, and accountability. Congregations do not live unto themselves. They are linked to each other in a classis, for common mission, witness, and faith formation. And together, as classes, we are bonded here, as the General Synod.

Together, we discern God's leading and direction. Together, we make decisions. Together, we embark on mission. Together, we worship. Together, we listen and reflect. Together, we are enriched by the Spirit through a rich diversity of geography, culture, ethnicity, gender, generations, and theological perspectives. Together, we confess our creeds and repeat our vows. We believe that we can more clearly know and discern God's Word and way for us when we work together than when we act as separate individuals. This is biblically grounded. The New Testament uses the word "together" no less than ninety-five times.

All this may, in fact, be profoundly counter-cultural. We live in an age that enshrines individuality. Rights are rooted in individuality. Truth is confined ultimately by the individual. Morality and values are matters of individual choice and conscience. And religious experience is judged by how it serves the individual's feelings and success in life.

**Christian faith is personal, but it is not individualistic.** Today we must understand that difference. Faith in Christ calls us to community, to a belonging with one another in love. How we live out our life together, as one community in Christ, may in fact be central to our witness in a society that is dominated by self-seeking individualism.

Consider these issues central to our life: How do we understand worship? How do we decide on those called to the pastoral ministry? How do we make decisions about accepting new members? How do we understand baptism? How do we call pastors? How do we ordain and install pastors? How do we decide on where to start new churches or close old ones? How do we respond to God's mission throughout the world?

In all these cases, the focus is on the community, the gathered people of God. We understand and guide our life through upholding, building, and trusting in the community of our fellowship together—within the congregation, classis, regional synod, and General Synod—in the unity of Jesus Christ.

**CHRIST BINDS US**

In the Reformed tradition our bonds of belonging to one another are the sign of our belonging to Jesus Christ, the only head of the church. The Reformed Church in America is not a confederation of individually autonomous congregations and individuals. It is not an association of like-minded people. It is not a coalition. It is not a special interest group, or a service organization, or an affiliated network.

Rather, we are an expression of the church of Jesus Christ. Our belonging to one another rests on our belonging to him. It is the first thing we confess in the Heidelberg Catechism: that we belong—body and soul, in life and death—to our faithful Savior. This belonging is the foundation of our relationship to one another.

Our fellowship is built not on the basis of whom we choose, but on whom God has chosen. Our task is to treasure and nurture this framework of fellowship, for it is God's gift. These bonds are not our doing; they are Christ's.
This also proscribes the boundaries to the circumference of this fellowship. Such boundaries are important to our identity. We express this through our standards and confessions, which have served us well since our beginning in 1628. They set forth clearly and explicitly the heritage of the Reformed understanding of Christian faith. Because ours is a living faith, we always need ongoing theological discussion about what it means to be faithful to these convictions. Here, the classis has a particular responsibility to nurture such dialogue.

But we have not always understood and practiced this well. In the past two years, two congregations of the Reformed Church in America have moved toward separation from our fellowship. Seventh Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, was released from the Classis of North Grand Rapids a year ago. Christ Community Church in Spring Lake, Michigan, has voted to separate from the RCA and presently is in negotiations with the Classis of Muskegon. These two congregations and their pastors represent opposite sides of the Reformed theological spectrum. Their circumstances are not the same. In the first, Seventh Reformed Church refused to pay part of its assessment over disagreements with the denomination. In the second, the senior pastor of Christ Community Church and the Classis of Muskegon have been in a widely publicized dispute over theological differences.

I grieve deeply the break in fellowship between these two congregations and the RCA. This is separate from the issue of accountability and discipline between pastors and their classis. The RCA has lost one of these congregations and seems to be on the verge of losing the second. Each has had a long and rich tradition in the RCA. Each could have continued to make a vital contribution to our witness. This separation did not need to happen.

Let me issue a strong warning against establishing an unfaithful and damaging precedent. If a classis makes the painful choice to break the bonds of fellowship with a minister, it should not follow that the congregation, with all of its members, is also severed in fellowship. Worst of all, no one should propose, nor should a classis allow, for a minister simply to demit, and then a congregation to leave, resulting in an independent congregation which pretends to "reordain" its pastor. That is a solution which belies and denies all we believe in the Reformed Church in America about the nature of ordination, the accountability of ministry, and the composition of the church. We do little to protect the purity of our doctrine by making a mockery of our polity.

Vows which bind hearts and minds in fellowship are fragile in today's society. Marriage vows are taken too lightly and broken too quickly. Sex without commitment and violence without context are presented as norms of entertainment. Loyalty to educational, religious, and political institutions is replaced with the hermeneutic of suspicion. Politics is characterized by balkanized, confrontational camps armed with sound bites and attack ads rather than a genuine but more difficult dialogue that searches for the community's higher ground.

The church must not become captive to the culture's present style of behavior. That would be the most damaging way of "letting the world squeeze us into its own mold." It diminishes the very witness of life together as one body in Jesus Christ, which this society so desperately needs to see and hear.

Our challenges of evangelism in a changing world, of starting new congregations, of responding to a renewed sense of mission, and of revitalizing our congregations with a fresh sense of God's calling cannot be met if we fall into a denominational climate of suspicion, distrust, and fear. Such an atmosphere destroys ministry. It suffocates the renewing work of the Spirit. It drives away those who want to come and see.
RENEWED IN MIND

Ours is a time when we need to reestablish a climate encouraging vital and coherent theological discussion which enriches our faith and clarifies our witness. Such discussion rests on the central affirmations of Christian faith, reflected in the Reformed tradition.

We affirm, without compromise, the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, God's only Son, and the way in which God has acted to bring salvation to the world. Our standards and confessions have done this clearly for centuries. And we need never hesitate to affirm this today.

But let us be honest. That affirmation does not end the need for theological discussion. It does not mean that every question is answered. Rather, that affirmation is the place where the discussion begins.

Next year's subtheme for the denomination is this: "God's People Transformed; Renewed in Mind." A strength of our tradition has always been the willingness to think deeply, openly, and biblically about our faith. That is how the Reformation began. And that spirit needs to continue. Let's not allow ourselves to slide into theological sound bites and slogans on either the "left" or the "right" instead of the solid theology demanded by our tradition and needed by our culture.

If we are to live as missionary congregations within our society, then we need to ask how biblical perspectives should inform the church in the midst of the world's many and diverse cultures. How do we understand our task of encountering those without any faith, and those with other living faiths, with the love and truth we know in Jesus Christ? Those have always been the questions faced by our missionaries. But today we are confronted by those same questions within our local neighborhoods.

My hope is that the Advisory Committee on Theology might give thought at this Synod to how we as a denomination can better equip ourselves to meet these challenges, especially as we look to next year's General Synod and its emphasis on being transformed through the renewal of our minds.

MAKING SPACE FOR THE SPIRIT

We need to make more space in our life at all levels for the work of the Spirit. As our president, the Rev. Dr. I. John Hesselink, has pointed out, our tradition is strong on the Word, but we need renewed attention to the Spirit.

In our consistories, classes, General Synod Council, and even here at General Synod, we are too easily buried in papers, overwhelmed by agendas, and consumed by the business of governing ourselves. We then deal only with immediate tasks at hand and neglect the challenge of longer-range vision. Further, we often fail to build our community with one another in sharing and biblical reflection. Sometimes, in the midst of so many meetings filled with so many words, it seems as though we are simply out of breath, needing the renewing wind and water of the Spirit.

But it need not be that way. We are beginning to discover, in the Reformed Church in America, a fresh way of opening our gatherings to more than just immediate business. The General Synod Council (GSC) has gone on retreat at each January meeting for the past two years, gathering without workbooks—and with Bibles—to discuss long-range goals and to seek guiding vision and direction for the future of the RCA.

This year, for the second time, we have changed the schedule and format of General Synod. In addition to our business we will have time to reflect together on our understanding and practice of worship. These questions are crucial to our life together as a denomination. They
aren't business issues; they go much deeper. So at this General Synod we will not only worship richly together but will seek to clarify the questions and controversies that so often are associated with worship today. These may, in fact, be the most important issues of all which we face during these days.

OUR CLASSES

How and why we meet together is most critical, however, for our classes. The word "classis" comes from the Latin, and it means "fleet," like a fleet of ships. For the seafaring Dutch, this was a powerful image. A fleet of ships, with different sizes and types, sailed together in common mission. Such a classis functioned best, even brilliantly, when it knew where it was going, when it had a common sense of direction, and when it shared a common strategy.

In RCA polity, the classis is the foundation. The life and ministry of congregations will be well supported, and the connections with the wider church will flourish fruitfully, if the classes are vital and strong.

Last year a group of RCA staff read together the Rev. Allan Janssen's new book, *Gathered at Albany*, a history of the Classis of Albany. I was amazed in the reading of this book to see the wide number of functions which that classis, at different points in its history, carried out. The Classis of Albany directed church extension and evangelism. It carried out diaconal ministry. The Classis of Albany even undertook the first foreign mission of the RCA, sending missionaries to Canada. This classis coordinated stewardship and undertook ecumenical initiatives in the Albany area. Of course, the classis exercised oversight of pastors and interpreted the Book of Church Order. And consistently the Classis of Albany nurtured congregations, intervening in their conflicts, giving counsel and direction, and enabling mutual support in ministry.

Today, many of our classes are like fleets which are floundering at sea. They lack a common direction and mission. Their ships are competing with one another, sometimes even firing salvos at each other.

The agendas of most classes are dominated by immediate business. Meetings are often crowded for time, and they are boring. Members of classes often resent having to attend. Inspiration and vision are lacking. Regulations, rule-making, and routine reports seem to dominate.

All this is a serious weakness, for RCA polity reserves to the classis many critical functions of the church, such as care of students in the preparation for ministry, ordination of ministers of Word and sacrament, nurture and support of pastors, church extension, legal responsibility for church property, and more. Yet, in most cases, those responsibilities are carried out by pastors or elders who volunteer their time, taking on additional responsibilities to their already crowded vocational lives. Further, the chairs of classis committees typically change each year.

What can be done? First, classes can seek to alter their style of meetings and discover a larger vision for their role. Some classes have begun going on a retreat together once a year, are providing time for members to deepen their fellowship with one another, and are seeking together a common vision for ministry in their region. Those classes are trying to be a true home of support and nurture for their members rather than simply a forum for legislation.

My own classis—the Classis of Cascades—has moved in this direction and is nurturing a vision for new churches in the Pacific Northwest. Its climate has changed remarkably from the time when I attended its meetings a decade ago. The Classis of Rocky Mountains has been
moving in similar directions, as are some others. Some are giving new opportunities for pastors to nurture and support one another. One classis recently had a session in which pastors came together to reflect on and share religious poetry.

Further, two classes—the Classis of California and the Classis of Southwest Michigan—have decided to employ their stated clerk (or classis executive) on a full-time basis. I notice remarkable results. And in some areas, such as in the Regional Synod of New York, regional synod staff are giving direct assistance to the functioning of the classes and are giving pastoral support to its ministers rather than defining their work programmatically.

We have fifty-six executive staff members working on behalf of the General Synod. Another thirty executive staff work on behalf of regional synods. But how do any of these staff relate to, support, and strengthen the functions and duties of our forty-six classes? Some do, to be sure. Yet, it seems that while RCA polity places central responsibilities with our classes, our structure directs RCA staff capacity only toward the regional and national level.

It is time to give this all some intentional consideration. Too many classes seem to be in trouble, unable to fulfill their calling. With this in mind, I offer the following recommendation:

P.3.
To request the general secretary to schedule visits with the pastors and members of classes of each region over the next twenty-four months for times of reflection and dialogue about our fellowship, our unity, and our commitment to be in mission and witness together; and further,

to review models of innovation and change presently underway in the functioning of classes; and further,

to prepare interim reports as necessary and a final report with recommendations for the revitalization of classes to the General Synod no later than 1998.

OUR MINISTERIAL PREPARATION

Few issues are as important to the future vitality of our congregations as the nurture and preparation of our future ministers. In 1994 the General Synod called for the formation of a special Task Force on the Standards for the Preparation for the Professional Ministry in the Reformed Church in America (MGS 1994, R-14, p. 278). In my service thus far as general secretary, this task force, in eight meetings over eighteen months, has been unparalleled in the intensity of its work, the vigor of its debates, the creativity of its thinking, and the fruitfulness of its labor. Its authors, representing every major perspective in our denomination concerning how pastors should be prepared for ministry, have embraced a remarkable common ground.

This report is in the Church Vocations section (see pp. 322-46). It offers the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America the opportunity to set forth a clear theological charter for ministerial formation and to establish standards and expectations for such training which can be implemented consistently in all our classes.

The RCA at large needs to discuss and reflect on these proposals. Therefore, the General Synod Council brings this report with the recommendation that it be received by you and commended to the church for serious study, dialogue, and reflection. After this period of listening and discussion, final recommendations will be brought to the 1997 General Synod.
OUR ECUMENICAL RELATIONS

The RCA has always understood that mission is undertaken in partnership with other expressions of the church. Therefore, the RCA’s commitment to mission involves the RCA in ecumenical relationships. Indeed, this is the history of the ecumenical movement; some of the most important expressions of our unity in Christ occur as churches engage together in God’s mission.

At its January 1992 meeting the General Synod Executive Committee appointed a Task Force on RCA Ecumenical Relations “to define the goals and criteria for the RCA entering into and maintaining participation in ecumenical relationships.” This task force was accountable to the Commission on Christian Unity, and the commission subsequently took over responsibility for the content of the report.

The commission took up this task with a commendable seriousness of purpose. It worked hard to reflect on the RCA’s biblical and theological basis for ecumenical relationships as well as to develop specific guidelines for future commitments and actions.

In order to gain comment and input, early drafts of the report were shared with the Advisory Committee on Christian Unity at the 1993 and 1994 General Synods. In addition, a cross section of RCA readers representing a wide spectrum of theological views offered opinions and comments.

At the 1995 General Synod a draft report, “An Ecumenical Mandate for the Reformed Church in America,” was presented (MGS 1995, pp. 173-86). This report was then sent to each RCA congregation and classis with a study guide and with an invitation to respond to the Commission on Christian Unity with reactions and suggestions. Copies were also sent to partner churches and ecumenical organizations. Many helpful and careful responses were received from throughout the church.

As a result, the Commission on Christian Unity has made further revisions in the report. A final version of this report is in the Christian Unity section (see pp. 184-97). This is a milestone. It is the rich result of a careful and thorough-going process. The report underscores the biblical basis for the RCA’s approach to any ecumenical relationship.

It is my hope that this Synod will gratefully and enthusiastically adopt this ecumenical mandate as a foundation and guide for the ecumenical life of the RCA as we enter the twenty-first century. It sets forth future challenges and guidelines for our work together with the whole church.

Among these challenges, and in my mind, our first priority, is to build new bridges between evangelical bodies and ecumenical organizations. Surely, the most serious division in the body of Christ today in North America comes between evangelical/pentecostal voices and those regarded as historic “mainline” churches. This is a fissure which cuts across other divisions of denominational separation.

The Reformed Church in America is evangelical in much of its temperament and in its convictions. At that same time, it is strongly ecumenical in its history and ongoing life. That is a rare combination and, I believe, a gift from God. It offers to the RCA an opportunity to play an important role in searching for Christian unity as we enter a new millennium.

More immediately, the RCA is faced with a specific challenge. For the past thirty-six years the Reformed and Lutheran churches, heirs of the sixteenth century Reformation, have been in a dialogue together about their differences. In 1992 this discussion reached a consensus on the issues of doctrine. Thus, it has been proposed that the Reformed and Lutheran churches
enter into a relationship of “full communion.” This simply means that the Reformed and Lutheran churches officially recognize each other as true and faithful churches in which the gospel is rightly preached and the sacraments rightly administered.

The RCA has played a key role in bringing this proposal to a common decision in 1997. This needs to move forward to next year’s General Synod without delay. It offers the opportunity to heal the centuries-long breach between these two traditions of the Reformation. As this century closes, the churches of the Reformation could come together at the Lord’s Table, bearing witness to the visible unity of the church and hearing the call to engage together in God’s mission, that “the world might believe.”

As we look beyond the year 2000, churches around the world should create a table which brings together in fellowship all the major Christian families—historic Protestant, evangelical/pentecostal, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox. The traditional ecumenical organizations (for example, the World Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches of Christ, USA) have thus far not achieved that end and may never be able to do so as presently structured. Therefore the Reformed Church in America should be ready to envision fresh and creative ventures, led by God’s Spirit, seeking to follow the commitment of the Reformed tradition to “one holy catholic church.”

Meanwhile, we are continuing to strengthen our ecumenical and mission partnerships with churches around the world. Earlier this year an RCA delegation led by former general secretary the Rev. Edwin Mulder visited the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa. Specific plans for deepening our relationship were explored as this church responds to the challenges of healing and justice in the new South Africa. Last month I was part of an RCA delegation visiting the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, expressing our commitment to continue our partnership with them during this exciting but uncertain time in their nation’s history. In situations like these we are learning what it means to move beyond a traditional mission relationship of sending funds or personnel, to a mutual partnership, based in our common belonging to Jesus Christ (see also Report of the President, p. 40).

OUR COMMUNICATION

We exist in fellowship as a denomination largely to be enriched by one another. Much of our life together consists of communication—sharing ideas, new approaches, problems, challenges, information, and vision. Communication builds community. And community enables communion, another word used sometimes to describe a denomination. We used to think of the purpose for denominations as designing and delivering programs to congregations. That still holds true in some cases. But more and more, denominations find their purpose through enabling communication and sharing between congregations, and also by building links to the global church.

The technology enabling communication constantly changes. We are presently in dramatic transition as a society, moving rapidly to sharing and transmitting information and building networks of communication electronically. This accounts for the explosive development of the Internet, which is radically changing the means by which society, and much of the world, exchanges information as we approach the twenty-first century.

These changes are not without dangers. Personal relationships can never be replaced with e-mail, electronic working teams, and video conferencing. Yet, the revolution in communications also offers the RCA important new opportunities for strengthening its ability to build community. When the telephone was invented, we did not avoid its use, preferring instead to communicate by letter or on horseback. Today the church should quickly adapt itself to opportunities presented by electronic communication. We can increase conversations and
dialogue around any number of subjects. We can conduct business with less travel. And we can open channels of communication across cities as well as across oceans at minimal expense.

To enable this, the Reformed Church in America has established a site on the World Wide Web, part of the Internet. Anyone with a computer and telephone line can reach this common place and communicate with others. You will be able to read reports, like the one on ministerial formation presented to this General Synod. You will be able to establish dialogue with others about such a report.

In the near future you will be able to look up videos with descriptions for your Sunday school and other church programs from our TRAVARCA library, and to place your order electronically. The whole RCA resource catalogue will be available for you to explore and order over your computer. You can find out about the RCA mission program in the Middle East and worldwide, send e-mail messages to one of our missionaries, and discover how your prayers and support are needed for immediate situations. You will be able to enter into direct conversation with denominational staff, whether we are in our offices or traveling to one of our mission sites throughout the world. If your church has a web site, you can link it to the RCA’s web site.

(A live demonstration of the RCA web site on the World Wide Web, part of the Internet, was presented.)

This new way of linking ourselves together is not limited to pastors. Anyone, including newcomers who want to learn about us, will be able to reach us, and we will be able to respond. One only needs a computer and a modem.

We have entered into this project because we received strong encouragement from across the church and a special financial gift to get started. The goal is to have each RCA congregation, as well as RCA seminaries and colleges, classis stated clerks, regional synods, and RCA missionaries, all connected in electronic communication as we enter the next century.

OUR FINANCES

Before closing, let me address a few words about RCA finances. You may recall that the General Synod Council’s budget for 1994 ended in a deficit. Last year we took decisive action to revise the 1995 GSC budget, monitor spending, and focus on stewardship efforts. We also prepared and sent to all congregations a new publication, Family Finances, explaining thoroughly and openly all the finances of the RCA.

As a result the 1995 GSC budget showed a small surplus of income over expenditures. Contributions from congregations for the RCA’s mission program increased by $300,000. We all can be deeply grateful for the continuing generous support of RCA congregations for the overall ministry and mission made possible through our denominational fellowship.

With the blessing and adoption by the 1995 General Synod, we now have officially established the RCA Foundation (MGS 1995, R-9, pp. 232-36). This new initiative, long overdue, will enable ongoing efforts in fund development that will undergird important dimensions of the RCA’s life.

The 1997 GSC budget has been built on the assumption that assessments will not increase, apart from adjustments for salaries and benefits which reflect the rate of inflation. The 1995 General Synod adopted a number of recommendations brought to it by a special Ad Hoc Committee to Study Assessment Issues/Denominational Funding (MGS 1995, pp. 342-51).
One recommendation continues to receive excellent attention—development of a new formula for calculating assessments instead of using the number of confessing members (MGS 1995, R-7, p. 350). The 1997 General Synod will consider any new formula proposed.

CONCLUSION

We are to be “God’s People Transformed,” renewed in spirit and mind, able to know and do the will of God, in the midst of a culture which wants us to conform to its self-seeking, individualistic values and secular ways. Where do we seek such transformation and renewal? How do we resist passive conformity? How do we discern what is good, and right, and perfect, in the words of Romans 12?

It does not happen alone. Our theme, and that passage from Romans, does not call just for transformed individuals. It calls for a people, a community, to be transformed by God’s Spirit.

We must build space in our life together as the RCA for this renewing and transforming work of the Spirit. Open space, without pressing agendas and immediate business; space for worship, for theological dialogue, for koinonia, for nurture. We tasted something of what this is like in April 1996 at Spring Sabbath. Seven hundred pastors and spouses—probably more pastors than have ever gathered together at any point in RCA history—came together simply to be with one another. To experience their own Sabbath. To make some space for renewal. To be refreshed by the Word and the Spirit. To treasure friendship and honor fellowship.

We did this together. And we discovered what a rare and valuable gift it is to dwell together as brothers and sisters in unity. Renewal in ministry and mission will occur in our congregations, our classes, our boards, our mission programs, and our institutions as we take this space and treasure the Spirit’s gift of our life together. That is how and where we will learn what it means not to be conformed, but to be God’s People Transformed.

**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 Evangelization and Church Growth; and P-3 was referred to the Committee of Reference.**
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; and 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, GSC held stated meetings on October 10-12, 1995, January 26-28, 1996, and March 26-28, 1996; 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’s 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 6j). 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 1995 General Synod 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
# Annual Meetings
Policy and Planning

# Amendments to the Book of Church Order

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

Budget

# Classis of North Grand Rapids 1993-96 General Synod Assessments

# 1997 General Synod Operational Budget

# Other 1997 General Synod Assessments

# Total 1997 General Synod Assessments

Supervision

# Personnel and Evaluation Committee

Other

# Spring Sabbath

# Classes and Regional Synod Stated Clerks Consultation

# Staff Consulting Group

# Council of Unit Representatives and Regional Synod Executives (COURSE)

# 1995 Statistical Report of the RCA

# Appointment of General Synod Treasurer and Assistant Secretary

Report of the Board of Directors

# 1995 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)
2. GSC Evangelism and Church Development Services Committee

Reformed Church in America Building and Extension Fund (Evangelization and Church Growth)

Office of Evangelism and Church Development Services (Evangelization and Church Growth)

Office of City Congregational Ministries (Evangelization and Church Growth)

Office of Congregational Evangelism (Evangelization and Church Growth)

Office of New Church Development (Evangelization and Church Growth)

Office of Small Membership Churches (Evangelization and Church Growth)

3. GSC Finance Services Committee

1997 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)

General Synod Assessment Formula (Financial Support)

Funding for Theological Education Students (Financial Support)

4. GSC Ministry and Personnel Services Committee

Office of Ministry and Personnel Services (Church Vocations)

Family Leave Policy (Church Vocations)

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

5. GSC Mission Services Committee

Office of Mission Services (World Mission)

Changes in Missionary Personnel (World Mission)

6. GSC Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee

1996-2001 Denominational Themes (Christian Education and Discipleship)

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

RCA History Video and Book (Christian Heritage and Communications)

Necrology (Christian Heritage and Communications)
1996 General Synod Theme (Christian Worship)

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

Chair of Personnel and Evaluation Committee Attend General Synod as Corresponding Delegate (Church Order)

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

Review Process for General Synod Operational Budget (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)

Task Force to Study Church Herald Distribution and Methods for Payment (Christian Heritage and Communications)

RCA Foundation (Financial Support)

Committee of Reference

# Referral

# Overtures

# 1997 General Synod Operational Budget

# Leaves of Absence

# Resolutions

AD INTERIM ADMINISTRATION

Regional Synod Minutes

The GSC received and found to be in good order the 1995 minutes of the regional synods of Albany, Canada, the Far West, the Great Lakes, the Heartland, Mid-America, the Mid-Atlantics, and New York.

Ad Interim Appointments

To the General Synod Council:


The Rev. Donald Ringnalda, representing the Classis of Pleasant Prairie, to fill the unexpired term of the Rev. Wayne Van Regenmorter, Class of 1998.


To the Commission on Christian Action:

Flora Miller, to fill the unexpired term of Marian Patterson, Class of 1998.

To the Commission on Christian Unity:

Stanley Olson, to fill the vacancy, Class of 1998.

To the Commission on History:

Christopher Moore, to fill the vacancy, Class of 1998.

To the Commission on Nominations:

Fran Baron, representing the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes, to fill the unexpired term of Harry Pofahl, Class of 1998.

To the New Brunswick Theological Seminary Board of Trustees:

Ruth Waller, New Brunswick Theological Seminary Trustee, to fill the unexpired term of Eunice Folkerts, Class of 1998.

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 classes, the regional synods, 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 the General Synod Executive Committee (GSEC) expressed concern about the form. By consensus GSEC 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 consistory 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 classes or the churches with delinquencies to become current in their financial obligations?

Indebtedness reports were received from thirty-seven classes. Of these, nine 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 British Columbia, California, Central Plains, Columbia-Greene, Holland, Montgomery, New York, Ontario, and Queens.

Revisions of Consistory Report Form

No revisions were made in the 1995 consistory report form.

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 1996 General Synod communion offering to Reformed Church World Service, specifically for the rebuilding of RCA churches in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

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 1995 and 1996 General Synod assessments.

Dates and Sites

1996 General Synod

Upon recommendation of the General Synod Executive Committee (GSEC), the 1993 General Synod 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

Upon recommendation of GSC, the 1995 General Synod accepted the invitation from the Classis of Wisconsin to host the 1997 meeting of the General Synod within its bounds. The classis is looking 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. The 1995 General Synod also set the dates of June 14-20 for the 1997 meeting of the General Synod (MGS 1995, R-3, p. 49).

1998 General Synod

Upon recommendation of GSC, the General Synod also in 1995 accepted the invitation of Hope College and Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan, to host the 1998 meeting of the General Synod on their campuses. The 1995 General Synod also set the dates of June 6-12 for the 1998 meeting of the General Synod (MGS 1995, R-4, p. 49).

1999 General Synod

At its March 1996 meeting GSC reviewed an invitation from the Classis of Dakota to host the 1999 meeting of the General Synod within the bounds of its classis.

R-3.
To accept the invitation of the Classis of Dakota to host the 1999 General Synod; and further,

to hold the meeting of the 1999 General Synod on the campus of Augustana College in Sioux Falls, South Dakota; and further,

to set the dates of June 12-18 for the 1999 General Synod meeting. (ADOPTED)

Annual Meetings

The subject of biennial meetings for General Synod has been discussed over the past number of years—in 1972, 1978, 1982, and again in 1987. In 1982 four overtures were submitted to the 1982 General Synod requesting biennial meetings (MGS 1982, pp. 177-79). The Advisory Committee on Church Order recommended to the 1982 General Synod denial of these overtures for the following reasons:

1. Constitutional changes, as well as changes in program emphasis, already take a long time, and biennial meetings would compound the problem.

2. The cost is really less than $1 per active communicant member.

3. Constant input from the grass roots is needed.

4. The "glue" that holds us together in our diversity requires us to meet every year.

5. If Synod did not meet annually, more responsibility and power would flow to the General Synod Executive Committee. Although an expanded GSEC would be less costly than annual Synod meetings, it would be inadvisable to vest so much power in so few.

6. Annual meetings offer more frequent review of the administration of our denomination.
7. Yearly meetings guarantee a larger participation on the part of both pastors and elders. Under the present system, elders on the average now only have one opportunity to attend General Synod during their lifetime. The testimony of many an elder has been "one of the greatest experiences of my life" (MGS 1982, p. 179).

The 1982 General Synod adopted the advice of the Advisory Committee on Church Order to deny the four overtures (MGS 1982, R-11, p. 179).

At the 1987 General Synod the president, in his report, recommended "studying the possibility of a biennial meeting of the General Synod for report to the General Synod in 1988" (MGS 1987, p. 33). In response, the 1987 General Synod authorized GSEC to appoint a committee to explore the possibility of biennial meetings of the General Synod (MGS 1987, pp. 306-07). At the 1988 General Synod, GSEC reported it was the consensus of GSEC that the benefits of meeting annually continue to outweigh the benefits of meeting biennially (MGS 1988, p. 49).

At its January 1990 meeting GSEC appointed an Ad Hoc Committee on Services, Structures, and Funding. This ad hoc committee focused on the restructure of the denomination, including a review of the frequency of General Synod meetings. The ad hoc committee held thirty-five consultations throughout the United States and Canada. In its report to the 1992 General Synod, the ad hoc committee stated:

there was considerable apprehension about going to a biennial meeting while structuring GSEC [General Synod Executive Committee] and GPC [General Program Council] with the new GSC [General Synod Council]. For at least the next three years the [ad hoc] committee recommends annual meetings. After a three-year period of operating with the new GSC structure, the decision whether to meet annually or biennially should be made by the General Synod on the recommendation of GSC (MGS 1992, p. 58).

In response to the report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Services, Structures, and Funding, the 1992 General Synod voted:

To instruct the General Synod Council following its third year of operation to review the matter of General Synod biennial meetings for report and recommendation to the General Synod in 1996 (MGS 1992, R-12, p. 61).

At its October 1995 meeting the GSC's Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee determined that the benefits of meeting annually continue to outweigh the benefits of meeting biennially. In addition to many of the reasons stated in previous years for continuing annual General Synod meetings (see above), the GSC’s Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee was strongly convinced that there is profound importance and significance for the RCA “family” to gather together annually. As for the matter of costs for annual General Synod meetings, the committee noted that the 1995 General Synod voted to schedule General Synod meetings at RCA colleges three out of every four years (MGS 1995, R-5, p. 50). The cost for General Synod meetings at RCA colleges is just slightly over $1 per active-confirmed member.

R-4. To approve continuation of annual General Synod meetings; and further,

to instruct the General Synod Council's Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee to review the matter of General Synod biennial meetings, for report and recommendation to the 1999 General Synod. (ADOPTED)
POLICY AND PLANNING

Amendments to the *Book of Church Order*

The *Government*

The General Synod in 1995 adopted and referred to the classes for approval five amendments to the *Book of Church Order*. The amendments are recorded in the *1995 Minutes of the General Synod*, pp. 135-36, 226-31, 246-47, 261-62, 380-81. Due to an oversight, the amendment of Chapter I, Part II, Article 10, Section 1 and Section 2, of the *BCO (MGS 1995, pp. 261-62)* to clarify that the M.Div. degree is the "regular course of seminary instruction" was not sent to the classes for approval. This amendment will be sent with the *BCO* amendments adopted by the 1996 General Synod.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposed Amendments</th>
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<th>Disapproved</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Membership Categories and Definitions</strong></td>
<td>44</td>
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<td>(<em>MGS 1995, pp. 224-31</em>) (BCO, Preamble, paragraphs on membership categories and definitions)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(<em>BCO, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 1, Sections 3, 7, 9, 11</em>)</td>
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<td>(<em>BCO, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Sections 9a, 9c, 13</em>)</td>
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<td>(<em>BCO, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 5, Sections 2a, 2b, 2d, 2f</em>)</td>
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<td>(<em>BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 6, Section 4</em>)</td>
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<td>(<em>BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Sections 12f, 19c</em>)</td>
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<td>(<em>BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 9, Section 2b</em>)</td>
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<td>(<em>BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 10, Section 2</em>)</td>
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<td>(<em>BCO, Chapter 1, Part III, Article 3, Section 1</em>)</td>
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<td>(<em>BCO, Chapter 2, Part II, Article 1, Section 3</em>)</td>
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<td><strong>2. Additional &quot;Constitutional Inquiry&quot; Question</strong></td>
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<td>11</td>
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<td>(<em>MGS 1995, pp. 246-47</em>) (BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 1d)</td>
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<td><strong>3. Laying on of Hands at Ordination Services</strong></td>
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<td>(<em>MGS 1995, pp. 369-81</em>) (BCO, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 12)</td>
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<td>(<em>BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 11, Section 5</em>)</td>
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<td>(<em>BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 12, Section 1</em>)</td>
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<td><strong>4. Examination of Teaching Function for Ministerial Candidates</strong></td>
<td>39</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>(<em>MGS 1995, pp. 129-36</em>) (BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 8, Section 6a)</td>
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R-5.
To declare amendments 1-4 to have been approved by the classes for incorporation into the 1996 edition of the *Book of Church Order*. (ADOPTED)
Amendments to *The Bylaws of the General Synod* and *Special Rules of Order of the General Synod*

The 1995 General Synod approved in first reading for recommendation to the 1996 General Synod the following amendment to *The Bylaws of the General Synod* and *Special Rules of Order of the General Synod*:

Membership Terminology Amendment from “Active Confirmed” to “Confessing”—

**R-6.**
To declare the above amendment approved by the 1995 General Synod in first reading to be incorporated into the 1996 edition of *The Bylaws of the General Synod*. (ADOPTED)

**BUDGET**

Classis of North Grand Rapids 1993-96 General Synod Assessments

At its April 1994 meeting GSC was informed that the Classis of Muskegon and the Classis of North Grand Rapids would not be paying in full the 1993 General Synod assessment because a church in each respective classis was refusing to pay its share of the General Synod assessment. (Note: The General Synod assesses classes and not congregations. Each classis determines how to collect and pay its General Synod assessment.)

Delegates from the Classis of Muskegon and the Classis of North Grand Rapids were not seated at the 1994 General Synod since these classes had not paid in full the 1993 General Synod assessment (*MGS 1994*, pp. 6-7, 48-49; see also *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 1, Section 1a).

On March 7, 1995, the Classis of North Grand Rapids, in a special session, voted to remove Seventh Reformed Church from the roll of classis due to nonpayment of assessments. The church property was given to the church by the classis.

The Classis of North Grand Rapids has paid its 1993-95 General Synod assessment except for the portion charged by the classis to Seventh Reformed Church. As for payment of the 1996 General Synod assessment, the 1996 General Synod assessment is determined from the 1994 confessing membership statistics listed in the 1995 RCA Directory. (Seventh Reformed Church was not removed from the roll of classis until March 7, 1995, as noted in the preceding paragraph.)

At its October 1995 meeting GSC reviewed a June 21, 1995, letter from the stated clerk of the Classis of North Grand Rapids requesting the 1996 General Synod forgive the portion of past unpaid General Synod assessments not paid by the classis for the years 1993-96. The portion not paid during these years was the amount charged by the classis to Seventh Reformed Church for its number of confessing members.

The GSC’s Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee, at its October 1995 meeting, noted the difficult and painful, long and complicated, and thorough and careful process the Classis of North Grand Rapids gave to attempting to resolve this situation before making its March 7, 1995, decision to remove Seventh Reformed Church from the roll of classis.
Since the classis did take, with regret, these decisive steps to address this situation, GSC, at its October 1995 meeting, voted to recommend that the 1996 General Synod forgive the Classis of North Grand Rapids the unpaid portion of its 1993-96 General Synod assessment charged by the classis to Seventh Reformed Church.

R-7. To forgive the Classis of North Grand Rapids for the unpaid portion (the amount charged by the classis to Seventh Reformed Church) of General Synod assessments due by the classis for the years 1993-96. (ADOPTED)

1997 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-confessing member assessment on the classes.

At its March 1996 meeting GSC reviewed requests for the 1997 General Synod Operational Budget totaling $4,070,800.

During the General Synod meeting, three items calling for additions to the 1997 General Synod Operational Budget were presented and approved (see Report of the Committee of Reference, p. 428 for a listing of all three items). After making the necessary adjustments in the proposed 1997 General Synod Operational Budget, R-8, R-9, and R-10 were presented to the General Synod for adoption (see pp. 69-70).

1997 GENERAL SYNOD OPERATIONAL BUDGET

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<td>I. General Synod Meeting</td>
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II. Staffing Costs (General Synod Council Units)

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<td>93,549</td>
<td>105,450</td>
<td>102,200</td>
<td>102,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office Maintenance</td>
<td>5,806</td>
<td>16,700</td>
<td>9,900</td>
<td>9,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office Supplies</td>
<td>8,929</td>
<td>10,800</td>
<td>14,400</td>
<td>14,400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### III. Committees/Commissions/Task Forces

#### General Synod Council Meetings
- **Printing:** $272,711, 26,450
- **Telephone:** 37,691, 31,400
- **Postage:** 20,880, 23,200
- **Depreciation:** 22,029, 19,064
- **Office Equipment and Repair:** 8,732, 4,900
- **Contingency:** 18,223, 6,700

#### Commissions:
- **Christian Action:** 4,101, 8,000, 6,500, 6,500
- **Christian Unity:** 8,186, 8,000, 8,000, 8,000
- **Christian Worship:** 3,624, 7,000, 6,000, 6,000
- **Church Order:** 1,879, 4,200, 4,000, 4,000
- **History:** 3,234, 5,800, 5,000, 5,000
- **Judicial Business:** 2,401, 1,000, 1,000, 1,000
- **Nominations:** 1,751, 1,000, 4,000, 4,000
- **Theology:** 5,765, 7,000, 6,500, 6,500
- **Women:** 10,416, 8,000, 8,000, 8,000

#### Task Forces:
- **Discipline/Judicial Procedures:** 14,295
- **Standards for Ministry:** 18,673
- **Baptism:** 1,611
- **Church Herald Study:** 4,907, 8,000
- **RCWM Relationship to RCA Structure:** -0-
- **Study of Purposes/Responsibilities of Regional Synods/Classes:** -0-

#### Councils:
- **African-American:** 15,031, 30,000, 28,000, 28,000
- **Hispanic:** 13,628, 22,000, 22,000, 22,000
- **Asian-American:** 20,124, 22,000, 22,000, 22,000
- **American Indian:** 12,309, 13,500, 13,500, 13,500
- **Staff Consulting Group/COURSE:** 12,924, 6,000, 15,000, 15,000
- **Classes Stated Clerks Meeting:** 9,964, 7,000, 7,000, 7,000

#### IV. Publications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Church Herald</strong></td>
<td>$943,900</td>
<td>$963,000</td>
<td>$991,900</td>
<td>$991,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pioneer Mailing</strong></td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>12,200</td>
<td>-0-</td>
<td>-0-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Book of Church Order</strong></td>
<td>8,298</td>
<td>8,000</td>
<td>8,500</td>
<td>8,500</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>BCO Spanish Translation</strong></td>
<td>-0-</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>-0-</td>
<td>-0-</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Perspectives</strong></td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>6,000</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Homosexuality Study</strong></td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>-0-</td>
<td>-0-</td>
<td>-0-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Loose-leaf Liturgy (Reprint)</strong></td>
<td>4,128</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reprints (Miscellaneous)</strong></td>
<td>8,389</td>
<td>-0-</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total:**
- **$986,715**  
- **$998,200**  
- **$1,021,400**  
- **$1,021,400**
V. Ecumenical Delegations and Agencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CCU Meeting Expenses</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$8,500</td>
<td>-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCC Delegation</td>
<td>5,062</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lutheran/Reformed Studies</td>
<td>2,390</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Reformed Church</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel of Ecumenical Appointees</td>
<td>10,572</td>
<td>13,000</td>
<td>14,000</td>
<td>14,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interpretive Speaking</td>
<td>2,002</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>2,000</td>
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<td>URCSA Delegate Travel</td>
<td>2,487</td>
<td>-0</td>
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<td>-0</td>
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<td>23rd General Council Meeting</td>
<td>-0</td>
<td>-0</td>
<td>3,000</td>
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<td>WCC Church Relations</td>
<td>2,199</td>
<td>2,000</td>
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<td>-0</td>
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<td>WCC Assembly</td>
<td>5,006</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>5,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ecumenical Contingency</td>
<td>9,053</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>2,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>World Alliance of Reformed Churches</td>
<td>12,075</td>
<td>12,650</td>
<td>13,575</td>
<td>13,575</td>
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<tr>
<td>Canada Council of Churches</td>
<td>1,346</td>
<td>1,950</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>1,500</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>$52,228</strong></td>
<td><strong>$45,500</strong></td>
<td><strong>$54,775</strong></td>
<td><strong>$46,275</strong></td>
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</table>

VI. Other

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presidential Expenses</td>
<td>7,472</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>8,000</td>
<td>8,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastoral Coverage</td>
<td>1,696</td>
<td>-0</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>1,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theological Education</td>
<td>26,985</td>
<td>20,800</td>
<td>10,400</td>
<td>10,400</td>
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<td>Seminarian Seminar</td>
<td>14,889</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archival Program</td>
<td>45,515</td>
<td>47,500</td>
<td>-0</td>
<td>-0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assessment Contingency</td>
<td>4,520</td>
<td>25,000</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>6,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastoral Services</td>
<td>38,238</td>
<td>30,000</td>
<td>24,000</td>
<td>24,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaplains Conference</td>
<td>20,938</td>
<td>17,500</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in Ministry Events</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>6,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Contingency</td>
<td>1,474</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>6,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Basic Service Costs*</td>
<td>495,300</td>
<td>509,580</td>
<td>455,945</td>
<td>460,285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>$657,027</strong></td>
<td><strong>$691,380</strong></td>
<td><strong>$552,345</strong></td>
<td><strong>$556,685</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Subtotals $3,894,514 $3,995,580 $4,070,800 $4,102,340

Less: Refund of Prior Year Surplus -0 -50,000 -0 -0

TOTAL $3,894,514 $3,945,580 $4,070,800 $4,102,340

* The 1997 Basic Service Costs of $460,285 represent contributions towards the operations of the following offices:

- Office of Finance $155,065
- Office of Information Systems 94,100
- Personnel Office 24,775
- Stewardship and Communications 186,345
NOTE: ASKINGS

1. It is important to note that the assessment amount requested does not meet all funding needs for the denomination. The assessment amount primarily covers administrative and operational costs. The assessment does not cover the General Synod mission program. Please refer to the Financial Support section (see pp. 370-72) for a recommendation to approve 1997 income projections based on askings developed by participants in the General Synod Council.

2. Also, it is important to note that 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 membership in these two agencies:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NCC</td>
<td>$31,238</td>
<td>$30,000</td>
<td>$31,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WCC</td>
<td>$26,618</td>
<td>$25,000</td>
<td>$30,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

R-8.
To approve the 1997 General Synod Operational Budget of $4,102,340, and further,

to set the 1997 per-confessing member assessment for the General Synod Operational Budget at $21.91.* (ADOPTED)

*Based on 1995 confessing membership of 187,255.

(The 1996 General Synod Operational Budget assessment was $20.85 per active-confirmed member.)

Other 1997 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.

$1.50 to provide sufficient retirement income for clergy who retired prior to 1973 (no increase).

*$3.14 to provide unified funding for the administration of theological education ($3.00 1996).

$4.64 TOTAL

*At its October 1995 meeting GSC voted to designate the 1997 General Synod assessment for the administration of theological education at 13.4 percent of the 1997 General Synod assessment allocated to the General Synod operational budget ($21.91, adopted in R-8 above) and the Board of Pensions General Fund budget ($1.50).

R-9.
To fix the 1997 budget for the other General Synod assessments (sufficient retirement income and theological education administration) at $4.64 per confessing member. (ADOPTED)
(The 1996 General Synod assessment amount for the above two items per confessing member was $4.50.)

**Total 1997 General Synod Assessments**

The total assessment for General Synod concerns in 1997 is $26.55 ($21.91 plus $4.64) per confessing member. This is an approximate increase of 4.73 percent over the 1996 total of $25.35 ($20.85 plus $4.50) per confessing member.

**R-10.**
To fix the total 1997 General Synod assessment budget at $26.55 per confessing member. (ADOPTED)

**SUPERVISION**

**Personnel and Evaluation Committee**

The Personnel and Evaluation 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 V-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>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLASSIFICATION</th>
<th>low</th>
<th>mid-point</th>
<th>high</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(80%)</td>
<td>(100%)</td>
<td>(120%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>$68,800</td>
<td>$86,000</td>
<td>$103,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>61,920</td>
<td>77,400</td>
<td>92,880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IIIA</td>
<td>51,600</td>
<td>64,500</td>
<td>77,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IIIB</td>
<td>43,000</td>
<td>53,750</td>
<td>64,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Associates</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>$28,430</td>
<td>$33,460</td>
<td>$38,480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>22,850</td>
<td>26,880</td>
<td>30,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretarial and Office Staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIA</td>
<td>19,690</td>
<td>23,170</td>
<td>26,640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIB</td>
<td>16,880</td>
<td>19,870</td>
<td>22,850</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE:** Special circumstances may warrant hiring below the sixth range.
OTHER

Spring Sabbath

In his report presented at the October 1994 GSC meeting, the general secretary proposed a gathering of RCA ministers for the purposes of mutual nurture, spiritual enrichment, and professional growth. In response, GSC voted to appoint an ad hoc committee to develop and plan a gathering designed for RCA ministers.

The ad hoc committee members were:

Johnny Alicea-Baez
Harold Brown (cochair)
Scott Brown
Andre Daley
Judith Marvel
Sophie Mathonnet-Vanderwell (cochair)
Tom Schwanda
Donald Troost
Paul Walther

Alvin Poppen and Wesley Granberg-Michaelson served as staff resource persons for this ad hoc committee. Ellen Mers served as the coordinator for this event.

Using the theme Spring Sabbath, the event occurred the first weekend after Easter, April 12-14, 1996. The event was held at the Adam’s Mark Hotel in St. Louis, Missouri. The keynote speaker was the Rev. Dr. Richard Mouw, president of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. Jeff and Karen Barker, associate professors of theatre and speech at Northwestern College in Orange City, Iowa, presented a program on Saturday evening, April 13, 1996. The Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson preached at the Sunday morning worship and communion service. (See also the Report of the Office of Ministry and Personnel Services in the Church Vocations section, p. 315.)

Classis and Regional Synod Stated Clerks Consultation

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. Funding for this annual stated clerks meeting is provided by the General Synod assessment budget, with the understanding that transportation expenses for this meeting are provided by the classes and regional synods.

The annual gathering of stated clerks was June 6-8, 1996, at Northwestern College in Orange City, Iowa. Discussed at this gathering were conflict management and RCA on-line computer services. The stated clerks were also alerted to particular issues coming before the 1996 General Synod, were provided additional background information and details on proposed amendments to the Book of Church Order, and were updated by the general secretary, the director of Ministry and Personnel Services, the director of Policy, Planning, and Administration Services, and the secretary for General Synod operations on ways to further facilitate cooperation, communication, and information between the General Synod, classes, and regional synods.

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/units, 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 November 14, 1995, in Chicago, Illinois. A report on the Mission is One consultation meeting held October 12-13, 1995, in Chicago, was presented. The Staff Consulting Group was informed that the regional synod executives, a representative from each of the four RCA racial/ethnic councils, the minister for social witness and worship, the director of Policy, Planning, and Administration Services, and representatives from Evangelism and Church Development Services and Mission Services were invited to this consultation. The consultation met to discuss the following proposal presented by the general secretary in his report to the 1995 General Synod:

- 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 (*MGS 1995, P-1/R-9, pp. 39, 329*).

The Staff Consulting Group also discussed the RCA Foundation approved for incorporation by the 1995 General Synod (*MGS 1995, R-9, pp. 232-36*).

**Council of Unit Representatives and Regional Synod Executives (COURSE)**

The Council of Unit Representatives and Regional Synod Executives (COURSE) was organized in 1993. The membership consists of the general secretary, the regional synod executives, and the directors of the seven GSC committees/units.

COURSE met on June 21, 1995, in Chicago, Illinois; September 6, 1995, in Grand Rapids, Michigan; and January 16, 1996, in Mahwah, New Jersey. Discussed during the past year at these meetings was the work of the 1995 General Synod, RCA on-line computer services, relationship of the regional synods to the classes and the denomination, representation of the regional synod executives on the General Synod Council, assignment of the general secretary and the directors of the seven GSC committees/units to a specific regional synod to attend its meetings, and the proposed 1999-2001 denominational theme.

**1995 Statistical Report of the RCA**

**SUMMARY OF THE STATISTICAL REPORT OF THE REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA FOR THE YEAR ENDING 12/31/95**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1993</th>
<th>1994</th>
<th>1995</th>
<th>1994-1995 Increase or (Decrease)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Churches</td>
<td>966</td>
<td>955</td>
<td>949</td>
<td>(6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Church Households</td>
<td>132,345</td>
<td>124,334</td>
<td>120,636</td>
<td>(3,698)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Confessing Members</td>
<td>192,730</td>
<td>189,338</td>
<td>187,255</td>
<td>(2,083)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Inactive Members</td>
<td>44,478</td>
<td>43,634</td>
<td>43,451</td>
<td>(183)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Baptized Members</td>
<td>86,047</td>
<td>83,154</td>
<td>82,096</td>
<td>(1,058)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Total Membership</td>
<td>323,255</td>
<td>316,126</td>
<td>312,802</td>
<td>(3,324)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Adherents</td>
<td>41,316</td>
<td>43,517</td>
<td>41,116</td>
<td>(2,401)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Average Worship Attendance</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>185</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Received on Confession</td>
<td>8,283</td>
<td>8,112</td>
<td>8,367</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Received on Certificate</td>
<td>4,806</td>
<td>4,903</td>
<td>4,865</td>
<td>(38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Transferred</td>
<td>4,125</td>
<td>4,080</td>
<td>4,072</td>
<td>(8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Deceased</td>
<td>2,990</td>
<td>2,953</td>
<td>3,004</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Other Removals from Roll</td>
<td>9,278</td>
<td>6,842</td>
<td>5,888</td>
<td>(954)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
14. Infants Baptized 4,894 4,680 4,639 (41)
15. Adults Baptized 1,150 1,132 1,059 (73)
16. Sunday Church School 97,938 98,189 95,170 (3,019)
17. New Membership Classes 11,664 11,769 11,918 149
18. Other Educational Programs 90,498 89,607 92,381 2,774

*19a. RCA Assessments $ 2,100,303 $ 7,957,511 $ 8,905,535 $ 948,024

*19b. RCA Contributions $ 7,975,984 $ 12,223,851 $ 13,170,360 $ 946,509
*20. Other Contributions $ 10,307,516 $ 8,479,849 $ 8,788,310 $ 308,461
*22. Regional Synod and Classical Assessments/Mission $ 5,882,085 ** **
*23. Denominational Fund Drives $ 453,540 *** ***

TOTAL $190,677,287 $185,496,616 $199,401,223 $13,904,607

* Items 19-23 were revised in the 1994 version of the Consistorial Report Form
** Amount for 1994 and 1995 included in 19a.
*** Amount for 1994 and 1995 included in 19b.

Organized
Sheffield Reformed Church, Sheffield, Ontario (5/95)
Choon Syn Reformed Church, Flushing, New York (6/95)
Christ's Church, Saint Peter's, Missouri (6/95)
The Cornerstone Church, Boubonnais, Illinois (8/95)

Disbanded
Covenant Community Church, Franklin, Wisconsin (8/94)
New Hope Community Church, Calgary, Alberta (1/95)
Crossroads Community Church, Elk Grove, California (1/95)
Community Reformed Church, Englewood, New Jersey (10/95)
East Williamson Reformed Church, East Williamson, New York (10/95)
Korean Community Church, Cypress, California (11/95)

Merged
St. Paul’s Reformed Church and Community Reformed Church became United Reformed Church, Youngsville, New York (2/95)
West Side Reformed Church of Cicero and First Reformed Church of Berwyn became First Reformed Church, Berwyn, Illinois (5/95)
Sixth Reformed Church and Calvary Reformed Church became Calvary Reformed Church, Holland, Michigan (10/95)

Removed from the roll of the Classis of North Grand Rapids
Seventh Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan (3/95)
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-11.
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, 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-12.
To appoint the Rev. David Schreuder assistant secretary of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America. (ADOPTED)
The Board of Directors hereby submits its annual report for the calendar year 1995. This is the 176th 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 is committed to providing quality accounting, investment, data processing, and other 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.

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 payroll for RCA staff and missionaries, and 5) other activities essential to the day-to-day functioning of the church. Staff is also responsible for interfacing with legal counsel, the independent auditors, state regulators, the Internal Revenue Service, and corporate insurance providers.

In 1994 numerous changes in the corporate structure of the RCA caused major changes in its financial reporting systems. Creation of the General Synod Council, the RCA Foundation, and the RCA Building and Extension Fund, Inc., necessitated modification of the account structure—so much, in fact, that a new software accounting package (American Fundware) was installed and implemented in 1994. This change has made several improvements in the office, and 1995 was a year in which the Office of Finance moved past the learning stages and began to capitalize on the strength of the software.

Structural changes continued to occur during 1995 as offices struggled to best define their mission and purpose. For example, in September 1995 the Office of Information Systems (commonly known as the computer office) was moved out of Finance Services into Policy, Planning, and Administration Services. At the same time, the offices of the racial/ethnic councils were moved from Congregational Services to Policy, Planning, and Administration Services. Policy, Planning, and Administration Services also expanded its staffing capabilities, placing additional emphasis on long-range planning and electronic communications.

All in all, Finance Services reached many of its goals and objectives during 1995 and gives thanks to God for the chance to be a servant of the church. There is, however, much that is yet to be accomplished, particularly in the area of developing an improved system of controls. Particular focus for the future will be the development of an accounting manual, the strengthening of budget controls, and improvements to the investment monitoring and reporting systems. The pages following are a concentrated overview of the areas of responsibility for Finance Services.

**FINANCIAL SUMMARY, 1995**

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 total revenues and expenses for the calendar year 1995.
### General Synod Council

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fund</th>
<th>Revenue</th>
<th>Expenses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Operating Fund</td>
<td>$12,541,707</td>
<td>$12,472,259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCA Distribution Center Fund</td>
<td>1,795,086</td>
<td>1,967,116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Development Fund</td>
<td>19,865</td>
<td>43,905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPIM Fund Drive</td>
<td>15,553</td>
<td>153,138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$9.8 by '98 Fund Drive</td>
<td>1,332,132</td>
<td>381,774</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$15,704,343</strong></td>
<td><strong>$15,018,192</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Reformed Church Women’s Ministries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fund</th>
<th>Revenue</th>
<th>Expenses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Fund</td>
<td>$208,184</td>
<td>$215,894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assembly Funds</td>
<td>248,454</td>
<td>214,543</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth Marcus Scholarship Fund</td>
<td>4,668</td>
<td>3,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$461,306</strong></td>
<td><strong>$434,137</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Board of Pensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fund</th>
<th>Revenue</th>
<th>Expenses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Fund</td>
<td>$1,602,923</td>
<td>$1,550,457</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annuity Fund</td>
<td>18,903,113</td>
<td>17,475,831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insurance Fund</td>
<td>9,293,054</td>
<td>7,275,612</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$39,799,090</strong></td>
<td><strong>$26,301,900</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### RCA Foundation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fund</th>
<th>Revenue</th>
<th>Expenses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legacy Fund</td>
<td>$249,246</td>
<td>$249,246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endowment and Trust Fund</td>
<td>871,128</td>
<td>2,551,272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey Fund</td>
<td>36,100</td>
<td>22,151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philanthropic Fund</td>
<td>89,648</td>
<td>38,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gift Annuity Fund</td>
<td>64,846</td>
<td>98,509</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revocable Gift Fund</td>
<td>14,356</td>
<td>13,801</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$1,323,324</strong></td>
<td><strong>$2,973,179</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### RCA Building and Extension Fund, Inc.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fund</th>
<th>Revenue</th>
<th>Expenses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extension Foundation Fund</td>
<td>$934,863</td>
<td>$894,653</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church Building Fund</td>
<td>1,015,300</td>
<td>122,793</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$1,950,163</strong></td>
<td><strong>$1,017,446</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### RCA Cash Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fund</th>
<th>Revenue</th>
<th>Expenses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$1,897,920</strong></td>
<td><strong>$1,897,920</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Grand Total**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fund</th>
<th>Revenue</th>
<th>Expenses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$51,138,146</strong></td>
<td><strong>$47,642,774</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 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 participating 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 may be deposited with the Extension Foundation Fund (EFF). The actual percentage will vary up or down, based on the immediate cash needs of the EFF. Because the EFF finances most of its capital needs through the sale of its investment notes, the percentage of Cash Program funds deposited with the EFF was only 5 percent at year's end.

The balance of monies on deposit with the Cash Program (95 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 fund operates like a money market fund, with net earnings being distributed to individual participants on a quarterly basis. Over the past several years, and again in 1995, the Cash Program has exceeded the rate of return offered in the marketplace for similar types of investment vehicles. As a result, entities tend to get into the program and stay there. Because of this fact, it has been possible to structure the fund so it is similar to a medium-term bond fund, thus allowing for longer maturities and providing for increased yields. The amount of outside deposits in the fund grew in 1995 from $18 million to $19 million.

Despite the influx of new cash during the year, the rate of return remained constant. The net return for outside investors during 1995 was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quarter</th>
<th>Rate of Return</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Quarter</td>
<td>6.41 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Quarter</td>
<td>6.25 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Quarter</td>
<td>6.26 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth Quarter</td>
<td>6.51 percent</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 1995 all investments in the RCA Cash Program (a total of $29 million) are under the direct management of the RCA’s managing director of investments.

During the past year a conservative approach was taken in establishing a $460,000 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, 1995, 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 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.

Three investment advisors are currently serving the Reformed Church Investment Program. They are Old Kent Bank and Trust Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan; Scudder, Stevens, and Clark, New York City; 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 values of assets at December 31, 1995, are listed below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Security</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Old Kent Bank and Trust Co.</td>
<td>$2,983,909</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scudder, Stevens, and Clark</td>
<td>$7,482,386</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Westminster Bank</td>
<td>$559,752</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interchurch Center Bonds</td>
<td>$675,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mortgages</td>
<td>$109,765</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCA Cash Program</td>
<td>$112,874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$11,930,686</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During 1995 the GSC removed $1,643,000 from the endowment fund and transferred it into the Cash Program fund. This transfer occurred upon the identification of operating monies that had been placed in the endowment portfolio several years prior to the establishment of the RCA cash program. Despite this sizable withdrawal, the market value of the asset is virtually the same at the end of 1995 as it was at the end of 1994, namely $11.9 million. This was possible because the fund had an unusually large double-digit rate of return in 1995 of 22.07 percent, of which 7.76 percent was attributed to realized earnings and 14.31 percent was attributed to unrealized gains.

Annually, each October, the General Synod Council establishes a rate of payout to be used for the subsequent year. During 1995 the established rate of payout was 8.00 percent (of market value), which 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, which also was the recipient of all dividends and interest earnings from endowment fund portfolios.

**BOARD OF PENSIONS INVESTMENTS**

At December 31, 1995, the Board of Pensions' asset base totaled over $228 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 one Bank Investment Contract (BIC) and Guaranteed Investment Contracts (GICs) with nine insurance companies. 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 of 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 to 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 the 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. 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 is similar to 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 1995 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" (GSEC 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 thirteen banks, credit unions, and other organizations total $281,942. Recipients of mission investment monies include firms such as South Shore Bank, located in an African-American section of Chicago, Illinois; Lumbee Bank of Pembroke, North Carolina, which serves a population primarily made up of members of the Lumbee Indian Nation; the NCC Minority Bail Bond Fund; and our most recent investment, the Shared Interest Group, which is investing in South Africa's democratic development.
Because of certain maturities during the year, the total funds invested are far below the 10 percent allowance established in 1970. A committee of five meets regularly to analyze the portfolio and is currently seeking additional opportunities for intelligent investing.

**ASSESSMENTS**

Ninety-four percent of the General Synod assessment giving for 1995 was collected by the due date of December 31, 1995. Of the outstanding 6 percent, all but 1 percent was received early in the calendar year 1996. The total assessment for 1995 was $23.72 per communicant member. Of this amount, $19.31 was designated for the General Synod Council, $1.50 was designated for the Board of Pensions General Fund, and $2.91 was designated for the administration of theological education. A verbal report was given at General Synod by the general secretary on classes payments of 1995 and 1996 General Synod 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 tenth such report, filed with the commission in August 1995, listed eight newly formed churches to be added, one newly formed agency to be added, twenty name/address changes, two merging churches, and thirteen churches/agencies 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.

**ANNUAL AUDIT**

The 1995 financial statements of the Reformed Church in America are examined and certified by Lambrides, Lamos, Moulthrop, and 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.
REPORTS ON CHRISTIAN ACTION

Report of the Commission on Christian Action

The Commission on Christian Action met November 3-4, 1995, at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan, and on March 8-9 on the campus of Hope College in Holland, Michigan.

“A Christian Response to Physician-Assisted Suicide” was first presented for study and discussion to the 1994 General Synod (MGS 1994, pp. 70-6). The 1994 General Synod voted to urge RCA congregations to study the paper and to send responses to the commission (MGS 1994, p. 76). The paper was widely discussed in the RCA, and the commission received numerous and varied responses. The commission presented a summary of those responses to the 1995 General Synod (MGS 1995, pp. 69-70). The 1995 General Synod voted to invite continued response to the paper and also instructed the commission “to revise the paper... 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” (MGS 1995, R-1, p. 70).

A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO PHYSICIAN-ASSISTED SUICIDE

INTRODUCTION

The question of physician-assisted suicide has forced its way into our awareness whether we want to think about it or not. Hardly a reader of this paper in 1996 would fail to identify Dr. Jack Kevorkian as the “suicide doctor.” But even if Dr. Kevorkian had not assisted a few people to die before natural causes took their lives, the issues surrounding assisted suicide would still be there. Children and spouses caring for persons who are slowly dying, cut off from meaningful relationships by their diseases, and with almost no hope of recovery, are asking questions such as:

Why do we allow loved ones to suffer when we put our pets out of their misery? Why have we given patients the right to refuse medical care when they know such a decision will cause their death, but not the right to choose their death through medical intervention? Why can’t a physician’s responsibility to relieve suffering include easing one into death by artificial means? Why should we endure pain at the point when our lives have been reduced to seemingly pointless and needless suffering? Why should we allow our last few weeks or months of life to drain limited family financial resources?

Recognizing that Christians have faced these questions and have come to different conclusions, and that people are being bombarded by the public debate, the commission offers some theological reflections that can form the basis for Christian action. The action on which this paper will focus is not social action in the sense that this is what the church should tell society to do. Such action may call upon society to change more than it calls upon the Christian community to change. This paper will focus instead on the action appropriate for Christians who are called to live in a way that makes a difference to the world. Such action strives to follow faithfully what we learn about God’s reign from Jesus, our Lord.

In addition to offering these theological reflections, this paper also explores other issues involving physician-assisted suicide. For example, this paper examines the role of medicine in providing not only cure but also care for the patient. Second, this paper considers the societal question of how Christian citizens should respond to legislative or judicial efforts to allow for, restrict, or prohibit choices made by individuals and physicians.
Physician-assisted suicide is active, voluntary, euthanasia. It is *active* because it employs means which intentionally cause the death of the patient. It is *voluntary* because the patient makes this choice. When we look at the issue in terms of these distinctions, we can ask two separate moral questions: 1) Is it morally appropriate for a Christian to request assistance in directly causing his or her death?, and 2) Is it morally appropriate for a Christian physician to comply with the wishes of a patient who makes such a request? Of these two questions, the former receives primary attention here.

**SUICIDE AND CHRISTIAN CONVICTIONS**

What Christians say about issues of morality ought to be and usually is a reflection of their fundamental faith convictions. At least three of these convictions appear especially relevant to the question of whether it is acceptable for Christians to seek a physician’s assistance in committing suicide in the midst of extreme suffering.

1. A fundamental conviction Christians have is that they do not belong to themselves. Life, despite its circumstances, is a gift from God, and each individual is its steward. A primary responsibility is to honor God in one’s living. Christians strive to acknowledge by their choices that they belong to God. Contemporary arguments for the “right” to assistance to commit suicide are based on ideas of each individual’s autonomy over his or her life. Christians cannot claim such autonomy; Christians acknowledge that they belong to God. Christians yield any claim to ownership of their lives. Christians yield their personal autonomy and accept a special obligation, as the first answer of the Heidelberg Catechism invites people to confess: “I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ” (Heidelberg Catechism, Q and A 1, and 1 Cor. 6: 19-20).

C.S. Lewis provides an analogy to clarify how special moral obligations arise from a special sense of belonging:

> Does it not make a great difference whether I am, so to speak, the landlord of my own mind and body, or only a tenant, responsible to the real landlord? If someone else made me, for his own purposes, then I shall have a lot of duties which I should not have if I simply belonged to myself.  

A decision to take one’s own life thus appears to be a denial that one belongs to God.

2. The second conviction is that God does not abandon people in times of suffering. The story of faith tells of a God whose love is constant and unconditional. Christians express their faith in God’s love by trusting in God’s care for them. A decision to end one’s life would appear to reflect a loss of trust. It is known that the perspective of one in deep suffering is different from that of those who are examining the issues in relative comfort and detachment. To those in deep distress pain may seem unbearable, life might seem no longer worth living, suffering may appear beyond relief. These are the kinds of situations that tempt people to give up (on God?) and take control of their own lives. But Christians must strive not to abdicate trust in God in the midst of the shadow of death. When all goes well it is easy to trust God. Suffering calls upon people to trust God even in the valley of the shadow of death. It calls on people to let God, and not suffering, determine the agenda of their life and their death.

3. A third conviction is that in the community of God’s people, caring for those who are dying is a burden Christians are willing to share. Both living and dying should occur within a caring community; and in the context of death, Christian discipleship takes
the form of caring for those who are dying. Considerations of care in the Christian community have two dimensions: a) the care shown by the community, and b) the care received by the patient.

THE CHURCH AS A COMMUNITY OF CARE

Of course, providing care for the dying is not always pleasant. It can be taxing well beyond the imagination of those who have never had to do it. Mother Teresa is fond of saying, "When we care for a dying individual, we care for Christ in his distressing disguise." It should be realized that this gift is not reserved for a spouse or family members alone. The whole Christian community must provide support for the individual sufferer and for the individual caregiver who have determined that going on in the face of suffering is a faithful response to God. The church cannot demand such courage by rejecting assisted suicide without at the same time providing the care that makes it possible to live with suffering. In this sense, part of the Christian response to the public debate about assisted suicide is to create communities of care which reduce the likelihood that people will choose physician-assisted suicide. As an Anglican study group wrote in 1975:

Love, agape, is the equal and unalterable regard for the value of other human beings independent of their particular characteristics. It extends to the helpless and the hopeless, to those who have no value in their own eyes and seemingly none for society. Such neighbor love is costly and sacrificial...in the giver it demands absolute caring, in the recipient, absolute trust.3

THE PATIENT AS A RECIPIENT OF CARE

One of the most common justifications offered for physician-assisted suicide is the stated desire that "I never become a burden to my family." However, the care offered by those who love us can make suffering possible to bear. In an essay written shortly before his death, the Rev. Arie Brower wrote:

From the beginning of this experience, I have been bathed in love. Those early outpourings of love gave me strength and courage in the measure I then needed it. As the disease has intensified its grip on my body, it seems that the capacity to love of those around me has kept growing until now it has reached depths I have not before known or at least not recognized.4

A person's willingness to bear his or her suffering is an expression of trust in God. It is also an expression of trust that those who love them will care for them even in difficult times. One's willingness to go on even in the midst of suffering offers those who love them the opportunity to care for them. The experience of love and care may surpass anything they ever knew they were capable of!

The ambivalence about being cared for may arise from a dislike of dependence on others.5 Many prefer being in control to being dependent. In the same way that people struggle to give control of their lives to God, people may struggle to allow themselves to depend on others for the kind of care that, in a state of sickness, can come only as an experience of grace.

The willingness to be cared for and a deep commitment to care are really two sides of a coin. The Christian commitment to care, and a Christian community that embodies this commitment in its life together, assures sufferers that their lives are valued even when they become a burden to others. Confidence is possible when one knows that his or her community of care will never abandon the sufferer; when one's community of care is committed to ease that person's suffering but does not contemplate elimination of the sufferer.
People who anticipate what it might be like to suffer a debilitating disease often say they would rather be remembered for who they were and not for who they have become when overmastered by their disease. One can hardly argue with such a wish, for it is likely a desire shared by all. But does this desire justify assisted suicide? Those of us who have lost a family member or friend to a disease that took his or her personality away before it took away life realize it is not so much the disease we remember, but the very qualities we expect a loved one would want us to remember. After the loved one's death, we may also remember and appreciate character qualities which shone in a new light, as the sufferer displayed courage, patience, and trust during the illness.

Do these convictions lead to the conclusion that Christians must never make the choice to take their own lives? Those of us who are not suffering intensely, as are some of our brothers and sisters, need to approach this question in a manner reflecting both these fundamental convictions and our love and pastoral concern for those who suffer. To be sure, taking one's own life does violate some fundamental Christian convictions, but the intensity of the suffering of those who contemplate it is one of the reasons why Christians find suicide so troubling.

MORAL COURAGE AND HUMAN FAILURE

To bear extreme suffering requires a degree of courage that most people have probably never needed to exercise. It requires the courage to trust God and a community of friends. It requires the courage to endure pain and deep sadness and to face fear that even deep faith does not always completely erase. It requires deep moral courage.

If you were to ask yourself, "What would I do if I had Lou Gehrig's disease?" you might answer, "I hope I would trust God and my community of care, but I could never be sure." This is why the perspective offered here is intended to be a gentle statement that points in the direction of basic faith commitments but is not quick to condemn those who choose otherwise. While fundamental convictions always act as boundary markers to guide moral choices, it is known that the extremities of the moment do not always allow people to examine these boundaries carefully and thoughtfully.

Not everyone finds it possible to be a moral hero, even when that person believes he or she should be one. As people with a pastoral as well as a prophetic role in the Reformed Church in America, the Commission on Christian Action believes that both roles need to be held in tension. If someone we love makes a decision for suicide, we need to pay attention. When, in our humanness, we fall short of our moral principles, we need to embrace each other. Together all of God's people depend only on God's acceptance of them despite their inability to follow God's ways perfectly. Repentance is itself a grace, not a work we do to guarantee our forgiveness.

THE CHARACTER OF MEDICINE

Medical ethicists and practitioners ask the question, "What should medicine do when it cannot cure?" The typical answer is, "It should care!" While medicine is, and perhaps should be primarily focused on cure, great strides have been taken to teach physicians, especially, not to abandon their patients whose illness is deemed incurable.

A new question is, "What does it mean to care?" Proponents of physician-assisted suicide argue that people care for animals and pets who are in pain by "putting them to sleep." Therefore, shouldn't humans at least do the same for their loved ones? Not necessarily. Animals and humans are treated differently in many ways. It is in the special nature of human relationships to have both moral constraints and obligations. Such constraints and obligations define appropriate care, and those constraints and obligations arise out of fundamental
convictions about responsibility to God and to each other. One obligation is to eliminate the suffering of others, but it is accompanied by the constraint that people may not eliminate suffering by eliminating the sufferer. God’s people may not eliminate suffering by any means possible.

An examination of the issue of pain relief may help to clarify this argument. Physicians say virtually all pain can be eliminated in almost all cases. There is one problem, however. The medication used to relieve pain, when given in high doses, may also kill the patient. What should be done? Ethicists often use the principle of double effect to deal with this dilemma. The double effect is: 1) the medication will relieve the pain, and 2) the medication may kill the patient. Under what conditions can the medication be administered? Four criteria are typically applied:

1. The caregiver must intend the good effect and not the bad one. This would mean intending to relieve the pain rather than to kill the patient.

2. The action itself must be good or at least morally indifferent. The action of relieving pain is a good one.

3. The good effect may not be produced by means of the evil one. In this case, pain relief is produced by the act of providing medication.

4. The good must outweigh the evil.

These conditions seem to allow a physician to administer pain relief with the intent of providing comfort, even if a risk of death exists, since death would be an unintended result of an act that in itself is good.

When an incurable patient who is suffering pain and in danger of imminent death requests relief, a physician should truthfully disclose the possibility that a high level of pain medication might cause death. If the patient is willing to accept that risk, the procedure becomes an appropriate form of care. It will be preferable in such cases to use medications which allow patients to retain their mental lucidity. When alternatives must be used, physicians must again provide full disclosure, so patients realize that in choosing pain relief, they may also be choosing an inability to relate in a meaningful way with their loved ones. Increasingly, pain medications without such side effects are becoming available.

Why isn’t eliminating the sufferer an appropriate part of medicine? The argument here is that it is neither a part of the cure nor of the care. Granted, this preserves a more strict or narrow definition of care, but one which arguably serves the ends of medicine best. The refusal by medical caregivers to assist in a patient’s suicide is a pledge that the caregiver will never give up on a patient, never cease active forms of care. It is a pledge by medicine to find more effective ways of eliminating pain, of providing emotional support, and of assisting the sufferer to experience a “good death” that falls short of ending the patient’s life. This view, which is held by physicians with a broad range of religious commitments, is part of the common grace God gives us all so that we may live together in society.

BEING A PROPHETIC CHURCH

Once we have outlined responses that seem appropriate to fundamental convictions shared as Christians, we are still left with the question of whether and how Christians who share these convictions apply them in a pluralist, secular society. The dominant secular position suggests that if a person is genuinely autonomous and there are no powerful utilitarian reasons of human worth and dignity to stand in the way, then one ought to allow a person to commit suicide, because to do otherwise would violate the person’s autonomy. If this autonomy is
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granted, it is also argued, society must recognize the right to a freely made choice. When we consider how Christian convictions influence a choice for assisted suicide, our primary concern is not to deny people's rights, but to make clear why Christians, given their convictions, are apt to see something as right or wrong.

The church affirms life and has a perspective both on living and on dying that is in contrast to that of much of society. Because of that difference in perspective, the church is called to be prophetic. As always, to be a prophet is to speak and act on behalf of the powerless and in a way that calls Christians individually and as communities to live the costly life which a Christian perspective demands.

With regard to physician-assisted suicide, the commission is convinced that the prophetic task of the church is to create a Christian community of care as described in this paper. The one who suffers and those who give care to the sufferer most need a community in which people are united by grace, people who affirm that one has the right to stay alive without justifying his or her existence and who can also understand the deep humanity of situations in which people are tempted to take their own lives as an end to suffering. To decry physician-assisted suicide without offering the loving, caring community which takes away the occasion for suicide is to offer law when grace is needed. To that end, the Commission on Christian Action urges all levels of the Reformed Church in America to consider how the church can create this community of care, and then to do so.

Notes:

1 C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity (New York: Macmillan, sixth printing, 1966), p. 73.


RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to create the communities of care that provide meaningful alternatives to physician-assisted suicide, the Commission on Christian Action recommended:

R-1. To invite classes and regional synods of the Reformed Church in America to convene regional conferences to explore the questions surrounding physician-assisted suicide and other end-of-life issues; and further,

   to include in such regional conferences physicians and other health care professionals as well as pastors, hospice workers, and others with knowledge about these issues. (ADOPTED)
The advisory committee recommended:

R-2.
To direct the Commission on Christian Action to continue the study on suicide by giving specific attention to the following:

1. An explicitly biblical understanding of suicide in general;
2. The question: "Is suicide ever an acceptable choice among ethically-compromised options?"; and
3. Guidelines for physicians, nurses, and other health professionals in regard to requests for suicide assistance. (ADOPTED)

Reason: These important issues are raised by the paper, "A Christian Response to Physician-Assisted Suicide," but are not answered.

The advisory committee recommended to amend R-3:

R-3.
To encourage RCA congregations to engage in discussions about how they can help build communities of care to support those who are suffering and who might be tempted to avail themselves to physician-assisted suicide; and further,

to include in these discussions topics raised in this paper, "A Christian Response to Physician-Assisted Suicide," as well as the matter of advanced directives and questions about specific ways the congregation can provide the support which is necessary as an alternative to physician-assisted suicide; and further,

to direct Congregational Services to provide lists of resources and a study guide for such discussions and to direct the RCA Distribution Center and TRA/VARCA to include such resources among those which they offer local congregations. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)*

Reasons:

1. This amendment makes available the breadth of materials that went into the preparation of this paper.
2. This amendment provides the biblical references used in the formulation of this paper.
3. This amendment encourages the church to think theologically about this issue.

R-4.
To call upon RCA congregations and classes to develop communities of care by creating and supporting hospice facilities in their local communities as well as lay pastoral care volunteer programs; and further,

to direct Congregational Services to provide lists of resources for developing and supporting these facilities. (ADOPTED)

*Addition is in light-face type.
The advisory committee recommended to amend R-5:

R-5.
To direct the Reformed Church in America and the Board of
Pensions to assure that its health insurance programs for pastors
and other staff continue to include coverage for significant hospice
care of beneficiaries; and further,

to encourage members of the Reformed Church in America who
provide group health insurance plans for their employees to assure
that the plans include coverage for significant hospice care; and further,

to direct the general secretary of the Reformed Church in America
to send this report to executive and legislative offices of the United
States and Canada [along with]; and further

to make the specific request of the executive and legislative offices of
the U.S. that Medicare and Medicaid provide significant coverage
for hospice care as one of their benefits. (ADOPTED AS
AMENDED)*

Reason: Significant insurance coverage for hospice care is already provided in Canada as
mandated under the Canada Health Act.*

TWO ASPECTS OF FAMILY LIFE: CHRISTIAN ACTION FOR HEALTHER
FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

The Commission on Christian Action considers the family to be an important focus for
Christian action for two reasons:

1. In the society at large, which includes people in RCA congregations, the family is in
great need. As one of the accompanying papers points out, “evidence is quickly
accumulating from across the political spectrum that the breakdown of this family
structure has negative consequences both for individuals and for society.” The church
must respond to this situation for the sake of families within the RCA community and
for all of God’s children in North American society.

2. The image of “family” goes well beyond the literal and traditional family unit. The
whole church—the “household of God”—may be and should be seen as a family. As
such, this larger family has certain needs which modern life does not easily provide,
most notably in contemporary attitudes toward loving discipline.

These are two very different sorts of issues; yet they are related in various ways. The needs
of both the individual family and the larger family of the church are in some ways similar.
The witness the church makes with regard to either of these families can provide a healing
remedy to both. For that reason, the commission prepared two separate but related papers,
one on “Hope for the Family: Christian Action for Stronger Families,” and one on “Christian
Families and the Household of God: Mutual Responsibility and Accountability.” Each may
be read as a separate and independent work, but they are presented together because the
commission found it enriching to consider both as parts of a similar need that cries out for
action by the church. A single set of recommendations to General Synod is included with
the two papers.

*Additions are in light-face type, deletion is enclosed in brackets.
A debate is raging within North American society about the nature and role of the family. North Americans are confronted with new proposals for how to define a family, with renewed calls to restore the “traditional” family and with great despair about the societal implications of family breakdown. How should the Reformed Church in America respond? In an effort to offer a word of encouragement to families and to offer a prophetic word to society about the importance of families, the Commission on Christian Action presents here a biblical vision of the family that speaks to these raging voices.

This paper includes several sections. The first section looks at the social crisis surrounding American families. Section two explores a biblical perspective on what the family can be, as a basic form of human community with unique functions that offer interesting parallels to the whole body of Christ. Because the church has special responsibility to strengthen the families within its fellowship, section three examines some approaches congregations can take. Section four discusses the additional responsibility of the church—to help strengthen all families, not just its own. In this regard, the paper offers ways in which families can be strengthened through reforms in public policy.

I. THE FAMILY CRISIS IN AMERICAN SOCIETY

No one can deny that the nature and role of the family has changed in recent decades. The traditional family—mother, father, children, all living together—has become less common and, for some, less the norm to follow. Yet, the evidence is quickly accumulating from across the political spectrum that the breakdown of this family structure has negative consequences both for individuals and for society. Indeed, Dr. David Myers reports that a survey of members of the American Psychological Association identified the “decline of the nuclear family” as the most important threat to mental health (Myers, p. 5).

Consider the evidence that the family is disintegrating:

Divorce rates have increased from 9.2 per 1,000 married women in 1960 to 20.7 per 1,000 married women in 1990 (Bennett, 1993, p. 14).

The percentage of all children born to unmarried women has increased from 5.3 percent in 1960 to 28.0 percent in 1990 (Bennett, 1993, p. 10).

Out-of-wedlock birth rates reach nearly 80 percent in some urban neighborhoods (Elshtain, 1993, p. 710).

Sixty-four percent of African-American children are born to unwed mothers and 51 percent live in households without a father present (Sawhill, 1992, p. 15).

One out of four children in the 1990s will enter a step-family relationship (Whitehead, 1993, p. 50).

More than 60 percent of single mothers receive no child support from the father (Whitehead, 1993, p. 62).

Consider the damaging effects of family breakdown, especially on children:

Three out of four teenage suicides occur in households where a parent has not been living in the home (Elshtain, 1993, p. 710).
Five of six adolescents in the criminal justice system come from a family with an absent parent (Elshtain, 1993, p. 710).

More than 70 percent of juveniles in state reform institutions come from fatherless homes (Whitehead, 1993, p. 77).

Children in single-parent families are nearly six times as likely to be poor as children in two-parent families (Whitehead, 1993, p. 47).

Forty-four percent of single-parent families in 1989 were poor (Sawhill, 1992, p. 152).

“The most important indicator of childhood problems—from poor health to poverty to behavioral problems—is whether a child grows up in a two-parent or single-parent or no-parent household” (Elshtain, 1993, p. 710).

The church cannot simply stand back and watch this deterioration of the family and its damaging effects on society. Rather, the church must work actively to strengthen family bonds and to reduce the societal consequences of family dysfunction.

Alternative Perspectives on the Family

In the midst of a growing consensus that the breakdown of the traditional family is damaging to society, there are loud voices offering contrasting positions in the debate over the family, voices which can lead to extreme perspectives which must be avoided. It is important that we in the RCA re-establish our course between these extreme perspectives on the family.

One perspective is relatively unconcerned about the form of a family, accepting uncritically almost any kind of caring adult relationship with or without children. Two-parent families, single-parent families, cohabiting adults, and homosexual unions are equally valid in this view and ought to be legitimized in law, public policy, and church life. Unfortunately, the more one stretches the definition of family, the less the term “family” really means. If any loving relationship constitutes a family, regardless of the length of the commitment, the term “family” itself has little value. From this perspective, family is defined almost exclusively in terms of function—love and care—rather than in terms of form. In addition, proponents of this view often minimize the consequences of family breakup. For example, they are quick to suggest divorce in the quest for individual happiness and fulfillment, underemphasizing the effects of divorce on spouses and children.

The contrasting perspective, which can also lead to an unhealthy extreme, accepts only one type of family form—a two-parent, patriarchal system, governed by a strong father who is seen as responsible for generating income, and nurtured by the mother who is responsible for housekeeping and child-rearing. Unfortunately, this perspective seems to have little empathy for those involved in family breakdowns, often looking more to cast blame than to meet the needs of the victims of the breakdown. Neither does this perspective seem to appreciate the gifts and the expanding role of women; by idealizing the stay-at-home wife and mother, this perspective does not recognize either the economic circumstances that often force women to work or the capabilities of women for work outside the home. In its rigid separation of parental roles, this perspective sometimes minimizes the role that fathers should play in caring for children. As Rodney Clapp (Families at the Crossroads, Chapter 2) notes, much of this vision of the traditional family represents a middle-class, eighteenth-century, western social structure, rather than a biblical vision of the family. As so often happens in discussion of social issues, advocates of this perspective have allowed a particular historical model to distort their reading of Scripture.
The task of those in the Reformed tradition is to steer a course between these contrasting, often extreme, visions of the family. One must search the Scriptures to find basic principles for the structure and function of families. From Genesis on, it is clear that God has planned for the family to be a most important social structure, joining in love and commitment husband and wife and providing for the birth and nurture of children. Although Scripture portrays a variety of family structures, it also suggests limits to the kinds of family structures that are pleasing to God. The church has an immense obligation to put forth a biblical vision of the family and to address family breakdown and its societal consequences in a prophetic and caring manner.

Why Is the Family in Crisis?

That the traditional two-parent family is eroding is overwhelmingly evident both from demographic trends and from ideological assaults. This trend has serious implications for parents, children, and society as a whole.

At the heart of this erosion is the shift from the value of community to the value of the individual. Instead of seeing themselves as members of a family or community with responsibilities for others, people are more likely to see themselves as individuals with rights, needs, and desires. The language of individual rights has replaced the language of community responsibilities. The language of personal fulfillment has replaced the language of loving one’s neighbor. This is clearly seen in the changing attitudes toward divorce in North American society. What was widely seen as an unfortunate and disruptive action of last resort is now seen as a means to pursue individual goals that have been stifled in a constricting, legal relationship.

Economic factors also contribute to family breakdown. Often, both parents now work, leaving many of their childcare responsibilities to others. It is true that some parents enter the work force in a materialistic quest for a certain lifestyle, and others do so for reasons of personal identity and fulfillment. It is also true that more parents must work, must work longer hours, or must work at more than one job to make ends meet. Having both parents working does not automatically create family problems, but in many cases it does. Children are spending more time at home without parental supervision or at day care centers which may or may not provide the loving or learning environment that children need. Many communities lack sufficient high quality, affordable daycare, which can increase the pressures on working parents and hinder the development of children.

Public policies have often permitted, or even worse, facilitated the breakup of families. No-fault divorce laws, although not the determining cause for increased divorce rates, do allow quick and easy dissolutions of marriages, often with little regard for the children and with little encouragement for spouses to work out their difficulties. Some states in the U.S. still have welfare policies which reduce payments to families with a father living in the home, thus providing incentives for fathers to leave. Programs that reduce benefits for parents who accept low-paying jobs with few opportunities for health insurance or child care can have the effect of keeping people on the welfare rolls. Tax policies which reward the wealthy at the expense of the lower-middle class can create additional pressures for both parents to work or for parents to work longer hours.

II. THE FAMILY: BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL INSIGHTS

A family is a group of individuals related to one another by law or birth. This general definition is offered in full awareness that the term “family” is very difficult to define precisely. For while everyone intuitively knows what the term means, the great diversity of family types makes defining the family solely in terms of form almost impossible. The simplest form of family—husband and wife (with or without children)—is statistically on the
decline in recent times. And while there has been a variety of family forms since the beginning of time, the realities of American life—death, divorce, and remarriage—have created a mix of numerous forms of traditional, extended, and blended family units.

One of the intentions of the Commission on Christian Action is to speak a prophetic word of encouragement to families today. The belief that the family was ordained by God as an act of grace for the benefit, enjoyment, and nurture of human beings underlies all that is said here about the family. The Westminster shorter catechism reminds us that the human purpose is to glorify God and enjoy God forever. Families provide a dynamic atmosphere for human relations in which God can be glorified and God's people enriched, both spiritually and socially.

There is a relationship between family form and function. For example, fidelity is a function of healthy marriages which has obvious implications for family form. While the Bible outlines some basic parameters concerning form, which will be noted below, the greater emphasis of Scripture is on function. It is possible for a particular family to fit the traditional family model—husband-wife-biological children—yet totally miss the mark of spiritual and social enrichment which is called for in Scripture. That is, merely conforming to a particular type does not guarantee the scriptural intentions for family living, which entail, among other things, the belief and practice of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5), the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20), and the Beatitudes (Matthew 5). Put another way, a traditional family form is no guarantee against neglect or abuse. Mutual love can be absent in nuclear families as much as in nonnuclear families.

Christians in the Reformed/Presbyterian tradition believe that families are called to pursue the glory of God. Healthy families are the result of healthy relationships among family members; and healthy relationships are enhanced by daily love for, and practice of, the virtues of Jesus. The fundamental building block in healthy homes is the acceptance and practice of godly grace. The result is freedom from guilt and from any need for revenge. The corporate pursuit of the glory of God fosters maturity in the family unit; and in this pursuit the family members assist each other in the giving and receiving of forgiveness and love.

Function

Biblically based family values are for the benefit of everyone, regardless of the family configuration. People in the RCA may find it comforting to learn that many of the Bible's great teachings on the Christian home are offered in the context of nontraditional settings, even dysfunctional homes, like those of Abraham, Jacob, and David. Jorge Maldonado's book, *Even in the Best of Families*, offers great encouragement by looking at a variety of home and family situations in the Bible.

In terms of function, there are interesting parallels between the family and the church. The Apostle Paul calls the church "the family of faith" (Gal. 6:10). A healthy church functions in many of the same ways as a healthy home. Thus the following paragraphs offer insights on family enrichment which are mirrored in the church, and are applicable presumably to any and all family situations.

1. Fellowship. This word, along with "communion," is the common translation of the Greek word *koinonia*. It is the close association of two or more people (Matt. 18:20). God created human beings to be in community: "Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone'" (Gen. 2:18a). In biblical and extra-biblical literature *koinonia* is a favorite expression for the divine-human relationship, the union of members of the body of Christ, the marriage relationship, and the trinitarian relationship. It implies sharing, fairness, altruism, and generosity. By it Christians are reminded that
many of the great virtues God’s people hope to foster in the church can and should be fostered in the Christian home. This is where the child first experiences and learns fellowship.

2. **Procreation and nurture.** While the birth of children is not necessary to a definition of the family, it is within the safe confines of the marital bond between husband and wife that children are to be conceived, born, and nurtured. God said to the man and woman, “Be fruitful and multiply” (Gen. 1:28). Another important aspect of Christian family life mirrored in the church is the function of education and nurture. After the summary of the law, given in Deuteronomy 6:4-5, we are instructed to teach the commandments to our children: “Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise” (v. 7).

The healthy family is also committed to helping each member discover and develop individual spiritual gifts. It is not threatened but rejoices with individual achievements and success.

The educational task of families, in response to God’s call for believers to be disciples of Christ in a broken world, requires skills in dialogue and a commitment to unity, peace, and justice. The commission finds practical efforts in other religious communities very appealing. For example, the Mormons have fostered this so well in their Family Home Evening series, in which families are encouraged to spend one evening per week in the home learning and growing together. In this context the great and important lessons of stewardship may also be modeled and learned.

Discipline in the home is an important aspect of nurturing children. It is important to remember that “disciple” and “discipline” come from the same Greek word meaning “upbringing, training, instruction, and correction.” At times proper discipline includes punishing unacceptable behavior, and parents must not avoid this task. Biblical encouragement is found in texts such as Proverbs 3:11-12; 6:20-23; 19:18, and Hebrews 12:5-11, which places discipline in the proper context, namely, love. “My child, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,” the author of Hebrews writes, “for the Lord disciplines those whom he loves” (vss. 5-6). In verse 10 we are told that the purpose of discipline is “that we may share his holiness.” The practical outcome of good discipline is “the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (vs. 11). Thus, proper discipline is never violent or abusive. Its fruits include peace, holiness, and respect.

Discipline and discipleship require intentional and godly courage. All parents have had moments of frustration when they have been overwhelmed by the twin tasks of discipling and disciplining their children, and have probably more than once come to the conclusion Erma Bombeck came to about her children: “They were a 4-H project that got out of hand.” Parents would do well to remember the James Dobson book title, *Parenting Isn’t for Cowards.*

3. **Worship.** As corporate worship is essential to the church’s spiritual health and well-being, so a family must foster knowledge of the sacred character of life and experience this truth in worship. The one surviving story of the boyhood of Jesus occurs in the context of worship. We are reminded that worship was a high priority for Joseph and Mary. Corporate worship is a key element of Christian family life.

Furthermore, worship should not be limited to the church setting but extended into the home. In the home, family members may ask honest questions about spirituality, faith, and social issues. Families are encouraged to be creative in finding appropriate
methods for family devotions, songs of praise, and prayer. Here also parents have the
great opportunity to model the Christian life before their children. Here wrongdoing
is confessed, forgiveness sought and given. Here, in the setting of the home, the seeds
of faith, hope, and love spring to life so that the tree bears its good fruit.

4. Mission. For the church as the community of the cross, mission has always meant
reaching out beyond themselves, in obedience to the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19).
One of the primary functions of the Christian family, too, is to follow the Lord’s call.
Christians are blessed to be a blessing to others. This great concept was first set forth
in Abram’s call to leave his father’s house, his kindred, and to follow the Lord’s
leading. God said, “I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a
blessing” (Gen. 12:2). Here we are reminded that wholeness comes only from doing
the will of God in the world. It is essential to have and to keep a mission focus as a
family, remembering that the purpose of Christian families is to live and function for
the glory of God, not of self. The family is not a self-serving unit even though the
benefits that await its members are great. It has a mission, a task to perform, an outward
focus, and will thrive spiritually insofar as it lives its mission, following the calling of
the Lord. Family life often falters for the same reason churches wither and die: God’s
people tend to avoid the difficult challenge of being light in a dark world (Matt. 5:13),
preferring to opt for the convenient or the comfortable.

Form

Function is intricately related to form. They are connected by the covenantal bond that
undergirds the relational enrichment which God intends for God’s children. Some basic
parameters of family life are given in Scripture which have implications for both form and
function.

1. Fidelity. Fidelity is the divine will for marriage. Jesus, quoting Gen. 2:24 (“Therefore
a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one
flesh”) concluded, “Therefore what God has joined together, let no one
separate” (Matt. 19:6). The warning of the seventh commandment, prohibiting adultery,
underscores the exclusiveness of marriage which God intends. Mutual devotion
between husband and wife is a reflection of God’s devotion to God’s people (Eph.
5:21-33).

2. Monogamy. The consistent witness of the church is that marriage involves one man
and one woman (Matt. 19:3-9; 1 Tim. 3:1-13).

3. Permanence. Marriage is meant to last a lifetime. The RCA liturgy asks those entering
the institution of marriage to vow faithfulness to each other “as long as you both shall
live” (Order of Worship for Christian Marriage, 1987). The permanence of marriage
is interrupted only by death, or in some rare instances by divorce, for example, where
unchastity is proven (Matt. 5:32).

A final word can be said in this context about the biblical call to singleness, for not everyone
marries. This does not deprecate the value of marriage; it does not negate the general truth
of Genesis 2:18: “It is not good that the man should be alone.” Jesus lived a single life, as
did Paul and many of the disciples. This does not mean, however, a life of isolation and
aloneness; single people are not to live their lives in a social vacuum. Human beings were
created to live in community, not in isolation. Thus, the church has an important obligation
and responsibility to all people, both married and single, to be an extended family and to
welcome strangers.
III. THE CHURCH'S ROLE IN HELPING FAMILIES

The church has a unique and important ministry to families. A crucial arena for Christian witness to the world is our affirmation, support, and encouragement of families. Genesis records the story of Cain denying any responsibility toward his biological brother Abel. In contrast, Paul suggests the parallels between the church and the family and makes it clear that Christians have an important obligation to one another. Church members often call each other “brother and sister in the Lord.” Jesus said in reference to his disciples: “Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother” (Matt. 12:49-50). Thus, a unique and special blessing of the church is this characteristic that all believers are a part of God’s family. The church is nothing short of a great extended family which recognizes the special needs of its individual members and fosters positive experiences that will benefit and enrich the lives of all, regardless of the family type or form.

In a number of ways the Reformed Church in America has declared these truths about families and has sought to embody them in its congregational life. The report of the Commission on Theology, “Biblical Perspectives on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage” (MGS 1975, pp. 162-172), for instance, is a powerful statement on God’s goals for marriage, offering guidelines for ministry by the church in this domain. The Family Life Ministry of the RCA, which functioned for about a decade after publication of the Commission on Theology’s statement, sought to equip congregations for family ministry. It developed a “marriage enrichment” curriculum—Growing in Marriage, written by the Rev. Del and Trudy Vander Haar and published with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and National Presbyterian Mariners, which has been used by many congregations in short courses and retreats for married couples.

Since that time, healthy marriages and family life have not gotten easier. Rather, RCA congregations are plagued by increasing rates of divorce and other family disruption. What would have been scandalous to a previous generation is too often now treated as sadly inevitable. Expectations of faithfulness to the covenant of Christian marriage are so often disappointed that the power of Christian witness in a world full of sinful and ruptured relationships is greatly diminished.

What can the church do to recover, within the community of believers, a sense of God’s purposes and resources for marriage and family? Surely, nothing less than proclaim them, teach them, and live them. The RCA recently established a staff position for family life ministry and spiritual formation. As those who directed the Family Life Ministry of the RCA urged, commitments and strategies to sustain marriage must be developed by each congregation, utilizing the resources available through denominational offices and ecumenical ministries, like Marriage Encounter. Furthermore, programming for marriage enrichment and family support is greatly enhanced when family “clusters” and other small groups exist to reinforce the lessons, share the difficulties and the triumphs, and together seek out God’s blessings and direction for each other through prayer and the study of God’s Word. Congregations can encourage family life through worship and programs that keep families together rather than separating parents from their children. Churches could also encourage divorced parents to fulfill their individual responsibilities for nurturing children even when they do not have custody.

The church also has opportunities for ministry to families in the community. One type of ministry is to model healthy family life in RCA congregations. Another example is to provide childcare facilities for parents who must work. Buildings that are nearly empty during the week could meet local codes for child-care services, often with minimal renovation costs. These services could include full-time day and night care or more limited programs before and after school for latchkey children.
IV. PUBLIC POLICY RESPONSES TO THE CRISIS

The church can also deal with the family crisis by promoting public policies which strengthen families and which address the negative consequences of family breakdown. Although families are affected by many different kinds of public policies, the Commission on Christian Action focuses on the areas of greatest impact.

As noted above, some U.S. states have welfare policies which have the effect of discouraging employment through the loss of benefits, and of discouraging fathers from remaining in the home. As the United States embarks on a program of welfare reform, policy makers must be sensitive to the impact of various proposals on families, with particular concern for the welfare of children. For example, citizens should support policies that more slowly reduce healthcare or childcare benefits as welfare recipients get jobs or move to higher paying jobs. Policies that would require and obtain child-support payments from so-called “deadbeat dads” would both encourage more parental responsibility and provide more nongovernment funding for single mothers and their children. On the other hand, however, U.S. citizens should oppose welfare reform proposals that punish children for the behavior of parents or that terminate welfare support for adults without substantial efforts to provide job training and jobs that pay a livable wage. Some of the recent proposals in the welfare reform debate seem punitive toward the poor rather than following the biblical mandate for justice and compassion toward “the least of these.”

Tax policies, such as tax credits or personal exemptions for dependents, also have an impact on families. If these benefits are sufficiently large, the number of parents who need to work could be reduced and the time that parents could spend nurturing their children could increase. The most positive benefit would occur if these credits or exemptions were targeted toward low- and middle-income families who have the greatest difficulty finding jobs with health insurance benefits, locating affordable day care, or simply making ends meet.

Other public policy initiatives that would help families include restricting the opportunities for easy, no-fault divorces, particularly in situations involving young children. Perhaps the divorce process could include additional or separate hearings when there are children still in the home, so that the developmental needs of the children will be considered in the decision-making process. In addition, laws prohibiting (or at least restricting) pornography can limit the availability of images that degrade women and portray unhealthy interpersonal relationships between men and women and between adults and children. Government policies, as well as private initiatives, can also be designed to provide alternatives to abortion through expanded adoption services.

V. SUMMARY

There is a crisis of the family in North American society. The church has a critical role to play in offering a biblical vision of healthy family life and in speaking prophetically to the family crisis. God calls the people of the Reformed Church in America to love and responsibility in the home and in society.

REFERENCES


CHRISTIAN FAMILIES AND THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD:
MUTUAL RESPONSIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

CHRISTIAN ACTION BEGINS INSIDE THE CHURCH AND FAMILY

In Resident Aliens, by Hauerwas and Willimon, the primary social (and political) task of the church is identified as:

influence(ing) the world by being the church, that is, by being something the world is not and can never be, lacking the gift of faith and vision, which is ours in Christ. The confessing church seeks the visible church, a place, clearly visible to the world, in which people are faithful to their promises, love their enemies, tell the truth, honor the poor, suffer for righteousness... This church knows that its most credible form of witness (and the most "effective" thing it can do for the world) is the actual creation of a living, breathing, visible community of faith. The overriding political task of the church is to be the community of the cross... [whose people] see clearly the cost of discipleship and are willing to pay the price (Hauerwas, 1993, p. 47ff).

The Commission on Christian Action understands that one of its primary responsibilities is to call the church to be such a "community of the cross," because Christian action begins here. The most immediate, visible, cross-bearing component of any larger faith community is the literal family unit. It is here Christians must find the willingness to pay the price and absorb the cost of discipleship.

A crucial arena for Christian witness to the world is the church's affirmation, support, and encouragement of families. This is so, not only because the social signs of the times point to distress and dysfunction in many families, but also because God's word teaches Christians that marital oneness, communion, fidelity, and family responsibility are meant to reflect the very relationship God has with God's people. God's covenant with Israel is often described in Scripture as one of husband with wife. Again and again God is depicted as wooing his beloved, demanding her exclusive loyalty, and then urging her to repent and return to his loving arms when she has strayed (e.g., Hosea).

Marriage and family are intended by God to be treasures in their own right and also training grounds for love and forgiveness which reach far beyond the front door of a particular house. If this is the case, then Christian action often begins here, in the nuclear family and its ties with the extended Christian family, the household of God. As Rodney Clapp writes, "[in the family] we pick up skills in patience, empathy, generosity, and forgiveness. All these are skills we can and must use to welcome other strangers, our many brothers and sisters in Christ" (Perspectives, January 1995, p. 8).
THE NEED FOR CHRISTIAN ACCOUNTABILITY IN CONGREGATIONAL LIFE

People committed to Christ’s intentions for marriage and all of life can be helped to keep their promises and bear fruit for God in a setting of mutual caring which is both pragmatic and spiritually sound. This is surely the almost forgotten meaning of Christian “fellowship,” which for many has been reduced to a cup of coffee after worship. In part, the reluctance of modern congregations to exercise church discipline grows out of the relative absence today of intimate relatedness that characterized congregations in previous times, when the lives of members overlapped with each other in many settings—the neighborhood and school as well as the church. In that context it was possible for members to have a humane understanding of difficult circumstances which might have weakened a fellow Christian’s resolve to do what was right. It must have seemed quite natural and necessary, therefore, for believers to follow Jesus’ instructions about confronting a brother who has sinned against you, first one-on-one; then, if need be, with another Christian; and only if the admonitions were still unavailing, to bring the matter before the church (Matt. 18:15-20).

In many congregations today, where most connections between families and individuals are limited to times of worship, it’s hardly surprising that members sense too little involvement with, and commitment to, each other to confront those who appear to be lapsing in their Christian lives with Christ’s call to repentance, his promise of forgiveness, and his offer of restoration. By contrast, members of groups who continually practice true Christian fellowship are much more receptive to graceful confrontation than anyone visited by an elder who knows little of that person’s personal circumstances and is not committed to supporting him or her in repentance and reform with practical and spiritual help.

TOWARD A PRACTICAL, BIBLICAL STRATEGY FOR RECOVERING CHRISTIAN DISCIPLINE

A growing number of church members lament the fact that church discipline is no longer widely practiced. Certainly, they do not regret the absence of a coercive form of discipline sometimes practiced in the past. On the other hand, the contemporary experience has become one of congregational anxiety, as many family units dissolve and disappear like ships on the horizon, with no trace of covenant accountability exercised by the congregation of which they are a part.

There seem to be two poles which should be avoided—absolute respect for individual Christians’ choices versus a preoccupation with upholding the integrity of the church. In the past, what was good for the institution (the church) was perceived as automatically good for the individual, who expected to be held accountable for the highest standards of Christian conduct. Over the last few decades, however, many congregations have over-corrected by adopting a view that what is most comfortable for the individual (e.g., ready support for those members seeking to dissolve a difficult marriage) is automatically best for the church. While both poles contain some truth, the Commission on Christian Action rejects an either-or choice between the two. The commission believes that it is important for RCA congregations to recover the practice of discipline, along with love and forgiveness, all of which are essential to affirming each person’s importance to the larger community, the body of Christ.

According to the Reformers, the practice of Christian discipline is one of the marks of a true church, along with preaching of the Word and right celebration of the sacraments. However, when the local congregation is no longer configured to be the family of God for each other on an ongoing basis, discipline lapses easily in favor of “love.” Yet, is it really love, or actually a cheap imitation which costs us very little, if Christians readily offer arms-length acceptance to those who have strayed, when what they truly need is to be put in touch again with God’s expectations, God’s loving provisions for their forgiveness, and the help of fellow pilgrims on the journey of Christian life?
Indeed, Christian discipline will not be effective unless most members of a congregation share this vision of Christian community, feel the need to be held accountable, and can only imagine with great sorrow the prospect of being deprived of full communion with this "family" which God has provided for them. How can an RCA congregation be that kind of community—one whose every breath is drawn from God? Scripture's clear teaching is that Christians are to see each other as members of God's extended family, God's household:

So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built up on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God (Eph. 2:19-22; see also 1 Tim. 3:15).

In a complementary image, Scripture teaches that Christians are to see themselves as forming parts of a single body, the body of Christ, which is the church. The connections among the parts, or "membranes" (as Methodist bishop, John A. T. Robinson, has referred to them), are even greater than those of people who find themselves under the same family roof. Paul's extensive development of the body image in 1 Corinthians 12 does not mean simply that Christians need each other.

What it means is that my identity depends on yours. It means that I cannot fully be what I am called to be—namely a new creature in Christ—unless you too are transformed. I cannot stand alone as an eye, an ear, a hand, or a foot. I have neither identity nor function apart from the operation of the whole. And whatever affects one part of the Body, for good or for ill, affects me in precisely the same way. Such is the meaning of Christian communion or what tradition calls the communion of the saints (Maas, 1989, p. 114).

This understanding of the believer's new identity in Christ has profound implications for all of life, including ethics regarding marriage and family. Thus, the prospect of divorce in a particular Christian family has very important implications for the whole body of Christ. It would be a misguided kindness to say to a couple contemplating divorce, "If you think it necessary to your personal happiness, then we must accept the brokenness of your relationship and offer you whatever consolation we can muster." No! This prospective forsaking of promises, and the progressive rupture of a one-flesh relationship which precedes it, concerns and affects the entire church community. As Robin Maas writes, "Does the fracturing of the marriage bring happiness and relief to the Body? Almost never. It brings pain, disappointment, discouragement, and scandal. In this way the fracturing of the family unit becomes a wound inflicted on the larger Body" (Maas, 1989, p. 115). True, sometimes surgery is necessary. Exercising discernment, the church may agree with a couple that divorce is the only healthy option in cases where irreparable abuse is occurring. However, as the body of Christ, we will want to bring all the necessary spiritual resources and practical gifts to bear on saving every marriage for the sake of their families and for the sake of the entire body.

It has always been understood that the practice of Christian discipline within the church rests on a commitment of Christ's people to mutual responsibility before God. Distressed families who are faced with unemployment, excessive expenses, or serious illness, for example, deserve effective support and encouragement from fellow Christians long before they are driven to the point of contemplating breakup. Thus, the grace of healing and reconciliation has always been the aim of church discipline, which is understood to be a way of life together, not a system for punishment.
In learning how to live as the body of Christ, what is at stake is much greater than the question of what to do when marriages are in trouble. Nevertheless, the Christian community's ways of dealing with threats to love and fidelity in marriage, and responsibility in family, are absolutely central to the church's calling to witness to God's love. At every baptism, members of a congregation are reminded of the promises they have made and recommit themselves "to love, encourage, and support" brothers and sisters in faith "by teaching the gospel of God's love, by being an example of Christian faith and character, and by giving strong support of God's family in fellowship, prayer, and service" (Order for the Sacrament of Baptism, 1994). It is fitting that such promises be made within the household of God. Consequently, Christians must find ways to simultaneously support families within the body of Christ and be an extended family to each other in every way that pertains to God's intention to make us like Christ: "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family" (Rom. 8:29; see also 2 Cor. 3:18).

STRUCTURES WHICH ENCOURAGE FAMILY-STYLE ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE CHURCH

Clearly, if God's work is to make believers more and more like Christ, and if our identity is not primarily as individuals but as a body, Christians must be trained and put in touch with the body's ways of caring for its various members and for the whole. The incorporation of Christians into groups of covenant discipleship (what Wesley called "class meetings") is a special gift of the Methodist tradition to all of Christendom. As a means of holding Christians accountable to their commitments, it complements the disciplinary role of elders. Covenant groups meet often and regularly for the purpose of encouraging and holding each other accountable in the journey along which God is making them (together and individually) like Christ.

The Commission on Christian Action strongly urges RCA congregations to develop such covenant groups among their members. These groups may take a variety of forms, but the basic ingredients are:

1. A covenant is made which commits each member to follow key spiritual practices, e.g., daily prayer, Scripture reading, and examination of conscience; regular participation in worship and Holy Communion; and obedience to the Holy Spirit's prompting regarding service to God and neighbor.

2. The groups meet regularly to encourage one another in keeping each of the key promises of their covenant. The groups are small, so that regular, sensitive, and practical sharing for mutual accountability and encouragement can be accomplished in about an hour.

Christians who commit themselves to a group which can exercise such close supervision and encouragement in their walk with Christ experience what it is like to be Christ's body. They discover for themselves what it means for God to form us into the likeness of Christ. In contrast with North American culture's idol of "self-discovery," the Christian knows the "self" to be crucified with Christ. It is only as a "new person," made alive by the grace of God in the resurrected Christ, that Christians can obey Jesus' command, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). And Paul reminds us that God's standard for perfection is the crucified love of Christ:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect (Rom. 12:1-2).
WHERE TO BEGIN?

A growing literature (see the list at the end of this paper) and a number of training systems are available for congregations who commit themselves to developing covenant groups. For instance, the Cursillo movement (sometimes referred to as “De Colores,” or, by Methodists, as “The Road to Emmaus”) first introduces interested couples and individuals to the challenges and methods of lifelong spiritual growth and Christian witness during an intensive weekend retreat, then follows through by helping these people form ongoing covenant groups.

Stephen Ministries is another organization that has taken up a major new effort to train congregations for small group ministries, which they call “Christ Care Groups.” This organization regards small groups to be as close to the heart of a congregation as Sunday worship—a channel through which the members of Christ’s body build each other up. Stephen Ministries offers a thorough training program and support system for congregational leaders—lay and clergy—wishing to start up small group ministries.

There is much to be learned from the experience of those who have studied and implemented successful covenant groups. There are issues of covenant content, size and format of group gatherings, appropriate “lifetimes” for groups, “ownership” of this approach to ministry by the congregation, training and maintenance of leadership, and much more to contemplate. There are myths to confront, like the one that these groups are inherently “elitist.” Instead of implying spiritual superiority, however, such groups represent an awareness by Christians of their need to acknowledge and confront common failings, and to seek by God’s grace and the regular support of Christ’s body, to live anew for God. There are pitfalls to avoid, such as allowing group interaction to deteriorate into a form of holy gossip (centered on the supposed failures of others) or group therapy sessions. This is not what it means to be mutually responsible for Christian growth.

One more word should be said about covenant groups. Although secular society is full of self-help groups which bear some resemblance to covenant groups, the commission is not suggesting that the church should model itself after the world. Quite the contrary. On the one hand, secular groups are sometimes little more than gatherings to promote self-fulfillment, not self-sacrifice. On the other hand, the best small groups in secular society are ones which follow practices that are similar to those taught by the church, such as confession and mutual accountability within a community based on respect and love.

Furthermore, covenant groups are certainly not a new invention of the church, either by us today or even by John Wesley in the eighteenth century. In fact, what the commission is urging is the recovery of a form of Christian community first created on Paul’s missionary journeys—the house church, like the one in the home of Priscilla and Aquila at Corinth. It is obvious that once typical congregations grew beyond the size which could worship together in someone’s home, they had to organize themselves in various ways so that they would still be able to care for each other as members of the household of faith. Covenant groups are one such vehicle while also serving as bases of encouragement to far-flung ministry beyond the church.

We of the Reformed tradition can find examples of mutuality in Christian guidance in Calvin’s teaching. For instance, he wrote: “We should lay our infirmities on one another’s breasts, to receive among ourselves spiritual counsel, mutual compassion, and mutual consolation” (Rice, Reformed Spirituality, 1991, p. 137). Covenant groups provide for such mutuality in spiritual formation. They never take priority over Word and sacrament, but rather build on these means of grace in the fabric of daily life.
The Commission on Christian Action urges the RCA and its congregations to encourage the design and development of various structures within which real community is created and sustained. Just how such groups are formed is not so important as that the Reformed Church in America does it. What the commission has called here "covenant groups" are simply communities of caring, in which members support each other in Christian growth and ministry, and within which they exercise mutual accountability for living the Christian life. By serving as foundations for growth in holiness and mutual care, they enable the church to witness with power to Christ in our broken world.

REFERENCES


RESOURCES

1. Accountable Discipleship: Handbook for Covenant Discipleship Groups in the Congregation, Discipleship Resources, Nashville, 1986. Besides providing very clear guidelines for covenant groups, David Lowes Watson also reviews the Methodist origins of such groups in Wesley's "class meetings."


4. Bringing Christ's Presence Into Your Home, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, 1992. In this book Keith A. Fournier says, "The domestic church is the first cell of the whole body of Christ." He presents the family not as a human invention but as an expression of God's nature, as revealed in the Trinity; and shows how in our human families we can live out God's model for family.

5. Church Discipline That Heals: Putting Costly Love into Action, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 1985. John White and Ken Blue, author and pastor, insist that corrective church discipline be understood in the larger context of "mutual training in godly living." They show how important small fellowship groups are for training in godliness and corrective discipline.

7. Resident Aliens: A Provocative Christian Assessment of Culture and Ministry for People Who Know that Something Is Wrong, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1993. In their book Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, professor and university minister, call the church to be an “alien colony” in this world—ordering its collective and individual lives so that the “world might look at us and know that God is busy.”

The commission recommended:

R-6.
To instruct the RCA Distribution Center to make available upon request copies of these papers, “Hope for the Family: Christian Action for Stronger Families” and “Christian Families and the Household of God: Mutual Responsibility and Accountability.” (ADOPTED)

The advisory committee recommended to amend R-7:

R-7.
To request Congregational Services to research the variety of alternatives available for equipping RCA congregations in the development of covenant groups (small group ministries), marriage enrichment programs, and other programs offering support to families the variety of family structures within our congregations; and further,

to include in this research such initiatives as the Cursillo Tres Dias program, Stephen Ministries, and similar programs in other denominations. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)*

Reasons:

1. This amendment makes clear to Congregational Services that resources and programs strengthening families are needed for a variety of family structures such as blended families and single parent families.

2. This amendment respects copyright concerns.<

R-8.
To request the Diaconal Ministries Team to consider the issues raised in these papers, “Hope for the Family: Christian Action for Stronger Families” and “Christian Families and the Household of God: Mutual Responsibility and Accountability,” in their development of programs and resources for equipping the diaconal ministries of RCA congregations. (ADOPTED)

R-9.
To request Reformed Church in America consistories to assess the quality of family life in their respective congregations, to consider the need for mutual accountability and encouragement in living the Christian life, and to facilitate, strengthen, and support programs of small group ministry and family support. (ADOPTED)

*Additions are in light-face type, deletion is enclosed in brackets.
R-10.
To urge the general secretary, RCA regional synods, classes, and boards of deacons to write to appropriate federal, state, and provincial executive and legislative leaders in Canada and the United States in support of legislation that:

- Increases tax credits for dependents of lower income families.
- Enforces child support payments and strengthens incentives for parents to provide for the care and nurture of their children.
- Reduces the financial penalty that takes away funding for welfare recipients who begin employment.
- Promotes job training and livable wages.
- Minimizes opportunities for no-fault divorce.

and further,

to oppose legislation that:

- Deprives children of necessary care and support because of the actions of parents.
- Sets arbitrary and inflexible limits on the length of time a parent receives government assistance. (ADOPTED)

COMMISSION MEMBERS

Two members of the Commission on Christian Action, Dr. Robin Klay and the Rev. Jack Klunder, are completing their terms of service. They have brought important insights and considerable gifts to the work of the commission. On behalf of the RCA, the commission thanks them for their faithful service and for their discernment and dedication in applying the claims of the gospel to the issues of contemporary society.

Report of the African-American Council

The African-American Council's (AAC) life is blessed with many manifestations of the Spirit of a living Lord. These manifestations of the Spirit need not only receptive soil but faithful nurturing if the Spirit is to bear fruit in growth toward the maturity the Apostle Paul envisioned when he wrote:

I want their hearts to be encouraged and united in love, so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:2-3).
A brilliant B. Moses James lecturer at Caucus '95, the Honorable Adelaide Sanford, regent of the University of the State of New York, contributed mightily to the council's understanding of the meaning of multiculturalism. Her knowledge supports that of religious scholars who have noted that multiculturalism, as presently practiced, marginalizes minority presence in mainstream institutions by avoiding crucial issues of shared decision-making. A gifted teacher, Sanford observed that curriculum design in public and religious education tends to present people of African ancestry without a history prior to the era of the slave trade, thereby fostering notions of Africans as being without history prior to contact with Europe—a misleading justification for the dehumanization that followed in the wake of the trade in human lives.

Manifestations of the Spirit were seen through the inclusion of members of the African-American Council in a multiracial visitation with the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa, February 27 to March 6, 1996. The chairperson of the AAC, Dr. Oliver Patterson, of First Reformed Church, Jamaica, New York, and Dr. Marye Thomas of Miraloma Community Church, San Francisco, California, brought expertise in educational administration and conflict resolution to the delegation, and they returned with useful ideas for RCA Christian education.

The past year was not without painful challenges for minority communities in America, where the unemployment rate is typically twice that of nonminority communities, and where the problem was further aggravated by women's wages, which are only 72 percent of male's wages for comparable work. The western region of the AAC made a timely request for a council position paper on affirmative action. An initial working document noted that bigotry continues to affect American thinking unconsciously, even in hiring, promotion, and educational decisions. The document welcomes RCA support for affirmative action policies consistent with standards of fairness, devoid of quotas or discrimination of any kind. The western region's request was in response to misdirected rage against socially and economically disadvantaged sectors of society while more fundamental sources of economic blight go unaddressed. Massachusetts Institute of Technology economist Lester Thurow, writing about the high cost of education and childcare, observes that "the traditional family is being destroyed not by social welfare programs coming from Washington (although there are some government initiatives that have undermined family structure) but by a modern economic system that is not congruent with family values" (Lester Thurow, "Corporate Closings; Family Breakdown," New York Times Magazine, September 3, 1995, p. 11). The document on affirmative action is available through the Office of the African-American Council.

The advisory committee recommended:

R-11.
To request the Commission on Christian Action, in consultation with the African-American Council, to prepare a paper on affirmative action and diversity in the workplace, for report to the 1998 General Synod. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The African-American Council has begun a study of this issue; it is a concern which merits a wider study and discussion in the church.

The AAC welcomes the vision of the RCA general secretary, Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, in the Mission Is One consultations and his inclusion of the racial/ethnic councils in these discussions. The AAC is further heartened by the General Synod referral instructing the appropriate units "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" (MGS 1995, R-9, p. 329). In response to R-9 and the Mission Is One initiatives the African-American Council
is cooperating with the Regional Synod of New York in proposing an Urban Leadership Development Academy based on AAC experience with Christian education in Reformed settings in central city churches. AAC feels called to move beyond the isolation that has become normative for many central city ministries in relation to one another and other agencies of the wider church.

Another General Synod referral (MGS 1995, R-7, p. 84), which encouraged ethnic youth to attend RCA camps and conference centers, was implemented during the year, thanks to the response of the directors at Fowler Camp and Conference Center in Speculator, New York, and the Warwick Center in Warwick, New York, who reached out to the African-American Council through offers for weekend planning sessions. In addition, two African-American ministers, the Rev. Barbara Alexander of New Brooklyn Reformed Church in Brooklyn, New York, and the Rev. Everett Kilgo of Cambria Heights Reformed Church in Queens, New York, have taken major responsibility in the eastern region’s Spectrum planning process. Their participation in the planning committee for this regional youth celebration goes far beyond the rhetoric of multicultural involvement by a process and structure more reflective of the full fabric of diversity found among the people of God in the eastern region of the RCA.

The spirit of atonement and reconciliation has led some AAC churches in the Eastern region to initiate dialogue with the New York City Police Department regarding more effective police-community relations.

R-12.
To urge the Reformed Church in America, its members, consistories, congregations, and assemblies to stand in solidarity with African-American congregations and other minority people in the effort to engage local police departments in more effective and positive dialogue between law enforcement officers and minority communities; and further,

to instruct Congregational Services, in cooperation with the African-American Council, to prepare a discussion guide for community dialogue with police. (ADOPTED)

Report of the Council for Pacific and Asian American Ministries

The Council for Pacific and Asian American Ministries (CPAAM) entered its seventeenth year in 1996. An annual consultation is held each year to share the joys and challenges of ministries, to assess needs and concerns, to become better equipped to do ministry, and to worship and fellowship together.

PRIORITIES

The executive committee, after consulting with Pacific and Asian American pastors and church representatives during the 1994-95 year, voted on the priorities of the council’s work for the next five years. From 1996 to 2000 the program priorities for CPAAM are:
1. Evangelism
2. Discipleship training
3. Ministry with youth
4. Stewardship
5. Ministry with women
6. Cross-cultural interchange
7. Ministry with the elderly
8. Recruitment, training, and support of clergy
9. Church planning and development

Evangelism

CPAAM has identified evangelism as its first priority for the next five years. CPAAM congregations have employed various means in their evangelism emphasis. The cell group model of ministry practiced by the Rev. David Cho in Seoul, Korea, and contextualized for the American church by Carl George, is being implemented by some CPAAM congregations. Other CPAAM congregations have used door-to-door evangelism, each-one-bring-one evangelism, and marketplace and workplace evangelism to share the good news of God’s saving love in Jesus Christ. While some of these methods of evangelization have been effective in some situations, they do not work in all cases. CPAAM pastors and congregations continue to seek out new ways to reach out to the unchurched in their communities.

CPAAM recommended:

R-13.
To instruct the Office of Evangelism and Church Development Services to explore effective models of evangelism which are arising out of racial/ethnic communities as it plans evangelism emphases for the Reformed Church in America.

Upon a motion from the floor to amend R-13, Synod VOTED: To instruct the Office of Evangelism and Church Development Services to explore effective models of evangelism which are arising out of racial/ethnic communities as it plans evangelism emphases for the Reformed Church in America; and further,

to explore evangelism and church plant models which encourage the development of multi-ethnic congregations.*

(The advisory committee had recommended the adoption of R-13.)

Discipling of the Laity

A corollary priority of the cell group model of ministry is the discipling of the laity. Increasingly, lay people are requiring training so they can be equipped to do ministry. A translation of the booklet, Ministry of the Deacon, into Korean was completed. A translator for the RCA elders’ manual is being sought. CPAAM is challenged to find language resources which will assist congregations in the task of discipleship training.

Youth

During the first half of this decade, ministry with youth was the top priority of CPAAM. The council sought to address this concern by encouraging retreats with youth, equipping youth leaders for ministry, and bringing youth to the annual CPAAM consultation to celebrate their

*Addition is in light-face type.
presence, participation, and dialogue with adults. In 1995 the CPAAM consultation focused on ministry with youth. The keynote speaker was the Rev. Donald Ng of Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, who addressed issues confronting Asian American youth of today. Congregations with a strong focus on immigrant adults have difficulty ministering to their youth. Youth often feel marginalized and misunderstood. Their bicultural context is sometimes unappreciated by parents who seek to preserve the culture and customs of their homelands. Pastors fear the youth will be lost to the church once they leave home for college. Some churches are using a modified version of the cell group model for their youth ministry with great success. Clearly, new models for youth ministry among Pacific and Asian American congregations are needed to meet the challenges of these times.

Stewardship

Stewardship education for some immigrant congregations is easily taught and practiced. For others, special programs have been used to teach the biblical concept of stewardship. Some congregations have used the Consecration Sunday materials successfully, while others have found that it does not cross cultural barriers. CPAAM will continue to seek ways to help its constituency to understand Christian stewardship.

Role of Women

The ministry with Taiwanese women continues with many serving on consistories. Programs addressing health, legal, and social issues have attracted many women (and men) and have afforded participants the opportunity for learning and fellowship. Many Korean women serve as deaconesses in their churches and are often weavers of the social fabric of their congregations. In many of the Japanese, Chinese, and Lao churches, women serve in all aspects of church life. For some CPAAM churches, traditional views of the role of women discourage their full participation in ministry.

Cross-Cultural Interchanges

Cross-cultural interchanges are ways for Pacific and Asian Americans to learn about other cultures and people, and an opportunity for others to become acquainted with the various cultures that make up CPAAM's constituency. Plans are being made for a tour of one of the church's choirs to California. It is hoped that by being together in worship, everyone present will learn to appreciate and better understand people with different cultural backgrounds. Learning opportunities such as these help to overcome stereotypical thinking, which inhibits a healthy understanding of God's diverse people.

Elderly

The Asian elderly are sometimes characterized as those who have lost their mouth, sight, ears, and feet. The language brought from their homeland is foreign to the ears of most westerners. The eyesight and hearing fail as the years take their toll. For the elderly, the great distances between home and the community center where others like them can gather portrays the loss of feet. Celebrating the gifts of the elderly and finding meaningful ways to express them is a challenge for congregations. The success of the Golden Eagle Academy for Taiwanese older adults and the weekly fellowship of the Taiwanese elderly in Queens, New York, indicates the distinct need for programs and ministry with the elderly.

Recruitment, Training, and Support of Clergy

Recruitment of Korean and Taiwanese pastors to the RCA has been an ongoing concern. With the assistance of these pastors in the council, several ministers are in various stages of affiliating with classes. Orientation and training of these ministers have been encouraged.
Work continues on translating the Book of Church Order into Korean and Chinese. Taiwanese pastors in the New York metropolitan area meet monthly for sharing, study, and support. The Korean pastors in the East and those in the West meet bimonthly. The East Coast pastors have retreats together, plan joint revival meetings, and are structured to support each other and advise the council on matters related to Korean ministries. The West Coast pastors participated with the Hispanic pastors in a retreat in the fall of 1995.

New Church Development

The members of the council and its staff have worked with the various regional synod executives to encourage church development among Pacific and Asian Americans in their region. With staff participation on the Council of Field Secretaries (COFS), the council and COFS have worked together on new church development strategies. Guidelines to assist classes in dealing with churches wishing to affiliate with the RCA have been developed jointly. CPAAM staff worked with the West Coast Korean pastors to develop strategies for Asian American new church development in the Classis of California. Currently, developing ministries are being explored in Carrollton, Texas; Killeen, Texas; Orlando, Florida; Queens, New York; Englewood, New Jersey; and Palisades Park, New Jersey. Also, a new Chinese ministry is being explored in the Pacific Northwest. Opportunities abound for new church development among Asian groups, and the council is eager to expand its ministry.

In retrospect, much has been accomplished this year, but the challenges facing the council’s ministries are great. The Council for Pacific and Asian American Ministries looks to the wider church to be partners so that the gospel can be proclaimed and disciples can be made to serve the reign of God.

WORK ON MATTERS REFERRED BY PREVIOUS GENERAL SYNODS

Violence

The General Synod in 1984 (MGS 1984, pp. 70-4) and in 1986 (MGS 1986, R-15c, p. 84) requested CPAAM to assist the minister for social witness in monitoring and reviewing violence against Pacific and Asian Americans. Because of the increasing number of reported incidents of violence and the openly hostile expressions of racism, CPAAM continues its practice of monitoring. CPAAM works cooperatively with mainline denominations through the Ecumenical Working Group of Asian and Pacific Americans and Canadians (EWGAPAC) in monitoring racial violence. EWGAPAC has published a resource, Beyond the Crucible, which cites cases of racial violence against Asian and Pacific Americans and Canadians, and responses of groups in the community to those acts. This resource is helpful to individuals and groups desiring to learn more about the issue of violence against Asian and Pacific Americans and Canadians, especially in the last decade; how community-based groups were formed in response to those incidents; and how to contact persons from those community groups.

Gifts of Women

The 1995 General Synod encouraged all RCA ministers, consistorys, 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 (MGS 1995, R-25, p. 280). CPAAM, at its inception, recognized the unique gifts women bring to ministry and created an at-large position on its executive committee to insure that at least one representative is a woman. Further, CPAAM continues to encourage congregations to identify, nurture, and utilize the gifts of women in all areas of ministry. Women serve as elders and deacons in many congregations and have represented CPAAM on denominational commissions and agencies.
New Models of Mission and Evangelism

CPAAM also received instruction from the 1995 General Synod 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 (MGS 1995, R-9, p. 329). During this past year CPAAM worked on a ministry outreach to Japanese-speaking persons in Western Michigan with the Classis of Holland and the Synod of the Great Lakes. It welcomes opportunities for cooperative efforts in ministry.

Camps and Conference Centers

The 1995 General Synod also encouraged 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 (MSG 1995, R-7, p. 54). During the summer of 1996 the Warwick Center in Warwick, New York, will be the site of the annual Korean youth event, Jesus '96. This is the tenth anniversary of this youth gathering, and planners for this event have been working with the staff of the Warwick Center to make this a successful gathering. On the other hand, some congregations have cited distance, cost, and food as being deterrents in using the Warwick Center facility.

ISSUE OF IMMIGRATION

CPAAM affirms the recommendations made by the Council for Hispanic Ministries regarding the immigration restrictions proposed by H.R. 2202, S. 269, and S. 1394 (see Report of the Council for Hispanic Ministries). This is not the first time the General Synod has considered issues related to immigration. In 1982 the General Synod supported the reunification of families as outlined in the Fifth Preference Category in the Preference System of the Immigration Act of 1965 (MGS 1982, pp. 83-4).

CPAAM recommended:

R-14. To reaffirm the action of the 1982 General Synod:

   to oppose the deletion of the Fifth Preference Category in the Preference System of the Immigration Act of 1965 (MGS 1982, R-32a, p. 84). (ADOPTED)

TIBET

Throughout this past year the executive committee of CPAAM has been studying the issue of Tibetan human rights. The U.S. visit of the Dalai Lama, the exiled spiritual leader of Tibetans, in the summer of 1995, provided media coverage on the plight of Tibet.

Amnesty International and other human rights groups have regularly reported human rights violations committed by the Chinese government in Tibet. In an interview, a senior U.S. diplomat said Tibetans caught while attempting to escape by crossing the Himalayas were systematically tortured by the Chinese. "The descriptions of where it happened and how it happened are so consistent they are fairly credible. Credible enough that there's a lot of concern" (Richard S. Ehrlich, the Washington Times, Jan. 20, 1996, p. A7).

The Dalai Lama's human rights officer, Chimney Dollker, said, "Methods of torture include beating with anything available at hand. Use of electric batons or electric cattle prods,
kicking, punching, mutilation of body parts, setting of guard dogs especially on female prisoners who are made to strip, and sexual abuse of female prisoners, is common in Chinese prisons in Tibet" (Richard S. Ehrlich, the Washington Times, Jan. 20, 1996, p. A7).


R-15.
To instruct the general secretary and the minister for social witness to write to the president of the United States and to instruct the Regional Synod of Canada executive secretary to write to the prime minister of Canada, urging their support of resolutions condemning China’s human rights violations of Tibetan people; and further, to call on members of the Reformed Church in America to pray for the Tibetan people. (ADOPTED)

(A motion was made and supported to amend R-15 by deleting the word “instruct” and inserting the word “urge” following the words “president of the United States and to.” The motion LOST.)

Report of the Council for Hispanic Ministries

A CELEBRATION OF MISSION

The edited version of A Celebration of Mission: The History of the Council for Hispanic Ministries of the Reformed Church in America is finished and ready for print. The Council for Hispanic Ministries (CHM) extends deep appreciation to the Rev. Johnny Alicea-Baez for compiling the history and highlighting the events of the council for the past twenty years. Included in the book are: an early history, priorities and achievement, the council as a prophetic voice, models of ministry, the challenges of the future, and more. The RCA Distribution Center will soon have this resource in its listings. Available in both English and Spanish, this is excellent reading for those interested in learning more about the work of CHM.

The council’s goals are centered in establishing cooperative ties with the various RCA structures. CHM gladly welcomes invitations from congregations, classes, regional synods, and other bodies of the church to share the council’s experiences in mission with the swiftly changing patterns of North American metropolitan communities. Council pastors have years
of practical experience both before and after being part of the RCA, and they can be useful resources as the RCA moves toward developing a balance between world mission and "city mission."

1995 GENERAL SYNOD REFERRALS

CHM is pleased to report the following actions on 1995 General Synod referrals.

The 1995 General Synod voted:

To encourage all RCA ministers, consistories, 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 (MSG 1995, R-12, p. 280).

Hispanic women are a vital part in the life of CHM and its ministries. The council is aware of the gifts that women bring, and the council has been proactive by including all pastors' wives as voting members of the Council for Hispanic Ministries' annual assembly. The council has also encouraged women to participate in leadership roles in consistories, commissions, etc. Presently, the council has one female pastor—at La Iglesia Reformada Hispana of Guttenberg, New Jersey.

The 1995 General Synod also voted:

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 (MSG 1995, R-9, p. 329).

The executive secretary of CHM participated in a Mission Is One consultation, October 12-13, 1995. Several Hispanic projects were included for possible Mission Is One program sites. As the denomination uncovers new ways of working in metropolitan areas it must be kept in mind that the leadership in those metropolitan areas must be allowed and empowered to be part of the development and cultivating processes.

The 1995 General Synod also voted:

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 (MSG 1995, R-7, p. 84).

The council, in consultation with the Rev. Kenneth Tenckinck, executive director of the Warwick Center in Warwick, New York, has set apart a Hispanic children's camp week to be held at the Warwick Center, August 11-17, 1996. The week is designed for first to eighth graders. Hispanic pastors and consistories are excited about the opportunity but also concerned about the financial cost. The reduced cost designated by the Warwick Center is still high for most families, especially those with more than one child. CHM is looking for ways to assist families in meeting the camp fees so that each child who desires to attend the camp may do so.
CHRISTIAN ACTION

C.H.R. 2202, S. 269, AND S. 1394—AN ISSUE OF CIVIL RIGHTS

On October 24, 1995, the Judiciary Committee of the House of Representatives approved H.R. 2202 on immigration restrictions. This action places immigration restrictions squarely on the congressional agenda, approving sweeping changes to the laws governing both legal and illegal immigrants. The bill:

- Sharply cuts legal immigration to the United States, eliminating several categories of family, employment-based, and independent immigration.
- Creates a national registry to verify employment eligibility.
- Cuts in half the number of refugees allowed into the U.S.
- Tightens the asylum process to make it much more difficult for persons fleeing persecution to gain refuge in the U.S.
- Makes sweeping changes to the due process rights of certain immigrants.
- Tightens sponsorship rules to make it more difficult for immigrants who fall on hard times to seek public benefits.

A controversial provision of the bill requires American workers and employers to submit to a national identification system. Such a provision, in effect, gives the federal government the authority to supervise every hiring decision in the United States—sixty-five million per year. Government databases, including the Social Security Administration’s, are rife with inaccuracies. John Miller of the Center for Equal Opportunity argued that even if there is only a 1 percent error rate (an optimistic scenario), the hiring of 650,000 Americans could be wrongly denied or delayed each year.

Advocates of the bill are expected to also propose the inclusion of a national identity card to be carried by every American. The card would include biometric identification such as a thumb print or retina scan. As a result, the intrusion of big government into the lives of ordinary Americans is at question. The cost to outfit every American with a national identification card would be $3 to $5 billion.

The bill eliminates four out of five existing family immigration categories: unmarried adult children of naturalized U.S. citizens, married and unmarried adult children of legal permanent residents, married adult children of U.S. citizens, and brothers and sisters of U.S. citizens. The reunification of the family, which is emphasized by the introducer of the bill, Representative Lamar Smith (R-Texas), chair of the House Immigration Subcommittee, is in contention.

History and many studies show that the United States benefits from its newcomers. Studies show that they are not a drag on the U.S. economy. Taxes and contributions made by legal newcomers exceed the minuscule cost of resettlement. Some lawmakers suggest that Congress should focus on controlling illegal immigration and not on those immigrants who are legal.

The advisory committee recommended to amend R-16:

R-16. To instruct the general secretary to urge the U.S. [government not to approve] House of Representatives and Senate Conference Committee to ameliorate the harsh provisions of H.R. 2202, the Immigration in the National Interest Act; [S. 269, the Immigrant Control and Financial Responsibility Act,] and [S. 1394] S. 1664, the Immigration Reform Act of 1995, since they separate families, deny children education, cause intrusion of government into the lives of ordinary Americans, and raise significant U.S. constitutional questions. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)*

Reason: Immigration reform bills have passed in both the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate and are now in joint conference committee. This amendment reflects the current status of the proposed legislation. S. 269 has been tabled indefinitely. S. 1664 replaced S. 1394.<

The advisory committee recommended to amend R-17:

R-17. To direct the Office of Social Witness to communicate with RCA congregations and members on the effects the H.R. 2202 [S. 269] and [S. 1394] S. 1664 would have on the reunification of families, denial of education of children, intrusion of government into the working lives of ordinary Americans, etc.; and further, to direct the Office of Social Witness to urge congregations of the Reformed Church in America to write their senators and representatives [not to approve bills H.R. 2202, S. 269, and S. 1394] to ameliorate the harsh provisions of H.R. 2202, the Immigration in the National Interest Act; and S. 1664, the Immigration Reform Act of 1995, since they separate families, deny education of children, cause intrusion of government into the lives of ordinary Americans, and raise significant U.S. constitutional questions. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)*

Reason: Immigration reform bills have passed in both the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate and are now in joint conference committee. This amendment reflects the current status of the proposed legislation. S. 269 has been tabled indefinitely. S. 1664 replaced S. 1394.<

HISPANIC MINISTRY STATISTICS

The following are statistics on the various forms of Hispanic ministries and Hispanic ministers serving in the RCA:

*Additions are in light-face type, deletions are enclosed in brackets.
## Hispanic Ministers in the RCA:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minis</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage of Total Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ministers</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lay pastors</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialized ministers</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastors under contract</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastors without charge</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate ministers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired ministers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>42</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Ministry Types:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage of Total Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organized Hispanic congregations</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organized bilingual congregations</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organized Anglo congregations</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>25.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission congregations (not organized)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>30.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialized ministries</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacant Hispanic congregations/missions</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>39</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most of these ministries are growing numerically and have given the RCA a presence in areas where missions take on a specialized form and innovative direction. Hispanics coming to the redeeming grace of God represent a broad spectrum of social and economic levels. Hispanics are people who are well educated and people who are laborers. CHM is ready to serve, and its members come with gifts that can enrich the community of believers.

### NOTES:


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

REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF SOCIAL WITNESS

Reformed theology is noted for its affirmation of Christ’s lordship over all of life—personal and corporate. The church’s social witness is an integral part of its mission in a time of economic inequity, global conflict, and environmental degradation. Through its social witness ministry the church affirms that the gospel is good news, not only for the individual human heart but for all of creation and that “justification by faith cannot be separated from justice on earth” (Ad Hoc Report on World Mission, Chapter II, General Program Council, November 1980).

The Office of Social Witness is responsible for providing resources, programming, and counsel to help equip congregations and individuals in their social witness ministry. The office also represents the denomination in several ecumenical gatherings and in the wider society through public statements and through participation in forums and conferences.

Providing Resources

The RCA has a pastoral responsibility to its members to offer resources for study, prayer, and action that will offer a biblical perspective on complex social issues and encourage a faith response. The office responds to numerous requests for information and study resources. In the past year the office has made available resources on physician-assisted suicide, welfare reform, abortion, capital punishment, gambling, immigration, racial reconciliation, environmental issues, and others. Abortion: Seeking Common Ground, a five-session adult study, has been published by Reformed Church Press and is now available through the RCA Distribution Center. Also available is Welcoming the Stranger, a study/action resource for the church’s ministry with people from other nations and cultures.

Other resources produced by the Office of Social Witness include: The City Gate, an occasional newsletter sent to each RCA congregation; the annual peace packet with study and worship resources for Peace with Justice Sunday; and Do Justice, Make Peace, Keep Creation, an action alert which is periodically sent to a growing network of RCA members who write their elected officials about important issues. Recent action alerts have encouraged participation in two public policy advocacy efforts: Bread for the World’s “Elect to End Childhood Hunger” campaign and an ecumenical effort concerning the protection of endangered species.

Through its Office of Social Witness the RCA participates in the National Religious Partnership for the Environment, which has prepared several resources for a faith-based response to environmental issues. Recently the minister for social witness contributed to a resource packet, “A Call to Defend God’s Creation,” which was sent to thirty thousand Protestant congregations.

Programming

The Office of Social Witness has been able to facilitate RCA participation in several events which enable church members to interact with legislators and government officials and consider how the biblical calls for justice, peace, and the well-being of creation can impact public policy. Such events enabled RCA people to express Christian social concern to leaders in government and to hear from others about how changes in public policy are affecting their lives. Likewise, it allows church members to experience firsthand the benefits and limitations of the political process. Such firsthand experience also adds insight and energy to social witness efforts in the regional synods and RCA regions.
In the past year RCA members attended the annual Interfaith IMPACT Legislative Briefing in Washington, D.C., and the Bread for the World National Gathering, as well as state and local public policy meetings. In addition, the Office for Social Witness made it possible for students from each of the three RCA colleges to participate in the Christian Environmental Association’s briefing in Washington, D.C., in March 1996.

Other programs offered by the Office of Social Witness include:

Workshops and presentations on “Christian Witness and the Environmental Crisis” in approximately twenty congregational or regional gatherings.

Workshops in the regional synods of the Mid-Atlantics and New York on the Bread for the World campaign, “Elect to End Childhood Hunger.”

“Christians Caring for Creation: An Educational Experience for Older Adults,” scheduled for July 28 - August 2, 1996, on the campus of Hope College.

Witness in the Public Square

At times the Office of Social Witness is called upon to represent the RCA’s position on social issues in public statements and forums.

In 1995 the RCA filed a shareholder resolution with Texaco Corporation concerning the company’s involvement with governments known for serious human rights abuses. The minister for social witness spoke at the annual stockholders meeting of Texaco Corporation and later had an opportunity, with other church representatives, to engage in dialogue with corporate management about the company’s responsibility to advocate for human rights in Myanmar (Burma).

In September 1995 the minister for social witness testified before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Resources concerning the reauthorization of the Endangered Species Act. Such testimony is less an attempt to comment on the specifics of legislation as it is an opportunity to present a biblical witness concerning the spiritual and moral issues underlying government’s role in tending and keeping God’s creation. The minister for social witness also participated in a World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) meeting on “Creation and Justice” in preparation for the next WARC General Council, to be held in Hungary in 1997.

REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF HUNGER EDUCATION

Hunger has not dominated the headlines this year. Yet hunger lurks behind the wan faces of war-weary Bosnians and of uprooted people from Rwanda, Sudan, and Afghanistan. These people suffer from malnutrition caused not by a natural disaster but by human choices and civil conflict. Surprisingly, hunger also exists in the United States and Canada in spite of abundance and ample, amber fields of grain. A recent study shows that 29 percent of U.S. children under the age of twelve—more than one in four—are hungry or at risk of hunger. Reports indicate that one child in ten is hungry in Canada.
We as Christians have a reason to be especially troubled by these statistics. Our faith in Jesus Christ compels us to love our neighbors as ourselves. The words of Jesus and the Old Testament reverberate in our ears with the knowledge that 29 percent in the U.S. and 10 percent of our young neighbors in Canada are hungry.

"Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone?" (Matt. 7:9). "If there is among you anyone in need, a member of your community in any of your towns within the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbor" (Deut. 15:7).

Reformed Christians also look to their theological forbearer, John Calvin, for clues as to how they are to treat those in their midst who are needy and what the role of civil governments should be. Calvin says, "No one ought to doubt that civil authority is a calling, not only holy and lawful before God, but also the most sacred and by far the most honorable of all callings in the whole life of mortal men" (Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, IV.xx.4). Calvin not only asserts that civil authorities have a holy calling but that "they should 'give justice to the poor and needy, rescue the destitute and needy, and deliver the poor and needy from the hand of the oppressor'... Justice, indeed, is to receive into safekeeping, to embrace, to protect, vindicate, and free the innocent" (Calvin, Institutes, IV.xx.9).

The biblical and theological mandates are clear. RCA members are encouraged to respond to the hungry, to those in need, and to the children in a number of ways.

Prayer and Fasting

Recognizing that people cannot solve the problems of hunger without God’s help, Christians need to dedicate themselves to seeking God’s grace for the hungry and guidance for how they might best respond. Christians can do that by studying the Scriptures to learn what the Bible says about the hungry and those in need, and by fasting and praying on their behalf.

R-18.

To request all RCA members to join other Christians in fasting and praying on behalf of hungry children everywhere on the first Friday of each month. (ADOPTED)

One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) and Reformed Church World Service (RCWS)

One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) was started in 1949 as a way to respond to those in need as a result of World War II. Today it is used as a way for people from several denominations to grow in their understanding of hunger and human need and as a way to channel contributions to the needy. Offerings are used by Reformed Church World Service to assist needy people locally and globally through relief and rehabilitation, development of local resources, and advocacy on behalf of the needy. An OGHS packet was mailed to each RCA church in January 1996. A combination hunger/OGHS packet will be mailed in August 1996. For the first time OGHS materials are also available in Spanish.

R-19.

To encourage RCA congregations to participate in One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) and send contributions to Reformed Church World Service (RCWS) to use for alleviating hunger and human need. (ADOPTED)
Bread for the World

The RCA takes its biblical and theological undergirding seriously in supporting efforts to “speak out, judge righteously, and defend the rights of the poor and needy” (Prov. 31:9). From the time of John Calvin, people in the Reformed tradition have taken seriously their obligation to remind civil authorities of their responsibility to be concerned about the poor and needy.

Bread for the World is a Christian citizens’ movement which seeks justice for the world’s hungry people by lobbying U.S. decision-makers. It does this by encouraging individuals to become Bread for the World members and congregations to become covenant churches with the organization.

Each year Bread for the World encourages Christians to give an offering of their citizenship to God by writing elected officials to support the needs of the hungry. This year the offering of letters encourages government officials seeking election to make a commitment to end childhood hunger by promising “to vote for legislation and to support federal programs that will help overcome childhood hunger in the United States.”

R-20.
To urge RCA congregations to offer their citizenship to God by conducting an offering of letters requesting that officials running for elected office commit themselves to ending childhood hunger. (ADOPTED)

Materials to support the three recommendations above are available from the RCA Office of Hunger Education in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

New Business

The following item of new business was referred to the Advisory Committee on Christian Action:

To request the 1996 General Synod to consider a response to the destruction of houses of worship in the southern region of the U.S., which continues even in recent days.

The RCA has demonstrated a generous and heart-felt response to the losses incurred through disasters in St. Thomas and St. Croix, Virgin Islands. This has been a powerful witness to RCA unity.

Can the RCA overlook a response to this destruction caused by hate, or prompted by prejudice, or bent on furthering divisions and discrimination?

1. Will the 1996 General Synod consider a letter encouraging President Bill Clinton to continue his outspoken and strong denunciation of these acts of violence, discrimination, and cowardice?

2. Will the 1996 General Synod also consider writing a letter to the governors of states where this destruction has occurred?
3. Will the 1996 General Synod consider an offering to be received this week and then sent to assist one or more of the churches affected in the southern region of the U.S., possibly within the Lutheran and Reformed traditions, or more significantly outside the RCA’s usual arena of dialogue?

4. Will the 1996 General Synod encourage each RCA congregation to consider a sister/brother relationship with one of the houses of worship destroyed, asking each RCA congregation to seek ways in the weeks and months ahead to do what it can to support and assist the affected houses of worship?

5. Will the 1996 General Synod ask the general secretary to communicate with national or regional faith communities who have lost houses of worship, the RCA’s concern, solidarity, and prayers for the congregations and leaders of these houses of worship as they live through this period of recovery, rebuilding, and response?

In response to this new business, the advisory committee prepared the following background information:

**Background Information**

The Advisory Committee on Christian Action received from the Committee on Reference a directive to consider and write appropriate recommendations in response to the recent epidemic of racially motivated hate crimes which have been targeted against houses of worship of both African-American and racially blended congregations in various states; and to present these recommendations to the 1996 General Synod for consideration.

The Advisory Committee on Christian Action believed this was an urgent task. Earlier in the week of the 1996 General Synod meeting, a National Council of Churches task force sponsored meetings in Washington D.C. between thirty pastors of burned-out churches and U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno, Treasury Secretary Richard Rubin, and various members of Congress. The purpose of these meetings was to inform federal officials of the terrorism and intimidation that is being perpetrated and to present evidence that the attacks are both racially motivated and connected to white supremacist groups, including the Aryan Faction, Skinheads for White Justice, and the Klu Klux Klan. To date, “57...churches have been bombed, burned, or vandalized during the past six years in more than a dozen states. Twenty-five of these acts have occurred during the first five months of 1996 alone. New attacks are being reported weekly” (*Church World Service News Release*, June 6, 1996). Most of the buildings terrorized belong to African-American congregations which are actively involved in community economic development, day care, and housing.

In response to this crisis Church World Service has issued an appeal for one million dollars to assist these churches with repairs and rebuilding as well as to promote public awareness and to support advocacy needs at governmental levels. All denominational contributions to this fund will be used for relief and recovery ministry.

The Advisory Committee on Christian Action believed that solidarity with brothers and sisters in Christ is necessary and proper, a visible sign of unity in Christ, and is an opportunity to literally “bear one another’s burdens.”
The advisory committee recommended:

R-21. To direct the general secretary to write a letter of encouragement to President Bill Clinton, urging him to continue his strong denunciation of the cowardly acts of violence being perpetrated against houses of worship; and further,

to send similar letters to governors of U.S. states in which these crimes are being committed. (ADOPTED)

R-22. To instruct the RCA Office of Volunteer Services, in consultation with the African-American Council, to explore appropriate ways for RCA congregations to support and assist the congregations which are affected by the violence; and further,

to instruct the RCA Office of Volunteer Services to issue an appeal to RCA congregations to enter into relationships with these churches for rebuilding, financial support, and spiritual encouragement. (ADOPTED)

R-23. To instruct the general secretary to communicate the love, concern, and commitment of the RCA to the various denominations affected by the violence. (ADOPTED)

R-24. To instruct the coordinator for RCA volunteer services, Reformed Church World Service, and disaster response to immediately issue a news release to RCA congregations informing them of the present needs; and further,

to direct the coordinator for RCA volunteer services, Reformed Church World Service, and disaster response to appeal for prayer and for funds for the $1,000,000 united appeal from Church World Service; and further,

to direct Reformed Church World Service to make an initial contribution of $10,000 to this fund. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The background information provided above is the rationale for R-21, R-22, R-23, and R-24.◆

R-25. To pause for prayer for the affected churches, for justice for victims affected by these crimes, and for a change of heart in those who have perpetrated these crimes. (ADOPTED)

Reason: It is important and necessary that the RCA stand in solidarity with our sisters and brothers in the victimized areas.◆
Report of Central College

During the 1995 commencement ceremonies, Central College awarded its ten thousandth degree. That means this small, independent, RCA-affiliated college in rural south-central Iowa has found a measure of success in its mission of enabling students to reach their highest potential and in sending them out to become effective citizens in the local, national, and international communities.

Central’s success, however, would be greatly diminished without the prayers, guidance, and sustenance of its friends in the RCA. In 1916, exactly eighty years ago this year, the RCA and Central College became partners in providing higher education, not only for the sons and daughters of the denomination, but for all deserving students. It is a distinct pleasure to submit this report to the 1996 General Synod of the Reformed Church in America.

ACADEMIC PROGRAM

For the second consecutive year Central College has been recognized as providing a high quality of education at modest cost by its inclusion in Money Magazine’s list of “The 100 Best Buys in College Education.” This distinction, awarded to only two other Iowa institutions of higher learning (out of 1,049 colleges and universities nationwide chosen for evaluation), provides testimony to the strength of Central’s academic program, directly reflecting on its outstanding faculty as well as attesting to the efforts that have been made to contain costs.

In the past year the faculty has been busily preparing for the launch of the new core curriculum in conjunction with the return of the semester calendar, both of which will go into effect in the fall of 1996. With the advent of these major changes, faculty members have had to redesign and create new courses, adjust course schedules and requirements for majors/programs, and incorporate into every discipline the new emphasis on various student skills development. This, in addition to regular teaching and advising loads for this academic year, has kept the faculty very busy.

Excitement for the new core curriculum and semester calendar is already evident among the students, even though it will undoubtedly add even more rigor to an already demanding curriculum. By requiring skills development in writing, oral communication, quantitative reasoning, computing, and foreign languages, the new curriculum is intended to make the Central College graduate even better prepared to enter a chosen career field.

Faculty Honors and Achievements

Two members of Central’s faculty received outstanding awards this year in recognition of excellence in scholarship and teaching:

Dr. Janel Curry-Roper, associate professor of geography, received a J. William Fulbright Award to continue research at the University of Guelph in Ontario, Canada, during the summer of 1995.

Dr. Donna L. Van Bodegraven, the Kenneth J. Weller distinguished professor of the liberal arts and associate professor of Spanish, was named outstanding educator of the year by the Iowa Foreign Language Association and was the recipient of an Outstanding Teaching Award given by the Penn State College of Education Alumni Society.
STUDENT LIFE

Two years ago under the direction of Louis Stark, vice-president of student life, Central College established new programs designed to better equip students for campus living. These included a transitional living program, a sharper focus on student programming using a comprehensive student programming board, and an increase in programming in the area of multicultural student affairs. Since that time, those programs have attained a level of maturity and have given rise to several new initiatives designed to more fully integrate campus life with academic life.

This year, several new programs of note were started, with two of them highlighted below.

Passport to Success

Passport to Success, developed by Marjorie Giles, director of retention and leadership development, provides opportunities for Central College students to build knowledge and skills in leadership through participation in a series of leadership development seminars. Specifically targeted to sophomore and junior students, the program's main purpose is to provide students with leadership skills that they may use immediately in campus organizations as well as in future employment situations.

Designed for a two-year cycle, Passport to Success consists of a total of fourteen seminars led by area business leaders, alumni, faculty members, and counselors, and includes such topics as conflict resolution, ethical leadership, decision-making, leadership styles, and stress management. For each seminar attended by a student, a record of participation, along with a description of the seminar, is placed in a student file in the Internship and Employment Services Office.

Job-Shadowing

The Job-shadowing Program was jointly launched by the director of counseling and career development, Pat Joachim Kitzman, and director of alumni relations, Steve Muller. It provides opportunities for current Central College students to observe Central alumni at work and to network with them in anticipated career fields in order to gain a feel for the actual workplace.

One of the more successful job-shadowing days this year occurred in Des Moines, Iowa. It started with a breakfast at Meredith Drive Reformed Church in Des Moines, where students met their mentors for the day prior to accompanying them to their respective jobs.

The renewed emphasis on student life at Central College has been accompanied by several changes in administrative staff, all of whom have brought significant expertise to individual assignments. Their names and respective areas are: Geoff Haskell, director of student activities; Diana Borrero-Lowe, director of multicultural student life; and Timothy Phillips, director of residence life.

COCURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

The majority of Central College students continue to participate in a vast array of cocurricular activities as a portion of their college experience, including drama, forensics, music ensembles, clubs, intramural sports, and intercollegiate athletics.

Of special significance this past year were tours by both the Central College A Cappella Choir and the Symphonic Wind Ensemble, which took them to churches and schools in several midwestern cities. The choir had the pleasurable experience of singing in one of the
midwest's largest Presbyterian churches, Village Presbyterian Church of Prairie Village, Kansas. The choir participated in three morning worship services and performed the American premiere of a work by the same Romanian composer who composed a benediction for the choir during its 1993 European tour.

Central's athletic teams continue to experience success on the field of competition and in the classroom.

The Central College football team, coached by Ron Schipper, won its twenty-second Iowa Conference football championship with a 10-0 record, earned its tenth NCAA Division III playoff berth in the past twelve years, and extended its regular-season winning streak to twenty-six games. Rick Sanger and Matt Bandstra both received All-America honors. Sanger received an NCAA post-graduate scholarship and Bandstra was named a GTE Academic All-American.

The Central College volleyball team, under the capable leadership of coach Megan Clayberg, had a school-record 36-6 mark and earned a first-ever berth in the NCAA Division III playoffs.

1995 graduate Emilie Hanson received the NCAA Today’s Top Eight Award, the highest award the NCAA gives to student athletes. It is based on excellence in athletics, academics, and service to others. Hanson is the first Iowan and only the sixth NCAA Division III athlete ever to receive the award, which was presented at the NCAA convention in Dallas, Texas, in January 1996. Hanson also was one of ten finalists for the NCAA Woman of the Year Award in October and received the Woody Hayes Scholar-Athlete of the Year Award in January 1996.

COLEGE DEVELOPMENT AND ALUMNI RELATIONS

Central College continues to benefit from the loyal financial support of its constituencies and surpassed several new milestones in gift support while not in a major campaign. The college realized in fiscal year 1994-95 nearly $2.5 million in giving from all sources, and prospects are strong for increasing that figure for the year which ends on June 30, 1996.

New initiatives for this area have included a conversion to a new information system, a venture fund program which will raise restricted dollars to benefit designated academic departments over and above operating budgets, and the revamping of alumni reunion programs to include alumni of all ages in five-year groupings for an on-campus summer reunion.

CAMPUS MINISTRY

Campus ministry at Central College is as diverse as its student population and offers many distinct ways of enhancing personal and corporate faith pursuits. Under the general umbrella of Campus Ministries, the Revs. Fran De Jong and Ronald Rienstra, campus ministers, oversee the entire program of campus worship, student nurture, and service outreach opportunities in cooperation with several autonomous campus-based Christian organizations. Within that cooperative framework the spiritual climate at Central College continues to benefit each student.

Renewed emphasis has been placed on student nurture, with a direct focus on a “ministry of presence” by those in leadership positions. Each of the cell ministries, although different in structure, has made this a priority. As a result, the leaders are building exciting relationships with the students involved in the individual programs. The Campus Church Board, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, and Catholic Campus
Ministries have each provided a weekend retreat away from campus for those students actively participating in these ministries.

The outreach ministries of Central College, which provide opportunities for students and staff to be Christians in action, have again flourished this academic year. Of particular note, a group of students spent a portion of their 1995 Thanksgiving break on a mission work trip, assisting the pastor of the new RCA church start in Iowa City, Iowa, with painting and minor refurbishing of the church facility.

ENROLLMENT

Central College welcomed a first-year class of 407 highly capable and enthusiastic young people in the fall of 1995. Although not a record enrollment, this number represented nearly a 15 percent increase over the previous year's class and is demonstrative of strong interest in a Central College education. This class, though considerably larger than its predecessor, was able to maintain a comparable record of outstanding academic achievement and community service, which have become the hallmarks for recent Central College first-year classes.

Applications for 1996-97 currently are keeping pace with established freshman enrollment goals and providing ample encouragement for another successful year.

Because of an ever-increasing technological sophistication among students considering a college education, Central College launched its homepage on the World Wide Web for the current academic year. This presence on the web via CollegeNet and Studyabroad.com permits potential students to access, from their computers, up-to-the-minute Central College information and aids them in the college search process. The homepage has brought a decidedly high-tech dimension to the college's marketing and recruitment programs.

CAMPUS DEVELOPMENT

Central College has experienced significant improvements in its physical plant this year. Completed projects have been a major renovation of Gaass Hall, redesigned to serve as a coordinated residence hall; the development of a new Health Center facility; and the completion of the lower level of the Maytag Student Center.

Perhaps the most significant change has been the removal of five residential homes from the northeast corner of campus in preparation for construction of a new dining hall and kitchen. The new facility, slated for completion in 1997, will provide state-of-the-art food preparation and delivery capabilities.

CONCLUSION

Next year Central College will welcome the class of 2000 to its campus. It will serve as a defining moment as the college community begins to reflect on the close of a remarkable century of growth and anticipates the inevitable change and opportunity of a new millennium.

It is encouraging to know that the college will be able to depend on the prayers, favor, and continuing support of the Reformed Church in America as it prepares to fulfill its mission of providing quality liberal arts education in the Christian tradition.
INTRODUCTION

Now in its 134th year as a collegiate institution, Hope College perseveres in pursuit of its mission—to achieve academic excellence in the context of the historic Christian faith. Hope College hopes and believes that its founder, the Rev. Albertus C. Van Raalte, would be proud of Hope College and would recognize it as his own. Hope College has changed and grown over the years since its founding, but its guiding purposes have remained the same. In a formal sense Hope is united to the Reformed Church in America by a covenant relationship. There is a strong bond that comes through the personal commitment of thousands of men and women both to the college and to the church. The close ties between Hope College and the RCA are historic. They are also vital in the present and are significant for both the RCA and the college in the future.

APPLICATIONS AND ENROLLMENT, 1996

Enrollment at Hope College reached an all-time high in the fall of 1995 with a total of 2,919 students and a full-time equivalent count of 2,747. The number of applicants making deposits to reserve a place in the class of 1999 far exceeded the number the college had planned on, and it became necessary to form a wait list soon after May 1, 1995. The class that arrived in late August 1995 was not only larger than its predecessors, but it was also more able as indicated by the conventional measures of board scores and grade point averages.

As of this writing, applications for the Class of 2000 are also running at historically high levels with deposits to reserve a place far exceeding those of any previous year. Hope’s recent experience with the rising demand for admission is one of the factors prompting a year-long examination of the issue of the size of the college. The question is whether Hope College should continue to grow, as it has during most of the last generation, or stabilize its size. And, if Hope College is to stabilize its size, how will that be accomplished?

One of the gratifying features of the large and able class of 1999 is that it contains a higher percentage of young people from the RCA than has been the case in recent years. It is satisfying to see the enthusiasm so many potential students have for Hope College, and it is especially satisfying to see that enthusiasm so well represented among RCA young people.

ELEMENTS OF SPIRITUAL NURTURE AT HOPE COLLEGE

Traditionally Hope College has had a strong religion department, and that tradition continues. Each Hope student takes at least two religion courses. In addition, each Hope student takes a senior seminar which focuses on questions of faith and learning, most often in the student’s major area of study. Since the abolition of required chapel attendance during the 1960s, Hope has supported an active voluntary chapel program. This program has included morning chapel services on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, as well as a service on Sunday. It has also included support of a variety of Christian groups, both formal and informal, as well as community service projects and short-term mission work.

As a result of the college’s lengthy strategic planning process, Hope was able to enhance its chapel program two years ago. The chapel program is headed by the Rev. Ben Patterson, ably seconded by two chaplains, the Rev. Paul Boersma and the Rev. Dolores Nasrallah, and by Dwight Beal, director of worship and music. Weekday services now draw attendance of around 1,000. The vitality of the chapel services is mirrored in the vitality of other aspects of the Christian life of the campus, formal and informal student groups, spring mission trips, and a Summer of Service program which combines Christian discipling with outreach in the Holland, Michigan, community.

Hope College is now exploring ways of providing more structured opportunities for students to prepare for Christian service.
CAMPUS DEVELOPMENT

Immediately following the 1996 summer theatre season, the theatre in the DeWitt Center will close for expansion and refurbishing. Gifts exceeding $500,000 have made possible an expansion of the scene shop and backstage areas, as well as repairs and improvements to the auditorium. In addition, the lighting facilities will be upgraded. There will be some inconvenience to the theatre program during the fall and winter, but the college expects the renewed facilities to be ready for use by spring. These improvements will not only provide better facilities but, by putting more of the set construction backstage, will also make the theatre more available for use for longer periods during the year.

The college is now actively seeking gifts that will allow the construction of a Dance Center. The college dance program is both excellent and popular, but it has outgrown its facilities and currently operates in three or four locations. A recently vacated building on campus has great potential as a center for the dance program, and Hope College is excited by the prospect of properly housing this outstanding department.

The foundation of the Haworth Conference and Learning Center is complete, and the structural steel is beginning to outline the ultimate shape of the building. Completion is scheduled for mid-autumn 1996. Its companion structure, the Cook Residence Hall, is scheduled for completion by mid-spring 1997. Hope College is looking forward to using both of these buildings as part of the accommodations for the 1998 meeting of General Synod, which will be hosted jointly by Hope College and Western Theological Seminary.

One of the interesting sidelights of the construction of the Haworth Center and Cook Residence Hall was the college’s need to remove about twenty houses from the construction site. Of these, half were sufficiently sound to survive a move and good enough to be worth moving. Therefore, the college had a “parade of homes” during the summer of 1995 as houses trundled down nearby streets and avenues to their new locations. When it was all over, the relocation of these houses had substantially upgraded several neighborhoods near the college.

WALK TO WORK PROGRAM

Hope College has an excellent location in the middle of the city of Holland, Michigan. As a contribution to the preservation of housing in the center city, Hope has recently initiated a Walk to Work program. Under this program, financial incentives are provided for college faculty and staff and also for food service staff to purchase and live in homes within easy walking distance of the college. The college guarantees the mortgage, thereby relieving the staff member of the need to make a down payment. Also, through the generosity of an anonymous donor, the college will provide funds to allow the purchaser to do some immediate home improvements. This Walk to Work program has attracted much favorable interest in Holland and farther afield.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Like other colleges, Hope College is working to stay abreast of the revolutionary developments in information technology. These developments are especially important to colleges because of the impact they are having on the ways in which information and, eventually, knowledge are distributed. Colleges and universities need to come to terms with the information technology revolution in at least three different ways. First, they need to provide good access for students and faculty to computers and their accessories and to networks, including the
Internet. Second, they need to assist faculty as they strive to learn how to use the new technology in their teaching and their research. Third, they need to have a vision of the way in which the whole field of education, including higher education, will be changed forever by new technology. This vision must guide institutional development. Hope College is excited by the challenge of the information technology revolution and hopes its responses to technology may be of interest and value to the RCA.

HOPE COLLEGE STATISTICS

Here are some numbers that help flesh out the impressions of Hope College given in earlier sections of this report.

<table>
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<th>Category</th>
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<td>Year in which college-level instruction was first offered</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of students enrolled*</td>
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<td>Number of full-time equivalent students*</td>
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<td>Costs for 1996-97:</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCA student representation+</td>
<td>20 percent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* As of the fall term 1995
+ This is the largest single denominational group. Other well-represented groups include the Roman Catholic, Christian Reformed, Presbyterian, and Methodist churches. Also, many students come from independent congregations.

CONCLUSION

Hope College is committed to the quest for academic excellence in the context of the historic Christian faith. Over the years the RCA has provided a spiritual context for Hope College, and it continues to do so. In turn, Hope College sends talented men and women into the RCA and other denominations as ministers, missionaries, and active lay members. There is always a need for the RCA and the college to understand and appreciate each other and to work together to help each other more fully achieve the mission of the RCA and Hope College.

Report of Northwestern College

It is a pleasure to share this Northwestern College report with the 1996 General Synod of the Reformed Church in America. Deeply cherished is the covenantal relationship which has been enjoyed now for more than a century. It is hoped that this will continue and even flourish into the next century! Since the record of history has repeatedly shown an erosion of
relationships between church-related colleges and their denominations, this requires a very intentional mutual commitment. There is considerable resolve on the Northwestern College campus for such a sustained effort.

ACADEMICS

The most significant change on the Northwestern College campus in the past decade is the increased rigor of the academic program. This has been endorsed by students, faculty, administration, and the board of trustees. The expectations for student performance are simply greater than they were in the past. Given the cost of an undergraduate education and the challenges which await graduates, this emphasis is most appropriate and important.

Indicative of outstanding undergraduate achievement this past year are the performances of Bryce Assink of South Haven, Michigan, and Elise Rens of Apple Valley, Minnesota. Both were significantly involved in undergraduate research during their years at Northwestern College. Assink was accepted in the Ph.D. program in chemistry at the University of Chicago, and Rens was accepted in the early admission program at the University of Minnesota Medical School.

Several faculty members have also enjoyed exceptional years. Biology professor Fred Van Dyke has again involved Northwestern College students in his environmental research efforts. Dr. Van Dyke is the recipient of numerous external grants from environmental agencies to fund these joint experiences. In addition, he has just written a book entitled *Redeeming Creation: The Biblical Basis for Stewardship*, published by InterVarsity Press. English professor Beth Doriani has also written a major book, *Emily Dickinson, Daughter of Prophecy*, published by the University of Massachusetts Press. Dr. Doriani's book has received rave peer reviews. Finally, business professor Dick Van Holland was named Iowa's Outstanding Postsecondary Business Educator for 1995. Dr. Van Holland consistently receives superb ratings from students for his teaching and twice has been named Northwestern College's Teacher of the Year.

During this past year Northwestern College was reviewed for continued North Central Association accreditation. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Cited were “clear consensus on the mission of the college” and “exceptional progress in increased enrollment, expanded endowment, improved facilities, and strengthened financial resources.” In addition, the accreditation team lauded “a dedicated, caring, faculty,” an unusual percentage of whom possessed terminal degrees, and “effective administrative leadership.” Also singled out for special commendation was the “distribution, quality, accessibility, and service of computer technologies.” Finally, the accreditation team noted the exceptional quality of the “town/gown” relationship and the participation of alumni in supporting the college.

Concerns that were mentioned by the accreditation team included the necessity of developing a systematic plan for enrollment and retention patterns and a plan to ensure that information derived from the assessment program would be used to improve curriculum and pedagogy. Also of concern was the increasing percentage of the budget allocated for student financial aid at the expense of the instructional budget and the relatively small college endowment.

COCURRICULUM

Northwestern College continues to enjoy a strong cocurricular program. Once again, students from Northwestern’s nationally reputable theatre program were selected for the American College Theatre Festival’s Irene Ryan Acting Competition in St. Louis, Missouri. For the fourth time in five years the volleyball team competed in the national tournament, this time in San Diego, California. There were numerous All-Americans and Academic All-
Americans in the intercollegiate athletic program, which now offers ten sports for men and nine sports for women. Newest of these opportunities are the soccer teams for both men and women, which competed for the first time at the intercollegiate level.

SPIRITUAL LIFE

The spiritual dimension at Northwestern College continues to be an integral part of the college. A very vibrant daily chapel program regularly involves campus community personnel as well as special guests. The highly visible Student Ministries program continues to be a popular and meaningful activity for approximately half of the students, who serve on campus, in the community, around the U.S., and, indeed, throughout the world. The college remains proud of this voluntary service and witness program.

For the fifth consecutive year Northwestern College was designated a “character-building” college by the John Templeton Foundation. Northwestern College is one of only two colleges in Iowa, North and South Dakota, and Nebraska to be so designated. Spiritual and moral development was documented at Northwestern College through the use of an instrument developed in a national Lilly-funded study conducted by the SEARCH Institute. Between the freshman and junior years the number of students exhibiting mature faith grew to a figure exceeding three times the national average for their age group. This research gives confidence that the path chosen at Northwestern College is fruitful; it also provides a challenge to do better the work already begun.

CAPITAL CAMPAIGN

The college capital campaign is drawing to a close. Since Synod last met on the Northwestern College campus in 1990, there has been a major renovation of the main academic building, a cafeteria expansion, and the construction of a new center for health, physical education, and intercollegiate athletics. Construction of a new residence hall and the restoration of historic Zwemer Hall are currently in progress.

When this capital campaign is completed at the close of this fiscal year, the total amount committed in pledges and cash gifts will exceed $20 million. This is a major achievement for the college, considering the fact that an additional $6 million was raised for the annual operating fund during this corresponding five-year period. Being good stewards of the money given to the college is extremely important. For the tenth consecutive year college revenues exceeded expenditures.

ENROLLMENT

Enrollment this past year was at a record high of 1,198 students, straining the college's physical plant. This represents a 44 percent increase in recent years. The rather unprecedented interest in the college during the last several years prompted the construction of the new residence hall. This was not part of the capital plan identified above. For the present, it is likely that enrollment will plateau at approximately 1,200 students—the size where the college functions most effectively and efficiently.

Given the demographics for this part of the U.S., it is likely that securing a full enrollment of capable students will always be a challenge. Currently 35 percent of Northwestern’s student body comes from the Reformed Church in America. This percentage has remained relatively constant during the past decade.
RESIDENCE LIFE

In the area of residence life, Northwestern College continues to be a beacon. Although certainly not perfect, the college strives diligently to maintain a wholesome residence life experience for students. Since Northwestern College is essentially a residential campus, this is an important effort. Unlike many institutions, Northwestern College continues to confront students (with compassion) when behavior is not in accord with college expectations.

CONCLUSION

On a more personal note, I would like to thank the denomination for uplifting Northwestern College in your prayers, entrusting to us your sons and daughters, and supporting us with your financial resources. The college is very grateful for this. As president, I am blessed with a very competent and loyal administrative team. In addition, the faculty and staff are both talented and dedicated. Most of all, however, I rejoice for the young women and men who bring to the college such wonderful talents to be nurtured and shared. For the privilege and joy of being president at Northwestern College, I often give thanks.

Report of Reformed Church Women's Ministries

In 1995 Reformed Church Women’s Ministries (RCWM) continued its long tradition of service, education, and mission support. The most visible reflection of these three prongs was the 1995 Triennial in Saratoga Springs, New York, which brought together twelve hundred people for spiritual renewal. During the Triennial the long-awaited volume on women in the RCA was released: Hands, Hearts, and Voices, by Una Ratmeyer. This volume sold over seven hundred copies at Triennial alone; total sales now exceed twelve hundred.

RCWM and Stewardship and Communication Services also produced Herstory, an eight-minute video on women in the RCA, which also premiered at the 1995 Triennial. This resource chronicles RCWM’s history, beginning with its early commitment to mission support, and concludes with a vision for the future of women’s ministries.

MAINTAINING AND CHANGING

Some long-standing RCWM programs received a face-lift in 1995. The leadership of RCWM examined all aspects of its programs to determine if the programs were still valid. While the answer came back a resounding yes, RCWM also felt it was time to make some changes. The Baby Roll program, which supports Southern Normal School, has been renamed Children in Covenant. The Mission Service Fund, a three-year fund-raising effort for a designated RCA mission project, has been renamed the RCWMission Commitment.

Directions, the RCWM newsletter sent to eighteen thousand women in the denomination, continues to inform and connect the members of RCWM. The publication is sent as a benefit of membership to dues-paying members of RCWM.
STRUCTURE

RCWM has struggled for years with its role in relationship to the Reformed Church in America, with the changing needs of its members, and with its financing. In order to serve and to include all the women of the denomination in its ministry, it may be time for RCWM to come fully under the umbrella of the denomination.

As a result of the RCA’s most recent restructure in July 1993, while RCWM maintained its financial independence and continued with its own set of bylaws, in most other ways RCWM became more accountable to the denomination. RCWM is functionally a full participating member of the General Synod Council’s Congregational Services Committee/Unit; it is serviced by the RCA’s Office of Finance and is charged for those services like any other GSC Committee/unit; and RCWM follows the majority of the RCA’s procedures and practices.

For many in the RCA, RCWM is considered the place to come for answers regarding any facet of women’s ministries, including information on women’s ordination or funding for any project that involves women. Although there is contact and cooperation between RCWM and the Commission for Women, there has never been a clear distinction or a clear division of tasks. Some of RCWM’s work overlaps while other tasks remain undone.

Increasingly RCWM is funded by, and therefore serves, a dwindling population of women. Yet RCWM continues to engage in a host of ministries that directly benefit the entire denomination: the RCW Mission Commitment, the Children in Covenant program, and the P.S. I Love You program, all of which support RCA mission; assistance with the production of an annual Bible study, in addition to other resources; and the Footsteps program, which sends women on short-term mission assignments. But unlike other RCA program units, RCWM must raise all of its own support, both for programs and for its staff and office costs.

Financial problems continue to drain the ministry. Women’s groups continue to support RCWM and the RCA and its programs, but RCWM income was down in 1995. The organization ended 1995 with an $8,000 deficit, even though expenses were less than they were in 1994. Although traditionally mission support is high, the Mission Service Fund, a commitment to raise $500,000 for indigenous peoples of the Americas, concluded in 1995 having raised only $357,400.

The women of the RCA have been generous to RCWM and to its many programs, but the burden of this responsibility grows ever greater. Eventually, there will be key losses to the women’s ministry programs essential to the work of the whole church.

For these reasons, RCWM recommended:

R-1. To instruct the General Synod Council, in consultation with the Reformed Church Women’s Ministries (RCWM) Executive Council, the general secretary, the director of Policy, Planning, and Administration Services, and the director of Congregational Services, to convene a task force of nine members, to include representatives from RCWM, the Commission for Women, and the General Synod Council’s Congregational Services Committee/Unit, to investigate the implications of bringing RCWM fully under the structure of the denomination, for report to the board of RCWM and to the 1997 General Synod.
Upon a motion from the floor to amend R-1, Synod

VOTED: To instruct the moderator of the General Synod Council, in consultation with the Reformed Church Women’s Ministries (RCWM) Executive Council, the general secretary, the director of Policy, Planning, and Administration Services, and the director of Congregational Services, to convene a task force of nine members, to include representatives from RCWM, the Commission for Women, and the General Synod Council’s Congregational Services Committee/Unit, to investigate the implications of bringing RCWM fully under the structure of the denomination, for report to the board of RCWM and to the 1997 General Synod Council.*

(This vote had a cost effect on the 1997 General Synod Operational Budget. See Report of the Committee of Reference, p. 428.)

(The advisory committee recommended the adoption of R-1.)

Report of the General Synod Council’s Congregational Services Committee

REPORT OF THE OFFICE FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AND YOUTH MINISTRY

Vanishing Boundaries.
Managing at the Speed of Change.
Congregational Megatrends.
Evangelism in a Changing World.

The recommended reading list for the 90s speaks one theme loud and clear: our world is changing, rapidly, before our very eyes, whether we want it to or not; whether we like the changes or not. We live in a world where change that once took a generation or more can, and often does, happen almost overnight; where children are compelled to grow up faster and faster all the time; where youth and young adults, caught in this maelstrom of change, all too often decide to give up before they even start.

The enterprise of Christian religious education is by no means exempt from this surging river of change around us; in fact, it often finds itself squarely in the strongest current. In a North American context that increasingly is being seen more as a mission field, the whole educational enterprise in the church must be asking how it approaches its craft in a changing world: how it continues to tell the story of faith both to those who have heard it all their lives but also, increasingly, to those who have never heard it; how it engages the church’s youth amidst a cacophony of competing voices; how to provide for our children the highest level of curriculum materials in an age of constricting budgets; and perhaps most importantly, how best to provide the members of the Reformed Church in America with the resources they need in this changing world to identify their own gifts in ministry and thus carry out the mission and work of Jesus Christ.

*Addition is in light-face type.
Listen, for example, to the observations of C. Jeff Woods. In an interview about his book, *Congregational Megatrends*, released in February 1996 by the Alban Institute, Woods chronicles the change from what he calls “tribal education” to what he calls “immigrant education,” and the profound ramifications that will have on the church:

Many people in the pews do not realize how diverse (North) America has become, and thus, how diverse their local communities have become. Due to the potential diversity among people joining a local church, congregations need to presume no previous Christian knowledge on the part of the new member. Many parishioners still expect new members to possess a working knowledge of their denomination, their church history, their distinctive, and their doctrine. The fact is, more and more people are joining congregations with little or no previous denominational or scriptural knowledge. Congregations with successful programs have begun to treat newcomers like immigrants rather than as members of their particular denominational “tribe” who have just reached the required age for initiation (Interview with C. Jeff Woods published in *Inside Information*, Alban Institute, Winter 1996, p. 4).

“Woods’ assessment of the place of the church in a changing society places Christian education in the middle of any formula which seeks the growth and revitalization of the church. The Reformed Church in America has long valued the role of education in the church; in a changing world, it is increasingly apparent that such a value must continue to be prominently held.

**Staffing**

Change isn’t always a matter of philosophy or program; sometimes it is also the very public matter of people. On June 17, 1995, the Rev. Kenneth R. Bradsell formally began a time of sabbatical, vacation, and transition to his new responsibilities as director of Policy, Planning, and Administration Services for the Reformed Church in America. Bradsell had served as the RCA’s minister for education and faith development for nearly eleven years; in fact, he is the only person to have served in this position since the education office was revived and reconfigured in 1984. During that time, Bradsell had helped the office make great strides in ministry for Christian education, but especially in the areas of curriculum development, resource availability, and training for leadership.

Ella Campbell, secretary for the Council for Pacific and Asian American Ministries, was appointed to serve, beginning in June 1996, as interim director of Congregational Services, another of Bradsell’s responsibilities, but not as interim minister for education and faith development. Thus, the Office of Christian Education and Youth Ministry was vacant for more than six months. The Rev. Jeffrey Japinga, appointed to the position by the General Synod Council in October 1995, began his duties as director of Congregational Services and minister for education and faith development on January 1, 1996.

While the vacancy in the denomination’s education office had an impact on what ministry could be done, especially in the development of new initiatives and the response to General Synod actions, other staff issues were similarly important to the work of education in the RCA. Bradsell’s departure also meant that some ongoing uncertainty surrounding the staffing of youth ministry would remain largely unresolved; positively, however, it also meant that the Youth Ministry Team would be reformed as a means for a denominational focus on youth ministry to continue. A new member of the staff, the Rev. Tom Schwanda, was hired on a contract basis to provide twenty days of leadership work in family ministry and another five to seven days in spiritual formation, as a small but positive first step in response to previous General Synod calls to provide assistance to the church in these important ministry areas. Willa Brown continued to provide excellent leadership in children’s ministry; similarly, the Rev. John Paarlberg continued to provide leadership in
both social witness and worship; and Betty Voskuil staffed a rapidly expanding program for deacon’s ministries and hunger education. Suzanne Ellis, administrative assistant for the Office of Christian Education and Youth Ministry, provided the stability and skills necessary for that office to continue to function during this interim period.

It takes the right people to make any endeavor work. But the endeavor itself must also be worthwhile, and the means to accomplish it of the highest quality. Here are some of the highlights of the program work of the Office of Christian Education and Youth Ministry for the program year 1995-96.

Children’s Curriculum

LiFE (Living in Faith Everyday), the Bible-based curriculum for children in preschool through sixth grade jointly developed by the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC) and the Reformed Church in America, continues to be well received by RCA congregations. Feedback from LiFE users has been very positive in both the content of the curriculum and its usability for teachers. Introduced in the fall of 1994 after five years of designing, writing, and editing, LiFE has quickly become the core children’s Christian education curriculum in more than a third of all RCA churches. LiFE will complete its first two-year cycle of materials in the summer of 1996; year one materials will be available again for use in fall 1996.

During this first cycle, the feedback collected from users has also been used to plan for a quarter-by-quarter revision of the curriculum beginning in 1997. The revised LiFE curriculum will be ready for fall 1998. In light of the plans for the revised LiFE curriculum, the education office is advising congregations to order conservatively for the next two program years.

A network of thirty-one regional consultants, working under the direction of the regional synod education staff with the support of the office of education, provide direct support and training for RCA congregations using LiFE. These consultants are available for a very minimal cost to lead continuing education events for teachers, provide training, or consult with churches on the development of sound educational programs for children.

The introduction of LiFE does not mean the RCA’s commitment to the Bible Way curriculum has ended. On the contrary, Bible Way continues to be available and will remain available as long as there are a sufficient number of churches using it to warrant its printing. Although the introduction of LiFE has resulted in a declining number of Bible Way users, about one-fourth of RCA congregations still use Bible Way on Sunday mornings or in midweek programs. Since many congregations continue to offer both Sunday church school and a separate catechism program for children, the availability of two core curricula that are grounded both in Scripture and in the Reformed creeds and confessions is a valuable asset to the overall education program of local RCA congregations.

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 1995. RCA usage of these two curricula, however, continues to decline. The Office of Christian Education and Youth Ministry continues to be in conversation with a PREM development team looking at the possible creation of a new, Bible-based curriculum for introduction in the year 2000.

In addition to the core curricula, the RCA has participated in the development and publication of the StoryTeller series, a five-day vacation Bible school program published by a partnership of several denominations. “Along the Road with Jesus” was introduced in 1995 with very strong affirmation from congregations which used it. “God’s Brave People,” the newest StoryTeller series, is available for 1996.
The Office for Christian Education and Youth Ministry is committed to strong support for the planners and leaders in congregations who use any of the four core curricula materials (LiFE, Bible Way, Celebrate, and Bible Discovery) or the VBS StoryTeller series 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 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 a toll-free RCA Resources Information Helpline, (800) 968-7221, and through the Children’s Ministry Office, (800) 968-3943.

Children and Worship

In addition to providing core curricula for the support of congregational ministries with young children, the Office of Christian Education and Youth Ministry remains deeply committed to the Children and Worship program adopted in 1988 as a cooperative ministry of Western Theological Seminary, the Reformed Church in America, and the Christian Reformed Church in North America. A new partner, the Presbyterian Church in Canada, was added to the program in 1995. Children and Worship continues to be one of the great success stories of children's ministries in any form.

At the beginning of 1995 the education offices of the sponsoring partner denominations implemented several revisions in the training and support system put in place in 1988. A management team made up of representatives from the Reformed Church in America, the Christian Reformed Church in North America, and the Presbyterian Church of Canada now oversees the program. The three denominations jointly support a network of twenty regional Children and Worship trainers in the U.S. and Canada. The trainers are responsible for scheduling and presenting either introductory sessions for congregations who want to learn more about the program or 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 enrichment events or specialized events for congregations that have been involved in the program for a number of years. The basic training costs $75 per participant. The cost for introductions, enrichment events, or specialized events is keyed to the nature of the event. These fees are used to offset the contract costs of the trainers and to enable the denominations to offer an annual conference and retooling event for trainers.

This year’s annual Children and Worship Conference for trainers is tentatively scheduled for October 1996 in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The conference will include a continuing education event for Children and Worship leaders in congregations.

Children and Worship trainers who work on behalf of the Reformed Church in America, the Christian Reformed Church in North America, and the Presbyterian Church in Canada are Barbara Cullum, Jan Hoffman, and Phyllis Palsma (Regional Synod of Albany); Dorothy Henderson, Yvonne Hogenes, Wendy Pauw, Marie Prins, Linda Shaw, and Anelia Wierbos (Regional Synod of Canada); Ann Jean Vander Veen (Regional Synod of the Far West); Susan Langeland, Holly Schut, and Ellen Vellenga (Regional Synod of the Great Lakes); Cheryl Newendorp, Helene Vander Werff, and Connie Vos (Regional Synod of the Heartland); Dot De Boer and Karen Stabelfeldt (Regional Synod of Mid-America); Ray Weeks (Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics); and Betsy Tamlyn (Regional Synod of New York).

It is important to be aware of the fact that other persons are offering 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; others are not. Some of these other programs, however, do differ significantly from the Children and Worship
model, 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 Children’s Ministry, (800) 968-3943, or the RCA’s Resource Information Helpline, (800) 968-7221, for information about localized training and personnel available to support the Children and Worship program.

During July 1995, in response to an invitation from the General Synodical Commission for Christian Education (GSCC) of the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa (URCSA), the RCA sent Sonja Stewart, professor of Christian education at Western Theological Seminary, and Rebecca Mead, Children and Worship trainer, to South Africa to introduce the Children and Worship program to local church leaders from the URCSA. Training workshops were held in Gauteng (Transvaal) and in the Western Cape Province. By fall 1995 the Children and Worship program was being used in 240 URCSA congregations. In addition to the transportation costs, the RCA, with the help of generous gifts from numerous churches and individuals, provided all the resources for two Children and Worship centers. The URCSA paid the costs of training and expenses within South Africa. The Office for Christian Education and Youth Ministry contracted Debra Schout, a student at Western Theological Seminary, to gather or make the resources for the two centers.

Youth and Young Adult Ministries

The availability of Christian education curriculum for youth is no less important than it is for younger children. The RCA continues to support the development and use of core learning resources for youth in cooperation with three North American denominations: the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, and the Presbyterian Church of Canada. Youth Action curriculum, released in 1994, features broadly graded resources both for younger youth (grades 6-8) and older youth (grades 9-12). The program includes four-to six-week courses focused on the Bible, church history, social action, and building/sustaining community. The RCA also continues to benefit from its cooperation with CRC Publications and the education department of the Christian Reformed Church. Here again, cooperative agreements make available a full range of learning materials for younger youth and a variety of course offerings for middle and older youth. All of these materials, as well as a range of others from various sources and publishers, are described more completely in the annual RCA Resources for Ministry catalog.

The key ongoing denomination-wide youth program continues to be Project Timothy, an annual ten-day summer mission event for high school-age youth and adult sponsors. Last year thirty young people from across the Reformed Church worked at five sites in the United States, in projects ranging from teaching Bible school to local children to painting, landscaping, and other essential maintenance work, all of this at places of ministry which simply could not accomplish this work without short-term mission help. The Rev. Randy Wieland of Paramount, California, served on a contract basis in 1995 as coordinator of Project Timothy and is contracted for 1996 in the same capacity. The program has been in existence since the mid-1980s and continues to be a valuable program for deepening the faith of high school-age young people in the RCA.

Staffing for youth and young adult ministry in the RCA continues to be an important topic of consideration. In the fall of 1994, following the departure of the Rev. Keith Krebs from his position as the RCA’s minister for youth and young adults, the General Synod Council approved a revised position description for an associate for youth and young adult ministry and authorized a search process to fill the position. However, 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 seek to define its responsibilities in youth ministry to better complement the work already being carried out in regional synods.
A new staffing plan was to be proposed at a late spring 1995 meeting of a revived denominational youth team, a group composed of representatives from each of the regional synods and the racial/ethnic councils, with the goal of having contracted staff in place by September 1, 1995. Because of the announced departure of the minister for education and faith development, the Rev. Kenneth Bradsell, however, there would be no human resources at the denominational level to implement any new staffing plans. Therefore, staffing issues for youth ministry were put on hold until the new director and the denominational youth team were able to hold discussions about the future directions and priorities of youth ministry in the RCA.

A spring 1996 meeting yielded specific plans and directions for the vital work of youth and young adult ministries in the RCA. It is clear that the denominational youth team, with its diversity along both regional synod and racial/ethnic lines, will play a key role in determining the future of youth ministries at a denominational level. Because of the continuing high level of success in youth ministry programming at the regional level, it will be crucial that the denomination closely coordinate its youth ministry efforts with those already ongoing at different levels of the church, while retaining a strong denominational commitment to youth ministry and to the youth of the Reformed Church in America. A holistic youth ministry program for the RCA is one that is best carried out together rather than exclusively within the bounds either of the denomination or of a regional synod; the Youth Ministry Team will be looked at to provide leadership and guidance in both staffing and program areas.

Family Ministry

Since 1990, at the impetus of a 1990 General Synod recommendation to the then-General Program Council “to develop a plan, including job description and 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 Office of Christian Education and Youth Ministry has sought to find a way to fulfill the General Synod’s intent consciously to do family ministry. As a beginning step, in the spring of 1995, with the encouragement of the GSC Congregational Services Committee, the minister for education and faith development hired the Rev. Thomas Schwanda to give eighteen to twenty days annually to family ministries. Schwanda has spent his initial contract time working to identify the key needs in this area and to begin to gather and identify resources that will be especially beneficial to families. Development of a long-range plan for family ministries in the RCA will also be crucial to accomplish. In April 1996 all RCA congregations were provided with a packet of resources in advance of Family Week, May 5-11, 1996. The focus of this year’s packet was “Strengthening Families for Change,” and it featured a number of resources for use both in the home and in educational settings for individuals and groups to promote ministry among families. The packet also highlighted a portion of the extensive collection of videos on family-related matters available thought TRAVARCA, the RCA’s video lending library.

Adult Education

Last year, in response to the report of RCA general secretary, the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, the General Synod approved a recommendation “to instruct the General Synod Council’s 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” (MGS 1995, P-3, p. 41 and MGS 1995, R-5, p. 136). The recommendation came out of Granberg-Michaelson’s own commitment that the church must increasingly look at fresh new ways to identify and utilize the gifts of the laity in ministry or risk a faith where “our faith atrophies and stops growing, [and] the waters of our baptism become stagnant” (MGS 1995, p. 41).
The first part of the recommendation, "to expand programs for equipping the laity," piggybacks on General Synod initiatives begun especially in the report of General Synod president Beth Marcus in 1993 (MGS 1993, pp. 30-5). A number of responses in this area of ministry have been ongoing or initiated as a result of the above recommendation, adopted by the 1995 General Synod. Those responses include new programs for deacons and elders, expanded social witness initiatives, and leadership training and education.

The other part of the recommendation, "to give a new central emphasis to adult Christian education," taps into an urgent and multi-faceted issue. To say that the RCA has not been involved in adult education would be to ignore the literally hundreds of educational resources for adults offered in the RCA Resources for Ministry catalog and in TRAVARCA. Some of these resources have been uniquely developed for the Reformed Church in America to address its own needs and educational opportunities; many others have been developed by other denominations or by other religious groups and made available to RCA congregations through partnerships in which the RCA is engaged. And new resources are being added annually. A group of adults who wish to broaden their faith through guided study could literally spend decades going through all the books and guides offered by the RCA.

During the past year, for example, the RCA continued its 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). For 1996-97 the program will include courses on the problem of evil, prayer, vocation, and evangelism, as well as both Old and New Testament Bible studies. The Rev. Dr. George Brown, professor of Christian education at Western Theological Seminary, serves as the RCA liaison to the Adult Foundational Curriculum development board. In cooperation with these same partners, an adult Bible Discovery series based on the International Bible Lessons for Christian Teaching (the Uniform Series) is also available. All of these programs are available through the RCA Distribution Center and are described more thoroughly in the RCA Resources for Ministry catalog.

A second, broad range of study resources for adults is available through cooperative agreements with the Christian Reformed Church, through Friendship Press (of the National Council of Churches of Christ) and through resource development within the RCA. These resources are all listed in the RCA Resources for Ministry catalog, available from the RCA Distribution Center. Among these are new resources developed with the CRC in the area of spiritual formation, including a study book by the Rev. Tom Schwanda, RCA associate for family ministry.

But the issue of adult education cannot be addressed simply by putting study materials on a shelf and urging adult study classes to use them. A philosophy of and commitment to adult education goes to the very core of one’s understanding of Christian commitment. Yet, despite widespread verbal affirmation of the importance of a faith that is knowledgeable and growing, education at the adult level is most often done haphazardly and is least often supported by the members. Less than one-third of all adult members of RCA churches participate in ongoing learning experiences in the church. The Office of Christian Education and Youth Ministry believes that a vibrant program of adult education, faith development, and spiritual formation is not only important for individuals but can be transformative for a local church. According to an oft-quoted and highly respected study from the Search Institute, a commitment to lifelong learning among members of the local church may be the key ingredient to the revitalization of the Christian church in the coming century. In March 1996 the Council for Christian Education of the Reformed Church (see Leader Support Section following for a discussion of CCE) eagerly embraced an invitation and challenge from the minister for education and faith development to begin an in-depth look at the philosophy of adult education in the Reformed Church and to make recommendations for
how the RCA can move to the cutting edge of adult education and possibly to the cutting edge of church revitalization. There is a solid base on which to build the future of adult education in this church and a growing energy, both at the denominational level and in the pew, to raise the commitment to this vital learning opportunity.

Leader Support for Education

Providing for the education ministries of the church means more than just the production and distribution of resources. It also means assisting in the identification of persons gifted to serve in the ministry of education, and then providing the training and leadership resources that allow those gifts to grow, blossom, and be appreciated in the church.

During the past program year (July 1995-June 1996) the Office of Christian Education and Youth Ministry produced three packets of resources to support congregational ministries: Christian Education Sunday resources for congregations using LiFE curriculum, a 1995 Advent/Christmas/Epiphany packet, and a 1996 Lent/Easter/Pentecost packet. This past year's Advent packet also contained additional worship resources, which, according to the evaluation of the packet, was a much-appreciated resource. Those same three resources are planned for the 1996-97 program year; the Christian Education Sunday packet will be mailed in July 1996, the Advent/Christmas/Epiphany packet in October 1996, and the Lent/Easter/Pentecost packet in January 1997. As always, the Office of Christian Education and Youth Ministry welcomes input on needs for the celebration of these Christian seasons.

The Office of Christian Education and Youth Ministry supports the publication of the RCA leadership resource, Servant Leaders, both financially and editorially, and continues to make use of the periodic mailing, reSOURCES. It also makes available low-cost subscriptions to Alert, a magazine for leaders and planners produced by the PREM partnership specifically to support Celebrate and Bible Discovery. The quarterly journal, however, is a valuable resource for educators regardless of the curriculum a congregation uses. It is available from the Office of Christian Education and Youth Ministry for a nominal annual subscription rate of $8.

New working agreements between the denomination's Office of Christian Education and Youth Ministry and a majority of regional synods were put in place last year that will continue to expand the number of trained consultants available to support training and consultation services in education for all local RCA congregations. One mark of that new working partnership was the first ever (and planned to be annual) RCA Christian Education Consultant Equipping Conference, held July 28-30, 1995, in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Thirty-six regional synod and racial/ethnic council education personnel, together with the staff from the RCA education office, participated in the two-and-a-half days of workshops, training, and information-gathering under the theme, "Circles of Community, the Larger World, and Ourselves." Four workshops presented were: "LiFE Leader Training," led by Colleen Aalsburg Wiessner, associate for Christian nurture for the Synod of the Mid-Atlantic, and Willa Brown, RCA associate for children's ministry; "Creative Learning and Teaching Activities," led by Debra Schout, student at Western Theological Seminary; "Curriculum Evaluation," led by the Rev. Dr. George Brown, professor of education at Western Seminary; and "Classroom Management," led by Marcia Floding, Christian education consultant for the Regional Synod of the Heartland. Worship each day; presentations and discussions around the ideas of basic consulting information, frequently asked consulting questions, taking care of ourselves and others, and priority issues in Christian education; an orientation to the resources of TRAVARCA and the RCA Distribution Center; and presentations about resources available from the RCA were all part of the event. One of the unique experiences of the weekend was having all worship, sharing times, and two workshops translated into Spanish for one of the consultants who speaks only Spanish. In the future she and other Hispanic persons, in cooperation with the Regional Synod of the
Mid-Atlantics, plan to offer a mini-conference in Spanish to Hispanic congregations in the regional synods of the Mid-Atlantics and New York. Plans are already set for the 1996 Christian Education Consultant Equipping Conference, scheduled for August 2-4, 1996, at Western Theological Seminary.

The conference was planned by the Council for Christian Education (CCE), a collaborative constituent team representing the regional synods, racial/ethnic councils, and denominational education staff. The council meets three times annually, paid for with a shared funding agreement, and operates under the umbrella of a document approved last year outlining eight assumptions about the joint work of the denominational education office and regional synod education personnel. CCE will play a central role in the future development of RCA educational philosophy and in the development or evaluation of educational resources. CCE embodies a commitment to the idea that Christian education can be done best and most efficiently when it is done on a collaborative basis and with the local congregation in mind.

While structurally housed in Policy, Planning, and Administration Services, and functionally the responsibility of classes, the newly introduced certification process for associates in ministry and ministers of Christian education is wholly supported by the denomination’s Office of Christian Education and Youth Ministry. It will encourage all those who are actively involved in Christian education in the Reformed Church to take advantage of this tremendous opportunity and will promote the program in a variety of settings.

Referrals

The 1995 General Synod, acting on the report of the general secretary, voted:

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 (MGS 1995, R-5, p. 136).

The response of the Office of Christian Education and Youth Ministry is largely spelled out in the previous section of this report under adult education. It is also important to note that the 1997 proposed budget for Congregational Services contains new programming dollars both for adult education and for spiritual formation. As a sign of their commitment to meeting this General Synod mandate, Congregational Services staff have committed themselves to seeking new and creative ways to raise these dollars, since all programming in education is funded through sources outside of assessments (and largely, through the benevolent giving of churches and individuals).

The 1995 General Synod voted:

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 (MGS 1995, R-16, p. 102).

Due to the vacancy in the Office of Christian Education and Youth Ministry, work on this item was not able to begin until a new director could assess means by which this recommendation could be accomplished. With the new director now on board, this item can be addressed, with a fuller report to the 1997 General Synod.
The 1994 General Synod instructed the Commission on Theology to develop resources to guide the church in a process of repentance, prayer, learning, and growth in ministry around the issue of homosexuality. In response, the commission presented a prospectus outline to the 1995 General Synod (MGS 1995, pp. 381-88). The 1995 General Synod adopted the following:

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 1995, p. 388).

Again, the vacancy in the Office of Christian Education and Youth Ministry delayed initial action on this recommendation until the new minister for education was in place. On February 1, 1996, a working group was brought together by the minister for education and faith development in Grand Rapids, Michigan, to study the referral and work on plans for its implementation. That group included the Rev. Kenneth Korver, the Rev. Richard Bennink (unable to be present for the meeting), the Rev. Diane Maodush-Pitzer, Dr. David Timmer, and Mignon Zylstra. By the end of its meeting the group had developed an outline for a three-tiered model of resources, including the development of a study guide that will follow the content of a section of the prospectus presented to the 1995 General Synod (MGS 1995, pp. 381-88); the recommendation of additional study materials addressing the scriptural and pastoral questions surrounding this issue, in keeping with the previous statements and actions of the General Synod; and an annotated bibliography of outside resources which move beyond the current statements of the General Synod, which could be used for additional study and reflection on this issue. The working group also recommended the development of a video resource unique to the RCA, to be used alongside the first tier of written resources, pending the identification of possible funding sources for this video. This educational plan was presented on February 2, 1996, to the Commission on Theology by the minister for education and faith development. The commission in general affirmed that the direction of the working group was in keeping with its prospectus, while making some additional helpful suggestions. Work will be ongoing on this project throughout 1996, with the first materials available for use in the church by early 1997.

(A motion was made and supported “to instruct the working group not to produce an annotated bibliography of outside resources which move beyond the 1978, 1979, 1990, 1994, and 1995 statements of General Synod on homosexuality.” The motion LOST.)

The 1995 General Synod voted:

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 (MGS 1995, R-12, p. 96).

The associate for children’s ministries initiated a conversation with CRC Publications in the fall of 1995 to discuss the possible translation of LiFE curriculum from English into Spanish. At that time CRC Publications reported that there were no plans or initiatives for such a translation. The secretary for Hispanic ministries and the RCA Distribution Center publisher and distributor met with the GSC Congregational Services Committee in October 1995 to discuss possible options. By consensus, the committee agreed to explore only the feasibility of translating the leaders’ guides of the LiFE curriculum rather than the entire curriculum. Subsequently, the GSC instructed Willa Brown, associate for children’s ministries, and Kim Baker, RCA Distribution Center publisher and distributor, to study this option and report back to the March 1996 GSC meeting.
Based on those conversations regarding usage and viability of the project, a consensus
developed between the Office for Hispanic Ministries, the Office of Christian Education and
Youth Ministry, and the RCA Distribution Center, that a Spanish translation of the LIFE
curriculum or the leaders’ guides is not feasible, practical, and reachable at this time. The
Office for Hispanic Ministries has been encouraged by the education office to review the
curriculum, Aventuras, a broadly graded Spanish-language curriculum for children ages 3-
11. The curriculum is recommended by the Presbyterian and Reformed Educational
Ministry, in which the Reformed Church in America is a partner, and is available through the
RCA Distribution Center. In addition, PREM offers Spanish translations of some adult
resources from the Bible Discovery curriculum.

The 1991 General Synod instructed the Office of Christian Education and Youth Ministry
to develop a study resource (MGS 1991, R-10, pp. 450-51) to accompany a General Synod
paper from the Commission on Theology entitled, “The Role and Authority of Women in
Ministry” (MGS 1991, pp. 435-49). The project underwent a series of false starts in
attempting to produce the required resources. Now, in a cooperative effort between the
Commission for Women, Reformed Church Women’s Ministries (RCWM), and the Office
of Christian Education and Youth Ministry, the minister for education and faith development
has agreed to convene and lead a project team to focus on the development of a video resource
that will link previous General Synod reports on the role of women in the church to current
emphases in both the Commission for Women and in RCWM on the utilization of the gifts
of all members. The resource will be completed and introduced to the church in 1998, to
coincide with the culmination of the Ecumenical Decade for Women.

REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF DIACONAL MINISTRIES

This report is submitted in compliance with the 1993 General Synod, which 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). Progress continues to be made on
implementation of the diaconal ministries program which was approved by the General
Synod Council in October 1993. (See MGS 1995, pp. 128-29 for further details.)

The second annual denominational diaconal ministries gathering was attended by forty-three
delegates and several staff members and guests. A highlight of the weekend was the
introduction of the Deacon’s Notebook, which is now available from the RCA Distribution
Center in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Over three hundred copies have already been distributed
to deacons.

The annual gathering is intended to equip and motivate diaconal delegates from the various
regional synods to serve as leaders in planning for diaconal training in their geographical
areas. With that goal in mind, delegates were updated in one of six diaconal concern areas
(stewardship, education, special individual and family concerns, local and global involvement,
disaster response and volunteer service, hunger and Reformed Church World Service, and
care for creation and simple living). Delegates then had an opportunity to learn more about
the Kalamazoo, Michigan, diaconal model, Consecration Sunday, Tithing Workshop, and
literacy before traveling to the Church of the Good News in Chicago, Illinois, to learn first-
hand of various diaconal ministries which this church is involved in.
A good part of the weekend was devoted to planning for the future by regional synod groups. As a result, training events have been held this past year in the regional synods of the Mid-Atlantics, the Great Lakes, Mid-America, and the Heartland, and the Classis of Ontario.

The 1996 gathering was held in Grand Rapids, Michigan, on April 26-28, and was centered around the theme, “Taking the Towel.” All eight regional synods had delegates present.

The coordinator for diaconal ministries continues to serve as editor of the *Deacon’s Bench*, which is mailed directly to deacons at their homes. The coordinator also contributes articles and information for the “Consistory Corner” in *Servant Leaders*.

The new elders’ booklet, *The Ministry of the Elder: Guiding and Nurturing God’s People*, is now available from the RCA Distribution Center. A consistory workshop model based on the deacon and elder booklets will be published in June 1996.

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From the Report of the General Synod Council’s Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee

**1996-2001 DENOMINATIONAL THEMES**

On October 30, 1989, a group of denominational staff and Reformed Church Women’s Ministries (RCWM) members met to discuss a unified denominational theme. The theme chosen, from Luke 14:23, was “That My House May Be Filled.” This theme began with the RCWM Triennial in July 1992 and was used in the RCA 1993-95.

On January 29-30, 1993, another group of denominational staff and RCWM members met to discuss a unified denominational theme for 1996-98. The theme chosen was “God’s People Transformed,” with the following three subthemes:

- 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

GSC approved the 1996-98 theme at its January 1994 meeting. This theme began with the RCWM Triennial in July 1995 and will be used in the RCA 1996-98.

On December 18-19, 1995, a group of denominational staff and representatives from various RCA groups met to discuss a unified denominational theme for 1999-2001. The theme chosen was “God’s Spirit upon Us,” with the following three subthemes:

- 1999—God’s Spirit upon Us: Proclaiming
- 2000—God’s Spirit upon Us: Celebrating
- 2001—God’s Spirit upon Us: Rebuilding

GSC approved the 1999-2001 theme at its January 1996 meeting. This theme will be introduced at the Reformed Church Women’s Ministries Triennial Assembly in July 1998.
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. Within the past year the commission has met twice, on September 29, 1995, and March 1, 1996, 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-five volumes have appeared since the inception of the series in 1968. One new volume is to be published this year: the second edition of *The Americanization of a Congregation*, by the Rev. Dr. Elton Bruins. This is a classic, now updated, history of Third Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan.

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 Chilapas, Mexico, mission by Dorothy Meyerink; a developing collection of essays by African-Americans in the RCA, to be edited by the Rev. Wilbur Washington; an important survey of the history of the RCA in the nineteenth century, by Dr. Gerald De Jong; and a collection of essays on women in RCA history, edited by the Rev. Renée House and the Rev. Dr. John Coakley.

The commission encourages persons who are contemplating RCA research projects to contact the commission and 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 continues to be concerned about the shortage of storage space and the need for additional staffing in the RCA Archives. The commission is discussing these concerns with the director of Policy, Planning, and Administration Services.

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 RCA’s permanently valuable records. In this context, the archives serves as the memory of the RCA. The archivist serves as the staff for this office and as the steward of the RCA’s documentary heritage.
The archivist also administers the RCA Historical Society, has responsibility for the compilation and updating of the *Digest and Index of the Minutes of the General Synod* and the *Historical Directory of the Reformed Church in America*, offers staff support for the Commission on History, provides assistance to congregations relative to celebration of anniversaries and care and maintenance of their records, and prepares historical background research reports for staff and agencies of the RCA. This year the Historical Society has published issues of *Historical Highlights* and a newsletter about activities in the archives and historical events in the RCA.

As the steward of the RCA’s documentary heritage, the archives accessioned the following records during 1995:

**Denominational Records:**

Board of Foreign Missions, Office of the Executive Secretary. Records of the secretary relating to India and the Middle East. Records include Vellore Christian Medical School, St. Christopher’s Training College in Madras, Kuwait Hospital, NECC, Radio Broadcasting, and Middle East Task Force.

Board of World Missions, Office of the Executive Secretary. Records of the secretary include missionary application files from 1920 to 1960. Other records include the minutes of the Arabian mission from 1962 to 1968 and materials concerning the Kuwait hospital closing in 1963; the RCA mission in the Philippines, India, Hong Kong, and Malaysia; missions with the United Church of Christ and various interboard and interchurch commissions and agencies from 1953 to 1968; and, the records of the committee on church relations and missions (CRAM) from 1965 to 1968.

General Synod, Office of the General Secretary. Records of the general secretary (the Revs. Marion de Velder and Arie Brouwer) from 1965 to 1980. Subject files relating to the work of the regional centers, General Program Council (GPC) members, the San Dimas Noteholders Association; GPC Sunday School Survey results; reports of libel action by Professor A.S. Geyser and the Rev. Beyers Naude against Professor A.D. Pont, in South Africa; records of the General Synod Executive Committee Ad Hoc Committee on Services, Structures, and Funding, from 1990 to 1993; and annual state of religion reports submitted by classes for use by the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson in the general secretary’s report to the General Synod in 1995.

General Program Council, Office of the Secretary for the Americas. Subject files of the secretary for the Americas concerning various RCA mission areas from 1989 to 1993.

General Program Council, Office of the Secretary for Africa and the Middle East. Subject files of the secretary (the Revs. John Buteyn and Warren Henseler) include Arabian mission records and mission work in Africa.

General Program Council, Office of the Secretary for Adult Voluntary Services. Records of the secretary (Charla Ten Clay) from 1987 to 1991 include correspondence with denominational staff, volunteer sites, and volunteers, and office administration records.

General Program Council, Office of the Secretary for Church Planning and Development. Records of the secretary from 1981 to 1987 include correspondence with the particular synods; small church programs; Walrath study; and publications, minutes, and reports of the Division of Church Planning and Development.

Praise and Promise. Records of the project director (Mary Jo Waters) for the Praise and Promise Convocation, July 25-28, 1991, at the University of California at Irvine. Records include planning documents, minutes of planning and publicity committees, registrations, and housing assignments.

General Program Council. Records of various staff from the General Program Council relating to youth ministry, workcamps and caravaning, and lay ministries. The records are from the Office of Family Life (the Rev. Delbert Vander Haar), the Office of Lay Ministries (Patricia Stere), and the Office of Youth Ministries (the Revs. Eugene Durkee and Lynn Joosten).


Beth Marcus. Two papers. A Story of Remembrance, by Dorothy Burt, reflects on thirty-three years of service on the staff of the RCA. Burt began in 1937 as a literature clerk with the Woman’s Board of Foreign Missions and retired in 1970. See How They Run, a play by Joan Drost, is an historical presentation of Reformed Church Women through the years.

Classical Records:


Classis of Florida. Records of the classis from its organization in 1974 through 1991 include minutes, agenda documents, files regarding the organization of the classis, the Southern Strategy Committee, church planning and development, photographs of the classis organization, and files on classis congregations.

Classis of the Palisades. Subscription book with signatures, and form to be subscribed before ordination with signatures (includes Van Bunschoten Bequest and Summary and rules of classis).


Local Church Records:

Bedminster, New Jersey, Bedminster Reformed Church. Records include consistory minutes, 1899-1934; elders’ minutes, 1891-1892; members, 1802-1906; baptisms, 1841-1907, 1913-1919; marriages, 1841-1918; deaths, 1840-1907; Missionary Society minutes, 1823-1837; pew register and account book, 1818-1846; treasurer’s book, 1923-1933.

Brewton, Alabama, Bergen Memorial Church. The congregation was established in 1968 near Southern Normal School and disbanded in 1985. The records include consistory minutes, 1968-1985.

Bronx, New York, Union Church of Highbridge. The Union Reformed Church of Highbridge, Bronx, New York, A History, 1860 to the present [1967], by Charles Andrew Chrastil. 8 pp., typescript.
Chapel Hill, North Carolina, new church start. Records of the new church development effort. The church was started in 1981 by the Classis of Mid-Hudson, and the project was terminated in June 1995.


Detroit, Michigan, Faith Community Church. The congregation was organized in 1946 and disbanded in 1992. The records include consistory minutes, register books, pastoral correspondence, bulletins and newsletters, financial and treasurer’s records, and miscellaneous papers.


Garfield, New Jersey, First Reformed Church. The congregation was established in 1891 and disbanded in 1976. Consistory minutes from 1923 to 1959.

Irvine, California, Parkview Community Church. The congregation (also known as Parkview Reformed and Santa Ana Reformed) was organized in 1948 and disbanded in 1988. The records include the request for organization; consistory minutes, 1948-1962, 1964-1983; and elders’ minutes, 1954-1962.

Marion, New York, First Reformed Church. The congregation was organized in 1870. Records are translated and transcribed in a typescript volume by Harold J. De Brine. The record book includes consistory minutes, 1870-1880; members, 1870-1885; baptisms, 1870-1893; revised membership list, 1893.

Mobile, Alabama, Anchor Christian Church. The Anchor Christian Church was a new church start in 1984, organized in 1989, and disbanded in 1994. Records include consistory minutes; financial records; membership records; and subject files relating to vacation Bible school, advertising, church development, evangelism, and staffing; photograph albums of members and activities, and the guest book.

Orlando, Florida, Sky Lake Park Reformed Church. Worship services were first celebrated in 1968. The congregation was organized in 1971 and disbanded in 1981. Records include the consistory minutes and the membership register, 1968-1981.


Ridgefield, New Jersey, Bergen Boulevard Reformed Church. The congregation was organized in 1926. Consistory minutes from 1943 to 1954.

Waldwick, New Jersey, Waldwick Community Church. The congregation was started in the 1890s as a Baptist mission church and joined the RCA in 1908 as First Reformed Church. It was disbanded in 1983. Records include minutes and papers of the Baptist Mission Association, consistory/elder minutes, and planning documents for church expansion.

Reference and Research

The RCA Archives continues 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 110 genealogical inquiries and 217 other types of informational inquiries. Forty-three researchers visited and made use of the archives on sixty-two separate days. Typical research queries range from preparation of background studies on the RCA and South Africa, to a study of deposed ministers, to providing records for scholars preparing monographs and articles, and to students engaging in primary source research for the first time.

Electronic Archives

The RCA Archives also keeps pace with the changing technology of record production. One classis now regularly submits its annual records (minutes, agendas, correspondence, etc.) in electronic form on floppy disks. The RCA Archives is also involved in preparing electronic records through the imaging of paper records to electronic format. Currently, the records of the Rev. Clifford Case, 1873-1920, are being scanned and stored on magnetic disk while on loan from Case's family. Other records, such as photographs, sermons, news clippings, and correspondence are also being added to the electronic archives on a regular basis.

Other Work of the Archives

The RCA Archives is represented in several professional organizations. In 1995 the archivist completed serving as chair of the Archivists of Religious Collections of the Society of American Archivists and was elected chair of the Archivists of Religious Institutions. The archivist has spoken to several genealogical and archival groups on research and the Dutch in America.

The archivist has also assisted congregations with their records management requirements and offered guidance in the celebration of anniversaries. The RCA Archives Office continues to publish History Helps as a source of information for a congregation's historical-informational needs and to produce research papers and pamphlets on RCA history. The archivist has participated in New Brunswick Theological Seminary's Standing Seminar on RCA History and prepared a paper on women in the Reformed Church in America.

The RCA Archives are stored in three rooms in the Gardner Sage Library of New Brunswick Theological Seminary without charge for space or utilities. The seminary has provided storage space for more than 120 years for the denomination's records. However, that space is now full as the original holdings of 1978 have more than tripled in volume. RCA staff and the General Synod Council (GSC) are studying how to develop additional storage space for
the archives in order to meet the needs of the future. In addition, the archives needs additional staff in order to continue to meet the needs of the denomination and of researchers as the archives and their use continue to grow.

The RCA Archives continues to gather records of RCA staff offices, regional synods, classes, and congregations so that future programs benefit from yesterday’s failures and successes. As the steward of the RCA’s heritage, it is the responsibility of the RCA Archives to assure that tomorrow has a yesterday.

**RCA HISTORY VIDEO AND BOOK**

The 1995 General Synod voted:

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 (MGS 1995, R-1, p. 138).

At its October 1995 meeting GSC authorized the director of Policy, Planning, and Administration Services to appoint a project team for the purpose of developing an RCA history video and RCA history book. GSC also authorized an expense budget of not more than $62,500. Policy, Planning, and Administration Services will capitalize up to $15,000 for the development and production of the RCA history video and study guide (recouping its costs from video sales), and $15,000 will come from special gifts to the RCA history video project. Production of the RCA video will begin only when the financial resources for this project have been identified. The RCA Distribution Center will capitalize $32,500 for the RCA history book.

**NECROLOGY**

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<td>December 6, 1995</td>
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**John Harry Sharpe**

John Harry Sharpe was born at Long Island City, New York, on February 18, 1926. He received his undergraduate education at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1950. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1953.
Sharpe was licensed by the Classis of Westchester in 1953 and ordained by the Classis of Albany the same year. He pastored the following New York congregations: Clarksville and New Salem from 1953 to 1957; Boght, Cohoes from 1957 to 1960; and New Jersey congregations: Keyport from 1960 to 1965; and First, Irvington from 1965 to 1989. He also served as chaplain to the Irvington Home and the police and fire departments in Irvington, New Jersey.


**Harvey B. Hoffman**

Harvey B. Hoffman was born at Overisel, Michigan, on June 11, 1910. He received his undergraduate education at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1932. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1935. He was awarded an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree from Hope College in 1959.

Hoffman was licensed by the Classis of Holland in 1935 and ordained by the Classis of Ulster the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Mount Marion, High Woods, New York, from 1935 to 1937; Old Saratoga and Northumberland, Schuylerville, New York, from 1937 to 1942; First, Hudson, New York, from 1942 to 1945; Second Hackensack, New Jersey, from 1945 to 1960; Greenville, Scarsdale, New York, from 1960 to 1968; Harrington Park, New Jersey, from 1968 to 1972; and Middle Collegiate, New York, New York, from 1973 to 1981. He also served as chaplain for the Swedish American Lines from 1972 to 1973.

Hoffman died in Naples, Florida, on October 18, 1995.

**M. Paul Vander Woude**

M. Paul Vander Woude was born at Oak Harbor, Washington, on January 12, 1930. He began his undergraduate education at Northwestern Junior College, from which he graduated in 1950. He completed his undergraduate education at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1952. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1955.

Vander Woude was licensed by the Classis of Minnesota in 1955 and ordained by the Classis of Cascades the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Faith, Lynden, Washington, from 1955 to 1960; Hope, Vancouver, British Columbia, from 1960 to 1963; Emmanuel, Springfield, South Dakota, from 1963 to 1967; American, Hull, Iowa, from 1967 to 1977; and Hollandale, Minnesota, from 1977 until his retirement in 1992.

Vander Woude died in Albert Lea, Minnesota, on November 1, 1995.

**John R. Kempers**

John R. Kempers was born at Sioux Center, Iowa, on February 19, 1900. He received his undergraduate education at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1921. His theological education was received at Princeton Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1925. He also received an M.A. degree from Princeton University in 1925 and was awarded an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree from Hope College in 1949.

Kempers was licensed and ordained by the Classis of West Sioux in 1925. He entered into missionary service and started the Chiapas, Mexico, mission work. He served in the Chiapas mission from 1925 to 1969. During his missionary service he was a professor at the Presbyterian Theological Seminary of Mexico from 1965 until his retirement in 1969.

Kempers died in Holland, Michigan, on November 27, 1995.
Henry E. Franken

Henry E. Franken was born at Sioux Center, Iowa, on November 18, 1899. He began his undergraduate education at Hope College, which he attended from 1924 to 1926. He completed his undergraduate education at Central College, from which he graduated in 1928. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1930.

Franken was licensed by the Classis of West Sioux in 1930 and ordained by the Classis of Pella the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Eddyville, Iowa, from 1930 to 1935; Fairview, South Dakota, from 1935 to 1937; Aurora Center, Stickney, South Dakota, from 1938 to 1948; Garden Home, Denver, Colorado, from 1948 to 1953; First, Winnipeg, Manitoba, from 1953 to 1961; and Bethel, Abbotsford, British Columbia, from 1961 to 1964. He also served as chaplain in the United States Army from 1943 to 1946 and as manager of Kirkside, Roxbury, New York, from 1964 until his retirement in 1966.

Franken died in Pella, Iowa, on December 6, 1995.

Albert De Voogd, Jr.

Albert De Voogd, Jr., was born at Grand Rapids, Michigan, on July 23, 1922. He received his undergraduate education at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1947. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1950. He also studied at Hartford Theological Seminary from 1962 to 1963. He undertook additional graduate studies and received a master's degree from the University of Detroit in 1970. He also continued his graduate theological education at Western Theological Seminary and received a Th.M. degree in 1977 and a D.Min. degree in 1982.

De Voogd was licensed by the Classis of Holland in 1950 and ordained by the Classis of Muskegon the same year. He pastored the following Michigan congregations: Faith, Traverse City, from 1950 to 1952; and Calvin, Cutlerville, from 1965 to 1969. De Voogd served as a missionary in Chiapas, Mexico, from 1953 to 1964. He also served in specialized ministry as a marriage counselor in Grand Rapids, Michigan, from 1969 to 1992.

De Voogd died in Kentwood, Michigan, on December 10, 1995.

Glenn Weeks Young

Glenn Weeks Young was born at Portland, Oregon, on February 28, 1915. He received his undergraduate education at Syracuse University, from which he graduated in 1937. His theological education was received at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, from which he graduated in 1940. He was awarded an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree from Pacific University in 1963.

Young was licensed and ordained by the Classis of Ulster in 1940. He pastored the following congregations: Jay Gould Memorial, Roxbury, New York, from 1940 to 1945; First, Hackensack, New Jersey, from 1945 to 1957; United Church of Christ, Upper Montclair, New Jersey, from 1957 to 1970; and United Church of Christ, Hackensack, New Jersey, from 1970 to 1981. His membership in the Reformed Church in America was retained during his service in the two United Church of Christ pastorates.

Young died in Kingston, New York, on December 24, 1995.
Ralph S. Meyer

Ralph S. Meyer was born at Aplington, Iowa, on February 10, 1926. He received his undergraduate education at Central College, from which he graduated in 1950. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1953.

Meyer was licensed and ordained by the Classis of Pleasant Prairie in 1953. He pastored the following congregations: Bethany, Belmond, Iowa, from 1953 to 1957; Alton, Iowa, from 1958 to 1964; First, Colton, South Dakota, from 1965 to 1969; and Newton Zion, Erie, Illinois, from 1969 to 1972.

Meyer died in Erie, Illinois, on January 5, 1996.

Laverne John Vander Hill

Laverne John Vander Hill was born at Holland, Michigan, on July 7, 1907. He received his undergraduate education at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1929. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1933.

Vander Hill was licensed by the Classis of New Brunswick in 1933 and ordained by the Classis of Paramus the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Clarkstown, West Nyack, New York, from 1933 to 1941; Suydam Street, New Brunswick, New Jersey, from 1941 to 1946; Queens, Queens Village, New York, from 1946 to 1962 and from 1966 to 1972. He served as the director of the Warwick Conference Center, Warwick, New York, from 1962 to 1966.

Vander Hill died in Waverly, Ohio, on February 9, 1996.

Henry R. Nyhoff

Henry R. Nyhoff was born at Sioux Center, Iowa, on June 18, 1906. He received his undergraduate education at Central College, from which he graduated in 1929. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1932.

Nyhoff was licensed by the Classis of East Sioux in 1932 and ordained by the Classis of Dakota in 1933. He pastored the following congregations: North Marion and Litchville, North Dakota, from 1932 to 1939; Fairview, South Dakota, from 1952 to 1958; Dempster, South Dakota, from 1958 to 1964; and Antelope Valley, Marietta, Minnesota, from 1967 to 1971. He served as a regional missionary for the Classis of Dakota from 1939 to 1952, and as stated supply of the Antelope Valley Reformed Church from 1958 to 1967.

Nyhoff died in Ogden, Iowa, on March 6, 1996.

Percy J. Kinkema

Percy J. Kinkema was born at Grand Haven, Michigan, on August 23, 1902. He received his undergraduate education at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1925. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1928.

Kinkema was licensed by the Classis of Grand Rapids in 1928 and ordained by the Classis of Albany the same year. He pastored the following New York congregations: Jerusalem and Onesquathaw, Feura Bush, from 1928 to 1937; Fifth, Albany, from 1937 to 1945;
Philmont and Mellenville, from 1945 to 1950; and Hagaman, from 1950 to 1957. He also pastored the following Illinois congregations: First, Peoria, from 1957 to 1962; and Elim, Kings, from 1962 to 1967.

Kinkema died in Kalamazoo, Michigan, on March 14, 1996.

Harvey Marion Calsbeek

Harvey Marion Calsbeek was born at Sibley, Iowa, on September 29, 1925. He began his undergraduate education at Northwestern College, which he attended from 1946 to 1948. He completed his undergraduate education at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1950. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1953.

Calsbeek was licensed and ordained by the Classis of Germania in 1953. He pastored the following congregations: Logan, Dell Rapids, South Dakota, from 1953 to 1954; Mescalero, New Mexico, from 1954 to 1962; Jicarilla Apache, Dulce, New Mexico, from 1962 to 1966; Silver Creek, Minnesota, from 1966 to 1970; Riverview Park, Yankton, South Dakota, from 1970 to 1975; United Presbyterian and Reformed Church, Willow Lake, South Dakota, from 1975 to 1978; and Macy, Nebraska, from 1978 to 1988. He served as interim pastor for the following congregations: Jicarilla Apache, Dulce, New Mexico, from 1988 to 1989; and First, Sibley, Iowa, 1990. He then served as associate pastor of the First Reformed Church in Sibley, Iowa, 1991.

Calsbeek died in Sibley, Iowa, on May 25, 1996.

The president announced the death on June 7, 1996 of the Rev. Dr. David Allen Hubbard, former president of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. Hubbard was president of Fuller Theological Seminary for thirty years and retired in 1993. Synod paused for a moment of silence in remembrance of Hubbard. The president then gave a prayer of thanksgiving for the life and contributions of the Rev. David Allen Hubbard.

Upon a motion from the floor, Synod:

VOTED: To request the general secretary send the following letter of condolence to Mrs. David Allen Hubbard, with a copy to the Rev. Dr. Richard Moww, president of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California:

The one hundred ninetieth General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Orange City, Iowa on the eleventh day of June, 1996, sends you our deepest condolences upon learning of your husband’s death. The Rev. Dr. David Allen Hubbard is well known to us as a brother in Christ. He made a profound contribution to theological education, was a faithful voice of the gospel and was a caring, compassionate friend to all. We grieve his absence, even as we rejoice with you in the hope of the resurrection. David has no doubt heard the words of his Master, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.”
A young man drives proudly off to college in that icon of male maturation, his first car! Every spare minute has been spent whipping it into shape. Tires have been replaced, seats reupholstered, carpeting upgraded, brakes relined, dents removed and, for the grand finale, a new paint job!

As he cruises back to school, he sits back contentedly, knowing that the hard work has been done. Not that he's finished, of course. There's still lots of room for fine tuning. Classy touches. Maybe chrome wheels. And pinstriping. It will be fun to see just how great a car he can create. But the pressure is off. The basic work is done. The car's fundamentally sound.

All fantasies of fine tuning go up in smoke a few days later when the engine blows. His whole perspective changes in a matter of moments. No longer savoring the luxury of making a good car great, he's wrenched back to basics: What's it going to take to keep this car running? How much does a new engine cost? How soon can he get one? What will he do for transportation in the mean time?

The editorial council of the *Church Herald* began 1995 feeling not unlike that young man cruising proudly off to college. The magazine entered 1995 in a strong position. Never in its history has it been so broadly read, so positively received, so highly regarded. More than one study and much anecdotal evidence have confirmed the wide appreciation within the Reformed Church in America for the role that the *Church Herald* plays in the life of the church family.

But neither the *Church Herald* staff nor the editorial council were sitting on its laurels...or awards. The *Church Herald* entered 1995 with some very specific goals that would further improve the magazine and ensure that it would continue to play a major role in meeting the communication needs of the denomination well into the twenty-first century. At its February 1995 meeting the editorial council committed to the following specific growth opportunities for 1995:

1. The establishment of a Strategic Planning Task Force that would meet twice during the year and bring back specific recommendations to the editorial council that would ensure that the magazine remains on the cutting edge of the communication business. With the exponential growth of the “information superhighway” and the growing opportunities that the Internet affords, the editorial council wants to be certain that it explores every effective, efficient communication vehicle. To paraphrase Henry Ford, the editorial council needs to remember that it is ultimately in the communication business, not the magazine business.

2. A strengthening of the infrastructure of the magazine, specifically as it relates to the care and development of its staff. The editor and publisher, the Rev. Jeffrey Japinga, recommended that the editorial council formalize some of the processes that had been handled more casually. An updating of all *Church Herald* staff job descriptions, a formal annual review with each staff person, and the development of a coherent, comprehensive personnel policies and practices manual were among the actions identified that would further ensure the fair treatment and ongoing development of an outstanding staff.

3. A thorough review of the role of the editorial council and its appropriate relationship to *Church Herald* staff.
It is gratifying to report that, with the exception of item 1 above, these goals were accomplished in 1995 despite the fact that “our engine went up in smoke” in September 1995 when Japinga submitted his resignation. Credit for the continued health and excellence of the magazine since Japinga’s departure goes directly to the remaining Church Herald staff, who have given generously of their gifts and time to fill the void during this interim period.

Upon a motion from the floor, Synod

VOTED: To give heartfelt thanks to the Rev. Jeffrey Japinga for his diligent and excellent work as editor of the Church Herald, September 1, 1991-December 31, 1995.

THE SEARCH PROCESS

At its September 1995 meeting, which fell just a week or so after Japinga’s resignation, the editorial council devoted several hours to a discussion of the future of the magazine and what skills would be most requisite in its leader to usher in that future. The editor and publisher job description, which had been totally rewritten earlier in the year, was further modified to reflect the values and priorities of the editorial council.

At this September 1995 meeting a search committee was also established, consisting of four members of the editorial council and three ex officio members. The search committee took a proactive approach to the process, soliciting suggestions for qualified candidates from some sixty-seven individuals throughout the denomination and, as a result of the suggestions made, encouraged some thirty individuals to consider God’s calling to this position as editor and publisher of the Church Herald.

The search committee initially interviewed candidates by teleconference call to save money and time and ultimately interviewed four candidates in person at the Church Herald offices in Grand Rapids, Michigan. On January 22, 1996, the search committee voted unanimously to offer the position of editor and publisher to Christina Van Eyl, who most currently has served as executive director of Reformed Church Women’s Ministries and who was a longtime associate editor at the Church Herald just prior to that. The Editorial council rejoices to report that Van Eyl accepted the offer of the editorial council and began her new position on April 29, 1996. The editorial council is excited about the gifts, creativity, and broad range of experience that Van Eyl brings to the position and is confident that under her leadership the magazine will continue to serve the church with excellence.

FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Nineteen ninety-five was also a challenging year for the Church Herald financially. After two years of ending the year well in the black and returning a total of $158,003 to the denomination, the magazine reduced its request for 1995 General Synod funding by $50,000. Unfortunately, this reduction in income came in the same year that printing, paper, and postage costs went through the roof. The costs in just those three budget categories escalated over $99,000 from 1994 to 1995. That’s an average increase of 18.6 percent over those categories, and that increase alone represents almost 10 percent of the magazine’s total budget.

Printing, paper, and postage costs are not categories over which the editorial council has much control. As the editorial council became aware of this dramatic rise, however, the editorial council took action to reduce expenditures in areas it did control. Choosing to reduce the quantity of the magazine rather than its quality, the editorial council included the Lenten devotionals as a part of the magazine rather than allowing it to increase the size of the monthly distribution; and the editorial council reduced the size of the January 1996 issue.
by one-third, to thirty-six pages. These actions, along with some internal efficiencies, allowed the Church Herald to save approximately $23,000. Despite increases in costs and about $7,000 in search committee expenses, the Church Herald was able to end 1995 with a deficit of only $3,533.

The Church Herald has always been profoundly aware of its responsibility to be a good steward of the resources the RCA has entrusted to it. Its commitment to fiscal integrity has only intensified since the implementation of the every-RCA-household distribution of the magazine in 1993 (MGS 1992, R-2, pp. 198-99). The good stewardship and high productivity of the staff of the magazine has translated to a 1996 budget which is built on exactly the same dollar distribution from General Synod ($963,000) as was received four years ago in 1993. And our proposed 1997 budget reflects only a 3 percent increase over that of 1996—and 1993. The staff and editorial council of the Church Herald remain committed to producing one of the very finest denominational magazines in the country at a per-page cost that is the envy of most comparable publications. The editorial council knows that the cost of the magazine to the RCA is significant but also believes that the RCA is receiving great value for the dollar.

CONCLUSION

The Church Herald looks to the future with confidence, gratitude, and anticipation:

1. The editorial council is confident that God is using the Church Herald to bear fruit over the length and breadth of the RCA. The recent Gallup Poll of the Church Herald commissioned by the 1995 General Synod (MGS 1995, p. 160) shows once again that the magazine is widely read and highly valued in the overwhelming majority of the households it enters and is making a significant difference in the spiritual lives of tens of thousands.

2. The editorial council is grateful to God and to the Reformed Church in America for allowing the Church Herald to serve the mission and work of the RCA and for enabling the good news of the gospel to touch so many different Christians at such diverse points in their spiritual journeys.

3. And the editorial council anticipates with excitement a future of continued excellence, as in familiar and perhaps new ways the Church Herald plays a constructive role in RCA’s renewal, re-creation, and re-formation.

In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this: that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus (Phil. 1:4-6, NIV).
Report of the Task Force to Study *Church Herald*
Distribution and Funding

BACKGROUND

At the 1992 General Synod meeting in Albany, New York, President Louis E. Lotz, in his report to the General Synod, presented only one proposal for consideration:

To send the *Church Herald* to every household of the Reformed Church in America as a benefit of membership in the denomination, beginning in 1993; and further,

to set the General Synod assessment for the *Church Herald* in the 1993 General Synod operational budget at $4.87 per active-confirmed member.” (*MGS 1992*, R-2, pp. 198-99).

Characterizing the idea as both “marvelous and enormously unpopular,” Lotz said that putting the magazine in every household would serve the denomination by creating identity, building unity, integrating new members into the life of the denomination, promoting the missions and ministries of the RCA, assisting the teaching ministries of the church, and promoting spiritual growth. Lotz likened the magazine to a sidewalk that could connect us, or a kitchen table around which we could all sit (*MGS 1992*, p. 29).

The 1992 General Synod adopted the Lotz recommendation, and implementation of the plan began with the February 1993 *Church Herald* issue. In June 1993 the General Synod, meeting in Vancouver, British Columbia, reaffirmed the distribution and funding plan despite seventeen overtures that asked for the plan to be rescinded or modified (*MGS 1993*, pp. 179-90). The 1993 General Synod did, however, instruct Stewardship and Communication Services to conduct a study of issues relating to the *Church Herald*, including assessment, method of assessment, readership, distribution, and alternative formats for a denominational publication (*MGS 1993*, p. 186). A task force was set up by Stewardship and Communication Services. This task force conducted “town meetings” in five regions of the RCA and recommended that the *Church Herald* distribution and funding plan be continued as it was being done (*MGS 1994*, pp. 158-63). Based on this report, the 1994 General Synod again reaffirmed both the distribution and funding components of the plan (*MGS 1994*, R-1, p. 163).

THE MANDATE

These three consecutive General Synod votes in favor of an every-household distribution of the *Church Herald* did not put to rest, however, the questions which continued to be raised about the plan: whether it was right for the church; whether it was accomplishing the purposes laid out by the Lotz recommendation; whether it was a financial hardship for too many congregations; and whether this was a decision individual congregations or even individuals should make for themselves. Arguments on both sides of the issue could, and often did, draw heavily on anecdotal evidence. Some called the plan inspirational and cited examples from their own experience on how the magazine had benefited particular individuals or congregations; others called the plan invasive and pointed to budget woes and continuing controversy.

The 1995 General Synod, in response to an overture asking that the distribution and funding for this distribution be discontinued, denied the overture (*MGS 1995*, R-4, p. 159). However, upon a motion from the floor, the 1995 General 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 (*MGS* 1995, p. 160).

The following people were appointed by the General Synod Council to serve on the Task Force to Study *Church Herald* Distribution and Funding: the Rev. John Buteyn, Jr., pastor in Plano, Texas, and moderator of the GSC Stewardship and Communication Services Committee; Howard Connell, layperson and president of the Classis of Muskegon; Dierdre Johnston, layperson and professor of communication at Hope College; the Rev. John Kapteyn, pastor in Chatham, Ontario, and stated clerk of the Regional Synod of Canada; and Rosanne Liesveld, layperson and vice-president of a research organization in Lincoln, Nebraska. The Rev. E. Wayne Antworth, director of Stewardship and Communication Services and the Rev. Jeffrey Japinga, editor of the *Church Herald*, were asked to staff the task force without vote.

**PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY**

The task force met on September 20, 1995, in Grand Rapids, Michigan. In reviewing both its written mandate and the unedited videotape of the 1995 General Synod discussion which preceded the vote to establish a task force, the group quickly gained consensus around the need for an objective, outside measurement of some of the identified issues framing the debate: how much was the magazine actually being used; was it making a widespread difference in the lives of individuals and congregations in the RCA; did recipients understand who was paying for the magazine; and did they approve of such a plan?

Having anticipated such a possible direction, the task force had invited proposals for a comprehensive survey of *Church Herald* recipients to be submitted in advance of this September meeting, with a clear understanding that a survey might or might not be undertaken. Four research organizations submitted proposals to the task force: the Barna Research Group, Glendale, California; the Frost Center for Social Research, Holland, Michigan; the Gallup Organization, Lincoln, Nebraska; and Message Factors, Memphis, Tennessee. Each proposal was evaluated on its methodology, perceived reliability, and total cost. The contract was awarded to the Gallup Organization. Dierdre Johnston and the Rev. Jeffrey Japinga were appointed by the task force to be the chief liaisons between the task force and the Gallup Organization during the development and execution of a telephone survey. In response to information provided by the task force, the Gallup Organization would be responsible for writing questions that were both technically correct and without bias.

The survey instrument itself was developed around the following general goals: evaluating recipients' perception of the magazine, including specific content areas; evaluating the level of readership; assessing the cost and benefits of the current distribution plan; and identifying specific actions or strategies in response to the findings. Twenty-four questions plus ten demographic measurements were formulated. Those questions were then asked of four hundred adults, eighteen years and older, who were randomly selected from a list of *Church Herald* recipients provided by the RCA. (Four hundred was the number of completed surveys recommended by the Gallup Organization in order to yield results accurate to plus-or-minus 4 percent.) The surveys were conducted in October and November 1995, between the hours of 4:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m., Sunday through Friday, and from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. on Saturdays.

**FINDINGS**

Among the myriad of competing issues regarding the every-household distribution plan, two questions have long stood out: is anyone really reading this magazine, and is this the right way to pay for it?
Readership: To the first question on readership, the survey was remarkably clear: people are reading the Church Herald. Ninety-one percent of all recipients report that someone in their household reads the magazine monthly, an exceptionally high number even when compared to magazines which draw their readership almost exclusively from individual subscribers. Those recipients read, on average, about half the magazine every month; one in five give the magazine to someone else when they are finished (again, both above average numbers in comparison to publishing industry standards). Seventy-seven percent of those surveyed say it is from somewhat to extremely important that they receive the Church Herald; of those who said it was not very or not at all important to receive the magazine, nine in ten said they still read at least something in it monthly.

When asked to evaluate the actual content of the Church Herald, 61 percent said their impression of the Church Herald was extremely or very favorable; only 3 percent rated their overall impression of the Church Herald as not very or not at all favorable. (And of those who said it was from somewhat to very important to receive the Church Herald, no one had an unfavorable impression of the magazine.) Readers rated as major strengths of the magazine its content on developing spiritual growth, reflecting on the social and personal issues that Christians face today, and knowing more about what the RCA is doing. Nearly two in three readers said that receiving the Church Herald helped them feel more connected to the Reformed Church in America. In short, the measurements of reader acceptance and use of the magazine suggest the magazine has met and indeed exceeded those goals set for it by the Rev. Louis Lotz in his president's report to the 1992 General Synod.

It is interesting to note some of the general characteristics of those persons expressing either high or low interest in receiving the Church Herald. High-interest readers—the 40 percent who said it was extremely or very important to them to receive the magazine—are likely to be older, longer-term members of the RCA and more frequent churchgoers; their religious interests coalesce around missions, diversity, and support for denominational issues. They tend to be, generally speaking, theologically conservative when asked for their views on issues like whether the Bible is the literal word of God or the church should provide clear answers to moral questions. They believe the Church Herald espouses beliefs consistent with their own, are more likely to pass their copy on to other people, would be more willing to subscribe to the magazine in order to receive it, and would pay a higher amount for a subscription, despite lower average incomes relative to other readers.

The low-interest group—the 23 percent who said it is not very or not at all important to them to receive the Church Herald—is younger but with higher income. They report less denominational involvement but nearly the same level of local congregational involvement. They say busyness is the top reason why they spend less or no time with the magazine, are less aware if the Church Herald is consistent with their own personal views, and would be less inclined either to pay for the Church Herald (and would pay less) or to pick up a free copy at their local church. The one area which the high- and low-interest groups had in common were article preferences: for both groups, developing their own spiritual growth and engaging contemporary issues were the two most highly rated types of articles.

In summary, the vast majority of recipients read the magazine; they read half or more of the magazine; and they are favorably disposed to the content of the magazine. It matches their beliefs and meets their needs.

Distribution: Questions about the second key issue, whether the current form of distribution of the magazine is the right method, yielded less definitive results, with significant differences appearing between the high- and low-interest groups. When asked, for example, whether they knew why they were receiving the magazine, just six in ten recipients could identify that belonging to the RCA or to their local congregation was the reason they received the magazine; a slightly higher number said they could identify who was paying for their copy of the magazine.
How dedicated, then, were these readers to the magazine? One in four said they would be unlikely to pick up the magazine if it were available only at their local church; nearly half said they would pick it up. Not surprisingly, a strong majority (63 percent) of those who think the magazine is important would pick it up at the local church, while nearly as many (58 percent) of those who find little importance in receiving the Church Herald would seek out the magazine at their local church.

Similar responses were given when asked how likely a person would be to subscribe to the magazine in order to receive it; 46 percent said extremely or very likely, and 15 percent said not very likely. But among those for whom receiving the Church Herald is important, only 3 percent said they were unlikely to order (and 68 percent extremely or very likely); for those who do not find very much importance in receiving the magazine, no one said they would be very likely to order, and 47 percent said they would not be very likely to order. In short, if the distribution method were changed, based on the responses given, the Church Herald might expect to lose approximately 30 percent of its subscriber base in the short term and likely 50 percent or more of its subscriber base in the long term, with much of the attrition coming from those who report the fewest connections to the church.

On the key question of funding methods, the survey asked recipients their level of agreement or disagreement (strongly agree / agree / neither agree nor disagree / disagree / strongly disagree) with three possible distribution methods:

- The current method of requiring all congregations to share in the cost of the magazine is the fairest way to pay for the magazine.
- Each local congregation should be able to decide whether or not to pay for its members to receive the Church Herald.
- Individual members should subscribe to the Church Herald and pay for their own subscriptions if they want to receive it.

It is important to note that the three possible methods were not presented as a menu of options from which the respondent was asked to choose one, but rather presented, in a random order and not necessarily in the order as presented here, as independent statements to which the respondent was asked his or her level of agreement or disagreement.

Seventy-eight (78) percent of readers strongly agreed or agreed that congregations should have the right to decide on distribution. Sixty-six (66) percent of readers said that they strongly agreed or agreed with the present method of distribution. Just 52 percent strongly agreed or agreed with individual decision-making.

These responses seem to indicate that the denomination as a whole was strongly affirming the present method of distribution while at the same time expressing a great momentum toward self-determination and local control. These responses are somewhat contradictory, because the RCA cannot both continue the present method of denomination-wide distribution and, on the other hand, allow congregations to decide.

The options that must be considered are the continuation of the current system or the viability of a system that is more locally determined. Both options could be supported from the survey data. Both options carry perceived benefits for at least one group of readers. Both options have costs to the denomination as well. It was over this very point of measuring the costs and the benefits that the task force had its most critical discussion.
A. To continue the current distribution method carries benefits for the RCA through present and future readership. Such sustained readership, according to the survey, builds loyalty, fosters discussion, addresses issues, sustains faith, and informs the membership. The current method also gives the *Church Herald* a solid fiscal base on which to build for the future.

Clearly the *Church Herald* is meeting its objectives editorially. Readership is high (91 percent of recipients) and waste is low. The benefits of reading the magazine are strong, most obviously to those who place high value on receiving the magazine, but also surprisingly high among those who don't value the magazine as highly. Every-household distribution has raised denominational awareness at a time when denominational identity is diminishing. Most importantly, the *Church Herald* is consistent with the beliefs of recipients and has helped them in their spiritual growth and development.

However, the denominational cost of continuing these benefits is to set aside the desires of many who favor local control of subscription decisions. It is also to avoid dealing with the financial ramifications that the increased assessment has had on numerous RCA congregations.

B. To choose the option of distribution based on congregational decisions would in fact allow congregations for whom this is a financial hardship to opt out of the program. It would also offer a positive response to those favoring local control and to others who felt powerless in the original decision at the 1992 General Synod.

There are two main ways that this option could be carried out. The first would be to simply allow each RCA congregation the choice of subscribing for its members or not, and adjusting the costs of a subscription accordingly. A second option would be a system that would pay for *Church Herald* office costs and magazine development costs, but would only ask those RCA congregations who chose to subscribe to the magazine to pay the cost of printing, paper, and postage for mailing. According to the *Church Herald*, roughly half of its current budget is committed to items related to office and development costs; the other half is directly related to production costs. For those RCA congregations who chose not to subscribe to the magazine for their members, this second option would reduce their assessment commitment; those RCA congregations who chose to subscribe to the magazine for their members would likely see slightly higher assessments, due to the loss of economies of scale.

The other loss in either of these options based on congregational decision-making would be, of course, readership. The statistics indicate that readership would decrease from 30 percent to 50 percent or more, again, because the readers report they would not subscribe themselves and would be far less likely to pick up the *Church Herald* at church even if it were free. For a variety of reasons, subscriptions would plummet, communication would diminish, and readership would decline radically.

This decline would be most obvious and prevalent among the group reporting less-identified value in receiving the *Church Herald*. This group is identified as younger, busier, and wealthier. They will read and benefit from the magazine if it is distributed directly but will not be likely to seek it out on their own.

The task force carefully and thoughtfully weighed these issues and the complicated relative values and costs. Out of that lengthy discussion, the task force unanimously affirmed the four recommendations presented below:
R-1.
To reaffirm the current funding by General Synod assessment and distribution plan to every RCA household for the Church Herald. (ADOPTED)

(A motion was made and supported to amend R-1 by inserting at the end of R-1 the words “and further, an exception may be made for a congregation demonstrating genuine financial need, and upon majority approval of the churches within the classis of the congregation, to receive directly a quantity of the Church Herald magazines sent through bulk mail; and further, to assess the classis only for the cost of these copies sent to the congregation requesting and receiving approval for an exception to the policy of distribution of the Church Herald to every RCA household.” The motion LOST.)

In the final analysis, the task force felt that the benefits of providing the Church Herald to all RCA constituent groups outweighed the obvious costs of doing so. It felt the Church Herald is serving as an important connection between individuals, their faith, and their church, even at times and in places where those individuals may or may not explicitly value those connections. In continuing the current distribution plan, the magazine and the resources it provides would continue to be present in RCA households when a person there needs those resources, times not always easily identifiable in advance. Christians live in an increasingly isolated world. The Church Herald provides connectedness to Christ, to community, and to the whole RCA family. The Church Herald must be a means of communication and response in an increasingly diversified RCA family.

In acknowledging the financial pressures that an assessment of this size naturally brings, the task force recommended:

R-2.
To encourage the Editorial Council of the Church Herald to explore with Stewardship and Communication Services the possibility of establishing and seeking funds for a Church Herald endowment fund, to be administered by the RCA Foundation. (ADOPTED)

The task force feels that the establishment of any means by which those most supportive of the magazine could aid additionally in its funding and decrease the pressure on General Synod assessments would be a positive step forward and a benefit to the whole church.

Thirdly, the task force recognizes that any funding and distribution plan like the one currently in place always has the potential for abuse, especially by the recipient of the funds. In any publishing venture, the key to success is knowing your readership: what it likes, what it wants, what it needs.

In recognizing the value it gained from its own survey, the task force recommended:

R-3.
To urge the Editorial Council of the Church Herald to engage in periodic readership studies of the RCA members, so that the magazine may continue to understand and to be able to respond to the spiritual needs of its recipients. (ADOPTED)

Finally, the task force discussed the manner in which the Church Herald itself has responded to the 1995 General Synod mandate and to the ensuing debate. When the Rev. Louis Lotz surmised in his president’s report that most people would read the Church Herald if it were sent to them, no one really knew whether that would be true or not. Now the task force knows it was, and is, true, and in large part that is reflective of the overall quality and professionalism
of the magazine itself. That the *Church Herald* attained this level of quality at a per-page cost much lower than comparable magazines attests to the skills and to the stewardship of resources by those who produce the magazine.

To that end, the task force recommended:

**R-4.**
To commend the staff of the *Church Herald* for undertaking and then fulfilling with excellence, professionalism, and grace the mandate given to them by the 1992 General Synod to send the *Church Herald* to every household of the Reformed Church in America, in producing a magazine highly valued by the members of the Reformed Church in America. (ADOPTED)

The task force appreciated all the help it received in its work, and especially thanked publicly Debra J. Manning, Ph.D., research analyst with the Gallup Organization, for her work in survey development and also in the clear presentation of its findings to the task force.

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**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 the supervision of SAC staff.

**COMMUNICATION**

The mission of the communication program of the General Synod Council is:

To develop and maintain a communication network which connects individual RCA members, congregations, and the denomination, thus building community, enhancing mutual understanding, and promoting cooperation and involvement in common ministry.

**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 to Michigan in 1986 from South Holland, Illinois, and from the denominational office in New York, the RCA Distribution Center has grown steadily. In its first year of operation, revenue totaled $281,000. In 1995 revenue (excluding TRAVARCA and Reformed Church Productions) exceeded $1,415,000, with the sale of print materials representing over $850,000 of the total—a record amount of sales for any calendar year to date.
Now located in the 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 different items in its 4,200-square-foot warehouse.

Promotional Efforts in 1995-96

1. Catalogs

The 1995-96 RCA Resources for Ministry catalog, along with an RCA version of the Friendship Press catalog, was distributed to three thousand customers, including all RCA congregations. The PREM catalog was sent to all current Celebrate and Bible Discovery users (approximately seventy-five RCA congregations).

2. Mini-catalogs

Mini-catalogs for adult church education and youth resources were distributed to all RCA congregations in August 1995.

3. Brochures and fliers

Brochures on the RCA's every-Sunday and special occasion bulletins, the New Oxford Annotated Bible (NRSV), and Songs for LIFE leader's guide were distributed through the reSOURCES mailing. Several "New!" fliers advertising new products were also distributed through reSOURCES and were included in outgoing orders. A special mailing of the StoryTellers Series (vacation Bible school materials published cooperatively with six other denominations) brochure was sent to all RCA congregations.

4. Advertising

In 1995 the RCA Distribution Center ran four display ads in the Church Herald, advertising LiFE, That the World May Know video series, Hands, Hearts, and Voices, and the Along the Road with Jesus vacation Bible school curriculum. LiFE was also advertised on the back cover of the 1995-96 RCA Plan Calendar. Our Brother Dan, a new video on AIDS/homosexuality produced in cooperation with Princeton Theological Seminary, was advertised widely, including a display ad in the Journal of Pastoral Care and in Christian Century; and a flier was sent to several denominational offices, resource centers, and broadcast/production companies. In 1996 the RCA Distribution Center advertised LiFE curriculum and the StoryTellers Series.
Servant Leaders

In January 1995 the RCA Distribution Center produced and distributed the first issue of the new leadership newspaper, *Servant Leaders: A Practical Publication Serving RCA Congregations.*

Produced on a quarterly basis, *Servant Leaders* is mailed to over 22,000 RCA members at their home addresses and has been very well received. In the fall 1995 issue, *Servant Leaders* published an extensive article in both English and Spanish on preventing child sexual abuse.

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 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, Carol Myers, Kristi Naber, Sara Smith, Jane Schuyler, and the Rev. Randy Wieland) assists in planning and evaluating each issue.

RCA Distribution Center Issues/Proposals

1. 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. The RCA Distribution Center currently has 340 LiFE customers. Establishing a strong network of RCA education consultants continues to be a high priority.

2. Profit/Loss. From 1988 to 1993 the RCA Distribution Center generated a modest “profit,” contributing a total of $103,917 toward the capitalization of new products and $68,612 into general reserves. However, since 1993 the operation has fallen short of meeting its budget. RCA Distribution Center staff is exploring several options to balance the center’s budget, including tight control of discretionary spending, adding new products, and charging for mailing services to other GSC units (see below).

3. Charge for Mailing Services. At the October 1995 GSC meeting the GSC Stewardship and Communication Services Committee requested Kim Baker and the Rev. Wayne Antworth to explore options with the Administrative Council and the Office of Finance to recover non-RCA Distribution Center costs for its mailing equipment and personnel. The committee requested that recovery of these costs begin in 1996.

The total annual cost of the RCA Distribution Center equipment and personnel is around $35,000, not including rent. In 1995 $193,908 of postage/shipping ran through the machine, of which only $53,000, or 27 percent, was RCA Distribution Center business. The other 73 percent was from the following GSC offices:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Congregational Services</td>
<td>5 percent</td>
<td>$1,750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelism and Church</td>
<td>1 percent</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development Services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission Services</td>
<td>15 percent</td>
<td>5,250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy, Planning, and Administration Services</td>
<td>10 percent</td>
<td>3,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stewardship and Communication Services</td>
<td>12 percent</td>
<td>4,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$9.8 by ’98</td>
<td>6 percent</td>
<td>2,100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The RCA Distribution Center did a similar study during the last six months of 1994. Percentages for the groups listed above were within 1 percentage point. The RCA Distribution Center remained at 27 percent of the total.

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 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 nine 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 approximately 820 congregations.

In January 1994 SAC and the Council for Hispanic Ministries began a joint venture of providing a Spanish edition of *RCA Today*, entitled *¡HOY!*. The translation work is being done by the Council for Hispanic Ministries, and the costs are underwritten by SAC.

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 1993 as a single sheet mailed with *RCA Today* and *Mission Today*. *Prayerline* is also sent free each month to more than three hundred individuals who have requested it.

Mission of the Month

Stewardship and Communication Services, in cooperation with Mission Services, has redesigned the Mission of the Month materials for 1996. *Focus* has been replaced by *Mission Today*, a four-page bulletin insert which highlights a specific mission area but includes news, photos, and prayer requests from other areas as well. The Mission of the Month mailing also includes an information sheet, a children's bulletin, offering envelopes, and—for the first time—a full-color mission poster. Many churches which previously did not use Mission of the Month materials responded positively to samples sent out early in 1996. About six hundred congregations have requested a total of 115,000 monthly copies of *Mission Today*. These materials are distributed free, but they must be requested.

Mission Calendar

Another new mission education piece was introduced in 1996—a full-color mission calendar. The attractive calendar, which follows the Mission of the Month schedule, includes birth dates of all RCA missionaries and their children under age eighteen, missionary addresses, and a short summary of the mission work in each area. Youth groups and other church organizations were given the opportunity to sell these calendars as a fund-raiser. A
calendar was also sent to each RCA congregation as a “thank you” for mission support. Mission Services and Stewardship and Communication Services plan to publish a 1997 mission calendar and to again offer it as a local fund-raiser.

“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, and profiles of new missionaries.

Profiles in Mission

Profile sheets are produced to 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-seven new or updated profiles were produced in 1995.

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 110 letters totaling 62,808 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 includes 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 were all produced by SAC. In 1995 editorial, production, and distribution staff worked to make the following resources available to regional synods, RCA congregations, and interested individuals:

- Campaign newsletters
- News bulletin inserts
- *Church Herald* ads
- Bimonthly *Church Herald* inserts
- 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 1995 the following resources were produced:

- "Family Finances" brochure updates
- Direct mail solicitation resources
- Spring Sabbath brochure
- *The Ministry of the Deacon*

**Ads**

Twenty-two ads were placed in the *Church Herald* in 1995. 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 921 copies were sold by the RCA Distribution Center. The 1995-96 *Plan Calendar* cover highlighted the denominational theme: "God's People Transformed."

**reSOURCES**

reSOURCES is used to distribute material to RCA congregations. reSOURCES is mailed quarterly using bulk postage rates. This provides an inexpensive way to distribute the many resources that are available to RCA congregations.

**News Service**

Twenty-seven news releases were sent to the *Church Herald* during 1995. *RCA Today* also publishes 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 1995.

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 currently 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 more than two thousand titles to support ministries in worship, education and faith development, evangelism and church development, family life, leader development, missions, social witness, 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, Laurie Rodgers and Deb Wolthuizen. 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 for the Resource Information Helpline 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. 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.

Nonmembers may also use TRAVARCA resources but must pay the established handling and shipping fees.

In the summer of 1995 the Media Resources for Ministry: 1995 Update catalog was sent to every RCA/CRC congregation, TRAVARCA members, RCA staff, selected lay leaders, and to other Christian churches within Michigan. As of February 7, 1996, TRAVARCA has 766 members and houses more than 4,105 videos, films, and slide shows (more than 1,555 different titles). It distributed more than 10,531 resources during 1995, an increase of 53 percent over 1994 figures.

To promote use of TRAVARCA, telemarketing was conducted to TRAVARCA RCA/CRC nonmember congregations in 1995. More than 1,200 RCA and CRC congregations were contacted, resulting in over 310 congregations trying TRAVARCA for the first time. Other promotions included ads in the Church Herald, the Banner, Servant Leaders, and the RCA Plan Calendar.

TRAVARCA completed its third year of operation in Grand Rapids, Michigan, on January 18, 1996. TRAVARCA ended 1995 with a deficit due to loss of income during the telemarketing free trial offers and several unanticipated expenses.

Under the current income structure, TRAVARCA's major source of income is generated by its annual membership drive. The financial viability of TRAVARCA depends on increasing the membership base (through marketing to non-RCA/CRC congregations and institutions), increasing membership fees, and/or changing the income structure.

AUDIOVISUAL PRODUCTION

The RCA's Office of Audiovisual Production is a fully operational production facility, with staff and equipment available for the production of video and other media resources. Senior producer John Grooters and associate producer Kathy Smarrella, along with part-time secretary Barb Koomdyk, staff the office and oversee all aspects of media development. Working together with other staff and editors from Stewardship and Communication Services, 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 most 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 1995 AV production generated $25,426 more than the previous year (1994) from its sale of services, supplies, and equipment rentals.

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, and hourly rates for the AVID Media Composer digital video editing suite help offset the costs of purchasing and maintaining these items. Production bids are available on a per-project basis from the AV production office.
RCA-produced media resources 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. **Light For the World, The Mission Vision of the Reformed Church in America**

   This video is an overview of the Reformed Church in America’s mission. It focuses on three mission stories that represent the RCA’s principles of mission—local and global mission involvement, holistic ministry, long-term commitment, and partnership in mission. The stories feature Harvey and Margaret Doorenbos in Aira, Ethiopia; North Reformed Church in Newark, New Jersey; and the Rev. James and Beth Harrison in Estonia.

2. **Evangelism in a Changing World**

   This video invites viewers to listen to the thoughts and faith memories of people who are not currently connected to the church, then introduces them to the ministries of three very diverse RCA congregations which have begun to move through tradition and into mission. By looking at how these congregations are telling the good news, viewers are motivated to take a fresh look at their own congregation and its neighborhood.

3. **RCA Today, 1996**

   Each year a new edition of this presentation highlights the RCA in mission. Information about recent developments throughout the denomination is provided.

4. **General Synod Synopsis, 1995**

   Produced annually, this video highlights significant issues and captures some of the spirit of each General Synod meeting of the Reformed Church in America.

5. **Herstory: The Ministry of Women in the RCA**

   Women have always played vital roles in the work of the church. This brief history tells the story of organized women’s groups in the Reformed Church in America from the late nineteenth century to the present.

6. **Mayan Weavings, Ministry Among the Tzotzil People of Chiapas, Mexico**

   This video, written by the Rev. Alan and Sue Schreuder, missionaries to Chiapas, Mexico, highlights the RCA’s ministries among the Tzotzil people of Chiapas. The areas of ministries covered are the Bible school, translation work, and medical ministries.

7. **Missionary Conversations with Barbara Kapenga**

   The missionary conversation series is a way to meet an RCA missionary in a casual and brief format. In this edition, RCA missionary Barbara Kapenga shows and tells how the people of Sudan are suffering in many ways, yet are hungry to learn more about the gospel of Jesus Christ.
8. General Synod Welcome

This video was produced for the Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics, host of the 1995 General Synod. Shown at the opening session of the Synod, the video was a lighthearted welcome for the delegates.

9. General Synod Orientation

This annually updated production is shown just before the first business session of General Synod and illustrates the operational procedures and rules for the orderly conduct of business at Synod.

The following videos are currently in progress:

10. Liturgy and Life: A Reformed Understanding of Worship

This video, premiering at the 1996 General Synod, is designed to help people understand the meaning of worship; to model the basic elements of worship in the Reformed tradition; and to illustrate how this can be expressed in creative, inspiring, and culturally sensitive ways.

11. Our Debt of Love (Regional Synod of Canada)

This video outlines the plan of action suggested by the Regional Synod of Canada as it seeks to support the eighteen “homeless” congregations in the synod by encouraging matching grants made available by contributions from the other thirty-one Canadian RCA congregations.

The following were produced for other clients during the past year by the AV production office:

1. The Campaign for Western: Mission in the 21st Century

This video helps Western Theological Seminary communicate its vision for the future and introduces the plan of action proposed through its current $12 million Campaign for Western.

2. Something Special at Marble Collegiate Church

This video assisted the oldest congregation in the RCA, Marble Collegiate Church in New York City as it undertook to raise $25 million in a special fund-raising endeavor.

3. The Ministry of the Christian Reformed Church in Japan (In progress, untitled)

Scheduled for shooting in April of 1996, this video will present the mission of the Christian Reformed Church in Japan.

PERSPECTIVES

The Perspectives Board of Editors appreciates this opportunity to report to the 1996 General Synod regarding its work over the past year. This monthly theological journal provides an important forum in which the Reformed Church in America can discuss theologically the issues it faces. It also provides opportunities for aspiring RCA writers to make theological contributions within the RCA and beyond the denomination to the wider Christian community.
Editorial Achievements

In 1995 Perspectives included articles from numerous RCA writers, some easily recognized, and others less well-known. Among them: Laurie Baron, James Brownson, Donald Cronkite, Kent Fry, Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, Robin Klay, Blaise Levai, Steven Mathonnet-Vander Well, Daniel Meeter, Barbara Pekich, and Norman Schouten (not to mention several regular RCA contributors and columnists).

A pair of articles entitled “Religious Revival on College Campuses,” written by Hope College chaplain the Rev. Ben Patterson and Hope College professor Donald Cronkite, examined the blessed-but-controversial spiritual events on the campus in spring 1995.


The “Spring Sabbath” issue focused on the Spring Sabbath event for RCA clergy that occurred April 12-14, 1996, in St. Louis, Missouri. Copies of this issue were made available to all Spring Sabbath participants.

Finances

At the close of 1995 Perspectives' checking account balance plus receivables was $16,283, an increase of $1,345, essentially a break-even operation. Perspectives' cash assets, counted in the year-end figure, include a $15,000 interest-free operating loan from the General Synod of the RCA.

In 1986 (Perspectives’ first year of publishing) the General Synod and RCA agencies now included in the General Synod Council provided $22,997 (76.7 percent) of Perspectives’ initial $30,000 budget. By 1995 the dollar amount had declined to $6,000 (about 12 percent of a $50,000 budget). The Board of Editors views this contribution as an essential linkage between itself and the RCA’s Stewardship and Communication Services.

The relationship is embodied and implemented through the active, discreet participation of the Rev. Wayne Antworth, director of Stewardship and Communication Services, at all meetings of the Perspectives Board of Editors. While not assuming editorial responsibility for materials that appear in Perspectives, Antworth has been especially helpful regarding financial development, marketing, and denominational issues.

Last year Perspectives began a “Friends of Perspectives” effort to create a modest base of financial support from interested individuals. Since that time at least fifteen such donors have been identified, with gifts totaling nearly $5,000. The Board of Editors has earmarked each of these gifts for subscription-base enlargement.

The Board of Editors is developing relationships with Calvin College, Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, and Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. Each of these relationships promises development of subscriptions; financial support is a more distant possibility.
Subscription Campaign

In late 1995 the Board of Editors launched its first direct-mail marketing effort for subscriptions. Subscriber- and purchaser-lists were rented from InterVarsity Press, the Christian Century, and Theology Today. On February 12, 1996, Perspectives mailed trial-subscription offers to 14,972 names on these lists.

As of this writing, 799 had responded positively, a 5.34 percent response rate. This compares very favorably with the industry average of a 2 to 3 percent response rate. The InterVarsity Press list did the best (9.37 percent), with the Christian Century at 2.52 percent and Theology Today at 3.81 percent.

Leadership Issues

At GSC meetings there has been candid discussion on the changing leadership model of Perspectives over the past few years. The Perspectives Board of Editors is now in a position to indicate that the changes have been implemented successfully.

The current year has stretched the Board of Editors’ human resources because the coeditor, the Rev. Dr. Thomas Boogaart, has been on sabbatical leave in Israel. More of the leadership load has rested with the Rev. Marchiene Rienstra and board member Carolyn Simon. The Rev. Dr. Paul Fries has stepped in as book review editor. Although some issues went to press a few days late, all issues appeared during their scheduled months of publication. The Board of Editors is confident that its publication schedule will remain current throughout 1996.

Overture

Church Herald Assessment and Distribution

1. The Classis of Schenectady overtures General Synod to remove the Church Herald from the annual General Synod assessment in order to enable each classis to determine a plan to facilitate distribution of the Church Herald among the churches within its bounds; and further,

   to request each classis to report its plan to the General Synod Council’s Stewardship and Communication Services Committee.

Reasons:

1. This overture supports the intent of General Synod to encourage denominational communication and cohesion and recognizes the benefits of the Church Herald.

2. Delegates to General Synod cannot know the minds of their classes without time allowed for consultation and deliberation.
3. General Synod delegates are under undue pressure. When General Synod delegates are asked to vote on recommendations not previously distributed, and which have significant assessment and/or policy implications, "management by crisis" and "group think" are dangerous pressures. In contrast to "congregationalism," the RCA risks the perception of centralized, authoritarian governance.

4. The authority and strengths of classes have been diminished unintentionally. Certainly General Synod has a necessary role in supervising national and international church/mission connections. Yet a strength of classis is its ability to know its churches and to know their unique cultures and particular needs. Approval and implementation of many nontheological decisions by General Synod should be left to the classes precisely because classes have this pastoral capacity. The strength of General Synod is legislative, not pastoral. Classes can be trusted. If given a recommendation by General Synod, classes will respond wisely for the benefit of the denomination as a whole.

5. General Synod needs to reclaim its original authority and strengths. A significant and original purpose for synods (i.e., the Synod of Dort) was to formulate statements of orthodoxy relevant to its era for the church. A synod suggested possible, responsible actions. Today the Reformed Church in America needs similar guidance in theology, practice, and program. Contrary to this guidance, recent General Synods seem increasingly focused on management issues and local program decisions. General Synod should reclaim its primary task as a unifier of the denomination by guiding the Reformed Church in America in faithful worship and witness.

6. 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, pp. 198-99), and particularly to assess for this distribution, might violate the Book of Church Order. The Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 2, Section 10 states:

   The General Synod shall recommend [italics added for emphasis] to the churches such methods as shall effectively sustain the denominational program, and the denomination's official periodical, and which tend to secure the largest dissemination of the gospel.

   To recommend means "to advise, counsel, or suggest," not to mandate or assess. The 1992 General Synod might have acted beyond its authority to "recommend," when it mandated the distribution to and assessment of every individual RCA confessing member to receive the denomination's "official periodical," the Church Herald.

The advisory committee recommended:

   R-5.
   To deny the overture, (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. It is important to separate the question of pastoral concerns for congregations and classes who feel the financial burden of assessments, from the strong, positive response to the value and quality of the Church Herald.

2. The concern of Overture 1, which focuses on the assessment issue, is being addressed by an ad hoc committee of the General Synod Council's Finance Services Committee (see pp. 375-77).
3. The implementation of Overture 1 would potentially complicate and add to the cost of the distribution of the *Church Herald*.

4. The pastoral concern for churches and classes unable to pay their assessments is already addressed by the Petition Process for Aid in Assessment Payment (see *MGS 1991*, R-5, p. 344).

Report of the Commission on Christian Unity

The Commission on Christian Unity (CCU) met twice since the last session of the General Synod: October 23-24, 1995, at the Alma Mathews House in New York City, and March 12-13, 1996, at the Lutheran Center in Chicago, Illinois, as the guests of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

CCU also met via a teleconference call on February 19, 1996, to discuss responses to “An Ecumenical Mandate for the Reformed Church in America.”

INTRODUCTION

The Constitution of the RCA gives responsibility for ecumenical relations to the General Synod (BCO, Chapter I, Part IV, Article 2, Section 5). To carry this out, the General Synod created the 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 it advocates for actions and positions consistent with the RCA’s confession and practice.

By means of its ongoing agenda, CCU keeps before the RCA the essential questions regarding the nature of Christian unity and ways of giving visible expression to the unity all believers have in Jesus Christ. Conversely, through referrals, the General Synod presents Christian unity matters to CCU for study and implementation and possible recommendations to General Synod.

This year CCU devoted much of its attention to the recommendation arising from last year’s General Synod regarding the study process of the proposed ecumenical mandate (MGS 1995, R-3, p. 186).

ECUMENICAL OFFICER AND ASSOCIATE FOR ECUMENICAL RELATIONS

The general secretary of the RCA is its chief “ecumenical officer.” As such, the general secretary serves the denomination through varied degrees of engagement with the leadership of other church bodies. Because of the vast scope of this engagement (both national and worldwide), the general secretary is enlisted as an ex officio member of CCU. The commission is grateful for the wealth of experience—ecumenically, practically, and theologically—that the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson brings to CCU.

Serving as the associate for ecumenical relations and as the staff person for CCU is the Rev. Douglas Fromm, who also serves as pastor of Upper Ridgewood Community Church in Ridgewood, New Jersey.

ECUMENICAL NETWORK WITH CLASSES

In 1993 CCU initiated an effort to establish an RCA Ecumenical Network with classes. This network was created to assist the commission in disseminating important information to the classes on behalf of CCU. The network is comprised of one individual—with interest in ecumenical matters—appointed by each classis to serve as a liaison between CCU and the classis. The network, though not yet totally complete in membership, is proving to be an
effective means of communicating CCU concerns at the classis and sometimes congregational level. The communication goes both ways: At CCU's February 1995 meeting a thorough and encouraging report was received from the Classis of Illinois. Network members were asked recently by CCU to help promote the study of “An Ecumenical Mandate for the Reformed Church in America” throughout the classes.

**RCA ECUMENICAL APPOINTEES**

Ecumenical appointees are individuals from within the RCA who represent the denomination in various ecumenical engagements (e.g., National Council of Churches, interchurch dialogues, ecumenical convocations, etc.). In 1989 CCU established a means by which RCA ecumenical appointees could report about their various assignments and provide a measure of accountability as RCA representatives. Each year (since 1989) CCU's regular agenda includes reviewing these reports, which are most often very thoughtful presentations of the appointees' experience at a particular ecumenical venue.

RCA ecumenical appointees represented the denomination in ecumenical relationships in a number of ways. During this past year at a USA World Council of Churches (WCC) gathering in Nashville, Tennessee, RCA delegates took an active role as worship leaders, gave substantive feedback to WCC directors and staff, and delivered formal theological presentations on Christian higher education. RCA ecumenical appointees (along with their reports to CCU) have become an indispensable aspect of the commission's management of RCA ecumenical endeavors. To further develop the role of the ecumenical appointees and to enhance their communication with the commission, CCU developed a revised "job description" for the appointees effective January 1, 1996.

**ECUMENICAL COUNCILS**

The RCA is a charter member of the World Council of Churches and participates in its programs. Late in 1995 members of the Commission on Christian Unity and other at-large RCA participants developed a response to a WCC self-study, “Toward a Common Understanding and Vision of the WCC.”

The National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA (NCCC) continues to move forward in its reorganization efforts. The RCA, as an active charter member of the council, participates in these positive efforts through the work of RCA delegates to NCCC board and commission meetings. CCU closely monitors the reorganization of NCCC.

**THE WORLD ALLIANCE OF REFORMED CHURCHES (WARC)**

The World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) maintains a number of dialogues with other historic communions and world confessional bodies. Currently the RCA is involved through WARC in two bilateral dialogues with the Coptic Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches.

CCU has been asked to appoint a delegate to the WARC General Council, which will meet next in 1997. This appointment is pending, but a name should be available by the time General Synod meets in June 1996.
SOUTH AFRICA RELATIONS

The 1995 General Synod voted:

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 (MGS 1995, R-1, p. 405).

RCA Delegation

In light of the above R-1 and in concurrence with similar actions and recommendations adopted in Mission Services, a delegation of RCA representatives traveled to South Africa, February 26, 1996-March 6, 1996 to meet with URCSA representatives. Members of the RCA delegation were:

- Douglas Fromm: Associate for ecumenical relations
- Rene House: New Brunswick Theological Seminary representative
- Eugene Meerdink: Supervisor of RCA mission programs in Africa
- Edwin Mulder: General secretary emeritus
- Oliver Patterson: African-American Council chair
- Paul Smith: Western Theological Seminary representative
- Marye Thomas: African-American Council member
- Richard Vander Voet: Coordinator of RCA volunteer services, Reformed Church World Service, and disaster response

The RCA delegation was headed by Edwin Mulder and was representative of several RCA agencies which have related to South Africa in past years. These RCA agencies will continue to cultivate developing relations in future years.

“New South Africa”

There is much talk today of the “new South Africa.” There is a high degree of optimism as this country, now free from apartheid, begins the journey of writing its constitution and setting in place a government which addresses the immediate concerns of economy, housing, education, etc., while at the same time beginning the work of long-range planning, reform, and the transformation of a country. Economical growth is slow, unemployment is high, the question of land distribution is emotional, and expertise for the new government is limited.

In general South Africans are excited about the change in their country. President Nelson Mandela is highly regarded. One of his major concerns is that the present state of euphoria and optimism not diminish or disallow for constructive criticism of his leadership or of his government. The art of government in South Africa is one of “compromise politics.” In the African tradition, consensus solutions are sought. This is a slow process. Some view the government as moving too slowly, while on the other hand there are those who feel that the government is moving too quickly.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Of considerable attention at this period of time is the formation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This commission is headed by Archbishop Desmond Tutu. This commission is to be of a “confessional nature” for both victims of apartheid and for the perpetrators. In session for eighteen months, the commission aims to honor the victims of apartheid and to
allow families the opportunity to find out what happened to missing family members. The commission has the power to subpoena; however, amnesty is granted to those perpetrators who come forward of their own volition and testify.

There is an anxiety about the work of the commission on all sides. It is a process of disclosing abuses and violations of human rights without exacting justice. There is risk. While intended to bring healing, the process revives the pain of apartheid. One of the big questions being asked is: “Can we really handle the truth?” What happens to the pain revived if there is no course for retribution but only unconditional amnesty for the perpetrators?

The Role of the Churches

Over-against the economic, social, and political background, the churches in South Africa are now asking, “What is our role?” During apartheid the role of the churches was clear: to resist and to bring down an illegitimate, oppressive government.

Now many of those who were part of the resistance are in the government. This has left a leadership drain on the churches in South Africa. With a legitimate government in place and with many of the leaders of the church now a part of the government, the role of the churches has changed. In meetings with the South African Council of Churches and with the leadership of the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa, this observation was made. Also, a clear statement was made that the churches of South Africa are in a period of transition from a time of deconstruction to a period of reconstruction. This raises questions of leadership and questions about theological education for those attracted to ordained ministry as well as to the laity and to congregations.

The former prophetic task of the church in South Africa—standing over-against an illegitimate power—has shifted to a different prophetic task—self-examination of loyalty to the government. The emerging role is pastoral, especially during the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Local pastors are dealing with revived pain. Here the churches see their role as one of “accompaniment”; of standing with and by those who testify. The pain of the individual becomes the pain of the community. The churches see themselves as called to model and practice forgiveness and acceptance, collectively and individually.

Listening Role

The RCA delegation had meetings with persons in government, administrators and faculty at the Turflop Seminary and the University of the Western Cape, staff of World Vision, staff of the South African Council of Churches, officers and staff of the Dutch Reformed Church (the white Dutch Reformed Church), and officers and staff of the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa. While the meetings were dialogical in format, the RCA delegation took a posture of mostly listening. Given all that is happening in this intense period of transition for both the country of South Africa and its churches, listening seemed to be an appropriate role for the RCA delegation and provided a background for future proactive relationships.

Five Working Principles

In a final meeting with the officers of the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa, the following five working principles were identified:

1. Movement of Information. There is a desire on the part of the URCSA to have a “movement of information” with the Reformed Church in America: sharing understandings of mission and moving toward a common understanding of mission. This involves informing each other of theological papers and positions for reflection and reaction.
2. Movement of People. There was consensus that the URCSA and the RCA should work together in the area of theological education and ministerial formation. Programs of faculty/student exchanges, clergy sabbaticals, laity exchanges, and volunteer internships were discussed. The questions of the quantity of persons to be involved as well as what agreements are needed were raised over against the economics of the URCSA and the RCA.

3. Understanding Issues Confronting the URCSA and the RCA. Discussion focused on the multicultural societies in South Africa and the U.S. and the conflicts and issues raised by pluralism. Do the RCA and the URCSA have something to say to each other about ministry in the formation of a culture that can live with nature’s integrity? Do the RCA and the URCSA have something to say to society and to government?

4. Solidarity. The question of how do members of the URCSA and the RCA truly pray for each other was raised. What is the intentionality in lifting each other’s denomination in prayer? The URCSA raised the question of how it can help the RCA by sharing its reflections on advocacy ministries. The issue of the church identifying the marginalized in society was also raised as a point of common sharing. The URCSA made it clear to the RCA delegation that the URCSA needs the support of the RCA in its dealing with the Dutch Reformed Church and with the question of the Dutch Reformed Church unifying with the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa.

5. Funding. To be honest with each other, the RCA and the URCSA have to acknowledge that finances are a part of any relationship. What principles are involved? How do the URCSA and the RCA democratize the relationship, given the different economies of the RCA and the URCSA? The RCA has multiple staff and full-time staff at the General Synod level. The URCSA, on the other hand, is functioning with limited and part-time staff at all levels. It was strongly stated by the URCSA that it wants to carry its own costs of being a denomination and does not want to be only in a “receiving partnership.” Still, the reality remains that the URCSA is a new denomination, only recently formed in April 1994 by the merger of two denominations, the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in Afrika (NGKA)(the black Reformed Church) and the Sendingkerk (the colored Reformed Church). Also, given the economic status of its country, the URCSA is limited in its financial resources. The RCA delegation expressed interest in sharing stewardship materials and expertise.

Summary

If one were to ask each member of the RCA delegation to give a summary of its task, there would be concurrence on the following:

1. Even as the URCSA is in a new phase of its life, so is the RCA in a new phase in its life with the URCSA. The visit was tangible evidence that the RCA is entering a new chapter of its history with South Africa. Just as the past period of the African churches was one of resistance and deconstruction, so it was one of RCA solidarity in resistance and disinvestment (literally, financial disinvestment) from South Africa’s past illegitimate government policy of apartheid. For the churches in South Africa it is now a period of reconstruction and reinvestment, and for the RCA it is a new era of relationships with South Africa. Together, the RCA and URCSA are learning how to do this and working together on what shape it will take.

2. The relationship of the RCA and the URCSA must be in parity. There must be a posture of equality and an openness to sharing and learning from each other, both in support of each other when in agreement and in support of each other through critical dialogue. As someone said in closing: “The future is now; may God bless our work.”
RCA ECUMENICAL MANDATE

As previously mentioned, CCU has given a major portion of its meeting time since the 1995 General Synod to facilitating the RCA’s study of “An Ecumenical Mandate for the Reformed Church in America.” This mandate, if adopted by this 1996 General Synod, will be the RCA’s policy statement on ecumenism as the RCA moves into the twenty-first century.

What follows is an introduction to the process CCU followed in bringing the statement to its revised form now ready for presentation to General Synod for adoption.

ADOPTION OF A MANDATE: A BRIEF HISTORY

In 1990 the RCA 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 new effort was in order.

A TASK FORCE ON ECUMENISM CREATED

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 both the concerns of the RCA and the biblical and theological principles that 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. The initial feedback to the task force’s work was encouraging, but the advisory committee asked for more specifics.

Subsequently, after further revision, comments from seventeen outside readers from across the denomination were solicited. This feedback resulted in still more revision of the document. The task force presented the final results of its work to CCU in February 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. To the extent that the task force’s endeavors are successful, its work is the legacy of Brouwer’s devotion to ecumenical work.)

CCU’S REVISION OF THE PAPER

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 review and response. At the October 1994 CCU meeting the paper was painstakingly reviewed again and once more refined by a commission member. At the February 1995 meeting CCU worked through the paper line by line and arrived at its final text.

The text was then presented in full to the 1995 General Synod and commended by the Commission on Christian Unity “to the whole RCA for study, reflection, and response” (MGS 1995, p. 174). After an affirmative vote by the 1995 Advisory Committee on Christian Unity, the 1995 General Synod voted:
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 of Christian Unity; and further, to request the Commission on Christian Unity to submit the final version of the paper... to the 1996 General Synod for adoption (MGS 1995, R-3, p. 186).

THE STUDY PHASE OF THE MANDATE

To facilitate the RCA’s study of the proposed mandate, CCU (through the RCA Distribution Center) formatted the paper into a booklet and developed (through the RCA Office on Christian Education) a study guide to accompany the booklet. Further, CCU provided a one-page questionnaire, inserted into each booklet, to facilitate responses. All these materials were mailed in late 1995 to each RCA pastor, clerks of each consistory, and various other recipients within the denomination, as specified in the 1995 General Synod recommendation (MGS 1995, R-3, p. 186).

Responses were due back in mid-February 1996. While there were not many responses, the responses received were overwhelmingly positive. It should be of interest that readers of the document from the World Council of Churches and the Vatican were also very positive, while suggesting a few alterations.

As noted in the initial introduction to this report, CCU conducted a telephone conference call on February 19, 1996, to review all the responses that had been turned in. From these responses a few, relatively minor changes in the document were agreed upon.

What follows then, with the enthusiastic commendation of CCU and the associate for ecumenical relations, is the final revised edition of “An Ecumenical Mandate for the Reformed Church in America.” With great anticipation that this document will be used by God to help the RCA set a new and bold course in ecumenical relations, CCU requested its adoption by the 1996 General Synod of the Reformed Church.

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).

INTRODUCTION

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, FORMATION, AND PURPOSE OF CHRISTIAN UNITY

A. 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 unity:

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 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 toward. 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 *status 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, while still seeking to build *koinonia* through dialogue and through mutual understanding.

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.”

**B. 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.

C. 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.

II. THE EXPRESSIONS, PROGRESS, 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?

A. 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 (WCC)—as well as nonmember communions such as Roman Catholic and Southern Baptist. 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. Moreover, recent WCC reflection has underscored the intrinsic link between the search for unity as expressed in Faith and Order and the church's mutual commitment to God's purposes of justice, peace, and the integrity of creation for the world.

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 conversation 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.

B. 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
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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.

C. 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 non-presbyterian 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 intention for deepening ecumenical commitment within traditional church settings is to provide RCA members a place in the life and worship of other churches, and members of other churches a place in RCA congregations. When invitations are issued, ministers of the gospel would have access to other's pulpits, and communion tables would be open to each other's members. Also, 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. Often 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.

III. GOALS, CRITERIA, AND OPERATING GUIDELINES OF CHRISTIAN UNITY

A. GOALS OF CHRISTIAN UNITY

Christian unity is central to our faith, and so these goals are put forward for implementation by the RCA.

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.
B. 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.”

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 national and worldwide Reformed denominations (e.g., Christian Reformed Church) that have confessions similar to our own, and we accept the special obligations such relationships have for mutual support, common testimony, and confessional solidarity.

C. 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, Calvini 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 and act over against this threat." This definition comes from D.J. Smit, "What Does *Status Confessionis* Mean?" in A Moment of Truth: The Confession of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church 1982, edited by G.D. Cloete and D.J. Smit (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), pp. 7-32.

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.

R-1.

To adopt the paper, "An Ecumenical Mandate for the Reformed Church in America," for use in the Reformed Church in America as a foundation and guide for its ecumenical relations; and further,

*to instruct the Commission on Christian Unity to distribute the paper, "An Ecumenical Mandate for the Reformed Church in America," to congregations, consistories, classes, regional synods, agencies, and institutions of the Reformed Church in America.*

(ADOPTED)

(A motion was made and supported to amend R-1 by inserting a third paragraph with the words "and further, to encourage pastors and congregations to join in the growing prayer movement throughout the U.S. and Canada to help build Christian unity through prayer." The motion LOST.)

(A motion was made and supported to amend the text of the paper, "An Ecumenical Mandate for the Reformed Church in America," by inserting in line four, p. 188, the words "in doctrine or practice" following the words "is consciously denied or rejected." The parliamentarian informed Synod that the text of the paper cannot be amended.)

(A motion was made and supported to amend R-1 by inserting in the first paragraph the words "in doctrine or practice" following the words "Reformed Church in America." The parliamentarian informed Synod that a motion was needed to refer R-1 to the Commission on Christian Unity for revisions of the text of the paper, "An Ecumenical Mandate for the Reformed Church in America.")

(A motion was made and supported to "refer R-1 to the Commission on Christian Unity." The motion LOST.)

(A motion was made and supported to suspend the Special Rules of Order of the General Synod, Article 2, Section 6 in order to make revisions to the text of the paper, "An Ecumenical Mandate for the Reformed Church in America." The motion LOST.)
LUTHERAN-REFORMED RELATIONS

Another major ecumenical initiative will come before the 1997 General Synod. CCU, while giving primary emphasis for the past two years to the RCA’s ecumenical mandate, has also maintained oversight of and a keen interest in the discussions of the Joint Coordinating Committee of the Lutheran-Reformed dialogue process—a long process which will come to a conclusion in 1997.

The Joint Coordinating Committee is comprised of individuals from four participating churches in the thirty-four-year-long Lutheran-Reformed dialogue: the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), the Presbyterian Church USA (PCUSA), the United Church of Christ (UCC), and the Reformed Church in America (RCA). The committee’s work—the final phase of the dialogue—is to assist each of the four denominations with their respective decisions on whether to enter into full communion as Lutheran and Reformed congregations. (The three Reformed bodies are informally in full communion with each other already.)

FORMULA OF AGREEMENT

In 1994, to facilitate the decision-making process, the Joint Coordinating Committee drafted a document called the Formula of Agreement. This document contains a brief compendium of A Common Calling (the report of the Lutheran-Reformed Committee for Theological Conversation, 1988-92) and answers some of the questions which have been raised within the participating churches about what full communion means.

The Formula of Agreement is printed in full in the 1995 edition of the Minutes of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, pp. 164-73. The 1995 General Synod instructed CCU “to distribute the Formula of Agreement to all RCA clergy, clerks of RCA consistories, and stated clerks of classes; and...to encourage RCA classes and congregations to study the Formula of Agreement (MGS 1995, R-2, p. 173).

To avoid possible confusion between the Formula of Agreement and the “Ecumenical Mandate for the Reformed Church in America,” CCU has delayed distribution of the Formula of Agreement until after the 1996 meeting of the General Synod. CCU will distribute the Formula of Agreement prior to the fall 1996 sessions of RCA classis meetings.

Each delegate at the 1996 General Synod will receive, however, an advance copy of the Formula of Agreement to coincide with the address of the Rev. George Anderson, newly elected bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Bishop Anderson, at the invitation of CCU, is the featured ecumenical guest at the 1996 General Synod and is addressing the delegates in plenary session.

CCU will continue to inform and educate the RCA members about the Lutheran-Reformed dialogue, full communion, and the Formula of Agreement throughout the coming year. CCU’s goal is to have the delegates attending the 1997 General Synod be as aware of the full range of issues related to the Lutheran-Reformed dialogue as possible so that an informed vote may be taken as to whether the RCA will formally enter into full communion with the three other denominations.

CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH RELATIONS

In 1995 an overture from the Classis of North Grand Rapids, to effect full programmatic and organizational union with the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) and the RCA by June 2000 (MGS 1995, p. 187), resulted in the following recommendation from the 1995 General Synod:
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” (MSG 1995, R-5, p. 189).

In response to R-5, CCU, at its October 1995 meeting in New York City, took the following action:

Motion/Seconded/Carried—That at the CCU’s October 1996 meeting an ecumenical officer from the CRC will be invited to meet with CCU. Further, that the Ecumenical Commission of the CRC be sent a copy of the RCA “Ecumenical Mandate” and that correspondence between the CCU moderator and his or her counterpart be commenced.

On March 14-15, 1996, denominational leaders of the Reformed Church in America and the Christian Reformed Church in North America met at Marble Collegiate Church in New York City and at the RCA offices in the Interchurch Center in New York City to explore common areas of ministry and mission. The participants will meet again in April 1997 at the Christian Reformed Church in North America headquarters in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Ecumenical Greetings

On Wednesday morning, June 12, 1996, Bishop H. George Anderson of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) presented greetings to General Synod. His greetings follow.

Introduction

Just as German Lutherans and Dutch Reformed churches are emerging from their ethnic isolation and joining the “mainline” denominations, we discover that the mainline itself is in deep trouble. It is as though we had been amassing our life savings in order to join the rich and famous on an ocean cruise, only to discover that our cruise ship is the Titanic!

In the last seven years at least fourteen major books have been written on the misery of the mainline denominations. The issue is whether to continue calling these churches “mainline” or “oldline”—or maybe even “sideline”? Mainline used to mean that those denominations were where the center of American culture was located; now it’s more like the Main Line in Philadelphia—once the area of wealth and social prestige, now a nearly abandoned commuter track, while the REAL traffic flows on Interstate 95, seven miles to the south.

There are at least three forces that have pushed the mainline to the margins. The first is the growth of the “evangelical” wing of American Protestantism. Not only have these denominations grown numerically, but they have used TV and other media to their advantage. Through groups like the Moral Majority and the Christian Coalition, they have captured the attention of America on many hot public issues. They are a new force in American religious life.
At the same time, many other Americans are opting out of the organized church. They have been called "believers, not belonging." There used to be a sharp line between church-going believers and the unbelievers, but now there is a growing grey area of people between the traditional denominations and those who are sentimentally religious, or New Age, or in a church of their own heads. A recent survey of Presbyterian baby boomers found that the two largest categories were "moderately active Presbyterians" (29 percent) and the "uninvolved but religious" (21 percent). The problem was that in actual beliefs, the two groups barely differed! (Hoge, Johnson, and Luidens, Vanishing Boundaries, 1994.) Already about half of all Protestants change denominations at least once, and they probably don't feel the need to add or subtract a single doctrine in the process. Even within the denominations, I suspect, lifestyle rather than religion is the organizing principle of most lives. They are not "rooted in the gospel"; they are rooted in a social class or a lifestyle, and the gospel is an ornament they wear, like a gold cross around their neck.

The third great change on the American religious scene is the arrival of traditional religions from overseas countries where we used to send missionaries. Let's just take one example: Muslims. The number of Muslims in the U.S. is now about equal to the number of Episcopalians, and there will be more Muslims than Jews in the U.S. by 2000. Right now there are as many mosques in our country as there are ELCA congregations. The military services will be adding a fourth category—Muslim—to the traditional Protestant-Catholic-Jewish chaplaincies.

What, then, shall we say to these things? Is the church about to plunge off the edge of the world? Are we going to witness the end of Christianity, or the end of organized religion, or at least the death of denominations? As a historian, I have several things that I would like to propose for your consideration.

I. Nostalgia isn't what it used to be.

The "good old days" really weren't so great after all. When we think about the way things really ought to be in the church, we tend to recall the days when pews were full, mission congregations were sprouting up all over, and every congregation met its benevolence 100 percent. When were those days?

Most people would say, "In the 1950s—that's when everything was really cooking." Well, I'm old enough to remember those days, which were often characterized at the time as a "religious revival."

But many observers in those years lamented the shallowness of church membership, claiming that people were joining because IBM or some other corporation expected them to, as a symbol of corporate involvement in the community. Some experts attributed the attendance to nervousness over the Cold War. Those were the days of Russian superiority in space—the "age of anxiety." Roy Eckardt, in his contemporary analysis, The Survey of Piety in America (1958), described the revival as an upsurge of interest in religion rather than of genuine religion itself.

In short, religious interest in those days was pretty shallow, like the roots of the seed that fell on sandy soil. Many theologians warned that the revival was more shadow than substance, and that it could wilt away as dramatically as it had flourished. Subsequent history proved those skeptics right.

Martin Marty was right when he said, "There are no golden ages, only yellow ones."
II. We are always at a crossroads.


Today we are certainly aware of the crisis. Perhaps in an exaggerated way. Loren Mead has written:

We are at the front edges of the greatest transformation of the church that has occurred for 1600 years. It is by far the greatest change that the church has ever experienced in America; it may eventually make the transformation of the Reformation look like a ripple in a pond.

These comments remind me of an observation by the British historian Herbert Butterfield, who wrote that the reason English historians were announcing that we had reached the end of western civilization was that they were no longer able to obtain good domestic help.

I really doubt that the membership woes of five or six U.S. denominations will amount to much more than a skin rash on the body of Christ—now spread over six continents and doing very well on many of them.

Of course, that doesn’t help those of us who are experiencing the stresses of these changes. To us the threats are real, the pangs excruciating. We don’t like to see our beloved churches falling behind or losing out. We question our own ability; we wonder if we are the problem—or at least if our church is the problem.

But there have been other moments of crisis just in the last years. I lived in the south during the 1950s, when the public schools were desegregated and our local pastors had to take a stand. Some of them lost their jobs. Others lived with a bad conscience. Most of you remember the family stress caused by generational differences toward the Vietnam war. It was not an easy time to minister, especially when institutions like the church were under direct attack. In the 1970s the Missouri Synod Lutheran Church went through the agony of internal conflict and ultimate division. Many of our church bodies struggled with an appropriate response to the charismatic movement.

What decade has been without its challenges and stress? Desegregation in the 50s, Vietnam in the 60s, charismatic renewal and historical criticism in the 70s, merger in the 80s, human sexuality in the 90s. There is always an issue, always a threat to the unity, always human pride and stubbornness to make a mountain out of a mole hill. What will our worries look like to the next generation?

III. God never lets the church stand still.

Maybe the social changes that each decade brings are not the only factor at work here. What if God’s preferred role for the church is more like Christ’s story than like Horatio Alger’s?

If you survey the long history of Christianity, you will find that every time the church found success, something bad happened to it. For example, it had no sooner climbed out of persecution and become the official church of the Roman Empire than the barbarians—our northern European ancestors—sacked Rome and ended that triumph. During the Middle Ages the church again created an empire for itself and humbled the mightiest rulers of Europe, only to crack apart because of inner corruption and decay. Revolutions in the nineteenth and
twentieth centuries destroyed the culture—the Protestantism that arose in the wake of Catholic Christendom—and, on a smaller scale, the unrest of the 60s interrupted the religious revival of the 50s.

It seems that God just won’t let the church settle down and enjoy its triumphs. Every time we want to linger on the Mount of Transfiguration, God pushes us off the scenic viewpoint and lands us back in some valley. It’s just like walking. If you stand still, you are perfectly balanced, but you don’t get anywhere. But if someone—maybe God—gives you a little push, you have to put a foot out to keep from falling. From your point of view it was a fall avoided, but from the world’s point of view, you just took a step forward.

Someone has wisely written that college faculties are all in favor of progress; it’s just change that they don’t like. The reason is that “progress” sounds like we’re getting something more than we had. “Change” often implies that we will lose something that is important or precious to us. How can we keep in mind that old truth that we sometimes have to let go of the old in order to grasp the new?

In theological terms, are we ready to forgo immortality in order to experience resurrection?

IV. Present trends never continue.

Those who know me may remember my doubts about predicting the future. I learned that caution from listening to a great church historian, Dr. Kenneth Scott Latourette, reply to reporters who asked him, “As a historian, what do you predict?” He always answered, “As a historian, I know that predictions seldom come true.” He was right. Ever since that time I have collected the predictions that come out at the beginning of each decade, and they make some amusing reading:

- Tris Speaker, baseball great, 1921: “[Babe] Ruth made a big mistake when he gave up pitching.”
- Thomas J. Watson, chairman of IBM, 1943: “I think there is a world market for about five computers.”
- Ken Olsen, president of Digital Equipment Corporation, 1977; “There is no reason for any individual to have a computer in their home.”
- Lyle Schaller, 1970; “The Sunday morning service will no longer be the chief worship service in Protestant churches by 1980.”

Why can the experts be so wildly wrong? Because they are experts—knowing a great deal about a tiny fraction of this complicated world. And because human history is woven out of human freedom, and no matter how large your statistical sample, you cannot cancel out freedom’s surprising effects. History is the kingdom of newness, the place where the creative Spirit of God continually is “doing a new thing.” Someone has said, “If you want to hear God laugh, tell God your plans.”

Although we cannot predict the future, there is ONE thing we can be sure of.

V. God’s Church will endure to the end.

When things looked bleak for the infant Reformation, John Calvin assured his friends that the cause was really God’s cause. God had said that the gates of hell would not prevail against the church, and God would see to it that the promise was kept. Our own concern, he wrote, should simply be to remain faithful to God’s invincible cause.
Granted that the church will survive. How about our own Lutheran and Reformed traditions? Many commentators claim that denominations are a thing of the past.

I think that is highly unlikely. Anyone who has tried to close a congregation or move a graveyard knows that religious institutions are very durable.

Denominational structures are like seashells. They are created, bit by bit, as houses for living organisms, but they can outlast their founders and become a home for hermit crabs and other life which has no connection with the original builders. The question is not whether denominations will survive, but whether they will continue to grow and change or just become hollow structures harboring nothing more than the sound of distant surf.

The living creatures which have built our denominations were the GREAT CAUSES—foreign missions, education, home missions, and care of the aged and orphans—urgent needs that congregations could not address alone. The issue for our time is whether we still feel that these, or other great causes, demand our loyalty and cooperation. Otherwise, the only role for denominations is to facilitate pastoral mobility and administer pension funds. I believe that there are still great causes, in addition to those of the past, that powerfully motivate us. Think of the tremendous outpouring of support to address human hunger worldwide—through Bread for the Word and One Great Hour of Sharing. But do you notice that these causes are ones that any caring organization could adopt? The Red Cross could do them. Is there anything left that only the church is called to do? I think there is.

VI. We do not face a spiritual desert, but a spiritual jungle.

In 1960 Time magazine ran its first cover without a picture on it. It was stark black, with three words: IS GOD DEAD? The “God is Dead” movement expressed the triumph of secular thought over traditional religion. But its consequences have been surprising.

The same Time magazine that asked about God being dead in the sixties ran a cover story on angels in 1994.

The culture teems with spiritual needs—climbing, seeking, groping for the light. The 90s are crowded with gods new and old. Exotic blends of New Age notions, belief in angels, astrology—and much more—compete with popular interpretations of Native American religion, revivals of Gregorian chant, Hindu meditation, and Zen Buddhism. They bring to mind the words of G. K. Chesterton that when people stop believing in God, they do not believe in nothing; they believe in anything.

The lead article in Newsweek magazine for November 28, 1994, is titled, “In Search of the Sacred.” It concludes with a quote from an anthropologist who observes, “People feel they want something they’ve lost, and they don’t remember what it is they’ve lost. But it has left a gaping hole.” It sounds a lot like St. Augustine’s famous line, “O God, You have created us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.”

While it is true that many of our contemporaries are spiritually hungry, it does not follow that they will automatically respond to our message. Their quest is for a different gospel that is self-affirming and privatistic. It is not a made-to-order receptacle for Christianity. Rather, it is a counter-religion that has its demonic side. It is here we must summon our best theological analysis in order to address these real spiritual needs—but not necessarily on their own terms.

What the world WANTS is comfort, pleasure, and to be left alone.

What the world NEEDS is service, sacrifice, and being brought together.
We understand that need, as the Rev. Timothy Brown reminded us in his meditation on “present your bodies as living sacrifices” this morning. What greater calling is there than to show this polarized, divided, and hostile world that reconciliation is possible—that not only Jews and Greeks, but even Reformed and Lutherans can heal divisions that go back four centuries.

It is our task, our challenge, to explain to the world what’s wrong, to diagnose this illness—this spiritual hunger that doesn’t go away, but only gnaws more deeply—and at the same time to demonstrate a better way—together. We must make Christ known as the one hope for the world.

God has offered us a great challenge.

God has given us the power to meet it.

I ask that you and we together accept the challenge and pray for that power.

H. George Anderson

Agency Report

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES OF CHRIST IN THE U.S.A. (NCC)

“The world’s resources are not ours, but God’s, and we are the stewards,” said the Rev. Dr. Joan B. Campbell, general secretary of the National Council of Churches (NCC), upon returning from the 1995 U.N. Social Summit in Copenhagen, where she was part of the official U.S. delegation. Sharing resources is a theological issue that is central to unity, she said.

This has been a consistent council message, not only at Copenhagen, but in many settings, domestic and international. In 1995 this message stood in sharp contrast to proposed federal spending priorities that balance the budget at the expense of the most vulnerable. The NCC spoke out, calling the nation to a Lenten reflection on the common good, which it is doing again in 1996. In November 1995 the NCC General Board urged President William Clinton to veto any measures that further endanger children, the elderly, and others who are vulnerable. A delegation of church leaders personally delivered the resolution to the president.

This passion for peace and justice energized the National Council of Church’s efforts, ranging from urban initiatives and a renewed emphasis on racial justice to a presence at the UN Summit on Women in Beijing, China. It shone through the general secretary’s pledge—as she left for the Rabin funeral in Israel—to continue ecumenical efforts for peace in the Middle East. It powered community development programs that Church World Service (CWS) supports with partners around the globe. It sparked a rapid, compassionate, and sustained CWS response to the bombing in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, and to emergencies in Bosnia, Rwanda, and many other places worldwide. It could be seen in a massive campaign to protect the rights of refugees. As xenophobia intensified at home, the ecumenical community countered with the biblical injunction to “welcome the stranger” and built on decades of success in resettling refugees in U.S. communities.
A "Transformation Process," implemented in 1995, helped position the NCC to carry its concerns into the future. Among other changes, a new National Ministries Unit took shape, capable of a strong and focused ministry to the nation. The unit drew together and was strengthened by these NCC program pieces: ministries that deal with the spiritual, economic, racial, sexual, and environmental dimensions of justice for all; the work of Education for Mission/Friendship Press to enlarge grassroots understanding of these and many issues; and strong programs in Bible translation and utilization, ministries in Christian education, professional church leadership, evangelization, and worship and the arts.

Among efforts in the General Secretariat, also a new structure for the council, were a conference on the churches' public witness, an initiative to get faith news on the Internet, work to improve interfaith relations, and much more. The Faith and Order Commission is lodged in the General Secretariat as well, providing a way for participants to reflect together on Christian unity issues. This work received a financial boost through the Ecumenical Development Initiative. A gala event honoring Archbishop Iakovos, primate of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America, raised $250,000 for the National and World Councils' Faith and Order work.

In other good financial news for the National Council of Churches, the majority of a troubled $8 million investment was recovered, while legal efforts to collect the remainder continued. Money-saving measures implemented in the council's finance and administrative functions also helped the NCC be a good steward of its resources—strengthening it for work in the world that God so loved.

> The advisory committee recommended:

R-2.
To adopt the following resolution:

WHEREAS Arthur O. Van Eck was on the denominational staff of the Reformed Church in America, serving as director of adult education, director of family ministries, and executive for education; and

WHEREAS Arthur O. Van Eck enriched the Reformed Church in America during these nineteen years through his role in joint educational development, urban ministry, work with minorities, and participation in ecumenical agencies; and

WHEREAS from 1982 to the present Arthur O. Van Eck has had a distinguished ministry with and to the larger church through the National Council of Churches, serving as executive director, education for Christian life and missions; associate general secretary, Division of Education and Ministry; and director, Department of Bible Translation and Utilization; and

WHEREAS Arthur O. Van Eck has made a major contribution to English Bible readers everywhere as project director of the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) Bible, administering the work of its translation committee, contracting for the development of its electronic database, overseeing the publishing and electronic rights for the NRSV, and the development of the NRSV Catholic edition, the NRSV Anglican edition, and the NRSV Common Bible;
THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninetieth regular session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Orange City, Iowa, on the twelfth day of June, 1996, extends its congratulations to Arthur O. Van Eck on the occasion of his retirement from the National Council of Churches; expresses its gratitude for the honor he has brought to the Reformed Church in America through his work with Reformed Church in America sister communions in the National Council of Churches; offers its admiration and appreciation for his many contributions to the life and mission of the ecumenical church; and wishes for him and his wife, Beatrice, health, happiness, and service in the years ahead. (ADOPTED)

Overtures

Postpone General Synod Decision on Ecumenical Mandate Until 1997 General Synod

1. The Classis of South Grand Rapids overtures General Synod to postpone until the 1997 General Synod a decision on the paper, "An Ecumenical Mandate for the Reformed Church in America."

Reasons:

1. The 1995 General Synod voted:

To commend the paper, "An Ecumenical Mandate for the Reformed Church in America," to the congregations, consistory, 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 (MGS 1995, R-3, p. 186).

2. The Commission on Christian Unity mailed the paper in the first week of December 1995 and asked for responses to the paper by February 12, 1996.

3. The Commission on Christian Unity surely did not receive widespread responses because the time frame was too short.

➢ The advisory committee recommended:

R-3.
To deny the overture.
Reasons:

1. The paper, "An Ecumenical Mandate for the Reformed Church in America," was sent to RCA pastors, consistories, and classes in the last week of November 1995, and the Commission on Christian Unity extended the deadline for responses to the paper.

2. The Commission on Christian Unity received adequate feedback on the paper, "An Ecumenical Mandate for the Reformed Church in America," from across the RCA, including feedback from the Classis of South Grand Rapids.

3. The Commission on Christian Unity received feedback throughout the drafting process of the paper, "An Ecumenical Mandate for the Reformed Church in America."

4. Although solicited responses to General Synod requests are sometimes expected too rapidly, in this particular instance there were multiple opportunities for input from a broad and varied constituency of the RCA membership.

Because of the vote taken by Synod to adopt R-1 (see p. 197), the moderator of the Advisory Committee on Christian Unity withdrew R-3 and Synod did not vote on R-3.

Formula of Agreement

2. The Classis of South Grand Rapids overtures the 1996 General Synod to postpone any decision on the 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 (UCC) until actions have been taken to:

A. Inform the United Church of Christ that while we ourselves have failed in many ways to submit our sexuality to the lordship of Jesus Christ and that while we too wrestle daily with the lusts of the flesh, in a spirit of repentance and love the RCA is opposed to the policies adopted by the United Church of Christ which condone homosexual behavior.

B. Offer to enter into dialogue with the United Church of Christ on the issue of homosexuality for the purpose of encouraging the UCC to move toward a more biblically faithful understanding of human sexuality and to move toward a repeal of all its policies condoning homosexual behavior.

Reasons:

1. Scripture condemns the practice of homosexuality.


It is not possible to quote all the insights from this paper, but it may be helpful to note the following:
1. "The [biblical] texts which do refer to homosexual activity are unequivocal in their condemnation of the practice" (MGS 1978, p. 230).

2. "The Scripture's repeated endorsement of heterosexuality as the Creator's expressed intent is far more significant for our understanding than the few negative pronouncements concerning homosexuality" (MGS 1978, p. 233).

3. "The homosexual must be affirmed as a person even while his/her acts of perversion cannot be" (MGS 1978, p. 236).

4. "When it is understood that most homosexual acts are performed by persons with some measure of heterosexual orientation, the urgency of the church's moral witness becomes obvious. Contrary to popular opinion, evidence suggests that most homosexuals do have some measure of choice. Thus, the church cannot abandon the adolescent struggling to achieve sexual identity, the ambivalent adult, or the neurotic gay bar 'cruiser' to the painful vagaries of a promiscuous culture or the ethical relativism of our time. While avoiding simplistic and obnoxious social crusades, the church must affirm through its preaching and pastoral ministry that homosexuality is not an acceptable, alternative lifestyle. God's gracious intent for human sexual fulfillment is the permanent bond of heterosexual love. This redemptive word must be spoken, with sensitivity, caring, and clarity to any person who would make a perverted sexual choice, and to society as a whole" (MGS 1978, p. 238).

5. "Scripture does not refer to the problem of homosexual acts which emerge in accord with one's conscious, sexual orientation and not against it. As Jesus remained silent on the entire subject, so the biblical writers did not address the human condition now known as homosexual inversion. It does not follow from this fact, however, that the heterosexual norm is less binding, as many in the homosexual context aver, or that any sexual act accords with God's will if it is performed in fidelity, trust, and love. The norm expressed in creation and reaffirmed in Jesus' own teaching is not abrogated by the fact that some persons cannot conform to it, any more than it is set aside because some persons will not live by it (MGS 1978, p. 238).

B. The 1979 General Synod received the report, "Christian Pastoral Care for the Homosexual," from the Commission on Theology (MGS 1979, pp. 128-35), and this paper is reprinted also in The Church Speaks (pp. 258-66). The suggested list of twelve readings which were part of the 1979 General Synod report (MGS 1979, pp. 134-35) are not included, however, in the reprint of this paper in The Church Speaks.

The 1979 General Synod voted "to make this paper available to the churches of the Reformed Church in America for study" (MGS 1979, R-4, p. 135). The advisory committee noted: "The advisory committee feels 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, p. 135).

This 1979 General Synod report identifies a number of crucial principles for pastoral understanding and response to homosexuals in a congregation, as well as expressing "Reasonable Expectations of the Homosexual" (MGS 1979, pp. 133-34). Included in these expectations is the following reminder:

The church can also reasonably expect that the homosexual will not regard only that love to be genuine which affirms his homosexual behavior.
Nothing can be more cruel than the tenderness that consigns another to his sin... It is a ministry of mercy, an ultimate offer of genuine fellowship, when we allow nothing but God's word to stand between us, judging and succoring (Quoted in MGS 1979, p. 133, from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together [New York: Harpers, 1954], p. 107).

One can love a person without approving those things in him which retard his fullest development... The church expects its people to be open to new possibilities. The homosexual must not place a ceiling on his capacity for growth. It is important that a person submit his whole self to Christ without excepting his homosexuality. This means letting go of the myth of incurability. A facile, overly optimistic view toward change and healing is unwise, but fatalism is even more so. With a teachable spirit, the desire and determination to find something better, a sense of the presence of Christ, who wills healing and growth, and support of the Christian fellowship, much valuable growth can take place (MGS 1979, pp. 133-34).

C. The 1980 General Synod responded to two overtures concerning homosexuality. The Classis of Schoharie (in the Regional Synod of Albany) overutured General Synod to deny ordination to practicing homosexuals and lesbians (MGS 1980, p. 285). The advisory committee recommended denial of the overture for the following reasons:

1. That General Synod cannot deny ordinations; only the classis can do that.

2. The advisory committee believes that the church knows that, according to the Scriptures, homosexual acts are sin (See General Synod papers on homosexuality [MGS, 1978, pp. 229-240, and MGS, 1979, pp. 128-135]).

3. The advisory committee believes that judicatories know their responsibilities in the exercise of discipline as prescribed in the Book of Church Order.

4. Because it is impossible to list all unrepeated sins that would cause ordination to be revoked or denied, it is inappropriate to list only one (MGS 1980, p. 285).

The Classis of Schoharie sent a second overture to the 1980 General Synod:

to bring to the awareness of RCA members, congregations, classes, and synods competent programs and persons which can successfully help the practicing homosexual and lesbian, minister or lay person, overcome his or her sexual behavior (MGS 1980, p. 97).

The 1980 General Synod approved this overture, but the RCA staff publication produced in 1981, "Programs for Helping the Practicing Homosexual and Lesbian," was challenged as being in conflict with the 1980 General Synod's intent because it included publications and groups which do not believe there can or should be any change in homosexual orientation on the part of Christians. In 1982 a new resource, "Response to 1980 Schoharie Classis Overture Regarding Overcoming Homosexual Behavior," was distributed in the RCA. This resource cited a number of books, articles, and other resources.

D. The 1990 General Synod adopted the following two statements:
1. 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).

2. To commend the papers “Homosexuality: A Biblical and Theological Appraisal” (MGS 1978, pp. 229-240) and “Christian Pastoral Care for the Homosexual” (MGS 1979, pp. 128-135) to RCA churches as pastoral advice until such time as a subsequent study by the Commission on Theology is approved by General Synod (MGS 1990, R-13, p. 461).

E. Over the last two decades the United Church of Christ has adopted resolutions and statements about human sexuality which the Reformed Church in America has consistently disapproved. The UCC resolutions and statements include the following:

1. The Fourteenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ recommends that Associations throughout the UCC be open to consideration of the nomination and election of avowed lesbian and gay laypersons and clergy to their Church and Ministry committees. (From a “Resolution Recommending Inclusiveness on Association Church and Ministry Committees within the UCC,” adopted by the Fourteenth General Synod, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, June 24-28, 1983, p. 20.).

2. The Fourteenth General Synod acknowledges that Associations have responsibility for ordination and ministerial standing. It therefore recommends to Associations that in considering a candidate’s qualifications for ministry, the candidate’s sexual orientation should not be grounds for denying the request for ordination. (From the “Report of the Task Force for the Study of Human Sexuality,” adopted by the Fourteenth General Synod, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, June 24-28, 1983, p. 21.)

3. The Fifteenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ encourages... the congregations of the United Church of Christ to adopt a non-discrimination policy and a Covenant of Openness and Affirmation of persons of lesbian, gay and bisexual orientation within the community of faith. (From a “Resolution Calling on United Church of Christ Congregations to Declare Themselves Open and Affirming,” adopted by the Fifteenth General Synod, Ames, Iowa, June 28-July 2, 1985, p. 23.)

4. Be it further resolved, the Eighteenth General Synod calls upon local churches, associations and conferences to extend their welcome and support to openly lesbian, gay and bisexual students in care, and to facilitate the ordination and placement of qualified lesbian, gay and bisexual candidates. (From a “Resolution on Affirming Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Persons and Their Ministries,” adopted by the Eighteenth General Synod, Norfolk, Virginia, June 27-July 2, 1991, p. 44.)

2. The Classis of South Grand Rapids is concerned about the spiritual welfare of practicing homosexuals. Denominational ambivalence furthers confusion as to whether or not homosexual activity is consistent with Christlike behavior. RCA witness must be clear and straightforward so that with tireless love, gentleness, and compassion, the RCA will be more effective in helping homosexuals win freedom from their bondage.
3. The Classis of South Grand Rapids is concerned about the spiritual welfare of the UCC. Since sin hinders the work of God, the RCA should not remain silent about that which is hindering the witness of those we love.

4. The Classis of South Grand Rapids is concerned about the spiritual welfare of the Reformed Church in America. For the RCA to join in with those who approve of what the RCA believes to be contrary to the will of God compromises and hinders the RCA’s witness for Jesus Christ.

5. The issue is not sin within the UCC; every church struggles with sin in its midst. The issue is approval of sin.

6. General Synod (see MGS 1982, pp. 139-40) has confronted sin in a former partner denomination in the past. The RCA did not remain silent about the approval of apartheid by the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk of South Africa.

➢ The advisory committee recommended:

R-4.
To instruct the Commission on Christian Unity to engage the United Church of Christ (UCC) in dialogue on the issue of homosexuality in the context of the paper, “An Ecumenical Mandate for the Reformed Church in America” (MGS 1996, pp. 184-97) and the Formula of Agreement (MGS 1995, pp. 165-173), with its covenantal call for the churches to:

   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; and

   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 (Formula of Agreement, Preface, p. 3 or see MGS 1995, p. 165);

and further,

to encourage this interdenominational discussion at the denominational, classical/association, and congregational levels, based on prior Reformed Church in America statements on homosexuality (MGS 1978, pp. 229-40; MGS 1979, pp. 128-35; MGS 1990, pp. 460-61; MGS 1994, pp. 375-75; and MGS 1995, pp. 381-89); and further,

to utilize materials and resources being developed by the Congregational Services Unit through its Office of Christian Education, in consultation with the Commission on Theology. (ADOPTED)
Reasons:

1. There is passionate concern among RCA members regarding this issue of homosexuality.

2. The RCA is already in ecumenical partnership with the UCC and is therefore in a relationship of mutual accountability.

3. The conscience of many RCA members compels the RCA to articulate its concerns through such a dialogue with the UCC.

(A motion was made and supported to amend R-4 by inserting the words “and further, to report a resolution to the 1997 General Synod” following the words “Commission on Theology.” The motion LOST.)

3. The Classis of Passaic Valley overtures General Synod to:

   A. Inform the United Church of Christ (UCC) that while we ourselves have failed in many ways to submit our sexuality to the lordship of Jesus Christ and that while we too wrestle daily with the lusts of the flesh, in a spirit of repentance and love, the RCA is opposed to the policies adopted by the United Church of Christ which condone homosexual behavior.

   B. Offer to enter into dialogue with the United Church of Christ on the issue of homosexuality for the purpose of encouraging the UCC to move toward a more biblically faithful understanding of human sexuality and to move toward a repeal of all its policies condoning homosexual behavior.

Reasons:

1. The RCA is in ecumenical partnership with the UCC and is therefore in a relationship of mutual accountability.

2. Scripture condemns the practice of homosexuality. The report, “Homosexuality: A Biblical and Theological Appraisal,” presented by the Commission on Theology to the 1978 General Synod (MGS 1978, pp. 229-40) stated:

   the texts [biblical] which do refer to homosexual activity are unequivocal in their condemnation of the practice (MGS 1978, p. 230).

   Also, while noting that Paul does not address this issue independently of other thoughts, the commission notes in this same paper the following: “Paul’s rejection of homosexual activity is beyond question” (MGS 1978, p. 232).

   Some of the Scriptures discussed in this paper are Lev. 18:22; 20:13 (MGS 1978, pp. 230-31), and Rom. 1:26ff (MGS 1978, p. 232).

3. Over the last two decades the UCC has adopted resolutions and statements about human sexuality which the Reformed Church in America has consistently disapproved. The United Church of Christ states (quoted from the “UCC Social Policy Regarding Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Concerns”):

   A. The Fourteenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ recommends that Associations throughout the UCC be open to consideration of the nomination and election of avowed lesbian and gay laypersons and clergy to their Church and
Ministry committees. (From a “Resolution Recommending Inclusiveness on Association Church and Ministry Committees within the UCC,” adopted by the Fourteenth General Synod, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, June 24-28, 1983, p. 20.)

B. The Fourteenth General Synod acknowledges that Associations have responsibility for ordination and ministerial standing. It therefore recommends to Associations that in considering a candidate’s qualifications for ministry, the candidate’s sexual orientation should not be grounds for denying the request for ordination. (From the “Report of the Task Force for the Study of Human Sexuality,” adopted by the Fourteenth General Synod, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, June 24-28, 1983, p. 21.)

C. The Fifteenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ encourages...the congregations of the United Church of Christ to adopt a non-discrimination policy and a Covenant of Openness and Affirmation of persons of lesbian, gay and bisexual orientation within the community of faith. (From a “Resolution Calling on United Church of Christ Congregations to Declare Themselves Open and Affirming,” adopted by the Fifteenth General Synod, Ames, Iowa, June 28-July 2, 1985, p. 23.)

D. Be it further resolved, the Eighteenth General Synod calls upon local churches, associations and conferences to extend their welcome and support to openly lesbian, gay and bisexual students in care, and to facilitate the ordination and placement of qualified lesbian, gay and bisexual candidates. (From a “Resolution on Affirming Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Persons and Their Ministries,” adopted by the Eighteenth General Synod, Norfolk, Virginia, June 27-July 2, 1991, p. 44.)

4. The RCA is not in agreement with the UCC’s resolutions and statements about human sexuality. For example, the 1978 General Synod received the report, “Homosexuality: A Biblical and Theological Appraisal” from the Commission on Theology (MGS 1978, pp. 229-40) and adopted a recommendation “that this study be made available to the churches of the Reformed Church in America for study” (MGS 1978, R-1, p. 240). In this paper it was noted: “Heterosexuality is not only normal: it is normative. Homosexual acts are contrary to the will of God for human sexuality” (MGS 1978, p. 235). Also, the 1990 General Synod voted the following:

To adopt as the position of the Reformed Church in America that the practicing homosexual lifestyle is contrary to Scripture, while at the same time encouraging love and sensitivity towards such persons as fellow human beings (MGS 1990, R-11, p. 461).

5. The Classis of Passaic Valley is concerned about the spiritual welfare of practicing homosexuals. Denominational ambivalence furthers confusion as to whether or not homosexual activity is consistent with Christlike behavior. The RCA witness must be clear and straightforward so that with tireless love, gentleness, and compassion, the RCA will be more effective in helping homosexuals win freedom from their bondage.

6. The Classis of Passaic Valley is concerned about the spiritual welfare of the UCC. Since sin hinders the work of God, the RCA should not remain silent about that which is hindering the witness of those we love.

7. The Classis of Passaic Valley is concerned about the spiritual welfare of the Reformed Church in America. For the RCA to join in with those who approve of what the RCA believes to be contrary to the will of God compromises and hinders the RCA’s witness for Jesus Christ.
8. The issue is not sin within the UCC; every church struggles with sin in its midst. The issue is approval of sin.

9. General Synod (see *MGS 1982*, pp. 139-40) has confronted sin in a former partner denomination in the past. The RCA did not remain silent about the approval of apartheid by the *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk* of South Africa.

10. The conscience of the Classis of Passiac Valley compels the classis to speak out and not remain silent.

➢ The advisory committee recommended:

R-5.
To deny the overture. (NOT ADOPTED) (YES-107, NO-119)

Reason: The substance of Overture 3 was dealt with in R-4 above (see p. 211) prepared by the advisory committee for Overture 2.

➢ Upon a motion from the floor, Synod

VOTED: To inform the United Church of Christ that while we ourselves have failed in many ways to submit our sexuality to the lordship of Jesus Christ and that while we too wrestle daily with the lusts of the flesh, in a spirit of repentance and love the Reformed Church in America is opposed to the policies adopted by the United Church of Christ which condone homosexual behavior; and further,

to offer to enter into dialogue with the United Church of Christ on the issue of homosexuality for the purpose of encouraging the UCC to move toward a more biblically faithful understanding of human sexuality and to move toward a repeal of all its policies condoning homosexual behavior. (YES-112, NO-110)

4. The Classis of Florida overtures General Synod to:

A. Inform the United Church of Christ (UCC) that while we ourselves have failed in many ways to submit our sexuality to the lordship of Jesus Christ and that while we too wrestle daily with the lusts of the flesh, in a spirit of repentance and love the RCA is opposed to the policies adopted by the United Church of Christ which condone homosexual behavior.

B. Offer to enter into dialogue with the United Church of Christ on the issue of homosexuality for the purpose of encouraging the UCC to move toward a more biblically faithful understanding of human sexuality and to move toward a repeal of all its policies condoning homosexual behavior.

C. Explain to the UCC that, if the RCA cannot through dialogue help its sister denomination return to a biblical understanding of human sexuality, the RCA will, with a heavy heart, be required out of love for the UCC and our Lord to sever ecumenical ties with the UCC until the UCC returns to basic Christian teaching.
Reasons:

1. The RCA is in ecumenical partnership with the UCC and is therefore in a relationship of mutual accountability. The partnership ought only to exist when there is agreement over the essentials of Christian doctrine.

2. Over the last two decades the UCC has adopted resolutions and statements about human sexuality which the Reformed Church in America has consistently disapproved. The United Church of Christ states (quoted from the “UCC Social Policy Regarding Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Concerns”):

   A. The Fourteenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ recommends that Associations throughout the UCC be open to consideration of the nomination and election of avowed lesbian and gay laypersons and clergy to their Church and Ministry committees. (From a “Resolution Recommending Inclusiveness on Association Church and Ministry Committees within the UCC,” adopted by the Fourteenth General Synod, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, June 24-28, 1983, p. 20.)

   B. The Fourteenth General Synod acknowledges that Associations have responsibility for ordination and ministerial standing. It therefore recommends to Associations that in considering a candidate’s qualifications for ministry, the candidate’s sexual orientation should not be grounds for denying the request for ordination. (From the “Report of the Task Force for the Study of Human Sexuality,” adopted by the Fourteenth General Synod, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, June 24-28, 1983, p. 21.)

   C. The Fifteenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ encourages...the congregations of the United Church of Christ to adopt a non-discrimination policy and a Covenant of Openness and Affirmation of persons of lesbian, gay and bisexual orientation within the community of faith. (From a “Resolution Calling on United Church of Christ Congregations to Declare Themselves Open and Affirming,” adopted by the Fifteenth General Synod, Ames, Iowa, June 28-July 2, 1985, p. 23.)

   D. Be it further resolved, the Eighteenth General Synod calls upon local churches, associations and conferences to extend their welcome and support to openly lesbian, gay and bisexual students in care, and to facilitate the ordination and placement of qualified lesbian, gay and bisexual candidates. (From a “Resolution on Affirming Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Persons and Their Ministries,” adopted by the Eighteenth General Synod, Norfolk, Virginia, June 27-July 2, 1991, p. 44.)

3. The RCA is not in agreement with the UCC’s resolutions and statements about human sexuality. For example, the 1978 General Synod received the report, “Homosexuality: A Biblical and Theological Appraisal” from the Commission on Theology (MGS 1978, pp. 229-40) and adopted a recommendation “that this study be made available to the churches of the Reformed Church in America for study” (MGS 1978, R-1, p. 240). In this paper it was noted: “Heterosexuality is not only normal: it is normative. Homosexual acts are contrary to the will of God for human sexuality” (MGS 1978, p. 235). Also, the 1990 General Synod voted the following:

   To adopt as the position of the Reformed Church in America that the practicing homosexual lifestyle is contrary to Scripture, while at the same time encouraging love and sensitivity towards such persons as fellow human beings (MGS 1990, R-11, p. 461).
4. The Classis of Florida is concerned about the spiritual welfare of homosexual and bisexual persons. Denominational affirmations such as those made by the UCC make clear that in their opinion homosexual and bisexual persons need not be changed in order to be Christlike. The RCA witness must be clear and straightforward so that with tireless love and compassion the RCA will be more effective in helping homosexuals and bisexuals win freedom from bondage.

5. The Classis of Florida is deeply concerned about the spiritual welfare of the UCC. Since sin hinders the work of God, the RCA sins when it remains silent about that which is hindering the witness of those we love.

6. The Classis of Florida is concerned about the spiritual welfare of the Reformed Church in America. For the RCA to join in with those who approve of what the RCA believes to be contrary to the moral will of God compromises and hinders the RCA's witness for Jesus Christ.

7. The issue is not sin within the UCC; every church struggles with sin in its midst. The issue is denominational approval of sin.

8. General Synod (see MGS 1982, pp. 139-40) has confronted the official approval of sin in a former partner denomination in the past. The RCA did not remain silent about the approval of apartheid by the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk of South Africa. Similarly the 1996 General Synod must not remain silent about the approval by the United Church of Christ of homosexual and bisexual practice among laypeople and clergy.

9. The conscience of the Classis of Florida compels the classis to speak out and not remain silent. The long silence by the RCA with regard to this pattern of proclamations by the UCC morally requires the 1996 General Synod to act decisively.

➢ The advisory committee recommended:

R-6. To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The substance of Overture 4 was dealt with in R-4 above (see p. 211) prepared by the advisory committee for Overture 2.

5. The Regional Synod of Mid-America overtures General Synod to:

A. Inform the United Church of Christ (UCC) that while we ourselves have failed in many ways to submit our sexuality to the lordship of Jesus Christ and that while we too wrestle daily with the lusts of the flesh, in a spirit of repentance and love the RCA is opposed to the policies adopted by the United Church of Christ which condone homosexual behavior.

B. Enter into dialogue with the United Church of Christ on the issue of homosexuality for the purpose of encouraging the UCC to move toward a more biblically faithful understanding of human sexuality and to move toward a repeal of all its policies condoning homosexual behavior.

C. Explain to the UCC that, if the RCA cannot through dialogue help its sister denomination return to a biblical understanding of human sexuality, the RCA will, with a heavy heart, be required out of love for the UCC and our Lord to sever ecumenical ties with the UCC until the UCC returns to basic Christian teaching.
Reasons:

1. The RCA is in ecumenical partnership with the UCC and is therefore in a relationship of mutual accountability. The partnership ought only to exist when there is agreement over the essentials of Christian doctrine.

2. Over the last two decades the UCC has adopted resolutions and statements about human sexuality which the Reformed Church in America has consistently disapproved as sinful. The United Church of Christ states (quoted from the “UCC Social Policy Regarding Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Concerns”):

A. The Fourteenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ recommends that Associations throughout the UCC be open to consideration of the nomination and election of avowed lesbian and gay laypersons and clergy to their Church and Ministry committees. (From a “Resolution Recommending Inclusiveness on Association Church and Ministry Committees within the UCC,” adopted by the Fourteenth General Synod, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, June 24-28, 1983, p. 20.)

B. The Fourteenth General Synod acknowledges that Associations have responsibility for ordination and ministerial standing. It therefore recommends to Associations that in considering a candidate’s qualifications for ministry, the candidate’s sexual orientation should not be grounds for denying the request for ordination. (From the “Report of the Task Force for the Study of Human Sexuality,” adopted by the Fourteenth General Synod, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, June 24-28, 1983, p. 21.)

C. The Fifteenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ encourages...the congregations of the United Church of Christ to adopt a non-discrimination policy and a Covenant of Openness and Affirmation of persons of lesbian, gay and bisexual orientation within the community of faith. (From a “Resolution Calling on United Church of Christ Congregations to Declare Themselves Open and Affirming,” adopted by the Fifteenth General Synod, Ames, Iowa, June 28-July 2, 1985, p. 23.)

D. Be it further resolved, the Eighteenth General Synod calls upon local churches, associations and conferences to extend their welcome and support to openly lesbian, gay and bisexual students in care, and to facilitate the ordination and placement of qualified lesbian, gay and bisexual candidates. (From a “Resolution on Affirming Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Persons and Their Ministries,” adopted by the Eighteenth General Synod, Norfolk, Virginia, June 27-July 2, 1991, p. 44.)

3. The RCA is not in agreement with the UCC’s resolutions and statements about human sexuality. For example, the 1978 General Synod received the report, “Homosexuality: A Biblical and Theological Appraisal” from the Commission on Theology (MGS 1978, pp. 229-40) and adopted a recommendation “that this study be made available to the churches of the Reformed Church in America for study” (MGS 1978, R-1, p. 240). In this paper it was noted: “Heterosexuality is not only normal: it is normative. Homosexual acts are contrary to the will of God for human sexuality” (MGS 1978, p. 235). Also, the 1990 General Synod voted the following:

To adopt as the position of the Reformed Church in America that the practicing homosexual lifestyle is contrary to Scripture, while at the same time encouraging love and sensitivity towards such persons as fellow human beings (MGS 1990, R-11, p. 461).
4. The Regional Synod of Mid-America is concerned about the spiritual welfare of homosexual and bisexual persons. Denominational affirmations such as those made by the UCC make clear that in their opinion homosexual and bisexual persons need not be changed in order to be Christlike. The RCA witness must be clear and straightforward so that with tireless love and compassion the RCA will be more effective in helping homosexuals and bisexuals win freedom from bondage.

5. The Regional Synod of Mid-America is deeply concerned about the spiritual welfare of the UCC. Since sin hinders the work of God, the RCA sins when it remains silent about that which is hindering the witness of those we love.

6. The Regional Synod of Mid-America is concerned about the spiritual welfare of the Reformed Church in America. For the RCA to join in with those who approve of what the RCA believes to be contrary to the moral will of God compromises and hinders the RCA’s witness for Jesus Christ.

7. The issue is not sin within the UCC; every church struggles with sin in its midst. The issue is denominational approval of sin.

8. General Synod (see MGS 1982, pp. 139-40) has confronted the official approval of sin in a former partner denomination in the past. The RCA did not remain silent about the approval of apartheid by the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk of South Africa. Similarly the 1996 General Synod must not remain silent about the approval by the United Church of Christ of homosexual and bisexual practice among laypeople and clergy.

9. The conscience of the Regional Synod of Mid-America compels the regional synod to speak out and not remain silent. The long silence by the RCA with regard to this pattern of proclamations by the UCC morally requires the 1996 General Synod to act decisively.

➢ The advisory committee recommended:

R-7.
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The substance of Overture 5 was dealt with in R-4 above (see p. 211) prepared by the advisory committee for Overture 2.<

6. The Classis of Canadian Prairies overtures General Synod to present specific information to the classes well in advance of the 1997 General Synod vote on the Formula of Agreement for full communion between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Reformed Church in America, and the United Church of Christ, in order to convince classes that the below documentation from the United Church of Christ is not in conflict with “preaching according to the Word of God” as stated in the proposed “Ecumenical Mandate for the Reformed Church in America” (MGS 1995, p. 183; see also Report of the Commission on Christian Unity, “An Ecumenical Mandate for the Reformed Church in America,” in the Christian Unity section).

Documentation:

Over the last two decades the UCC has adopted the following resolutions and statements about human sexuality. The United Church of Christ states (quoted from the “UCC Social Policy Regarding Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Concerns”):
1. The Fourteenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ recommends that Associations throughout the UCC be open to consideration of the nomination and election of avowed lesbian and gay laypersons and clergy to their Church and Ministry committees. (From a "Resolution Recommending Inclusiveness on Association Church and Ministry Committees within the UCC," adopted by the Fourteenth General Synod, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, June 24-28, 1983, p. 20.)

2. The Fourteenth General Synod acknowledges that Associations have responsibility for ordination and ministerial standing. It therefore recommends to Associations that in considering a candidate’s qualifications for ministry, the candidate’s sexual orientation should not be grounds for denying the request for ordination. (From the "Report of the Task Force for the Study of Human Sexuality," adopted by the Fourteenth General Synod, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, June 24-28, 1983, p. 21.)

3. The Fifteenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ encourages... the congregations of the United Church of Christ to adopt a non-discrimination policy and a Covenant of Openness and Affirmation of persons of lesbian, gay and bisexual orientation within the community of faith. (From a “Resolution Calling on United Church of Christ Congregations to Declare Themselves Open and Affirming,” adopted by the Fifteenth General Synod, Ames, Iowa, June 28-July 2, 1985, p. 23.)

4. Be it further resolved, the Eighteenth General Synod calls upon local churches, associations and conferences to extend their welcome and support to openly lesbian, gay and bisexual students in care, and to facilitate the ordination and placement of qualified lesbian, gay and bisexual candidates. (From a “Resolution on Affirming Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Persons and Their Ministries,” adopted by the Eighteenth General Synod, Norfolk, Virginia, June 27-July 2, 1991, p. 44.)

Reasons:

1. The paper, “An Ecumenical Mandate for the Reformed Church in America,” defines full communion as “meaning the recognition in other churches that the gospel of Jesus Christ is preached and the sacraments are administered according the Word of God” (MGS 1995, p. 183; see also Report of the Commission on Christian Unity, “An Ecumenical Mandate for the Reformed Church in America” in the Christian Unity section).

2. The Formula of Agreement presented at the 1995 General Synod states:

   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 (MGS 1995, p. 164).

3. The 1997 General Synod will vote on a declaration of full communion between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Reformed Church in America, and the United Church of Christ. (See Formula of Agreement, presented at the 1995 General Synod, MGS 1995, pp. 163-73.)

4. As noted in the above documentation, one of these four denominations, the United Church of Christ, in the matter of ordination of practicing homosexual persons, seems to have adopted policies that are contrary to Scripture.
5. The 1978 General Synod received the report, “Homosexuality: A Biblical and Theological Appraisal” from the Commission on Theology (MGS 1978, pp. 229-40) and adopted a recommendation “that this study be made available to the churches of the Reformed Church in America for study” (MGS 1978, R-1, p. 240). In this paper it was noted: “the texts [biblical] which do refer to homosexual activity are unequivocal in their condemnation of the practice” (MGS 1978, p. 230). Also, the 1990 General Synod voted the following:

To adopt as the position of the Reformed Church in America that the practicing homosexual lifestyle is contrary to Scripture, while at the same time encouraging love and sensitivity towards such persons as fellow human beings (MGS 1990, R-11, p. 461).

6. The 1979 General Synod received the report, “Christian Pastoral Care for the Homosexual” from the Commission on Theology (MGS 1979, pp. 128-35). In this paper it was noted:

The church’s mission to the homosexual is in most respects the same as it is to the heterosexual: to preach God’s good news of grace and forgiveness through Christ, release to those in bondage and liberty to the oppressed (Luke 4:18)....Homosexuality is neither to be celebrated nor persecuted (MGS 1979, p. 130).


8. Affirming the above Commission on Theology reports and the above 1990 General Synod vote (MGS 1990, R-11, p. 461), the Classis of Canadian Prairies emphasizes that it desires to be clear that the classis is not singling out the sin of homosexuality for special condemnation. Homosexuality is a sin, like any other sin. Homosexuality must therefore be treated like any other sin—with confession and repentence. The real issue is not whether there is sin in the UCC, for there is sin in the RCA as well. The question is: “Why does the UCC condone, accommodate to, and legalize what Scripture declares to be sinful?”

➢The advisory committee recommended:

R-8.
To deny the overture. (NOT ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. The United Church of Christ (UCC) is more than a single issue church. To educate RCA classes regarding the UCC requires the presentation of far more material about the UCC than Overture 6 seeks.

2. The Commission on Christian Unity will provide as much education about the Formula of Agreement (see MGS 1995, pp. 165-73) as possible.

3. Other concerns of Overture 6 are addressed in R-4 prepared by the advisory committee for Overture 2.
(A motion was made and supported "to present specific information to the classes well in advance of the 1997 General Synod vote on the Formula of Agreement for full communion between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Reformed Church in America, and the United Church of Christ, in order to convince classes that the documentation from the United Church of Christ submitted with Overture 6 is not in conflict with "preaching according to the Word of God" as stated in the paper, "Ecumenical Mandate for the Reformed Church in America" adopted by the 1996 General Synod, R-1, p. 197. The motion LOST.)

No further motions were made and supported in response to Overture 6.

RCA and Christian Reformed Church Union Churches

7. The Regional Synod of the Great Lakes overtures General Synod to request the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in North America to consider making provision for union churches with the Reformed Church in America.

Reasons:

1. The 1995 General Synod urged development of additional programmatic areas of cooperative ministry with the CRC (MGS 1995, R-5, p. 189).

2. While the RCA's Book of Church Order provides for union churches with other Reformed bodies (BCO, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 7, Section 1), CRC provisions do not allow such unions.

3. CRC provisions for union churches would facilitate united efforts in such ministries as the Vietnamese congregation in Grand Rapids, Michigan; the campus ministry at Ferris State University in Big Rapids, Michigan; and the Christ Memorial Reformed Church and Maple Avenue Christian Reformed Church joint ministry in Holland, Michigan.

4. In neighborhoods and towns where CRC and RCA congregations struggle side by side, merging CRC and RCA churches into union congregations could provide a means for renewed ministry.

The advisory committee recommended:

R-9.
To instruct the Commission on Christian Unity to request the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in North America to consider making provision for union churches with the Reformed Church in America. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. The 1995 General Synod urged development of additional programmatic areas of cooperative ministry with the CRC (MGS 1995, R-5, p. 189).

2. While the RCA's Book of Church Order provides for union churches with other Reformed bodies (BCO, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 7, Section 1), CRC provisions do not allow such unions.
3. CRC provisions for union churches would facilitate united efforts in such ministries as the Vietnamese congregation in Grand Rapids, Michigan, the campus ministry at Ferris State University in Big Rapids, Michigan; and the Christ Memorial Reformed Church and Maple Avenue Christian Reformed Church joint ministry in Holland, Michigan.

4. In neighborhoods and towns where CRC and RCA congregations struggle side by side, merging CRC and RCA churches into union congregations could provide a means for renewed ministry.
REPORTS ON CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Report of the Commission on Christian Worship


In his report to the General Synod of 1995, the general secretary noted:

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 are dramatically affecting our practice of worship” (MGS 1995, p. 39).

Much of the current discussion about worship and many of the tensions experienced in RCA congregations have revolved around questions of music. The commission encourages such discussion. The commission believes that this discussion goes beyond questions of musical style and taste. This is also a time for the RCA to be in conversation about the place and purpose of music in the context of worship. The commission submits the following paper to the RCA as a part of that conversation.

THE THEOLOGY AND PLACE OF MUSIC IN WORSHIP

The people of God sing. After escaping from the Egyptians and crossing the Red Sea, the people of Israel sang a song to the Lord (Exod. 15). Singing was part of Israel’s formal worship in both tabernacle and temple (1 Chron. 6:31-32, 16:42). The Psalms bear rich testimony that in joy and sorrow, in praise and lament, the faithful raise their voices in song to God. Hymn singing was practiced by Jesus and his disciples (Matt. 26:30). The Apostle Paul instructed the Colossians, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Col. 3: 16-17).

Music and song continue to play a vital role in the life of God’s people today. Contemporary culture and modern technology bring new possibilities and new challenges to the music ministry of the church. People’s lives are surrounded with music—television and radio, the background music of video games, the muzak of shopping malls, CDs, and synthesizers. Yet much of the time music functions as “background” rather than as an opportunity for serious listening, much less participation. Outside the church there are few occasions or opportunities in North American culture for people to sing together. Much of the popular music (including popular Christian music) composed today is for performance rather than for participation.

The church also has greater access and has shown greater openness to a greater variety of music—from classical hymnody to Christian rock, from European cantatas to South African choruses. Such diversity is to be welcomed and celebrated; it reflects the diversity and richness of God’s creation. But greater variety and options in music call for greater discernment and care in planning and implementing the music ministry of the church. The people of God sing; what they sing and how they sing are important issues.

In order to further the dialogue in the RCA about music and worship, and to encourage healthy and vibrant congregational singing as a vital part of ministry, this paper offers some reflections on the theology and place of music in Christian worship. The paper closes with some suggested guidelines for evaluating and selecting music for the congregation’s worship.
1. **Music is a gift of God and part of the created order.** From its inception, “when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy” (Job 38:7), to its consummation, when “every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them” will sing to the Lamb on the throne (Rev. 5:13), creation is musical. “All nature sings and round me rings the music of the spheres.” Human music-making participates in the music of creation and reflects the order, beauty, and diversity of God’s creation.

2. **Of all the musical instruments that may be employed in the praise of God, the human voice has priority.** Other instruments are to be used primarily in the service of the singing of God’s people. Reformed theologian Karl Barth points out that singing is not an option for the people of God; it is one of the essential ministries of the church:

   The Christian church sings. It is not a choral society. Its singing is not a concert. But from inner, material necessity it sings. Singing is the highest form of human expression....What we can and must say quite confidently is that the church which does not sing is not the church. And where...it does not really sing but sighs and mumbles spasmodically, shamefacedly and with an ill grace, it can be at best only a troubled community which is not sure of its cause and of whose ministry and witness there can be no great expectation....The praise of God which finds its concrete culmination in the singing of the community is one of the indispensable forms of the ministry of the church.

3. **Singing is a ministry that belongs to all the people of God.** The congregation is always the primary choir. The role of professional or volunteer choirs and musicians is to aid the whole people of God in their worship. While anthems or vocal and instrumental solos may be offered, they do not have to be. Congregational singing, however, is essential. While it is possible to be actively engaged in worship and in prayer while listening to an anthem or solo, a diet of worship which does not regularly include ample opportunity for all the members of the congregation to join in song will be impoverished worship, and the life of the church and the faith of its people will suffer.

4. **Of all the art forms that may be employed in worship, singing is especially corporate.** Indeed, it is the art form most suited to expressing the church’s unity in the body of Christ. Different voices, different instruments, different parts are blended to offer a single, living, and unified work of beauty. John Calvin recognized the power of congregational singing and unison prayer in helping the church express and experience the unity of the body of Christ. Asserting that the human tongue was especially created to proclaim the praise of God, both through singing and speaking, he noted that “the chief use of the tongue is in public prayers, which are offered in the assembly of the believers, by which it comes about that with one common voice, and as it were, with the same mouth, we all glorify God together, worshiping him with one spirit and the same faith.”

5. **The church’s ministry of song is for the glory of God.** The principal direction of congregational singing is to the Lord (Ps. 96:1). Music is made first of all to the Lord and only secondarily to each other. Music should communicate and express a sense of awe and wonder in the presence of God; it should lead our thoughts toward God rather than toward ourselves.

   God can be glorified by beautiful sounds and spirits may be uplifted by a pleasing melody, but it is primarily the joining of the tune to a text that gives meaning to Christians’ songs. Not only should both text and tune glorify God and be consistent with each other, but the tune must serve the text. Music is always the servant of the
Calvin cautioned that “we should be very careful that our ears be not more attentive to the melody than our minds to the spiritual meaning of the words...[S]uch songs as have been composed only for the sweetness and delight of the ear are unbecoming to the majesty of the church and cannot but displease God in the highest degree.”

6. The church’s ministry of song is for the edification of God’s people. Through congregational singing Christian faith is not only expressed; to a very real degree it is formed. Since people tend to remember the theology they sing more than the theology that is preached, a congregation’s repertoire of hymnody is often of critical importance in shaping the faith of its people. Here again, it is the meaning of the text that is of primary importance. It is through the sense of the words that God’s people learn of the nature and character of God and of the Christian life. Noting that if one prays in a tongue, the “spirit prays,” but the “mind is unfruitful,” the Apostle Paul vows, “I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also” (1 Cor. 14:14-15, RSV).

Christian hymnody contains some of the most tightly packed, concise doctrinal and devotional thought of the church. Through congregational song God’s people learn their language about God; God’s people learn how to speak with God. Songs of worship shape faith. It is, therefore, very important that a congregation have a rich “vocabulary of praise.” Simple, repetitive music such as praise choruses and Taize chants are very appropriate in worship and can be very effective in moving individuals to prayer and to praise. But it is also important for the congregation to know some of the great hymns of faith in order to have a sense that the Christian faith is both relevant and enduring, and to be enriched by the faith of the “great cloud of witnesses.” Hymns, both ancient and modern, which stretch minds, increase vocabulary, rehearse the biblical story, and teach of the nature and the mighty acts of God are essential for the congregation’s growth in faith.

7. The emotional power of music, rightly employed, is a vital and moving aid to worship. Music, quite apart from an associated text, is capable of evoking powerful emotions. Hearts are stirred and feet set to tapping by a rousing Sousa march, while another melody may move people to tears. Calvin recognized the emotional power of music and for that reason included the singing (rather than the saying) of Psalms in the church in Geneva. Such singing “lends dignity and grace to sacred actions and has the greatest value in kindling our heart to a true zeal and eagerness to pray.” Music can indeed “excite piety,” and depending on its mood, move individuals to penitence, thanksgiving, adoration, love, or any one of a host of emotions. Those who love the Lord are encouraged to “sing till we feel our hearts ascending with our tongues.” It is, therefore, important that the emotional mood of a particular tune be commensurate with the sense of the text. It is also important that the emotional power of music in worship be evocative rather than manipulative, honest rather than manufactured, and that the congregation’s singing allow for the full range of emotions in worship.

SUGGESTED GUIDELINES FOR EVALUATING AND NURTURING CONGREGATIONAL SINGING

Evaluating and choosing music for Christian worship should be a careful process, guided primarily by theological considerations. Pastors, consistorys, musicians, choir directors, and worship committees may be aided in this process by being attentive to the following suggested guidelines. The commission also invites responses to these guidelines, especially from those congregations that can suggest additional or alternative criteria for selecting hymns or a hymnal.
1. What theology is expressed in our congregational singing? Is it biblical? Is it consistent with Reformed theology? Is the range of what we sing representative of the "whole counsel of God?" What do our songs and hymns say or imply about the sovereignty and grace of God? About the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ? About the work of the Holy Spirit, the nature and mission of the church, the sacraments, and the Christian life? The Book of Church Order specifies that "The hymns used in public worship shall be in harmony with the Standards of the Reformed Church in America" and assigns this responsibility to the consistory (BCO, Part I, Article 2, Section 6d).

2. Is there sufficient pastoral breadth in our music ministry? Do we sing songs that are appropriate to the many and variable life situations in which believers find themselves? Does our congregational singing include the many moods and types of prayer, including praise, thanksgiving, confession, lament, intercession, and dedication? A congregation which sings only "upbeat" praise choruses and hymns, for example, will have a diminished and restricted understanding of prayer.

3. Is there sufficient liturgical breadth? Does our congregational singing include songs and hymns appropriate to each of the seasons of the church year? For the celebration of the sacraments? For the various opportunities for congregational responses in the order of worship? Is the congregation provided with the opportunity to sing those parts of the service that are better sung than spoken?

4. Is there sufficient historical, cultural, and generational breadth? Does our congregational singing express belief in the communion of saints? Are all the saints present encouraged to join in singing, and do our songs also express our belief that we sing with saints throughout the ages and around the world? Do the hymns and songs include contributions from other cultures, languages, and eras? Are songs included which allow for the full participation of children? For those beginning the journey of faith as well as for more mature Christians?

5. Is the language of our hymns inclusive? Do our hymns make use of the full range of biblical imagery for God? Can all believers, male and female, young and old, feel included by the language of our congregational songs?

6. Are we providing our congregation with a sufficient vocabulary of praise? Marva Dawn suggests that a hymn text "is great in proportion to what we can learn from it." What do we learn about God and the Christian faith from what we sing? Can the text stand on its own?

7. Does the music serve the text? "A hymn tune is excellent only as it is subservient to the words, undergirds the thought, and captures the dominant mood." Does the tune help us to recall the words by bringing forward appropriate features of the text, or does the tune call attention to itself and contradict or stand in the way of the words?

8. Does our music encourage corporate worship? Does the music encourage congregational singing or is it designed for the solo artist or does it come across as entertainment? Are soloists and choir effectively leading and supporting the congregation in its worship or are they merely displaying their virtuosity? Do the hymns and choruses we sing express the faith of the gathered community or do they tend toward individual and private expressions of faith?

9. Is the music appropriate to the ability of the congregation? Do our musical selections respect the past practice of congregation? Do we include enough familiar hymns?
10. Do the hymns and choruses we sing assume and encourage growth in discipleship? Is continuing congregational education in music and worship a part of our ministry? Do we take the time and effort to learn new hymns and challenging hymns? Worship is a “living sacrifice,” and therefore our gifts to God should represent some cost to us. Learning more difficult music and coming to understand and appreciate richer theology may be difficult work, but it can also be a source of spiritual renewal and growth.

NOTES:

1 Maltbie D. Babcock, “This Is My Father’s World,” 1901.

2 Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, Vol. IV, part 3, chapter 16, par. 72, #4.

3 With apologies to the Apostle Paul, a paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 12, substituting music imagery for body imagery, illustrates the point: There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of notes, but the same song; and there are varieties of voices, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good... For just as the song is one and has many parts, and all the parts of the song, though many, are one song, so it is with Christ.... Indeed the song does not consist of one part, but of many. If the tenors should say, we are not sopranos so we do not belong to the song, that would not make them any less a part of the song. And if the altos should say, because we do not sing bass, we have nothing to contribute to the song, that would not make them any less a part of the song. If the whole congregation were sopranos, where would the tenors be?.... But as it is, God has arranged the parts of the song, each one of them as he chose. If all sang the same part, where would the harmony be? As it is there are many parts, many voices, yet one song. Now you are the song of Christ, and individually members of it.


6 Calvin, Institutes, III. 20, #32. In his list of practical rules for congregational singing, John Wesley offered similar instructions: “Above all, sing spiritually. Have an eye to God in every word you sing. Aim at pleasing Him more than yourself, or any other creature. In order to do this, attend strictly to the sense of what you sing, and see that your heart is not carried away with the sound, but offered to God continually; so shall your singing be such as the Lord will approve here, and reward you when He cometh in the clouds of heaven.” Cited by Austin Lovelace and William C. Rice, Music and Worship in the Church (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), p. 157.


8 Calvin, Institutes, III. 20, #32.

9 William Hammond, “Come, We that Love the Lord,” 1745.

10 Although music evokes deep and powerful emotions, even more important then the emotion of the moment is the way worship shapes our affections, values, perceptions, and beliefs over time. Don E. Saliers notes, for example, that to speak of how worship shapes “deep emotions such as thankfulness and trust in God does not mean simply ‘feeling thankful’ from time to time. Vital liturgy certainly may produce feeling states, but that is not the criterion for praise and thanksgiving to God...Christian gratitude is not so much ‘felt’ or ‘produced’ as it is elicited in season and out of season.” Worship as Theology: Foretaste of Glory Divine (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), p. 37.
John Campbell Shairp's hymn, "From Noon of Joy to Night of Doubt" (1871) also speaks of the need to base our faith on something more permanent than fleeting human emotion.

From noon of joy to night of doubt our feelings come and go; our best estate is toss'd about in ceaseless ebb and flow; no mood of feeling, form of thought, is constant for a day, but thou, O Lord, thou changest not; the same thou art alway.

I grasp thy strength, make it my own, my heart with peace is bless'd; I lose my hold, and then comes down darkness and cold unrest. Let me no more my comfort draw from my frail grasp of thee: in this alone rejoice with awe, thy mighty grasp of me.

Thy purpose of eternal good let me but surely know; on this I'll lean, let changing mood and feeling come and go; glad when thy sunshine fills my soul, not sad when clouds o'ercast, since thou within thy sure control of love dost hold me fast.


Bibliography


R-1.
To request the RCA Distribution Center to distribute the paper, "The Theology and Place of Music in Worship," to RCA pastors and congregations for study and discussion; and further,

to request RCA pastors and congregations send responses to the paper, "The Theology and Place of Music in Worship," including suggested criteria for selecting hymnals, to the Commission on Christian Worship by January 31, 1997. (ADOPTED)
EDUCATIONAL VIDEO ON REFORMED WORSHIP

Over the past year the commission has worked closely with the Office of Worship and with John Grooters, producer in Stewardship and Communication Services, in the production of an educational video on Reformed worship. The video discusses the essential elements of worship and shows a variety of ways for implementing those elements. The video is intended for use by new church starts, consistories, worship committees, new member classes, adult study groups, and catechetical classes. The commission commends this video for those who seek a basic understanding of Christian worship in the Reformed tradition. In an increasingly secular age, worship education is an important responsibility for each congregation.

ORDER FOR THE PROFESSION OF FAITH

In 1993 the commission presented an order for the profession of faith, “Remembering Baptism and Professing Faith” (MGS 1993, pp. 219-30). The 1993 General Synod approved the order for a three-year period of study and provisional use (MGS 1993, p. 230). The 1995 General Synod, in response to the report of the Task Force on Remembering Baptism, Professing Faith, and Membership Terminology, instructed the Commission on Christian Worship to prepare an order for professing faith and “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...at other significant times in a person’s life” (MGS 1995, p. 207). The commission continues to work on developing another order for professing faith but has not yet completed its work. The commission recommends that the provisional order, “Remembering Baptism and Professing Faith,” serve as the order for the profession of faith until work on a new order is completed.

R-2.
To extend the provisional status of “Remembering Baptism and Professing Faith” for an additional two years until the 1998 General Synod. (ADOPTED)

OTHER WORK IN PROGRESS

The commission continues its work on a service for the organization of a new church and an order for the ordination and installation of a minister of Word and sacrament.

COMMISSION MEMBERS

One of the joys of serving on an RCA commission is the opportunity to grow in fellowship with brothers and sisters in Christ. The commission expresses its thanks for the faithful work and witness of the Rev. Richard Otterness, who has served as moderator of the commission for the past several years. Otterness has been a gentle and visionary leader whose love of God and commitment to the RCA have been an inspiration to all who have worked with him. The commission also thanks Robert Olson, minister of music at Emmanuel Reformed Church in Paramount, California. Olson’s gifts greatly expanded the commission’s knowledge and appreciation of sacred music, and his contribution is reflected in the commission’s work which is even now coming to fruition.
REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF WORSHIP

The Office of Worship provides congregations with resources for worship through its Worship newsletter, articles in Servant Leaders, and occasional resource packets. Packets during 1996 included worship resources for each of the Sundays in Lent and another resource mailing for congregations whose pastors attended Spring Sabbath. The office has also provided leadership for regional and congregational workshops and worship education events. Much of the work of the office in the past year has been devoted to the production of a worship video and to planning for the 1996 General Synod theme program on the understanding, practice, and revitalization of worship (see General Synod 1996 theme report in the Evangelization and Church Growth section).

The 1995 General Synod instructed the General Synod Council's Congregational Services Committee to develop plans for an ecumenical consultation on the “Theology and Practice of Reformed Worship in the Midst of Contemporary Culture” (MGS 1995, p. 208). Several denominations have been contacted and have expressed keen interest in participating in such a consultation. The consultation is tentatively scheduled for April 1997.

The 1995 General Synod also requested the General Synod Council (MGS 1995, p. 195) to consider committing more time and personnel resources to the Office of Worship. At its October 1995 meeting the General Synod Council voted (GSC 95-159) to approve the redesignation of $60,000 of PPIM funds originally intended for “On the Way—Equipping” for worship programming. This redesignation will allow for the production of a worship video, additional programming resources, and some part-time contracts over the next five years.

The Office of Worship also responds to numerous requests for resources and information, represents the denomination on the Council of Common Texts, staffs the Commission on Worship, and provides staff assistance for the worship services of the General Synod.

GENERAL SYNOD 1996 THEME

The 1996 General Synod theme is “God’s People Transformed: A Living Sacrifice.” The theme text is:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship (Rom. 12:1).

At its October 1995 meeting, GSC appointed the following persons to serve on the 1996 General Synod Theme Program Committee:
The 1996 General Synod Theme Program Committee met October 31, 1995, at the Dominican Center at Marywood in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The committee agreed that the purpose of the program and worship experiences is to recall the meaning and intent of Christian worship; to worship in a manner that models the careful integration of liturgy, music, the reading of Scripture, the preaching of the Word, and the celebration of the sacraments; to help General Synod participants discuss the meaning and practice of worship; and to offer helpful tools for the design of worship. (For specific details on the 1996 General Synod theme program, see General Synod Theme—Saturday evening through Tuesday evening, pp. 21-22.)

Overtures

Bapismal Liturgy Alternate Wording for Adolescents and Children

1. The Classis of Montgomery overtures General Synod to revise the RCA baptismal liturgy to provide alternate wording for use when baptizing adolescents and children who have achieved an appropriate level of cognitive development.

Reason: The current baptismal liturgy addresses only adults, infants, and very young children. Most children at, or approaching, adolescence have developed a level of faith and faith understanding that allows meaningful interactive participation in the form of response to questions about their faith. For these adolescents and children, active participation in the sacrament of baptism will reinforce and strengthen their developing faith in their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

➢ The advisory committee recommended:

R-3.
To refer Overture 1 to the Commission on Theology for study and report to the 1997 General Synod. (ADOPTED)

Reason: Before the baptismal liturgy is revised, the theological issues need to be clarified. One theological question is this: When a child is baptized at the parents' initiative, is the baptism to be considered an “infant baptism” or a “confession of faith?”
Order for the Organization of a New Congregation

2. The Classis of Illinois overtures General Synod to instruct the Commission on Christian Worship to prepare a new "Order for the Organization of a New Congregation in the Church of Jesus Christ"; and further,

to instruct the Commission on Christian Worship, in consultation with the Commission on Church Order, to include in this new order a provision for the installation of the "planting" pastor who began the new congregation.

Reasons:

1. The current "Order for the Organization of a New Congregation in the Church of Jesus Christ" makes an assumption that the new church start does not presently have a pastor. The current order was formulated to fit an older model for starting new churches in which the congregation was organized first, and then its consistory called a pastor. Under the new model, however, the pastor arrives first, calls a congregation together, and together the pastor and congregation organize as a church.

2. Since most new church starts today begin with a "planting" pastor, it makes sense to incorporate the installation of the "planting" pastor into the "Order for the Organization of a New Congregation in the Church of Jesus Christ."

3. Since the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 2 implies that a pastor cannot be installed until at least three weeks after the organization of a church and consistory, the Commission on Christian Worship needs to consult with the Commission on Church Order (see Overture 5 in the Church Order section).

The advisory committee recommended:

R-4.
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The Commission on Christian Worship is already addressing these issues.

From the Report of the President

P-2 (p. 34) was referred to the Advisory Committee on Christian Worship.

In response to P-2 (p. 34), the advisory committee recommended:

R-5.
To instruct the Commission on Christian Worship to produce worship resources which include supplemental forms of worship and hymns, songs, and choruses which reflect our faith and speak to our time; and further,

to instruct the Commission on Christian Worship to submit the first of such resources to the 1998 General Synod. (ADOPTED)
REPORTS ON CHURCH ORDER

Report of the Commission on Church Order

Since the 1995 meeting of the General Synod the Commission on Church Order met on October 6, 1995, and February 23, 1996, near O'Hare Airport in Chicago, Illinois, to consider referrals from the General Synod and other matters related to church order.

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 1995, p. 247).

At its October 1994 meeting the Commission on Church Order determined that the most workable plan to present to the 1995 General Synod was 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 noted that use of these words “may have” fulfilled 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 was not required to have delegate representatives. It was an option. (MGS 1995, pp. 214-16).

In response to this proposed plan, the Advisory Committee on Church Order at the 1995 General Synod recommended referral to the Commission on Church Order for further study and report to the 1996 General Synod. Although the advisory committee affirmed the intent of the plan presented by the Commission on Church Order, affirmed the vital role of deacons, and affirmed the renewed emphasis on the diaconate, the advisory committee expressed concern that the proposed plan was subject to various interpretations. It might be possible under the proposed plan for a classis to only have deacon delegates and no elders in attendance at a classis meeting. The 1995 General Synod adopted the recommendation of the advisory committee to refer (MGS 1995, p. 216).
At its October 1995 meeting the Commission on Church Order reviewed the plan it submitted to the 1995 General Synod. The commission also reviewed other plans on this topic submitted to General Synods since 1980. Specifically, the commission reviewed the 1988 and 1989 General Synod reports, “The Office of Deacon: A Ministry of Mercy” (MGS 1988, pp. 234-41, and MGS 1989, pp. 299-309), and the 1991 General Synod report, “Inclusion of Deacons in Higher RCA Assemblies” (MGS 1991, pp. 225-31). All of these reports proposed diaconal representation at the classis, regional synod, and General Synod levels.

(The 1988 General Synod referred the plan for diaconal representation presented by the Committee on Ecclesiastical Office and Ministry back to the committee for report to the 1989 General Synod [MGS 1988, p. 242]. The 1989 General Synod adopted the plan for diaconal representation presented by the Committee on Ecclesiastical Office and Ministry [MGS 1989, R-10, R-11, R-12, R-13, R-14, R-15, R-16, R-17, pp. 207-09]. Two-thirds of the classes, however, did not approve this plan [MGS 1990, p. 39]. The 1990 General Synod did not adopt the plan for diaconal representation presented by the Commission on Church Order [MGS 1991, pp. 229-31].)

After reviewing the above plans and the most recent plan submitted to the 1995 General Synod, the commission determined that the most workable plan to present to the 1996 General Synod was to revise the BCO definition of classis membership from “emolled ministers” and “elder delegates” to “enrolled ministers” and “delegates” (deleting the word “elder”). This definition allows for the inclusion of deacons as well as elders.

The commission also proposes reducing the minimum number from three hundred active-confirmed members to one hundred active-confirmed members for the elder delegate from each church within the bounds of a classis. This change allows smaller congregations to have deacon representation after the first one hundred active-confirmed members rather than after the first three hundred active-confirmed members (see Chapter 1, Part II, Article 3, Section 1 below). The increase in delegate size of the classes is minimal.

In the plan presented below the Commission on Church Order emphasizes that this plan is for deacon representation at the classis level only. The commission did consider presenting a plan for diaconal representation at the regional synod and General Synod level, but noted that the plans presented to the 1989 General Synod and the 1990 General Synod (see above) were not approved. The commission agreed with the intent of the above overture from the Classis of Rocky Mountains to limit, at this time, the plan for deacon representation to the classis only. The commission also emphasizes that deacon representation at the classis level is an option; it is not required.

As for the role and participation of deacons during times of judicial business, the commission, 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 could vote on judicial business. The only exception, however, concerned matters of discipline. On matters of discipline, participation in debating and voting would continue to be limited to elders only. The plan presented below reflects this same interpretation.

R-1.
To amend the Book of Church Order to define classis membership to consist of enrolled ministers and delegates (elders and deacons), for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined; deletions are enclosed in brackets):

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] 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] delegates and those enrolled ministers who are actively serving as ministers either under the jurisdiction or with the approval of the classis.

Article 3. [Elder] Delegates

Sec. 1. A church with [three] one hundred or fewer confessing members shall have one elder delegate, and an elder or deacon delegate for each additional three hundred 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. 3. The [elder] delegate to classis shall be chosen from the [entire body of elders in a church, whether or not presently a member of the board of elders] great consistory.

Sec. 4. [The elder] Each 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, confessing 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] 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] delegates. At least ten days' notice of any special session shall be given to all the ministers and [elder] delegates of the classis. The notice shall state the purpose of the special session. The presence of three ministers and three [elder] 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
deleagates to the synods are appointed,] classis shall annually
address the following inquiries to the [ministers and elder
delegates] consistory 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 . . . ?

c. . . . . . . .

Article 11. Supervision of Licensure and Ordination

Sec. 3. The licensed candidate for the ministry, who is an elder
or deacon, may be elected [shall not be a minister delegate] to any
ecclesiastical assembly or judicatory[, but may be elected an elder
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 as elder or
deacon, shall [be entitled to all the privileges and responsibilities
pertaining to that office] not serve as that church’s delegate to
an ecclesiastical assembly or judicatory.

Upon a motion from the floor to amend R-1, Synod

VOTED: To amend the Preamble of the Book of Church Order, for
recommendation to the classis for approval (additions are underlined:
deletions are enclosed);

Preamble (second paragraph)

The four basic or focal governmental units in the Reformed Church
in America are the consistory, the classis, the regional synod, and
the General Synod. The consistory is divided further into a board
of elders and a board of deacons. The board of elders, the classis,
the regional synod, and the General Synod exercise judicial as well
as legislative powers. Deacons exercise legislative powers as well
as judicial powers, except in matters of discipline. A governmental
unit exercising its judicial powers is called a judicatory, and at all
other times the governmental unit is known as an assembly.
[Deacons exercise a legislative function only in the circle of the
whole consistory.] Three offices are employed in the governmental
functions of the Reformed Church, . . . .

*Amendment to R-1 is in light-face type.
Preamble  (Government by Elders paragraph)

Government [by Elders] and Supervision of the Church. The Reformed churches have sought to follow the practices of the churches whose experience is recorded in the New Testament. The churches then [were ruled by] had officers called “presbyters” (or “elders”) and “deacons.” The early church patterned the office of elder after the elders in [just as] the synagogues from which the first Christian converts came [were ruled by elders]. The deacons were a new office patterned after the service ministry of Christ. The Reformed churches consider the minister to be an elder of a special kind, called in some churches of the Reformed order, the “teaching elder.” Ministers, [and] elders, and deacons, therefore [govern] supervise the church [together]. Each office has its own responsibilities with respect to the message, the membership, and the ministry of the congregation. They also assist. . .

and further,*

to amend the Book of Church Order to define classis membership to consist of enrolled ministers and delegates (elders and deacons), for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined; deletions are enclosed in brackets):

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] 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] delegates and those enrolled ministers who are actively serving as ministers either under the jurisdiction or with the approval of the classis.

Article 3. [Elder] Delegates

Sec. 1. A church with [three] one hundred or fewer confessing members shall have one elder delegate, and an elder or deacon delegate for each additional three hundred 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. 3. The [elder] delegate to classis shall be chosen from the [entire body of elders in a church, whether or not presently a member of the board of elders] great consistory.

*Amendment to R-1 is in light-face type.
Article 4. Sessions of Classis

Sec. 1. Stated sessions of classis shall be held at least annually at such times as the classis may determine. All classis sessions shall begin and end with prayer. There shall be a sermon preached, or a devotional service, or both, at each stated session. The presence of a majority of the [elder] delegates and a majority of those 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] delegates. At least ten days’ notice of any special session shall be given to all the ministers and [elder] delegates of the classis. The notice shall state the purpose of the special session. The presence of three ministers and three [elder] 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,] classis shall annually address the following inquires to the [ministers and elder delegates] consistory 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 doctrines contained in the Heidelberg Catechism explained...?

c. .

Article 11. Supervision of Licensure and Ordination

Sec. 3. The licensed candidate for the ministry, who is an elder or deacon, may be elected [shall not be a minister delegate] to any ecclesiastical assembly or judicatory[, but must be elected an elder 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 as elder or deacon, shall [be entitled to all the privileges and responsibilities pertaining to that office] not serve as that church’s delegate to an ecclesiastical assembly or judicatory.
A point of order from the floor challenged the motion to amend R-1. The parliamentarian ruled the motion was IN ORDER. A point of order from the floor challenged the ruling of the parliamentarian. Synod

VOTED: To sustain the ruling of the parliamentarian.

(A motion was made and supported "to refer R-1 to the Commission on Church Order, for report to the 1997 General Synod." The motion LOST.)

(The advisory committee recommended not to adopt R-1.

Reasons:

1. The *Book of Church Order* maintains a clear distinction between the office of elder and the office of deacon [*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part I, Articles 5 and 6].

2. Deacons are already allowed to serve on classis committees [*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 6, Section 4].)

R-2.
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 ministers.* (ADOPTED)

(The advisory committee recommended not to adopt R-2.

Reason: The advisory committee recommended not to adopt R-1.)

**APPROVAL BY CLASSES FOR NEW GENERAL SYNOD ASSESSMENT BUDGET ITEMS THAT EXCEED 5 PERCENT OF TOTAL GENERAL SYNOD ASSESSMENT**

The Classis of Illiana and the Classis of Muskegon submitted the following overture to the 1995 General Synod:

The Classis of... 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 (*MGS 1995*, pp. 353-54).
Upon recommendation of its Advisory Committee on Financial Support, the 1995 General Synod voted:

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 (*MGS 1995, R-9*, p. 354).

At this meeting, the Commission on Church Order reviewed the above R-9 and agreed, by consensus, to not prepare such an amendment to the *Book of Church Order* for presentation to the 1996 General Synod. CCO noted the following reasons for making this determination:

1. The commission attempted to create and apply a model for an approval process by classes for new General Synod assessment budget items exceeding 5 percent of the total General Synod assessment. CCO noted several problems: 1) the General Synod assessment budget approved by General Synod would only have tentative approval until final approval by classes and would delay implementation of a General Synod budget for six months to perhaps even one and one-half years; 2) implementation of new programs would be delayed up to two years; 3) efforts to present new programs at less than a 5 percent increase to avoid the approval by classes requirement might occur; and 4) “lobbying” efforts for new programs might increase.

2. Decisions on programs are elevated to a constitutional status, requiring the same approval by two-thirds of the classes as amendments to the *Book of Church Order* or approval of *Liturgy*.

3. Requiring classis approval of the General Synod budget undermines and second guesses the responsibility of General Synod delegates. General Synod representation is overwhelmingly and primarily based on representation from classes. Each classis has a minimum of four General Synod delegates (two ministers and two elders). It is the responsibility of General Synod delegates (mostly from classes) to review carefully and approve the General Synod assessment budget.

4. Noting number 2 and 3 above, the commission observed that the overtures violate RCA church order. Office bearers make decisions on behalf of those represented. The commission then cited the following in the preamble of the *Book of Church Order*:

   *The Representative Principle.* The power which Jesus Christ bestows upon his church is mediated by the Holy Spirit to all the people. Since not everyone in the church can hold an office, and since the offices differ among themselves in function, some persons will always be subject, within the proper exercise of authority, to the decisions of others. Since the whole church cannot meet together at one time and place to deliberate, representative governing bodies must be established on the various levels. The unity of the church is preserved in acceptance of the fact that all are governed by the decisions made in their behalf by those who represent them.

5. According to *The Bylaws of the General Synod*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 4, the Commission on Church Order is responsible for making recommendations concerning the content, structure, and style of the *Book of Church Order*. Although
the commission understands the intent and motivation for the proposed amendment to the BCO, the commission believes it would be irresponsible on its part to present an amendment that in practicality does not work.

In still further discussion on this topic, the Commission on Church Order reviewed the "Report of the Ad Hoc Committee to Study Assessment Issues/Denominational Funding" presented at the 1995 General Synod (MGS 1995, pp. 342-53). CCO strongly affirms this report and specifically recommendation 6 within the report adopted by the 1995 General Synod. R-6 states:

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 (MGS 1995, R-6, p. 349).

Although the Commission on Church Order did not present to the 1996 General Synod an amendment to the BCO to require classis approval for new General Synod assessment budget items that exceed 5 percent of the total General Synod assessment amount, the commission presented the following two recommendations to reaffirm, emphasize, and make aware to the classes and to the General Synod delegates (mostly from classes) the importance for classes to orient their General Synod delegate representatives on the importance of understanding the background and content of reports presented at General Synod and to understand General Synod assessments. Also, the commission emphasized that it is important for General Synod delegates to understand their responsibility for approving the General Synod assessment amount at General Synod.

R-3.
To strongly reaffirm and encourage implementation of the following action of the 1995 General Synod (adopted from the "Report of the Ad Hoc Committee to Study Assessment Issues/Denominational Funding" [MGS 1995, R-6, p. 349]):

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)

R-4.
To request classes to orient their respective General Synod delegates on understanding General Synod assessments, and specifically to communicate to their respective General Synod delegates the responsibility of their respective delegates for approving the General Synod assessment amount at General Synod. (ADOPTED)
TEMPORARY CLASSIS MEMBERSHIP OF MINISTERS FROM OTHER DENOMINATIONS

The Classis of Albany sent an overture to the 1993 General Synod to clarify temporary classis membership of ministers from other denominations serving RCA congregations. The classis proposed an amendment to the BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 13, Section 15, to not allow temporary members of classis to vote or participate in judicial sessions (MGS 1993, p. 288). The classis gave the following reasons for this proposed amendment:

1. This amendment is more consistent with RCA polity. Only ministers and elders within the RCA are subject to the discipline of the RCA.

2. This amendment is consistent with the church orders of other denominations (MGS 1993, p. 289).

In response the 1993 General Synod voted to refer this overture to the Commission on Church Order for study and report to the 1994 General Synod (MGS 1993, p. 289).

At its October 1993 meeting the Commission on Church Order reviewed the BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 13, Section 15, and noted that the concept of temporary membership in classes applies only to ministers ordained in another denomination who have not joined the RCA or are not otherwise enrolled in a classis.

Accordingly, the commission recommended that amendments be made to clarify the language of the BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 13, Section 15, to indicate that temporary membership is granted only upon the approval of the classis and that voting rights are limited to the following existing provisions of the BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 1:

Voting rights shall be limited to elder delegates and those enrolled ministers who are actively serving as ministers either under the jurisdiction of or with the approval of the classis.

The commission presented the following recommendation to the 1994 General Synod:

To adopt the following revisions to the BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 13, Section 15, for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined; deletions are enclosed in brackets):

Sec. 15. A minister of another denomination whose ordination meets the criteria of Chapter 1, Part II, Article 12, Section 1, [and] whose good standing has been certified by that denomination, [may be enrolled as a temporary member of classis. Such temporary membership shall apply to only those ministers] and who serves with the approval of classis as a minister[s] under contract, an assistant minister[s], a minister[s] in a cooperative specialized ministry in which the classis shares sponsorship, or a minister[s] to a congregation composed of denominational units at least one of which is associated with the classis[], may upon request and with the approval of classis hold temporary membership in classis. Such temporary members shall have the rights and privileges of membership for the period of approved service, but may not vote, participate in judicial sessions, or represent their classis in the higher judicatures, assemblies, agencies, or commissions of the Reformed Church in America (MGS 1994, R-1, pp. 218-19).

The 1994 General Synod adopted R-1 above (MGS 1994, R-1, pp. 218-19), and two-thirds of the classes approved the above proposed BCO amendment (MGS 1995, p. 51). The 1995 General Synod, however, did not declare this amendment to be incorporated into the 1995
The 1995 General Synod voted:


At its February 1996 meeting the Commission on Church Order reviewed *BCO*, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 7, Section 2k and Section 2s, pertaining to union churches and membership of these ministers in RCA classes, with the proposed revisions of *BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 13, Section 15, clarifying temporary membership of ministers from other denominations in a classis. Under the proposed revision below, temporary membership of ministers from other denominations in a classis is more than the right to speak and to vote. Temporary members are also “subject to discipline.”

R-5.

To adopt the following revisions to the *BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 13, Section 15, for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined; deletions are enclosed in brackets):

Sec. 15. A minister of another denomination whose ordination meets the criteria of Chapter 1, Part II, Article 12, Section 1, [and] whose good standing has been certified by that denomination, [may be enrolled as a temporary member of classis. Such temporary membership shall apply to only those ministers] and who serve with the approval of classis as a minister[s] under contract, an assistant minister[s], a minister[s] in a cooperative specialized ministry in which the classis shares sponsorship, or a minister[s] to a congregation composed of denominational units at least one of which is associated with the classis[,] may upon request and with the approval of classis,
hold temporary membership in classis. Such temporary members shall have the rights and privileges of membership for the period of approved service, but may not represent their classis in higher judicatories, assemblies, agencies, or commissions of the Reformed Church in America. Temporary members shall be subject to the discipline of the classis as provided in Chapter 1, Part I, Article 7, Section 2s. (ADOPTED)

CLARIFICATION OF INSTALLATION FOR ASSISTANT AND RETIRED MINISTERS UNDER CONTRACT

The 1989 General Synod adopted and two-thirds of the classes approved the following BCO amendment:

The classis shall 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, which meets the following 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; and

3. is intended to witness to the Word in the world or to nurture and train Christians for their ministry to the world (MGS 1989, R-5, 195-96; MGS 1990, R-6, pp. 40-41; and BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 13, Section 4a).

Prior to the above BCO revision, only ministers who received calls from RCA churches were installed. This was limited to "senior" and "associate" ministers. "Assistant" ministers were not installed since they served under contracts.

With the incorporation into the BCO of the above BCO revision, the classis is required to "install every minister." This requires the installation of not only senior and associate ministers, but ministers under contract, specialized ministers, specialized interim ministers, chaplains, etc.

The meaning of installation, especially as it applies to ministers serving under contract in RCA churches, has a different effect, however, than the installation of a minister (senior or associate) with a call from a church. Assistant ministers have contracts that must be renewed each year if the church and minister desire to continue the relationship. On the other hand, a "call" carries implications of a lasting covenantal relationship and an enduring quality of faithfulness which is not easily or lightly terminated (MGS 1995, pp. 211-12). (For a more complete explanation on the distinction and meaning of "call" and "contract," see the report, "Clergy Contracts," presented at the 1995 General Synod [MGS 1995, pp. 209-12]).

The proposed revisions presented below are intended to help clarify for classes installation of ministers under contract and retired ministers under contract. The proposed revisions do not create a new class of ministers. There are already ministers under contract (a practice not encouraged in the RCA as noted in the report to the 1995 General Synod, "Clergy Contracts," [MGS 1995, pp. 209-12]).

R-6.
To adopt the following BCO revisions to clarify installation of ministers in the Reformed Church in America under "call" or under "contract," for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined; deletions are enclosed in brackets):
Chapter 1 The Government

Part I The Consistory

Article 1. Definitions

Sec. 1. A consistory is the governing body of a local church. Its members are the installed minister/s of that church serving under a call, and the elders and deacons currently installed in office. A consistory is a permanent, continuing body which functions between stated sessions through committees.

Sec. 8. The office of the elder is, together with the other installed elders and the installed minister/s serving under a call, to have supervision of the church entrusted to them. They have charge of all matters relating to the welfare and good order of the church. They have oversight over the conduct of the members of the congregation and seek to bring that conduct into conformity with the Word of God. Elders exercise an oversight over the conduct of one another, and of the deacons, and of the minister/s. They make certain that what is preached and taught by the minister/s is in accord with the Holy Scripture. They assist the minister/s with their good counsel and in the task of visitation. They seek to guard the sacraments of the church from being profaned. An elder may administer the sacraments, if authorized by the board of elders.

Article 2. Responsibilities of the Consistory

(New Section 4. Current Section 4 and subsequent sections renumbered)

Sec. 4. A consistory may contract with one or more assistant ministers to serve along with its minister(s) serving under a call. The contract(s) shall follow the guidelines established by the classis. The assistant minister shall be installed by the classis as a minister under contract, but shall not be ipso facto a member of the church or the consistory.

Article 3. Officers of the Consistory

Sec. 2. The consistory shall elect one of the elders to the office of vice-president. If there is more than one installed minister serving under a call, the consistory may elect the associate minister/s to the office of vice-president in addition to the elder vice-president. The order of seniority of the several vice-presidents shall then be determined.

Part II The Classis

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 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 in conformity with:
   i. the Word of God?
   ii. the Standards of the Reformed Church in America?

b. Are the points of doctrine contained in the Heidelberg Catechism explained in your church from time to time, as required by the Government of the Reformed Church in America?

c.-e.....

d. Do the salary, housing, arrangements for professional development, and all other benefits received by the minister/s meet the terms of the original call or contract, subsequent revisions thereof, and the minimum standards of the classis?

g.-i.....

Sec. 4. The classis, at the request of a church or with its consent, shall appoint one of its ministers or a minister of another classis, or of another approved body, the minister under contract of a church that is without an installed minister. The appointment shall be for a term of not more than one year. It shall be subject to renewal after proper review by the classis. The minister under contract shall perform the duties and receive the financial support which is agreed upon and shall report to classis whenever that body shall require it.

Sec. 9. The approval of the classis shall be required before a church and a competent minister, or ministers, may contract for the purpose of maintaining public worship, under the church's direction, in a place or pulpit in any locality, or provide assistance for its own installed minister/s. In such cases a formal call is not required, though the classis shall review all such appointments contracts annually. Ministers employed by such contracts may or may not be required to be members of the classis.

Article 13. Supervision of Ministers of Word and Sacrament

Sec. 9. When a minister of a church has attained the age of seventy years, the ministerial relationship to that church shall be terminated. The classis shall terminate the relationship at a special meeting, or not later than the next regular meeting. The classis shall then appoint a supervisor over the church, unless other contractual relations approved by the classis are in effect. Those who reach the age of seventy years may continue to be employed on a renewable contract basis, the length of time of the contract being no more than one year at a time, with each
renewal approved by consistory and classis. Retired ministers may be installed to a form of ministry. (ADOPTED)

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 author of the overture a sample copy of the Government (Book of Church Order) showing the proposed revisions which would be deleted from the Constitution and included instead in the Canons. The commission also requested comments from the Commission on Theology and the Commission on Christian Worship.

At its October 1995 meeting the commission reviewed a sample copy of the Government (Book of Church Order) divided into two parts (Constitution and Canons). The commission also reviewed a February 3, 1995, communication from the Commission on Theology that expressed a number of concerns about dividing the RCA Constitution into two parts.

After careful review, the Commission on Church Order determined it is not feasible to amend the RCA Constitution in its entirety—Doctrine, Liturgy, and Government—by dividing it into two parts, Constitution and Canons. The Commission on Church Order agreed with the Commission on Theology that it is a matter of opinion on what is "constitutional" and what is "canonical." The Commission on Church Order also questioned the use of the church's limited resources on such a project and did not see this project as a priority for the church at this time.

No formal recommendation by the commission to amend the current format of the RCA Constitution is presented to the 1996 General Synod.
REPORT OF THE TASK FORCE TO REVISE DISCIPLINARY AND JUDICIAL PROCEDURES

REVISIONS OF DISCIPLINARY AND JUDICIAL PROCEDURES

Upon a motion from the floor, 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 to present a preliminary report to the 1996 General Synod; 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).

The reasons presented to the 1994 General Synod for the above motion were:

1. The Commission on Church Order recognized and sought to correct serious deficiencies in the existing disciplinary and judicial procedures of the Book of Church Order and submitted proposed amendments to the 1993 General Synod (MGS 1993, pp. 225-46). Debate on these proposed amendments and the subsequent defeat by over two-thirds of the classes (MGS 1994, p. 50) indicate the need for continuing attention to issues raised in this process.

2. The significance of the disciplinary and judicial procedures in the life of the RCA makes it important to have a year of consultation throughout the church. Open discussion allows different areas of the RCA to offer modifications prior to the whole report being presented to General Synod and classes for approval.

3. A task force will provide broader representation from the RCA.

4. A task force is able to focus entirely on this one important issue without being encumbered with other diverse responsibilities (MGS 1994, p. 51).

As noted in the above reasons, the vote by the 1994 General Synod followed proposed major revisions in the disciplinary and judicial procedures that were not ratified by classes (MGS 1993, pp. 225-46 and MGS 1994, p. 50). Nonetheless, the 1994 General Synod determined that the RCA found the current procedures still seriously deficient and desired a task force to focus solely on this issue and to also establish a means for the entire RCA to confer on this matter of crucial importance.

At its October 1994 meeting the General Synod Council appointed a Task Force to Revise Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures consisting of the following persons:
The task force met in Holland, Michigan, on December 13, 1994; March 9-10, 1995; May 8-9, 1995; July 13-14, 1995; October 30-31, 1995; and November 27-28, 1995. The task force also met via a telephone conference call on January 31, 1996. The following preliminary report is presented to the 1996 General Synod.

In the revision of Chapter 2 of the Book of Church Order, the task force strove for clarity and consistency of language to assist judicatories as they work through what is often a painful and exacting task. The task force also attempted to avoid language of the secular court in order to indicate the peculiarly ecclesiastical nature of discipline.

The following major revisions of Chapter 2 of the BCO are proposed by the task force:

1. The distinction between private and public offenses is deleted. The "private" and "public" division caused confusion.

2. The process of bringing a charge is amended so that either an individual or a committee of a judicatory can bring a charge. Also, a committee of the judicatory (rather than the entire judicatory) ascertains whether a charge is of sufficient merit to warrant further consideration. This committee will not then be involved in the trial of a charge. This eliminates a fundamental unfairness present in the current procedures, where members of the judicatory act as "prosecutor, judge, and jury."

3. A set of procedural rules for a trial is added to clarify and to assist judicatories in the fair adjudication of a charge(s) that comes before the entire judicatory.

4. The procedures for complaints and appeals are separated into Part II and Part III to avoid confusion between a complaint and an appeal.

In addition, the task force proposes the publication of a commentary. The commentary will be printed as footnotes to Chapter 2 of the Book of Church Order. However, the commentary footnotes will not be constitutional material.

The task force offers the commentary to assist judicatories as they proceed with disciplinary matters. The commentary notes important distinctions and describes, in a more narrative style, how a judicatory can employ the disciplinary procedures when discipline becomes necessary. The commentary can aid judicatory members in determining how the church works its way through a disciplinary procedure.

The task force emphasizes again, however, that the commentary is not constitutional. It is not to be taken as the BCO procedure. The text of Chapter 2 of the BCO is the procedure.

The presentation of this preliminary report to the 1996 General Synod begins the process of soliciting comments to the proposed revisions. Upon approval by the 1996 General Synod for distribution of this preliminary report, the task force will communicate directly with classes, regional synods, agencies, and individual RCA members. The task force is also prepared to meet with groups of interested parties to discuss responses to the report and to receive suggestions for further revisions.
The task force recommended the following: (The commentary that follows various sections is not in bold and is not part of the recommendation printed in bold.)

R-7.
To instruct the Task Force to Revise Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures to distribute the following proposed revisions of the Book of Church Order, Chapter 2, “The Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures,” Part I, “Discipline,” and Part II, “Complaints and Appeals,” to the agencies, institutions, pastors, consistories, classes, and regional synods of the RCA for prayerful consideration, study, discussion, and response to the task force by January 1, 1997; and further,

R-8. To instruct the Task Force to Revise Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures to present a final report to the 1997 General Synod (additions are underlined; deletions are enclosed in brackets):

Discipline

Chapter 2, Part I, Article 1. Nature of Discipline

Sec. 1. Discipline is the exercise of the authority which the Lord Jesus Christ has given to the church to promote its purity, to benefit the offender, and to vindicate the honor of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Sec. 2. The exercise of discipline may take the form of admonition, rebuke, suspension from the privileges of membership in the church or from office, deposition from office, or excommunication, as the gravity of the offense in the opinion of the judicatory may warrant. Admonition and rebuke are pastoral in nature and are exercised by an assembly in the ordinary course of its proceedings. All further steps of discipline—suspension, deposition, and excommunication—are judicial in nature and require the formal presentation [and trial] of charges [in] to a judicatory.

Article 1 provides a definition of “discipline.” The authority exercised by any judicatory is given only by God. The judicatory is responsible to the accuser, the accused, the church, and Jesus Christ.

The exercise of discipline may begin informally. The body exercising informal discipline may never have to resort to Chapter 2 of the Book of Church Order. Many times discipline issues are addressed by an assembly through its executive committee, pastoral relations committee, or judicial business committee. However, only admonition and rebuke may be imposed without implementing the provisions of Chapter 2, Part I of the BCO to become a formal judicatory. The deletion of the words “and trial” allows for an issue to be settled short of a formal trial.

Chapter 2, Part I, Article 2. Nature of Offenses

Sec. [1] 2. [Private o]ffenses [are those] which are known at most to a very few persons[. They] shall be dealt with first in the manner indicated by the Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 18:15-17. If this procedure fails, the matter shall be presented
to the judicatory to which the offender is amenable.

Sec. [2] 3. [Public offenses are those of a] Notorious and scandalous offenses require immediate action by the responsible judicatory [shall take immediate cognizance of a public offense].

Sec. [3] 1. [Those] The only matters which can be shown to be such from the Bible, or from the Constitution of the Reformed Church in America, or which are sins or offenses which cause their perpetrators to become dishonorable in reputation before the world.

Article 2 defines offenses requiring discipline. Because the distinction between “public” and “private” is open to interpretation and “public” or “private” offenses do not necessarily require different discipline procedures, the terms are deleted. It is the responsibility of the judicatory to define “notorious” or “scandalous.” Some “notorious” or “scandalous” situations may require immediate attention such as closing the pulpit (see commentary following Chapter 2, Part I, Article 3, Section 3b below), and formal proceedings addressing these situations occur later. In such situations, it is assumed the judicatory will appoint a committee to investigate the situation(s) and under appropriate circumstances file a charge.

The procedure outlined in Matthew 18:15-17 does not always apply for all offenses. Under certain circumstances, it may be difficult or impossible for the offended party to face the offender (see also commentary following Chapter 2, Part I, Article 5, Section 7 below). In the case of such an offense, as well as with other offenses not lending themselves to the procedures outlined in Matthew 18:15-17, Article 2 applies.

Because the phrase “dishonorable in reputation before the world” is difficult to define and is subject to varied interpretation, the phrase is deleted. A situation that violates the Bible or the Constitution of the Reformed Church in America is sufficient for a judicatory to take action.

Chapter 2, Part I, Article 3. Responsibilities for Discipline

Sec. 1. Discipline of a Member

All members of a local church are under its care and are subject to its government and discipline, as administered by its board of elders. A member who persistently rejects the admonitions or rebukes of the board of elders may be suspended from the privileges of membership in the church. If a member fails to show marks of repentance after suspension, the board of elders may, with permission of the classis, proceed to excommunication. The board of elders shall publicly notify the congregation of its intention to excommunicate, and later, of its final action, unless the board chooses to may omit such public notification, if in its judgment, the omission will not impair the purposes of discipline and will best serve the spiritual welfare of the congregation. Such omission shall require a two-thirds vote of the board of elders.

The word “rebukes” is added to make it consistent with Chapter 2, Article 1, Section 2 above. The requirement of notification is not new (see also commentary following Chapter 2, Part I, Article 5, Section 14 below). The civil courts generally are in agreement to not interfere
with ecclesiastical courts, provided these ecclesiastical courts follow their respective church orders. This Section 1 assumes that a Board of Elders is concerned for both the welfare of the member and the congregation.

Sec. 2. Discipline of an Elder or Deacon

The board of elders shall have jurisdiction in the case of a charge against an elder or deacon. If [convicted] the charge is proven, the elder or deacon may be suspended or deposed from office, or from the privileges of membership in the church, or from both, together with such other discipline as may be imposed in accordance with Section 1 of this article.

The discipline of an elder or deacon in this Section 2 refers to the "office" of elder or deacon. If a minister is serving as an elder or deacon, the minister (serving as elder or deacon) may be disciplined only by the classis (see Chapter 2, Part I, Article 3, Section 3a below and commentary following Chapter 2, Part I, Article 3, Section 3c below).

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

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

b. The consistory has the right to close the pulpit to a minister who has been accused of any public sin or gross notorious or scandalous offense which would render appearance in the pulpit inexpedient or offensive. The terms "public sin or gross" are deleted and the terms "notorious or scandalous" are added in order to be consistent with the definition of offenses in Chapter 2, Part I, Article 2 above.

Proceedings of the consistory in such a case are at its peril, but are undertaken to prevent scandal. This action is not to be considered a trial and must be reported immediately to the classis.

When a consistory "closes a pulpit," this is an immediate and short-term solution only (see commentary following Chapter 2, Part I, Article 1 above).

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

The word "exclusive" is added to make it very clear that only the classis has authority to discipline a minister (see Chapter 2, Part I, Article 3, Section 3a above). Also, as noted in the commentary following Chapter 2, Part I, Article 3, Section 2 above, only classis may administer discipline to a minister who is serving as an elder or deacon. If a proven charge is overturned on appeal, the discipline matter must still be referred to the classis in which the minister is a member.

A minister may demit. However, demission is not the exercise of discipline. When demission occurs, the responsible assembly must keep a record of the facts and circumstances surrounding demission (see Chapter 1, Part II, Article 13, Section 12a and see also commentary in bold following Chapter 2, Part I, Article 4, Section 4c below).
Sec. 4. Discipline of a General Synod Professor of Theology

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

Although a minister is amenable to classis (Chapter 1, Part II, Article 13, Section 2), a General Synod professor of theology is amenable to the General Synod (Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 8). As stated in this Section 4, the General Synod may suspend or depose a General Synod professor of theology from the Office of General Synod Professor of Theology and/or the Office of Minister of Word and Sacrament. In seeking restoration to the Office of Minister of Word and Sacrament, the individual needs to return to the classis in which membership was held prior to installation as a General Synod professor of theology.

If General Synod suspends or deposes a General Synod professor of theology only from the Office of General Synod Professor of Theology, the individual (still a minister of Word and sacrament) is dismissed to the classis in which membership was held prior to installation as a General Synod professor of theology.

Sec. 5. Discipline of a Consistory

Consistories are under the care of the classis and are subject to its government and discipline. A classis has the authority, after [due process and] trial, to suspend [or depose from office] a consistory accused of unfaithfulness to duty, or of disobedience to the classis, or of violation of the Constitution of the Reformed Church in America[,] or [of] the laws and regulations of the church. If a consistory is [deposed from office] suspended, it shall be disqualified for re-election until the classis has removed the disqualification. The classis shall fulfill the duties of the consistory so [deposed] suspended until a new consistory has been legally constituted.

The deletion of the words “due process” is an attempt of the task force to forego (throughout Chapter 2) the usage of common civil law phrases or legalisms. This deletion also makes this Section 5 consistent with the other sections 1-4 in this Article 3 (see also commentary following Chapter 2, Part I, Article 5, Section 11e below).

The classis has authority only to suspend a consistory and not to depose a consistory since a “consistory” is not an office.

Chapter 2, Part I, Article 4. [Presentation of] Procedure for Bringing a Charge

This Article 4 outlines the procedure for handling a charge. A new Formulary 11 (see below) is the form to use for the charge. An accusation or an allegation becomes a charge upon compliance with this Article 4.
Sec. [1] 2. [Persons accused of an offense] A charge may be brought [for trial] by an individual [accusation or on the initiative] who is subject to the jurisdiction of the responsible judicatory. [Proceedings by individual accusation] If the charge is brought by an individual, it must be signed by and made in the name of the [accuser or accusers] individual who must come forward openly to support the charge(s) throughout the proceedings. [Individual accusations shall be admitted only if they are signed by persons subject to the jurisdiction of the judicatory].

Either an individual or a committee of the judicatory (see Section 3 below) may begin the process of bringing a charge(s). If a charge(s) is brought by an individual, the individual accuser must be subject to the discipline of that judicatory or a lower judicatory within its bounds. This restriction holds the individual accuser to the same standards of discipline as the individual accused and thereby minimizes the possibility of a frivolous or malicious charge(s). The individual accuser is responsible for supporting and proving the charge(s). If the individual accuser is not within the jurisdiction of the judicatory, lacks capacity to bring the charge(s), or chooses not to bring the charge(s), then the matter may be referred to a committee of the judicatory (standing committee or ad hoc committee), and this committee may bring the charge(s).

The factual foundation for the charge(s) must be the same whether the charge(s) is brought by an individual or by a committee of the judicatory.

Sec. [2] 1. A charge is a written accusation of an offense{ive behavior} filed with the clerk of the responsible judicatory specifying the name of the accused, the nature of the alleged offense, and the time, place, and attendant circumstances of the alleged offense{ive behavior}. (For the form of the charge, see Appendix No. 11). The clerk of the judicatory shall provide a copy of the charge to the accused within three days of its receipt. "Provide" means reasonable efforts to deliver, such as hand delivery or certified mail.

Sec. 3. [The testimony of more than one witness shall be required in admitting accusations. If two or more witnesses bear testimony each to different acts of the same general nature, this shall be considered sufficient to support the accusation.] A charge may also be brought by a committee designated by the responsible judicatory.

Sec. 4. If filed by an individual, the charge shall be referred to a committee appointed by the judicatory to determine whether there is sufficient merit to the charge to warrant further consideration. If a charge is filed by a committee of the judicatory, that same committee shall continue its proceedings to determine whether there is sufficient merit to the charge to warrant further consideration. In either case, in making this determination, the committee may:

Even if a charge(s) is brought by an individual, the charge(s) must be referred to a committee of the judicatory. The members of this committee will not be part of the deliberations at trial (see Chapter 2, Part I, Article 5, Section 6 below).
This Section 4 outlines the criteria for determining sufficient merit to a charge(s). The committee of the judicatory may determine that even if a charge(s) is true, there should not be discipline.

a. **Investigate the charge by interviewing the accuser, the accused, and any witnesses.**

b. **Consider the number and credibility of witnesses and the length of time between the occurrence of the alleged offense and the date when allegations were made.** [The judicatory shall dismiss a written charge if the alleged offenses occurred more than two years prior to the date of the charge, the charge shall be dismissed by the committee except when it can be shown that circumstances prevented an earlier bringing of the accusation.]

In considering the dismissal of charges because of failure to bring the charge(s) within two years of occurrence, the burden is on the accuser to show what circumstances prevented the accuser from bringing the charge(s) earlier.

c. **Determine whether efforts to resolve the matter short of trial would be appropriate.** Such efforts may include mediation, admission by the accused that the charge is true and acceptance of appropriate sanctions, or any other disposition to which the committee and the accused may agree. Any demission, suspension, deposition, or excommunication must be approved by the appropriate judicatory.

Mediation must include the accuser and the accused.

If the investigation of a charge(s) results in demission from office, the record must reflect the nature of the charge(s) in order to provide some history of why the demission occurred (see commentary following Chapter 1, Part I, Article 3, Section 3c above).

**Sec. 5.** [The judicatory shall determine whether there is sufficient merit in the charge to warrant further consideration. If there is not, the judicatory shall dismiss the charge. If there is sufficient merit, the judicatory shall proceed to try the charge.] If the charge is not otherwise resolved, and the committee determines there is sufficient merit in the charge, the judicatory shall proceed to trial. If there is not sufficient merit, the committee shall dismiss the charge. This dismissal shall be the final resolution of the charge by the judicatory.

Section 5 gives the committee of the judicatory great authority, including the authority to dismiss a charge(s) or to arrive at a negotiated agreement or to determine sufficient merit to have the judicatory proceed to trial.

This committee of the judicatory is necessary to preserve the objectivity of the judicatory in the trial process. By having a committee of the judicatory (instead of the entire judicatory) determine whether there is sufficient merit for proceeding to trial, the judicatory that later must weigh the evidence at trial is shielded from early knowledge of this evidence. Hearing this evidence prior to the trial could prejudice the judicatory’s decision at trial. The members...
of the committee of the judicatory at the trial do not participate in the deliberation or decision (see Chapter 2, Part I, Article 5, Section 6 below). This separation of functions between the committee of the judicatory and the judicatory as a whole is essential to the appearance of fundamental fairness in the process.

If a member of the judicatory or the accuser is dissatisfied with the decision of the committee of the judicatory, a new charge(s) may be filed.

Sec. 6. The action of the committee shall be reported to the judicatory.

It is sufficient for the committee of the judicatory to report to the judicatory that a charge(s) was investigated and found to be without merit without reporting the details of the charge(s).

Chapter 2, Part I, Article 5. Trying a Charge

At all times during the trial the parties are to act with fundamental fairness.

Sec. 1. The clerk of the judicatory shall issue a citation (for the form of the citation to an accused person or consistory, see Appendix, No. 12) signed by the president and clerk, requesting the accused to appear before the judicatory at a specified time and place. The citation and a copy of the charge shall be [given] provided to the accused.

The clerk of the judicatory issues the citation and provides a copy of the citation to the accused by whatever means is fair.

Sec. 2. The accused shall file a written reply to the charge with the clerk within [ten] twenty days of the receipt. If the accused acknowledges guilt or fails to file a reply to the charge, the judicatory shall impose the appropriate discipline.

This Section 2 gives the accused twenty days to respond rather than ten days. Also, the accused may wish to end the process and accept the discipline of the judicatory. There is no need then to proceed to trial.

Sec. 3. The judicatory shall try the charge within thirty days of the filing of the reply, unless the trial is postponed to a later date by consent of the parties and the judicatory involved.

Sec. 4. The judicatory may try the charge, even though the accused is not present, if it is satisfied that proper notice was [given] provided.

Sec. 5. The clerk of the judicatory shall issue citations to persons who are requested to appear as witnesses for or against the accused and, at the same time, shall provide a list of the witnesses to all parties. Persons who have not received a witness citation may be permitted to testify at the trial, if [their testimony is desired by a party to the case] it can be shown that to allow the testimony is not fundamentally unfair. The clerk shall provide a list of the witnesses to all parties.
Sec. 6. Neither the accuser, nor the accused, counsel for any party, witnesses, clerk of the judicatory, members of the committee of the judicatory as described in Article 4, nor any person with a conflict of interest shall [act as a member] participate in the deliberation or the decision of the judicatory at any stage of the trial. [Nor shall any person who is a voting member of a board of elders, consistory, classis, or regional synod which is a party in said trial act as a member of the judicatory.]

The persons listed in this Section 6 are not allowed to participate in the deliberation or in the decision of the judicatory at trial. However, these persons may participate in the imposition of discipline (see commentary following Chapter 2, Part I, Article 4, Section 4 above and Chapter 2, Part I, Article 5, Section 13 below).

Sec. 7. Witnesses shall be examined in the presence of the accused. The accused and shall be [permitted to] subject to cross-examination [adverse witnesses]. No affidavits shall be admitted.

Fairness requires witnesses to be examined in the presence of the accused. The new Section 8 below allows the taking of testimony outside of trial. There is a particular concern when minor children are witnesses. In these instances, the judicatory must determine the appropriate means of protecting both the accused and the witnesses. “In the presence” may include the use of screens, video testimony, or other means fair to both the accused and the witnesses (see commentary following Chapter 2, Part I, Article 2 above and the new Section 8 below).

Sec. 8/. [Testimony shall be recorded, transcribed.] A verbatim record of the trial, including the judgment, shall be preserved and entered into the records of the judicatory [together with its judgment]. Parties to the case shall be given reasonable access to the record.

Sec. 9/. The judicatory may, at its discretion, appoint a [commission] committee to take testimony of a party or witness at a location other than that of the place of hearing, upon request of any party. Ten days’ notice shall be given to all parties of the appointment and membership of the [commission] committee and of the time and place of its meeting. The parties shall examine the witness(es) and shall have the right of cross-examination.

(See commentary for Section 7 above and see also commentary for Chapter 2, Part I, Article 2 above).

Sec. 10. [Only ministers or elders of the Reformed Church in America may serve as counsel.] Parties and the judicatory may be represented by counsel of their own choosing, provided that such counsel is a minister, elder, or confessing member of the Reformed Church in America. Counsel shall not be compensated for their time or efforts but may be reimbursed for expenses.
Counsel does not need to be an attorney. Counsel does not make decisions, but gives advice. Allowing confessing members of the Reformed Church in America to be counsel rather than limiting counsel only to ministers or elders increases the availability of counsel to all parties. Authorization for counsel to be reimbursed for expenses is added to reduce the burden on counsel.

Sec. 11. [The judicatory shall record its decision, stating at length the reasons therefor.] Procedural Rules

This Section 11 provides direction for procedures to follow at trial. Even if the accused pleads guilty, the judicatory must still render a decision and impose discipline (see Section 12 and Section 13 below). (This Section 11 and Sections 12-13 below clarify the steps of discipline.)

A sample trial format procedure is available upon request to the Office of the General Synod.

a. The judicatory shall establish such administrative rules for the trial as it deems appropriate to ensure that the trial will be conducted in a fair and impartial manner.

[Sec. 12] b. No member or groups of the Reformed Church in America, nor any person connected with the case, shall circulate, or cause to be circulated, any written or printed arguments or briefs upon any charges before the final disposition of same, including appeals, if any.

c. The required quorum for a judicatory conducting a trial shall be the same as is required for a regular or stated session of that assembly.

d. The accuser shall be responsible for moving forward with the evidence.

e. The charge(s) must be proven with a high degree of probability.

Currently, the Book of Church Order sets no standard of proof. The proposed "high degree of probability" gives definition and uniformity to the standard of proof. This proposed standard was deliberately chosen by the task force so as to avoid the use of "legal terms" since the trial under this Article 5 is an ecclesiastical proceeding and not a criminal or civil proceeding (see also commentary following Chapter 2, Part I, Article 3, Section 5 above).

f. Receipt of evidence shall not be controlled by formal rules of evidence. However, the presiding officer may exclude any evidence if the officer determines that to admit such evidence would be fundamentally unfair.

g. The only persons who may attend the trial are the parties, their counsel, the members of the judicatory, and such other persons as the judicatory deems appropriate.

"Such other persons" may include the counsel for the judicatory.

h. Only members of the judicatory shall be present for the deliberation on the evidence. However, the counsel for the judicatory, if any, may be present.
Sec. 12. Decision

a. The vote on whether the charge(s) has been proven shall be by signed written ballot. A simple majority of those present and voting shall be required to reach a decision.

b. The judicatory shall record its decision, stating the reasons therefor. A copy shall be provided to the parties.

Sec. 13. Imposition of Discipline

a. The judicatory shall impose such discipline as is appropriate for the offense and as is consistent with the Bible and the Constitution of the Reformed Church in America

(See commentary for Chapter 2, Part I, Article 5, Section 6 above.)

b. The judicatory shall record its actions, stating the reasons therefor. A copy shall be provided to the parties.

Sec. 14. The recorded decision and the disciplinary action shall be made available upon request to other assemblies within the Reformed Church in America and other appropriate ecclesiastical bodies. In addition, the judicatory, at its discretion, may distribute the recorded decision and disciplinary action to assemblies within the Reformed Church in America.

This Section 14 is added to allow the judicatory to determine the appropriateness of distributing the decision. Without this Section 14, a judicatory may be concerned about liability in the civil courts for damage to reputation of the individual disciplined. To conceal the decision may cause further harm to the church at large. Under this Section 14, the judicatory must take whatever action is necessary in order to honor the Lord Jesus Christ and to help heal all those involved (see also Chapter 2, Part I, Article 3, Section 1 above and commentary that follows).

Chapter 2, Part I, Article 6. Restoration and Reinstatement

Sec. 1. A member who has been suspended or excommunicated may be restored to the privileges of membership in the church upon repentance expressed before the judicatory [to which amenable] which suspended or excommunicated the member. If public notice of the judgment of excommunication had been given, due public notice of reinstatement shall also be given the congregation.

Sec. 2. A person who has been suspended or deposed from office may be restored to office upon repentance and renewal of vows before the judicatory which suspended or deposed that person, provided that the judicatory is satisfied that the honor of the office will not be impaired and that the welfare of the church will be served by such a restoration, and provided that the restoration is approved.
by a two-thirds vote of those present at the meeting of the judicatory. Restoration after deposition shall include reordination to office.

Restoration and reinstatement occur only through the judicatory which imposed the discipline.

Complaints [and Appeals]

To avoid confusion in the complaint and appeal process, the existing Chapter 2, Part II of the Book of Church Order is divided into Part II for complaints and Part III for appeals. Part III is substantially the same language as in the existing Part II of the Book of Church Order. It is not a significant rewrite.

Chapter 2, Part II, Article 1. Nature of Complaints

Sec. 1. A complaint is a written statement alleging that an action or a decision of an assembly or officer of the church has violated or failed to comply with the [Book of Church Order] Constitution of the Reformed Church in America or other laws and regulations of the church.

Sec. 2. A complaint may be filed only with the judicatory that has immediate superintendence of the assembly or officer.

Sec. 3. A complaint may be filed only by:

a. One or more confessing members in good and regular standing against the consistory or board of elders having superintendence over them.

b. One or more members of an assembly against that assembly of which they are members.

c. An assembly against that assembly having immediate superintendence over it.

Sec. 4. Neither notice of intent to complain nor the complaint itself shall have the effect of suspending the action against which the complaint is made, unless one-third of the members of the assembly complained against who were present when the action was taken file within thirty days a request for such suspension until a decision is made in the higher judicatory.


Sec. 1. Written notice of intent to complain [or appeal] shall be filed with [the] an officer or with the clerk of the assembly or judicatory which took the action in question. This filing shall be completed not later than twenty days after having received official notification of the action taken. In default of this requirement, the case shall not be heard.
Sec. 2. The complaint [or appeal] and the reasons therefor shall be filed with the clerk of the higher judicatory within twenty days after the filing of notice of intent. In default of this requirement, the complaint shall be considered to be dismissed and the clerk of the higher judicatory shall notify the parties involved.

Sec. 3. Within this same period the clerk of the lower [judicatory] assembly shall file with the clerk of the higher judicatory the original record of all the proceedings [in the case] pertaining to the complaint, including the notice of intent[, the evidence, the arguments] and any other documents bearing on the [case] complaint. These constitute the record of the case. [In cases of appeal, the higher judicatory shall not admit or consider as evidence anything not found in this record without consent of the parties in the case. If the clerk of the lower judicatory does not deliver these papers within the specified time, the clerk may be ordered by the higher judicatory to show cause why there should not be censure for such failure.]

Sec. [3]4. The clerk of the higher judicatory shall, upon receiving the record [of the case], promptly notify its judicial business committee, call a meeting of the committee at a suitable time and place, and give notice of such meeting to all the parties involved. The committee shall determine whether the case and its attendant papers are in order. The committee shall promptly advise the several parties if it finds any irregularities. A period of not more than twenty days shall be allowed to correct such irregularities. The committee may request further written response or arguments to be submitted within the same twenty days. If less than thirty days remain before the next regular session of the judicatory to which the committee is to report and the committee determines that it is unable to prepare an acceptable report, it shall immediately record this determination and the reasons therefor with the clerk of such judicatory and request permission to delay its report until the next session. The clerk shall promptly confer with the officers of the judicatory who shall promptly rule upon the request.

Sec. [4]5. If the case is in proper order, the committee shall then consider its merits. It shall consider the record of the case and such additional arguments as may have been submitted. It shall also hear the [original] parties together with such counsel as may be requested by the parties, [together and approved by the committee as complying with] Counsel shall meet the qualifications set forth in Chapter 2, Part I, Article 5, Section 10. This hearing shall be conducted in a fair and impartial manner with all parties present. If [both an appellant and counsel or] the complainant [in person or by counsel] [for the same] fails to appear, the committee may declare the case to be defaulted.
Sec. [5]6. The committee shall report in writing its findings and recommendations to its parent judicatory by a date determined by the parent judicatory prior to the next stated meeting or a special meeting and shall [simultaneously therewith] furnish a copy of its report to each of the parties. [Within twenty days thereafter, any party may submit to the clerk of the judicatory a written response to the committee's report. The clerk shall distribute copies of the committee's report and any responses received to the members of the judicatory.] After receiving the report of the committee [and the responses thereto], the judicatory may request to hear the original parties in the case with their counsel. The [report] recommendation(s) of the committee may be adopted, rejected, amended, or referred back to the committee. The judicatory may confirm or reverse, in whole or in part, the [judgment] action of the lower [judicatory or] assembly, or remand the [case] matter to it with instructions.

Sec. [6]7. Persons who have voted on [a case] the matter in a lower [judicatory] assembly or who have [prepared or conducted that case] a conflict of interest shall not vote upon the case in a higher judicatory.

Sec. [7]8. The judicatory shall record its decision, stating [at length] the reasons therefor.

Sec. [8]9. When a complaint is filed, the complainant has the burden of moving forward and proving by a preponderance of the evidence that the respondent has violated or failed to comply with the Constitution of the Reformed Church in America or other laws and regulations of the church.

A standard of review "preponderance of the evidence" is added to provide uniformity and clarity. This is the standard which has been used by the General Synod Commission on Judicial Business.

Sec. [9]10. No member or groups of the Reformed Church in America, nor any person [submitting to the jurisdiction thereof] connected with the matter, shall circulate, or cause to be circulated, any written or printed arguments or briefs upon any complaints before the final disposition of same, including appeals, if any.

Sec. [8]11. No complaint [or appeal] can be taken against any action or decision of the General Synod.

Appeals


Sec. 1. An appeal is the transfer to a higher judicatory of a complaint, a charge, or an appeal on which judgment has been rendered in a lower judicatory. The right of appeal belongs to either of the original parties in a case. That right may be exercised when a party considers itself to be aggrieved or injured by a judgment of a judicatory.
Sec. 2. The grounds of appeal include [such matters as the following]: irregularity in the proceedings of the lower judicatory; refusal of reasonable indulgence to a party on trial; receiving improper, or declining to receive proper, evidence; rendering a decision before all the testimony is taken; [manifestation of] bias or prejudice in the case; and manifest injustice in the judgment.

Sec. 3. Notice of intent to appeal suspends the judgment of the lower judicatory until the appeal is finally decided. But when the judgment which is appealed from results in suspension, deposition from office, or excommunication, the person against whom the judgment has been pronounced shall be required to refrain from the sacrament of [Holy Communion] the Lord’s Supper and from the exercise of office until the appeal is finally decided, unless exception is made in the judgment of the lower judicatory.

Sec. 4. The regional synod shall be the final court of appeal for all cases originally heard by a board of elders. However, the General Synod may hear such an appeal if one delegate to the regional synod from each of the classes in that regional synod, with the exception of the classis from whose action the appeal is taken, shall give written notice to the clerk of the regional synod within thirty days of its adjournment that there is just cause for appealing a case to the General Synod.

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

Sec. 1. Written notice of intent to appeal shall be filed with an officer or with the clerk of the judicatory which took the action in question. This filing shall be completed not later than twenty days after having received official notification of the action taken. In default of this requirement, the appeal shall not be heard.

Sec. 2. The appeal and the reasons therefor shall be filed with the clerk of the higher judicatory within twenty days after the filing of notice of intent. In default of this requirement, the appeal shall be considered to be dismissed and the clerk of the higher judicatory shall notify the parties involved.

Sec. 3. Within this same period the clerk of the lower judicatory shall file with the clerk of the higher judicatory the original record of all the proceedings in the case, including the notice of intent, the evidence, the arguments, and any other documents bearing on the case. These constitute the record of the case. The higher judicatory shall not admit or consider as evidence anything not found in this record without consent of the parties.

Sec. 4. The clerk of the higher judicatory shall, upon receiving the record of the case, promptly notify its judicial business committee, call a meeting of the committee at a suitable time and place, and give notice of such meeting to all
the parties involved. The committee shall determine whether the case and its attendant papers are in order. The committee shall promptly advise the several parties if it finds any irregularities. A period of not more than twenty days shall be allowed to correct such irregularities. The committee may request further written response or arguments. If less than thirty days remain before the next regular session of the judicatory to which the committee is to report and the committee determines that it is unable to prepare an acceptable report, it shall immediately record this determination and the reasons therefor with the clerk of such judicatory and request permission to delay its report until the next session. The clerk shall promptly confer with the officers of the judicatory who shall promptly rule upon the request.

Sec. 5. If the case is in proper order, the committee shall then consider its merits. It shall consider the record of the case and such additional arguments as may have been submitted. It shall also hear the original parties, together with such counsel as may be requested by the parties. Counsel shall meet the qualifications set forth in Chapter 2, Part I, Article 5, Section 10. This hearing shall be conducted in a fair and impartial manner. Either party may elect not to appear in person or by counsel at the hearing.

Sec. 6. The committee shall report in writing its findings and recommendations to its parent judicatory by a date determined by the parent judicatory prior to the next stated meeting or a special meeting and shall furnish a copy of its report to each of the parties. After receiving the report of the committee, the judicatory may request to hear the original parties in the case with their counsel. The recommendation(s) of the committee may be adopted, rejected, amended, or referred back to the committee. The judicatory may confirm or reverse, in whole or in part, the decision of the lower judicatory or assembly, or remand the case to it with instructions.

Sec. 7. Persons who have voted on the matter in a lower judicatory or assembly, or who have a conflict of interest shall not vote upon the appeal in a higher judicatory.

Sec. 8. The judicatory shall record its decision, stating the reasons therefor.

Sec. 9. When an appeal is filed, the appellant shall have the responsibility to establish that the lower judicatory erred in its decision.

Sec. 10. The judicatory hearing the appeal shall give deference to the decision of the lower judicatory, particularly in the matter of credibility of witnesses, and shall uphold the decision of the lower judicatory if it is supported by substantial evidence in the record when the record is viewed as a whole.
A standard of review, "substantial evidence," is added to provide uniformity and clarity. This is the standard which has been used by the General Synod Commission on Judicial Business.

Sec. 11. No member or groups of the Reformed Church in America, nor any person connected with the case, shall circulate, or cause to be circulated, any written or printed arguments or briefs upon any appeals before the final disposition of same.

Sec. 12. No appeal can be taken from any decision of the General Synod.

The Formularies of the Reformed Church in America

New No. 11. (Current No. 11 and No. 12 renumbered)

No. 11. Charge

REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA

NAME OF THE ACCUSER

ADDRESS

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

NAME OF THE ACCUSED

NATURE OF ALLEGED OFFENSE

TIME, PLACE, CIRCUMSTANCES OF ALLEGED OFFENSE

Date Signature

(ADOPTED)
The advisory committee recommended:

R-8.
To commend the Task Force on Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures on their excellent work in preparing the proposed revisions to Chapter 2 of the Book of Church Order. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The work of the task force reveals careful attention and promises to be helpful to the church.

From the Report of the General Synod Council’s Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee

CHAIR OF PERSONNEL AND EVALUATION COMMITTEE ATTEND GENERAL SYNOD AS A CORRESPONDING DELEGATE

Under the former structure of the RCA, all members of the General Synod Executive Committee (GSEC) attended General Synod as corresponding delegates. Under the new structure of the RCA, effective July 1, 1993, the General Synod Council (GSC) replaced GSEC and the General Program Council. Of the sixty-two GSC members, only the seven moderators of the seven GSC committees attend General Synod as corresponding delegates, serving as the Committee of Reference.

Unless the chair of the Personnel and Evaluation Committee (comprised of four members from GSC) happens to be a moderator of one of the seven GSC committees, the Book of Church Order (BCO) under the new denominational structure does not provide for the chair of the Personnel and Evaluation Committee to attend General Synod as a corresponding delegate.

A Personnel and Evaluation Committee report is included each year in the GSC report presented to General Synod. It is important for the chair of the Personnel and Evaluation Committee to be present for the committee’s report at General Synod and to supply any other information requested at General Synod.

R-9.
To adopt in first reading the following amendment to The Bylaws of the General Synod in the Book of Church Order, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 8, for recommendation to the 1997 General Synod for approval (addition is underlined):

New Section 14.

Sec. 14. Personnel and Evaluation Committee Chair

The chair of the Personnel and Evaluation Committee, or another of its members designated by the Personnel and Evaluation Committee, shall be a corresponding delegate. (ADOPTED)
From the Report of the Commission on History

COMMISSION MEMBERSHIP

At its September 1995 meeting the Commission on History reviewed the composition of its membership and specifically the formal membership status of the general secretary. Although the commission strongly affirmed the membership of the general secretary on the commission, it was noted that it is not necessary for the general secretary to have formal membership status to attend or participate at any denominational commission meeting. In addition to the Commission on History meetings, the general secretary attends and participates in as many of the other eight commission meetings as his schedule permits. However, only the Commission on History has formal membership status for the general secretary. The other eight denominational commissions do not have formal membership status for the general secretary.

The Commission on History concluded it is not necessary to have formal membership status for the general secretary on the commission.

The commission recommended:

R-10. To adopt in first reading the following amendment to The Bylaws of the General Synod, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, for recommendation to the 1997 General Synod for approval (additions are underlined; deletions are enclosed in brackets):

Sec. 5. Commission on History

a. Membership

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

From the Report of the Board of Pensions

BOARD OF PENSIONS CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

Prior to 1992 the Board of Pensions of the Reformed Church in America maintained that a member’s assets in the Reformed Church Annuity Fund were held to be indivisible in the event of a divorce. This changed in 1992 with a section entitled “Assignability” added to the Constitution and Rules of the Board of Pensions (MGS 1992, p. 347).
Since the addition of this section to the *Constitution and Rules* of the Board of Pensions, several distributions from accounts of members of the Reformed Church Annuity Fund have been made to spouses per qualified domestic relations orders. Usually the amount granted was not more than 50 percent of the total accumulations in the member’s account. However, recently a qualified domestic relations order granted to the spouse the total accumulations through June 1995 from the member’s account in the Reformed Church Annuity Fund. This order raises the very real possibility that the member will probably need assistance from the Board of Pensions General Fund almost immediately upon retirement.

The Policy, Program, and Services Committee of the Board of Pensions, at its January 1996 meeting, recommended to the 1996 General Synod that distributions per qualified domestic relations orders from a member’s account in the Reformed Church Annuity Fund be limited to 50 percent.

**R-11.**
To adopt the following amendment to the *Constitution and Rules* of the Board of Pensions, Article III, Section 3.17. (addition is underlined):

> Section 3.17. Assignability

The right of any Member or Beneficiary to receive any benefit from the Fund shall not be subject to alienation, assignment, garnishment, attachment, execution, or levy of any kind and any attempt to cause any such right to be so subjected shall not be recognized, provided, however, the foregoing sentence shall not apply to the creation, assignment, or recognition of a right to any benefit payable with respect to a Member or a Member’s Spouse pursuant to a qualified domestic relations order as defined in Code section 414(p) so long as the benefit does not exceed 50 percent of the total accumulations of an account. (ADOPTED)

**From the Report of Reformed Church Women’s Ministries (RCWM)**

**RCWM BYLAWS**

Reformed Church Women’s Ministries (RCWM) revised its bylaws to accommodate changes in women’s ministries in recent years. The modifications allow for more flexibility at the regional and classical union levels and document the new shape of RCWM at the denominational level. The revised bylaws are substantially changed from the previous bylaws due to significant internal restructure; thus only the new set of bylaws is presented to the 1996 General Synod.

**R-12.**
To adopt the following revised *Bylaws of Reformed Church Women’s Ministries* (RCWM), the same to supersede all previous editions of RCWM bylaws.
BYLAWS OF REFORMED CHURCH WOMEN'S MINISTRIES

ARTICLE 1  NAME AND PURPOSE
The name of the organization shall be Reformed Church Women's Ministries (RCWM).

The organization's purpose:

To glorify God, we, as women of the Reformed Church in America, unite in devoting ourselves to Jesus Christ, discipling one another in love, and developing a responsibility for mission and ministry through the power of the Holy Spirit.

ARTICLE 2  RELATIONSHIPS
Reformed Church Women's Ministries is a ministry of the Reformed Church in America.

Reformed Church Women's Ministries shall be open to all women who endorse its purpose.

Reformed Church Women's Ministries shall be self-governed and self-funded.

Reformed Church Women's Ministries shall be accountable to the General Synod Council through its Congregational Services Committee.

ARTICLE 3  GOVERNMENT
Programs and policies shall be determined and administered by the Denominational Board, which shall be composed of three representatives from each regional synod and the denominational officers.

Guests and resource people may be invited to attend. Voting members include the synodical representatives and the officers.

The synodical consultants and the executive director shall be members without vote.

The Denominational Board shall meet once a year.

A quorum shall be at least one more than half of the voting membership.

Costs for the meeting will be covered by the RCWM denominational budget.

The Executive Council shall be composed of the officers, the consultants, and the executive director. Each member, including staff, shall have the privilege of the floor and may vote. This council shall function as the board between the meetings of the Denominational Board. This group shall meet in person at least once annually.

ARTICLE 4  OFFICERS
The elected officers shall be a president, vice-president, secretary of finance, program secretary, service secretary, the immediate past president, and an at-large member.

Officers shall be elected by the Denominational Board prior to the Triennial Assembly. They shall be installed into office during the Triennial Assembly.

The term of office shall be three years. No officer shall succeed herself with the exception of the secretary of finance, who may serve two consecutive terms.
A vacancy within the elected offices shall be filled by a person appointed by the president, in consultation with the executive director. If less than half of the term of office remains, the replacement is eligible to serve one additional full term.

The duties of the officers shall be:

**President**: Presides at all meetings, serves as a member of the personnel committee, sets the agenda for all meetings, in consultation with the executive director appoints members of ad hoc committees, selects persons to attend special meetings, and represents RCWM at denominational and interdenominational events.

**Vice-President**: Presides at meetings in the absence or at the request of the president, assists the president when asked, and represents RCWM at the request of the president.

**Secretary of Finance**: Serves as the chair of the Finance Committee, guides RCWM in areas of finance, in consultation with the executive director prepares annual budgets, suggests new areas of development, monitors RCWM income and operating expenses, and serves on the Personnel Committee.

**Program Secretary**: Oversees the development and production of *Directions*, invites authors for RCWM's Bible study and leader's guide, and arranges for prayer and devotional times at all RCWM denominational meetings.

**Service Secretary**: Oversees the Footsteps program and coordinates other denominational service projects.

**Immediate Past President**: Chairs the Personnel Committee, participates in the Executive Council, and performs other duties as requested.

**At-large Member**: Participates in the Executive Council and performs other duties as requested.

When possible, each officer shall be chosen from a different regional synod. All officers shall be nominated by the Nominating Committee.

**ARTICLE 5**    **DENOMINATIONAL BOARD**

The Denominational Board shall meet once a year.

Attending shall be the members of the Executive Council and representatives from each regional synod. Guests and resource people may be invited to attend. Voting members include the synodical representatives and the officers.

A quorum shall be at least one more than half of the voting membership.

Costs for the meeting shall be covered by the denominational budget.

**ARTICLE 6**    **COMMITTEES**

The committees that are appointed by the president, in consultation with the director, shall include the Finance Committee, the Nominating Committee, and ad-hoc committees.

The **Finance Committee** shall be chaired by the secretary of finance, with the executive director serving *ex officio* and without vote. The Finance Committee shall inspect and monitor the budget throughout the year, administer all RCWM scholarships, propose development ideas, and propose and/or consider changes in the way RCWM handles its finances.
The Nominating Committee chair shall be appointed by the president, with committee members representing each of the seven regional synods. It shall be the responsibility of the Nominating Committee to prepare a slate of officers. Persons eligible for election shall be those serving on a synodical board or the RCWM denominational board or anyone having served on those boards during the five years preceding the election.

The Triennial Committee chairwoman shall be appointed by the incoming president, with planning committee members selected by the Triennial chair in consultation with the executive director. This committee and its subcommittees shall plan every facet of the Triennial (except for theme, location, and dates), including speakers, music, publicity, food and housing arrangements, cost, and offering designees. The RCWM denominational president shall serve as a member of the committee. The RCWM denominational president shall communicate with the Denominational Board and the Executive Council regarding the arrangements.

The Personnel Committee shall be chaired by the immediate past president. Other members of the Personnel Committee shall be the president, the secretary of finance, and the director of Congregational Services. The Personnel Committee formulates the executive director's job description, conducts annual performance reviews, and makes salary recommendations. The Personnel Committee is accountable to the executive officers.

ARTICLE 7 FINANCES

The fiscal year shall be the calendar year.

Income for RCWM shall be through membership gifts/dues, contributions and offerings, sale of literature, interest, and other categories.

Members of RCWM shall support the RCWM denominational office through their membership gifts, the amount to be suggested by the board. The RCWM classical union treasurer collects these gifts and retains 10 percent for the classical union's annual expenses. Membership gifts are sent from congregations to RCWM classical union treasurers and on to the RCWM offices. Membership gifts shall be sent during the first quarter of each year.

An operating budget shall be prepared by the Finance Committee. Upon approval by the Denominational Board, the budget shall be sent to the General Synod Council with recommendation for approval.

In the event of the dissolution of an RCWM group at any level, including local, classical, regional, or denominational, any financial surplus collected for RCWM shall be designated for the ministry of the Reformed Church in America.

The books shall be audited annually as part of the Reformed Church in America's general audit.

ARTICLE 8 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

There shall be an executive director of Reformed Church Women's Ministries, to be elected by the RCWM Denominational Board upon recommendation of the RCWM Search Committee. The general secretary of the Reformed Church and the director of Congregational Services shall be kept apprised of the search process and recommendation.

The executive director shall be accountable to the RCWM president and the RCWM denominational board. Staff supervision shall be provided by the director of Congregational Services.
The executive director shall:
- Serve as chief liaison for RCWM with other RCA agencies.
- Serve *ex officio* on all denominational committees.
- Suggest program design and implementation.
- Be responsible for fundraising and monitor income and expenses.
- Manage the office of RCWM, employing such personnel as required for efficient office operation within budget allowance.
- Appoint consultants with the approval of synodical boards.
- Supervise consultants, conducting annual performance reviews.
- Serve as an advisor to all committees.
- Be responsible for written communications, editorials, *Church Herald* articles, *Directions*, and General Synod reports. She may invite others to perform these duties in her place.

**ARTICLE 9 CONSULTANTS**

There shall be an RCWM consultant for each regional synod.

The consultant shall:
- Keep the officers and the executive director apprised of the work, events, and issues in her region.
- Counsel synodical boards, classical union boards, and local congregations about issues, events, and problems as needed.
- Work with the RCWM synodical treasurer and RCWM president on the synodical budget.

**ARTICLE 10 RCWM SYNODICAL LEVEL BYLAWS**

**Section 1 Divisions**

*Within Reformed Church Women's Ministries are seven synodical divisions. They are:*  
- Synod of Albany, which contains seven classical unions.
- Synod of the Far West, which contains six classical unions.
- Synod of the Great Lakes, which contains nine classical unions.
- Synod of the Heartland, which contains eleven classical unions.
- Synod of Mid-America, which contains eight classical unions.
- Synod of the Mid-Atlantics, which contains four classical unions.
- Synod of New York, which contains eight classical unions.

**Section 2 Government**

Each synodical division shall be governed by a synodical board.

The members of the board shall be at least one representative from each classical union.

The officers of this board shall include a chairwoman, a recorder, a treasurer, and any other officers stipulated by the bylaws of the synodical division.

The consultant for the regional synod shall be a member without vote.

The synodical board shall meet annually.

The leadership and the consultant shall serve as the decision-making body between meetings of the board.

The synodical board shall:
- Facilitate the work of RCWM denominationally and classically.
- Serve as a liaison between the RCWM Denominational Board and the classical unions.
Receive information from the consultant.
Train the leadership of the classical unions.
Plan regional gatherings as desired.
Coordinate and assist classical union conference planning as desired.

Section 3 Leadership

The chairwoman shall:
- Prepare the agenda for the synodical board.
- Preside at all synodical board meetings.
- Appoint committees on the synodical level.
- Serve as an *ex officio* member of all synodical committees.
- Maintain records of leaders in the classical unions.
- Keep classical unions apprised of activities and issues of the synod and its unions.
- Plan and conduct synodical workshops for classical union leaders as needed.
- Write or assign responsibility for writing all synodical correspondence.
- Work with the treasurer and consultant on the budget.
- Maintain a file and pass it on to her successor.

The recorder shall:
- Record and produce the minutes and distribute them to her leadership team, consultants, denominational officers, and the RCA Archives.
- Handle correspondence at the request of the chairwoman.
- Maintain a file and pass it on to her successor.

The treasurer shall:
- Conduct the synodical workshop for classical union treasurers.
- Maintain a mailing list of classical union treasurers.
- Work with the president and the consultant to prepare a yearly budget.
- Prepare a financial report for the synodical board meeting.
- Submit the treasurer’s books for annual audit.
- Pay bills for synodical expenses.
- Prepare and submit monthly/quarterly reports to the denominational office for reimbursement and to the consultant and the chairwoman for information.
- Maintain a file and pass it on to her successor.

Section 4 Committees

The executive committee shall be composed of the president as chairwoman, all other elected leadership, and others as dictated by the synodical bylaws.

The executive committee shall serve as the board between meetings of the board. The executive committee has the authority and the responsibility to plan, to evaluate, to set goals, and to make decisions on behalf of the board.

Other committees at the synodical level shall be dictated by the bylaws of the synodical RCWM.

Section 5 Bylaws

Bylaws and amendments of the synodical level of RCWM shall be approved by the synodical board. Amendments shall be presented to the Denominational Board of Reformed Church Women’s Ministries for information. The synod may also produce bylaws for the classes within its bounds.

Synodical bylaws shall be consistent with RCWM denominational bylaws.
Section 6 Board Meetings

The synodical board shall meet once annually.

The cost of this meeting shall be covered through the RCWM denominational budget.

If additional meetings are held, the synodical board shall assume the cost of these meetings.

Section 7 Finances

The following synodical expenses shall be funded through denominational gifts/dues:
- Synodical consultant salary.
- Synodical consultant travel.
- Synodical board meeting expenses (one annually).
- Expenses of standing committee secretaries.
- Postage, stationery, photocopying, and telephone.

Each synodical treasurer shall operate from a checking account.

The synodical board, in consultation with the RCWM executive director, may raise and disburse funds for projects, events, and administrative costs.

ARTICLE 11 RCWM CLASSICAL LEVEL BYLAWS

Section 1 Structure and Purpose

The classical union shall bring together the women's groups of congregations.

Member churches of classical unions may or may not parallel the member churches of classes.

Classical unions shall:
- Provide training for local church leadership.
- Communicate information on RCWM's denominational and synodical programs to local church leadership.
- Coordinate classical union conferences and events.

Each classical union shall be directed by a leadership team.

The composition of the leadership team shall be determined by the classical union's bylaws.

Section 2 Leadership

The leadership team shall be a chairwoman, a recorder, a treasurer, and any other officers stipulated by the classical union's bylaws.

The chairwoman shall:
- Prepare the agenda for all classical union meetings.
- Preside at all classical union meetings.
- Attend the synodical workshop(s).
- Train local RCWM leaders through a workshop or other means.
- Communicate with local leaders.
- Serve as an ex officio member of all classical union committees.
- Complete and distribute an annual report to the denominational office, and the consultant.
- Maintain a file and pass it on to her successor.
The recorder shall:
Record and produce the minutes and distribute them to her leadership team, consultants, denominational officers, and the RCA Archives.
Handle correspondence at the request of the chairwoman.
 Maintain a file and pass it on to her successor.

The treasurer shall:
Care for the money contributed by local RCWMs.
Train local RCWM treasurers through workshops or other means.
Prepare an annual budget to be approved by the union leadership team.
Present a financial report for the previous year at the spring classical union events.
Report at each union leadership team meeting.
Submit books annually for audit.
Send spring and fall event offerings to the RCWM denominational office.
Provide forms, including assessment figures, to local treasurers for union pledges and RCW Mission Commitment (formerly Mission Service Fund) money.
Maintain a file and pass it on to her successor.

Section 3 Finances
The fiscal year shall be the calendar year.

The classical union treasurer shall collect membership gifts/dues from local congregations as soon after the first of the year as possible. The classical union shall retain 10 percent of these gifts/dues to cover its administrative costs and shall forward the balance to the RCWM denominational office.

All regular conference offerings shall be sent to Reformed Church Women’s Ministries.

The books shall be audited annually.

Section 4 Bylaws
Bylaws of the classical level of RCWM may be produced by the RCWM synodical level (see Article 10, RCWM Synodical Level Bylaws, Section 5, Bylaws).

Bylaws and amendments of the classical level of RCWM shall be approved by the classical union leadership team and the synodical board. Amendments shall be presented to the denominational board of Reformed Church Women’s Ministries for information.

Classical union bylaws shall be consistent with RCWM denominational bylaws.

ARTICLE 12 RCWM LOCAL LEVEL BYLAWS

Section 1 Structure and Purpose
All congregations shall be encouraged to create a women’s group for the purpose of Bible study and education. Additionally, these groups may undertake service and mission projects.

All women of the congregation shall be invited to participate in the women’s group.

The women’s group shall have a leadership team.

The leadership of the women’s group shall be determined by the bylaws of the women’s group.
Section 2 Leadership

The leadership team shall be a chairwoman, a recorder, a treasurer, and any other officers stipulated by the group’s bylaws.

The chairwoman shall:
- Prepare the agenda for all meetings.
- Preside at all meetings.
- Serve as liaison between classical union leadership and her congregation.
- Communicate with other leaders.
- Maintain a file and pass it on to her successor.

The recorder shall:
- Record and produce the minutes and distribute them to her leadership team.
- Handle correspondence at the request of the chairwoman.
- Maintain a file and pass it on to her successor.

The treasurer shall:
- Care for the money contributed to the organization.
- With the chairwoman, prepare an annual budget and present it to the leadership team.
- Present a financial report to the leadership team quarterly.
- Forward annual dues/gifts and RCWMission Commitment money to the classical union treasurer.
- Submit books annually for audit.
- Maintain a file and pass it on to her successor.

Section 3 Bylaws

Bylaws and amendments of the local level of RCWM shall be approved by the local congregational RCWM group. Amendments shall be presented to the RCWM classical union leadership team for information.

RCWM local congregation women’s groups’ bylaws shall be consistent with RCWM denominational bylaws.

ARTICLE 13 AMENDMENTS

Bylaws may be amended by a two-thirds vote of the members of the RCWM Denominational Board, provided written notice of the proposed amendment(s) has been given each member of the board two months in advance of the vote.

Amendments of RCWM bylaws are to then be approved by the General Synod upon recommendation of the General Synod Council.

ARTICLE 14 PARLIAMENTARY AUTHORITY

The rules contained in Robert’s Rules of Order, Revised shall govern the RCWM organization in all cases in which they are applicable and in which they are not inconsistent with the Bylaws of Reformed Church Women’s Ministries. (ADOPTED)
Overtures

"Conscience Clauses"

1. The Classis of New Brunswick overtures General Synod to adopt the following addition to the Book of Church Order (BCO), Chapter 1, Part II, Article 13, Section 14, for recommendation to the classes for approval (addition is underlined):

   Sec. 14. Ministers shall not be pressured in such a way as to lead either one who supports or one who opposes, on scriptural grounds, the ordination of women to church offices to offend against one’s conscience; nor shall any minister be penalized for conscientious objection to or support of the ordination of women to church offices; nor shall any minister obstruct by unconstitutional means the election, ordination, or installation of a woman to church offices. Delegates to classis who oppose the ordination of women on scriptural grounds shall not participate in any action of classis that pertains to the ordination of a woman as a minister of Word and sacrament.

Reasons:

1. The RCA has established the right of women to be ordained as ministers of Word and sacrament (MGS 1979, pp. 64-70).

2. The RCA also recognizes that delegates to classis who oppose the ordination of women on scriptural grounds may choose not to participate in such ordinations (BCO, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 5, Section 2h and BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 2, Section 7).

3. It is a conflict of interest, as well as a violation of the intent of 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) for any delegate to classis to participate in any action that limits a woman’s right to be ordained. The intent of the "conscience clauses" is to establish the right of nonparticipation in the process of ordination of women. Nonparticipation, therefore, must be extended to all classis actions in this regard, including participation in any vote to either approve or deny ordination.

4. In order to maintain the right of conscience, delegates to classis must exercise the right of conscience consistently, and therefore must not participate in any action that might deny or limit the right of a woman to be ordained.

The advisory committee recommended:

R-13.
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reason: Overture 1 prevents the exercise of the minister’s or elder’s responsibility.

Approval of Assessments

2. The Classis of South Grand Rapids overtures General Synod to proceed with the following recommendation adopted by the 1995 General Synod:

...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... (MGS 1995, R-9, p. 354).
Reasons:

1. The proliferation of General Synod assessments since 1986 has been unprecedented. The 1986 General Synod assessment was $5 per confessing member for the General Synod operational budget and an additional $1.50 per confessing member special assessment to provide sufficient income for retirees who retired prior to 1973. The 1987 General Synod approved the following additional assessments: $1.80 to provide unified funding for the administration of RCA theological education (MGS 1987, R-12, p. 270) and $2.43 to support the staff levels of the Office of Church Planning and Development and the Office of Christian Discipleship, including the racial/ethnic councils (MGS 1987, R-11, p. 265). The 1987 General Synod also approved $5.48 for the General Synod operational budget (MGS 1987, R-7, p. 42). The 1992 General Synod approved the distribution of the Church Herald to every RCA household and set the General Synod assessment for the Church Herald at $4.87 (MGS 1992, R-2, pp. 198-99). The 1995 General Synod fixed the total General Synod assessment budget per confessing member for 1996 at $25.35 (MGS 1995, R-11, p. 57).

2. It is a healthy and positive step to move to approval of assessments by votes in classes since churches are represented at classis meetings and churches pay the assessments.

3. It is important to require approval in more than a majority of the forty-six classes in the RCA because there is a wide fluctuation in the number of members and churches in RCA classes. A majority of classes might represent less than the majority of RCA members or churches of the denomination. Obtaining a majority vote in two-thirds of the classes is a more representative result.

4. The Classis of South Grand Rapids is aware of the Commission on Church Order’s discussion of the 1995 General Synod instruction to prepare the amendment to the Book of Church Order to implement this approval process by classes for new General Synod assessments (see MGS 1995, R-9 above) and notes that the Commission on Church Order proposed an alternative to this amendment (see Report of the Commission on Church Order in this Church Order section, pp. 239-41).

The advisory committee recommended:

R-14.

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 and programs not previously funded by assessments, and if they exceed 5 percent of the prior year’s total General Synod assessment—be approved by majority vote of two-thirds of the classes. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The Commission on Church Order was instructed in 1995 to prepare this Book of Church Order amendment (MGS 1995, R-9, p. 354). It remains an unfinished task of the Commission on Church Order. <

Additional Responsibility for Consistories

3. The Classis of Greater Palisades overtures General Synod to adopt the following addition to the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, for recommendation to the classes for approval (addition is underlined):

New Section 5. (current Section 5 and subsequent sections renumbered)
The consistory shall prayerfully consider 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.

Reasons:

1. The 1995 General Synod adopted the following additional “constitutional inquiry” question for the identification of leaders in the congregation for insertion into the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 1d:

   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? (MGS 1995, R-19, p. 247, and MGS 1995, R-1, p. 411).

   Two-thirds of the RCA classes approved this addition to the BCO (see Report of the General Synod Council, Policy and Planning section, Amendments to the Book of Church Order, p. 64).

2. Consistories are being asked to report on a matter they have never been instructed in the BCO to do as a responsibility.

3. Since the BCO does not list the above new “constitutional inquiry” question as a responsibility of the consistory, the consistory would be within its rights to consistently answer “no” to the new “constitutional inquiry” question.

4. For the classis to require the consistory to respond to the above new “constitutional inquiry” question, the Book of Church Order needs to positively require it in the list of responsibilities of the consistory.

The advisory committee recommended:

R-15.
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. This concern is already covered in the “constitutional inquiry” questions, Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 1d.

2. “Constitutional inquiry” questions are not necessarily directly mandated elsewhere in the Book of Church Order.

Calling of Pastors in New Church Starts

4. The Classis of Illinois overtures General Synod to instruct the Commission on Church Order to prepare revisions to the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 2, in order to clarify how Section 2 applies to new church starts in which the pastor is present in the community before any church or consistory is organized.

Reasons:

1. The BCO, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 2 is difficult to apply to new churches getting organized. Section 2 fits the older model of starting churches, in which the congregation was organized first and then its consistory called a pastor. Under the new
model for a new church start, however, the pastor arrives first, calls a congregation together, and together the pastor and congregation organize as a church. How does this new church start call its “planting” pastor?

2. If the current BCO, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 2, were strictly observed, then the church “planting” pastor could not be installed in that church until at least three weeks after the organization of the church and consistory. Although the classis appreciates the theological distinction that it is the consistory who calls the pastor, this may be “forcing a square peg into a round hole” when Section 2 requires the “planting” pastor not to be installed until three weeks after the congregation has been officially organized. This procedure in Section 2 gives the odd impression that there might be some question whether the new church start will call the “planting” pastor. The extra services required also create unnecessary logistical problems for the classis, especially when the new church start is geographically distant from other churches within the bounds of the classis.

3. Although there are lengthy rules in the Book of Church Order about union churches (BCO, Chapter 1, Article 7) and about the disbanding of churches or the withdrawal of churches to other denominations (BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Sections 16-21), there are few rules in the area of new church starts. Classes could use some more guidance in this area.

➢ The advisory committee recommended:

R-16.
To instruct the Commission on Church Order to prepare revisions of the Book of Church Order to clarify how and when new church start pastors are installed. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The current Book of Church Order requirements are difficult to apply when a pastor begins a new church start ministry prior to installation.<

Two-Thirds Approval by Classes for Formula of Agreement

5. The Classis of Canadian Prairies overtures General Synod to require, upon approval of the Formula of Agreement by the 1997 General Synod for full communion with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Reformed Church in America, and the United Church of Christ, two-thirds approval of the Formula of Agreement by classes (the same two-thirds requirement currently used for amendments to the Book of Church Order and the Liturgy).

Reasons:

1. Many amendments to the RCA Constitution are of far less significance to the overall life and witness of the RCA than the proposed full communion among the four denominations with historic Reformation heritages.

2. The significance of full communion requires widespread support throughout the RCA.

3. A mere simple majority vote by General Synod undermines the reality of full communion. The required two-thirds majority vote by classes to approve amendments to the Book of Church Order and the Liturgy seems tailor-made for voting on the historic and very significant matter of full communion.

4. The argument that General Synod alone has the right to decide on the matter of full communion (BCO, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 2, Section 4) is not undermined by requiring a two-thirds vote of approval by the classes on this issue.
5. Other denominations involved in this matter of full communion are requiring more than a simple majority vote. At present the RCA only requires a simple majority vote of approval at the 1997 General Synod for full communion. The Evangelical Lutheran Church, however, requires a two-thirds majority vote of approval at its Synod, and the Presbyterian Church (USA) requires a majority vote of approval at its General Assembly and a majority vote of its presbyteries. Although the United Church of Christ requires only a simple majority vote of approval at its General Synod (like the RCA procedure), the United Church of Christ emphasizes that there is considerable autonomy at its lower levels of conferences, associations, and local churches. In other words, RCA congregations and classes have less of a voice on this matter of approving full communion than is true for at least two and probably all three of the other denominations involved.

➢ The advisory committee recommended

R-17.
To deny the overture.

Reason: It is the prerogative of General Synod to enter into ecumenical relationships (Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 2, Section 4).<

➢ The general secretary ruled Overture 5 OUT OF ORDER. A point of order from the floor challenged the ruling of the general secretary. Synod

VOTED: To sustain the ruling of the general secretary.<

➢ Because the general secretary ruled Overture 5 out of order as per the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 2, Section 4, Synod did not vote on R-17.<

Term of Office for Elders and Deacons

6. The Classis of Queens overtures General Synod to instruct the Commission on Church Order to prepare an amendment to the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 9e, for recommendation to the classes for approval, to limit the number of consecutive terms or total years an elder or deacon can serve on consistory without a year of eligibility.

Reasons:

1. Mandatory rotation is an accepted practice in the RCA and is taught as preferable in RCA seminary courses on RCA polity. A BCO requirement would make this practice universal in the RCA.

2. Rotation on consistory is essential for introducing fresh ideas and new vision. Today’s world is changing so dramatically and rapidly that consistories must be able to respond expeditiously to the needs in their communities. Rotation on consistories provides the freshness needed to allow for this dynamic. It also helps consistories be more responsive to new members within their congregations.

3. In congregations stifled because of a conflict within the consistory, or conflict between the pastor and consistory, rotation of consistory members helps to provide a new mix of members on consistory and offers a fresh start each new year.

4. Oftentimes the administrative load on a consistory member’s life in terms of time and energy can be overtaxing. Sometimes other spiritual commitments are neglected due to the burden of consistory committee and business meetings. Rotation of consistory members allows for a natural break for the spiritual refreshment of leaders within a congregation.
5. Consistory membership is about leadership, not power. Rotation of consistory members protects the consistory from the temptation of vested power while allowing for the work of the Holy Spirit to bring forth new leadership and allowing for new vision to surface.

The advisory committee recommended:

R-18.
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The term for elders and deacons is a matter for local governance.<

Deacon Representation at the Regional Synod Level

7. The Regional Synod of Canada overtures General Synod to amend the Book of Church Order to allow deacons to serve as delegates to regional synod meetings; and further,

to accomplish deacon representation at regional synod meetings, each classis will have the option to replace one elder delegate with one deacon delegate; and further,

to assign regional synod and General Synod delegates to regional synod committees or commissions that address financial matters.

Reasons:

1. There is scriptural support for deacon representation found in Acts 6:1-6, which states that the Holy Spirit guides the church to delegate matters of welfare and finance to suitably-gifted Christians.

2. The Book of Church Order already allows deacons to serve on classis committees (BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 6, Section 4) and General Synod agencies and commissions (BCO, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 4, Section 2).

3. Regional synods need the services of deacons gifted in handling financial concerns.

The advisory committee recommended:

R-19.
To instruct the Commission on Church Order to prepare revisions to the Book of Church Order to allow confessing members to serve on regional synod committees, commissions, or boards. (ADOPTED)

Reason: R-19 will give the same freedom to regional synods which classes and the General Synod already allow (Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 6, Section 4 and Book of Church Order, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 4, Section 2).<

General Synod Council Representation

8. The Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics overtures General Synod to adopt 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, for recommendation to the 1997 General Synod for approval (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 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 or regional synod they represent.

Reasons:

1. The ministry and mission of regional synods are an integral part of the life of the RCA. Regional synod input at General Synod Council (GSC) meetings would make a significant contribution to the work of GSC.

2. Regional synod representation on GSC would provide a vital link to the program agencies of General Synod and the program agencies of the regional synods.

3. 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 the Mid-Atlantics believes the same is true for regional synod membership on GSC.

4. The regional synods always held membership on the former General Program Council of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America. This regional synod membership indicated the importance of the linkage between the assemblies and agencies of the RCA.

5. While the Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics recognizes the increased dollar cost for regional synod representation on GSC, the Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics believes the ministry and the mission of the whole church outweighs the cost (italics added for emphasis).

6. While regional synod executives are invited to attend GSC meetings, regional synod staff ought not represent assemblies on policy-making bodies (italics added for emphasis).

➢The advisory committee recommended:

R-20.
To adopt 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, for recommendation to the 1997 General Synod for approval (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 confessing members of the Reformed Church in America. Members shall hold office only as long as they remain within the bounds of the classes or regional synods they represent. (NOT ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. Regional synod input at General Synod Council (GSC) meetings could make a significant contribution to the work of the GSC.

2. Regional synod representation on GSC would provide a vital link to the program agencies of General Synod and the program agencies of the regional synods.

3. The General Synod has deemed regional synod representation important and has provided for regional synod delegates at General Synod meetings (Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 1). The same principle should apply for regional synod representation on GSC.

4. The regional synods had membership on the former General Program Council (GPC). This representation was lost when GSC replaced GPC and needs to be corrected.

5. The ministry and mission of the church outweighs the added cost of eight additional regional synod delegates.

6. Although regional synod executives are invited to attend GSC meetings, regional synod staff ought not represent assemblies on policy-making bodies.

9. The Regional Synod of Albany overtures General Synod to adopt 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, for recommendation to the 1997 General Synod for approval (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 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 or regional synods 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 (GSC).
2. Regional synod representation on GSC provides a necessary and appropriate liaison between program agencies of General Synod and the program agencies of the regional synods. Regional synod representation on GSC is important for sharing ideas, explaining programs, and seeking mutual support between regional synods and the denomination.

3. The regional synods held membership on the former General Program Council. The regional synod representative was lost when the General Synod Council replaced the General Program Council and the General Synod Executive Committee. The absence of regional synod members on GSC needs to be corrected.

4. The Regional Synod of Albany applauds the March 1996 decision of the General Synod Council to affirm the attendance of regional synod executives at GSC meetings. This is helpful in improving communication between regional synods and the denomination. However, regional synod executive staff attendance at GSC meetings does not address the lack of regional synod voting representation on the General Synod Council.

➢ The advisory committee recommended:

R-21.
To deny the overture.

Reason: The substance of Overture 9 was dealt with in R-20 prepared by the advisory committee for Overture 8.

➢ Because of the vote taken by Synod not to adopt R-20, the moderator of the Advisory Committee on Church Order withdrew R-21 and Synod did not vote on R-21.

General Synod Representation

10. 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 judicatory of the Reformed Church in America. It consists of two minister delegates and two elder delegates from each of the classes having four thousand or fewer confessing members on the roll of its churches, and one minister delegate and one elder delegate for each two thousand confessing members, or fraction thereof, from each of the classes having more than four thousand confessing members on the roll of its churches; one elder or minister delegate from each of the regional synods, except that each regional synod may send a second delegate if that delegate 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 Book of Church Order allows each regional synod to send two women as corresponding delegates to General Synod (BCO, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 8, Section 12). The above proposed revision allows for at least one woman regional synod regular
voting delegate to attend General Synod in addition to the two nonvoting corresponding women delegates the regional synods are allowed. The above proposed revision also allows those regional synods who choose not to send women as regular voting delegates to still send two women nonvoting corresponding delegates.

2. 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.

3. 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).

4. 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.

5. 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 sole 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 woman as a regular voting 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.

6. The cost for the above proposed revision amounts to approximately 2.5 cents per active-confirmed member.

7. The Regional Synod of Albany presented the same above-proposed revision as an overture to the 1995 General Synod. The 1995 General Synod denied the overture (MGS 1995, R-18, p. 246). One of the reasons presented by the Advisory Committee on Church Order at the 1995 General Synod recommending denial of the overture was that “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” (MGS 1995, p. 246).

The Regional Synod of Albany notes that the dictionary defines “quota” as follows:

1. A fixed share that must be done or contributed or received.

2. The maximum number or amount of people or things that may be admitted, as to a country or institution; import quotas.

The RCA’s governmental structure is already replete with quotas. As noted in reason #1 above, 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). In the BCO, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 1 (the very article for which this overture is recommending an amendment), the composition of General Synod is defined by quotas: i.e., a fixed number of delegates based on membership from each classis,
regional synod, RCA theological seminary, etc.

Rather than moving toward a quota system (which already exists), this overture constitutes a movement away from a quota system. The above proposed revision provides each regional synod with an option as to the number of delegates it may send. The only requirement is that any delegate in excess of one delegate shall be a woman. The Regional Synod of Albany does not believe the above proposed revision constitutes a movement toward a quota.

➢ The advisory committee recommended:

R-22.
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reason: Representation should be based on classes and regional synods, not on gender.

Procedure for Requesting Regional Synod Special Sessions

11. The Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics overtures General Synod to adopt the following revision to the Book of Church Order (BCO), Chapter 1, Part III, Article 4, Section 2, for recommendation to the classes for approval (addition is underlined; deletion is enclosed in brackets):

Sec. 2. The president of the regional synod shall call a special session of the synod upon receipt of a written request of [four ministers and four elder delegates] one minister and one elder delegate from each of the classes within its bounds. At least three weeks' notice of the meeting shall be given, such notice stating the purpose of the meeting.

Reasons:

1. This amendment brings the regional synod's call for special sessions into conformity with the principle that governs the call for special sessions of the General Synod (see BCO, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 4, Section 2, which requires three minister and three elder delegates from each regional synod).

2. This amendment requires broad representation from across the regional synod for the calling of special sessions.

3. Special sessions are appropriately called when there is a need to deal with an issue or an action which concerns all sections of the regional synod.

➢ The advisory committee recommended:

R-23.
To adopt the following revisions to the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part III, Article 4, Section 2, for recommendation to the classes for approval (addition is underlined, deletion is enclosed in brackets):

Sec. 2. The president of the regional synod shall call a special session of the synod upon receipt of a written request of [four ministers and four elder delegates] one minister and one elder delegate from each of the classes within its bounds. At least three weeks' notice of the meeting shall be given, such notice stating the purpose of the meeting. (ADOPTED)
Reasons:

1. This amendment brings the regional synod's call for special sessions into conformity with the principle that governs the call for special sessions of the General Synod (Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 4, Section 2, which requires three ministers and three elder delegates from each regional synod).

2. This amendment requires broad representation from across the regional synod for the calling of special sessions.

3. Special sessions are appropriately called when there is a need to deal with an issue or action which concerns all sections of the regional synod.
REPORTS ON CHURCH VOCATIONS

Report of New Brunswick Theological Seminary

Sing to him a new song; play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts (Psalm 33:3).

And when in scenes of glory I sing the new, new song
T'll be the old, old story, that I have loved so long (Katherine Hankey).

New Brunswick Theological Seminary (NBTS) is an old school that is singing a new song. NBTS has had enough experience now with the new song that the harmonies are beginning to come together. Those who listen closely hear six melody lines. This report will play a brief excerpt from each.

While hearing the excerpts, it is most important not to hear them as solo lines. They are harmonies in a whole song whose name is mission. Over the last twenty years, under the leadership of three presidents, NBTS has ceased to be an agency of the church and has become a mission of the church. An agency of the church serves the internal life of the church and NBTS did that as its main task for nearly two centuries, producing almost exclusively ministers from RCA churches for RCA churches. In a world of denominational lines and loyalties, that was a gospel work.

In late twentieth century North America the lines are permeable and the loyalties transferable. So the task of preparing ministers must reach across lines and welcome multiple expressions. NBTS has begun that mission service and the song is beginning to be sung with skill—and with an occasional loud shout.

A SONG OF MISSION: GOD’S FAMILY IS REUNITED AT NBTS

The Reformed doctrine of election means that God calls together a church to witness; and that church is inclusive because God calls all sorts and conditions of people. No ecclesiastical authority gets to choose who is in or out. The church of Jesus Christ is not a human society of the like-minded. We are chosen by another, Jesus Christ, to be with this group of God’s children, in this age and in this place. That means divisions and fragmentations in church and society are not pleasing to God. The ecumenical task of healing the divisions in the body of Christ “so that they might all be one” is high priority in both church and seminary.

NBTS is singing that song by having twenty to thirty-five denominations represented among its students. None of those denominational families are in the majority. Neither is there a racial/ethnic majority. Because human beings only come in two genders, there is always a gender majority. At this writing it is women, but only by a few. Most of the time, the student body is about half women and half men.

No student can be educated in so rich a mix and not gain a deep appreciation for the whole expression of a whole gospel. One of the students who came to NBTS from another country arrived with a particularly set view of what a Christian was and how a Christian should live, think, and act. This married student had a difficult time being in fellowship with other students until the sudden and unexpected death of one of this student’s children. In the aftermath of grief, the student was surrounded with care by the NBTS community and experienced a broader view of what a Christian is and how a Christian acts. Every congregation this pastor serves will be blessed because this pastor went to an ecumenically diverse seminary.

Daily learning, worshiping, and socializing with Christians who express their faith differently stretches future leaders, making them big enough to share a whole gospel faith with those who have no faith at all. And that sharing, be it called evangelism, discipling, or witness, is a song of mission.
A SONG OF MISSION: REAL QUESTIONS GET REAL ANSWERS AT NBTS

Why are so many people coming to seminary in mid-life? Part of the answer is modern secular society where there is no truth, only a collection of personal opinions. Many books and articles demonstrate this, as do court cases in which the placing of a creche on public property at Christmastime is challenged.

Significant numbers of students come to NBTS, and other seminaries, as second career men and women who have had some depth experience of biblical truth or are looking for something other than simply living the secular life like everyone else. An example is David. David was a scientist who had worked in communications technology. But the more David learned in his career, the more uncertain he became of what was really true. After moving from church to church, David finally came to NBTS with his search. What he found were Christians who were liberal, conservative, evangelical, pentecostal, and liturgical, as well as combinations of all those and more. David grew tremendously in faith during the NBTS experience. The major contributor to his growth was grappling with Scripture in the context of a diverse and concerned seminary community. He is now an effective pastor of an evangelical congregation.

The Bible affirms reality and truth, which has found rich expression in the variety of Christian traditions. The Christians' call is to a questioning journey that can finally rest only in the triune God. NBTS affirms both the truth of faith and the meaning of Christian life and service. NBTS is a school of the church and affirms the searching journey, the possibility of truth, and the Christian faith as an expression of it.

A SONG OF MISSION: NBTS DEVELOPS DISCIPLES

What character and qualities does a pastor need to be faithful and effective twenty years from now? What kind of common ministerial concept is needed for the ministry to which Jesus calls the church in twenty-first century North America? Many factors influence both a student's and congregation's perception of what a minister is. For people from mainline churches, the pastors from childhood and the current ones are formative. In some racial/ethnic churches the power and authority of the minister is quite different than it is in mainline churches. For people from Pentecostal, Roman Catholic, Holiness, Anabaptist, and other traditions, there are yet other cultural and conceptual realities that form ministerial identity. NBTS graduates many persons who have a ministerial identity they have built during their seminary training.

Sally's ministerial identity developed during her NBTS experience. Sally came to NBTS with a love of working with people and a fear and dislike of preaching. During her beginning experience she spent time in many supervised ministry settings that were people-oriented—soup kitchens, shelters, youth camps, and the like. Then she took a year of supervised ministry with a small church whose pastor insisted she learn how to do it all. The first service she conducted alone was likened to root canal work. But as the year progressed, preaching moved from being a threat to a welcome challenge. And now, instead of some form of specialized ministry, Sally is planning on parish work.

A SONG OF MISSION: CHRIST IS ALWAYS AT THE HEART OF THINGS AT NBTS

Christianity is both historical and incarnational. The mission work in which NBTS is involved is not just intellectual, spiritual, and metaphysical. It is patterned after Jesus' own ministry. God created the world through Christ, and God cares for the creation. So it is good and right for church people and their leaders to pray about material concerns like health, societal relations, and justice in access to the basic physical needs of life. Training for
ministry needs to take such concerns seriously. Ministerial leadership will sing a wide variety of tunes—liturgical renewal, shelter programs for the homeless, Christian education, service to senior citizens, and many more.

One recent student expresses her incarnational theology physically; she dances. Annette is both a professional dancer and a dance instructor. While at NBTS she has choreographed many liturgical settings. Think of what she will be able to do with a congregation, especially with the youth, in designing celebrations of the goodness of God. Does not Pentecost, for example, seem like a dancing occasion?

A SONG OF MISSION: AT NBTS THE FOCUS IS ON THE PARISH

NBTS is clear about its focus. NBTS is educating leaders for the community of God’s people. NBTS is preparing parish leaders and people who can combine work with the community of God’s people with other occupations in specialized ministries.

For example, one particular African-American parish has two students at NBTS. This parish is in the suburbs and always has been. It is now a substantial parish with membership in the thousands and a budget in the millions. Yet for all of that, the parish was being run on the old style of ‘the minister decides everything,’ and the minister was getting quite tired. Andrew was able to fashion a theologically sound and practically helpful evaluation process and to relieve the minister of many extra burdens. (Andrew comes from a career in management with a major communications company.) In the same parish, Barbara was able to begin involving the membership in work with inner-city African-Americans, something they had not done before. NBTS is not trying to produce academic professors or TV stars. They may come, of course. God does many strange and wonderful things. But the program at NBTS looks at the secular world of unbelievers and tries to prepare Christian leaders to gather mission communities for witness and service. Those gatherings—some called parishes, some called congregations, some with unique identities—are of primary interest to faculty and students alike.

A SONG OF MISSION: NBTS CONNECTS THE STUDY OF THEOLOGY WITH THE REAL WORLD

The scholar pastor was an ideal of the Reformation leaders and is still a legitimate live option. But there is a difference between professors and pastors. God raises up theological specialists—professors—who are called to use their 168 hours a week in theological research. God raises up parish leaders—pastors—who are called to use their 168 hours a week in interaction with the daily stuff of peoples’ lives. Theological education that is real connects both worlds in an observable and definable way. Professors teach first and occasionally preach and take turns in the soup kitchen. Pastors live the daily life of a congregation and write occasionally for a journal. That mix is a part of education at NBTS. NBTS faculty members are all active in congregations and take part in the work of the congregations as any members might. While they do that, they train people in theology so that those trainees who will spend their lives in parish work will also be attuned to the nuance of the Spirit’s work among us.

THE SONG GOES ON

In all these various ideas and activities, NBTS tries to sing the one song of mission in all its variety. It is a new song for a small school from a small denomination. But it is a song the whole church has been called to sing. NBTS is grateful for the Reformed themes that began NBTS singing, for the continued support and the students that come from RCA congregations, and for the continuation of those themes in all the new harmonies the Lord of the church calls forth.
Report of Western Theological Seminary

From its establishment Western Theological Seminary (WTS) has existed to serve the church of Jesus Christ. Its mission began with the task of educating and nurturing those who were called to leadership in the Reformed Church in America, and, although its reach has broadened with the years, Western’s central mission of service to the church remains unchanged. Today that mission finds new urgency as the church faces challenges of identity and mission within a culture in turmoil.

A cry has gone up from churches around the country for leaders—Christ-centered, biblically rooted, well-trained, compassionate leaders with a vision for the church in the twenty-first century. WTS has clearly heard this call. It is the seminary’s goal to prepare men and women to serve with understanding in a many-cultured world. Whether they are called to North American or international churches or to other specialized ministries, WTS graduates must go out with a strong biblical and theological foundation; with deep personal commitment; with knowledge of and experience in the many struggles and issues of the times; and with the ability to lead the church in bringing the hope-filled message of the gospel to a struggling, fractured world.

But a three-year seminary education—even the best possible education—is not enough. To answer the call for church leaders, it is also Western’s intention to open its doors ever wider to those who serve the church of Christ: to put seminary resources at the disposal of the churches for continuing education of pastors; to train elders, deacons, teachers, and other congregational leaders; and to promote theological and spiritual renewal for all.

In order to succeed at these tasks Western Theological Seminary needs a strong and stable financial base. The budget strains of recent years must give way to a time of generous resources for student and faculty support, for program expansion, and for adequate tools for the technological age. That is why the WTS Board of Trustees has launched Campaign for Western, a two-year campaign to raise $12 million for the seminary’s endowment fund.

CAMPAIGN FOR WESTERN

Due to the intensive nature of the training, seminary education is very expensive. In the past, RCA congregations have provided generous support for theological education. While a number of congregations continue to support the seminary with generous gifts, even with assessments the percentage of Western’s income from church sources has continued to fall.

With rising costs and reduced church support forcing unacceptable levels of student debt, it has become clear that a more stable source of funding must be developed. A strengthened endowment can provide such a stable funding source for the future. This is the purpose of Campaign for Western.

In 1994 a feasibility study was undertaken by Campbell and Associates to study the viability of a capital funds campaign, and a goal of $12 million was set. This amount will increase the size of the seminary’s endowment threefold. The Rev. John Nordstrom was hired in July 1995 to direct Campaign for Western. A campaign committee was set up, and the “quiet phase” of fund raising began.

On March 19, 1996, President Dennis Voskuil announced the opening of the public phase of Campaign for Western, with more than $7 million already raised at that time. Regional events will continue through 1996 and 1997.
Building on the work of the New Wineskins strategic plan, the board of trustees adopted five "strategic initiatives" for which campaign funds are designated. They are:

1. Strengthening financial aid for students.
2. Enhancing faculty/staff salaries and resources.
3. Continuing education for pastors and lay leaders.
4. Developing mission-based theological training.
5. Strengthening the curriculum for the twenty-first century.

Primary among the goals of Campaign for Western is increasing financial aid to students. The RCA has a long history of supporting the education of those it calls to ministry; until the early 1960s, WTS students paid no tuition at all. Today students pay $5,000 per year, and the amount has been increasing regularly; it is up 30 percent since 1991. At the same time, many more seminarians are older and supporting families. Consequently, many students find it necessary to borrow for their education, leaving them with debts which ranged in 1995 from zero to $40,000 upon graduation. If WTS is going to continue to attract outstanding candidates for ministry, more scholarship funds must be made available to those candidates.

Another goal of Campaign for Western is to support efforts to more adequately prepare graduates for the world in which they will minister. To this end it will provide resources for intercultural mission experiences in a wide variety of North American and global settings, as well as for efforts to develop mission-based theological training in the classroom.

In order to fulfill the promise of such theological training, students must be guided by gifted teachers in a well-directed program of study. WTS is blessed with highly gifted and dedicated faculty members, who are currently engaged in revising the curriculum to meet today's demands. It is a goal of Campaign for Western to provide the faculty and staff with resources for bringing salaries in line with those of colleagues in comparable seminaries, for professional development and research opportunities, and for updated technological tools.

Another goal of Campaign for Western is to support continuing education for pastors and others involved in church leadership. At WTS this need for life-long learning is fulfilled through Continuing Education for Christian Training and Service (CONnECTS).

CONnECTS

The 1995-96 academic year was the first complete program year for CONnECTS. CONnECTS seeks to expand Western's continuing education offerings from lectures and workshops to include longer courses and special events. It also has moved away from campus with five-week courses and day-long seminars in various locations around the country.

Highlighting the year was a pastoral leadership conference led by the Rev. William Hybels, pastor of Willow Creek Community Church in Barrington, Illinois; the annual M.E. Osterhoven Lectures given by Dr. Jane Dempsey Douglass; and the annual summer Children and Worship training with Dr. Sonja Stewart. Other lecturers included Dr. Donald Luidens, sociologist; Dr. Ellen Davis, biblical scholar; the Rev. Dr. Lee Barrett, theologian; and Dr. Barry Bandstra, Old Testament professor. Preaching workshops were led by the Rev. Dr. Eugene Taylor Sutton and the Rev. Dr. Timothy Brown; a workshop for church librarians was led by the Rev. Paul Smith and Anne Nieuwkoop; and a youth ministry workshop was led by Dave Van Kley and Janie Tinklenberg.

Five-week courses designed for lay Christians were taught by WTS faculty or other specialists in the fall and early spring. Most of these were held off-campus at host churches in the Kalamazoo, Grand Rapids, Muskegon, and Chicago areas. In addition, one-day seminars for classis members on subjects of their choice took place in California, Colorado,
Iowa, Michigan, and Minnesota. These efforts to put the seminary “on wheels” made its resources available to a much wider, more diverse population than has been possible in the past.

CHIAPAS

In January 1996 a group of WTS students and faculty, along with other RCA members, traveled to Chiapas, Mexico, as part of Western’s program of intercultural immersion. During this eleven-day trip the group met with the Rev. Samuel and Helen Hofman, the Rev. Vern and Carla Sterk, Donald and Brenda Schout, and the Rev. James and Sharon Heneveld, all RCA missionaries working in cooperation with the National Presbyterian Church of Mexico. The group also visited village churches, stayed overnight in a Guatemalan refugee camp, and learned about local church efforts to advocate for human rights.

STUDENT ENROLLMENT AND RECRUITMENT

Final enrollment figures for Western Theological Seminary showed 144 students enrolled during the 1995-96 academic year. There were fifty-nine Master of Divinity students, twenty-two students in the Master of Religious Education program, four in the Master of Theology program, and thirty-one special students (those not yet committed to a degree program). These numbers represent a fairly stable enrollment, with the exception of special students, whose numbers nearly doubled over the previous year.

The increase in the number of special students indicates the success of the first year of an expanded schedule of evening courses. Many second-career students and those exploring ministry options must work studies around daytime responsibilities. They appreciate and are taking advantage of evening courses.

In addition to welcoming these nontraditional students, the director of church vocations, the Rev. Dr. Timothy Brown, has focused his energy on enhancing relationships with the RCA colleges and their students. Western Theological Seminary is happy to report that, as a result of these efforts, several students from each of the three RCA colleges—Hope, Northwestern, and Central—are already enrolled at WTS for the 1996-97 year. The seminary is thrilled with this progress and is anticipating a large and gifted class of incoming juniors in the fall of 1996.

STUDENT AND FACULTY LIFE

The annual all-seminary retreat at Geneva Camp and Conference Center in Holland, Michigan, September 1, 1995, began the academic year. The Rev. Dr. Timothy Brown, who this year began his work as the Henry Bast Professor of Preaching and director of church vocations, established the day’s theme with a Bible study that explored the marks of Christian community.

The student council, led by president David Bonselaar, provided frequent social activities for the seminary community, as well as “parents’ nights out” especially geared to students with young children. The student council continues to publish Poiema, a journal of student thought.

WTS was honored to have the Rev. Dr. I. John Hesselink serve as president of the General Synod this year. The Rev. Dr. Christopher Kaiser was awarded a prize from the Templeton Foundation for his book, Creation and the History of Science, and is at work on an expanded edition to be published in 1997. Two professors, the Rev. Dr. Thomas Boogaart and the Rev. Dr. James V. Brownson, enjoyed sabbatical leaves during this year. Boogaart is currently spending a year in intensive Hebrew language study in Israel; Brownson spent the first two quarters of the year at work on various writing projects.
TECHNOLOGY

The seminary has developed a proposal for a new technological infrastructure that will assist in both administrative and teaching tasks. The plan provides for fully integrated software systems for seminary administration, hardware capable of operating current software, networking capabilities within WTS and easy access to other institutions using the Internet, and planned maintenance and upgrades. Campaign for Western has designated funds to support this large step forward in the seminary’s technological capability.

FINANCES

WTS was pleased to meet its 1995 budget and to note that giving both from congregations and from individuals exceeded that of 1994. The increase in congregational giving reversed a recent downward trend.

CONCLUSION

The board of trustees, staff, faculty, and students of Western Theological Seminary give thanks to God for the privilege of serving, teaching, and leading during the year 1995-1996. WTS also thanks God for the many prayers offered during the past year on its behalf. 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 1996 General Synod. TEA operates with an eight-member 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. Kors is on the faculty of Fuller Seminary, where he teaches Reformed polity.

During this past year twenty-seven new candidates were admitted to the TEA program upon recommendation of the candidates’ respective classes. Four candidates withdrew from the TEA program. TEA was also asked by two classes to oversee the supervised ministries of licensed candidates coming from other denominations.

The TEA Board of Trustees awarded Certificates of Fitness for Ministry this past year to the following individuals:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Classis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Karl Neerhof</td>
<td>Classis of Rocky Mountains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles Spencer</td>
<td>Classis of Red River</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following sixteen candidates will be presented to the TEA Board of Trustees by the TEA Certification Committee for the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry in June 1996:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Classis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>James Anderson</td>
<td>Classis of Mid-Hudson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward Baker</td>
<td>Classis of South Grand Rapids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dwayne Decker</td>
<td>Classis of Central California</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Carson Culp
Douglas Dobbie
Susan Den Herder
Kathleen Edwards
Daniel Griswold
Mark Morris
Steven Peterson
Christopher Piersma
Cain Reagan
Daniel Sewell
Brian Stone
Lori Walber
Harold Willemstyn
Classis of Ontario
Classis of South Grand Rapids
Classis of Minnesota
Classis of Red River
Classis of Schenectady
Classis of Central Iowa
Classis of Minnesota
Classis of Illiana
Classis of California
Classis of Erie
Classis of Wisconsin
Classis of Minnesota
Classis of Dakota

TEA completed oversight of supervised ministry experiences for the following licensed candidate:

Timothy Meendering Classis of North Grand Rapids

ENROLLMENT STATISTICS

Registered Candidates 78
Inactive and Special 8
Supervision of Licensed Candidates Applicants 8
TOTAL 96

ASSET MANAGEMENT, FINANCES, AND SUPPORT

TEA budgets over the past four years are listed below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Revenues</td>
<td>$171,199</td>
<td>$186,174</td>
<td>$218,313</td>
<td>$199,885</td>
<td>$200,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expenses</td>
<td>$170,715</td>
<td>$183,648</td>
<td>$195,897</td>
<td>$193,958</td>
<td>$200,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance</td>
<td>($26,593)</td>
<td>($24,067)</td>
<td>($1,651)</td>
<td>$ 4,276</td>
<td>$ 4,276</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

+ This is the projected budget for the 1996 year.

The TEA ministry has been blessed financially over the past number of years with an excess of income over expenditures. Thus, TEA has been able to overcome a deficit of over $27,000 in 1991 to a positive balance of more than $4,200 at year’s end, 1995. Special fund-raising efforts by the TEA Board of Trustees and the director have been instrumental in bringing TEA to a healthy financial position. The major source of income continues to be the RCA assessment for the administration of theological education. The second major source is contributions from congregations and classes.

Pledges toward the 1996 budget are such that it should be possible to raise the $200,500 presently forecast to cover expenses. Extra pledges from the Classis of California and Emmanuel Reformed Church in Paramount, California, have allowed TEA to project a balanced budget. The TEA Board of Trustees and its staff give thanks to God for the faithfulness God has shown in providing for the TEA ministry.
CHURCH VOCATIONS

PROGRAM

Teaching Church Conference

In September 1995 TEA cohosted with Emmanuel Reformed Church in Paramount, California, a conference to explore RCA opportunities to establish Teaching Churches. Keynote speakers included the Rev. Dr. Richard Mouw, the Rev. Dr. Charles Van Engen, the Rev. Frank Vanderzwan, the Rev. John Woodyard, and the Rev. Dr. Gerald Sittser. More than seventy-five persons participated in the conference and new visions were cast. Many of the conclusions were presented in the monthly TEA newsletter, the *TEA Times*.

Summer Intensives

During the past year two summer intensives were again offered. In June 1995 the intensive covered RCA Standards, taught by the Rev. Dr. Paul Fries from New Brunswick Theological Seminary (NBTS), and RCA Polity, taught by the Rev. Paul Smith from Western Theological Seminary (WTS). In July 1995 the second intensive, RCA History and RCA Worship, was taught by the Rev. Dr. Daniel Meeter, adjunct professor at NBTS and pastor at Community Church of Hoboken, New Jersey.

In 1996 RCA courses will be offered through three separate intensives. In June 1996 RCA Polity will be taught by the Rev. Dr. Robert Hoeksema from NBTS, and RCA Standards will be taught by the Rev. Dr. I. John Hesselink from WTS. In July 1996 the Summer Intensive II will be RCA History and Mission Programs, taught by the Rev. Dr. Dennis Voskuil from WTS. The Summer Intensive III will cover RCA Worship, and it will be team-taught by the Rev. Dr. Donald Bruggink and the Rev. Dr. George Brown from WTS. The courses for 1996 will be officially recorded by Western Theological Seminary in 1996.

The Summer Intensive I will be offered as four credit units and offered the week after the 1996 General Synod at Northwestern College in Orange City, Iowa. The Summer Intensive II and Summer Intensive III will be offered one week at a time as three credit units. They will be offered back-to-back and will be taught at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan.

TEA Certification Committee

The TEA Certification Committee continues to consist of two faculty members from New Brunswick Theological Seminary, two faculty members from Western Theological Seminary, and two representatives from the TEA Board of Trustees. One of the TEA board representatives was changed this past year. The Rev. Chester Droog completed his tenure on the TEA board and was replaced by the Rev. Barbara Nauta. Special thanks are extended to Droog for his years of service, both on the TEA board and TEA Certification Committee.

TEA Certification Committee members at present are: the Rev. Dr. James Brownson (WTS), the Rev. Renee House (NBTS), the Rev. Richard Koerselman (TEA), the Rev. Barbara Nauta (TEA), the Rev. Dr. Stanley Rock (WTS), and the Rev. Dr. David Waanders (NBTS). The TEA Certification Committee’s main function is to interview TEA candidates and make recommendations to the TEA Board of Trustees in regard to the granting of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry.

The TEA Board of Trustees

The Rev. Harold Korver is completing his term on the TEA Board of Trustees and has served as its moderator for the past ten years. The Rev. Richard Koerselman has completed six years of service on the TEA board this year and has served as the board’s secretary/treasurer for
the last two years. Dr. Raymond Lokers, who is also completing a six-year term on the TEA Board of Trustees, has done special work for TEA in serving on the certification committee and acting as a regional representative for TEA in the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes and beyond. Special thanks and God’s blessings are extended to these individuals for the many years of service.

**Affirmation of the TEA Ministry**

The Classis of Albany sent an overture to the 1995 General Synod to orderly dissolve the Theological Education Agency (MGS 1995, pp. 298-99). The discussions initiated by the overture resulted in the 1995 General Synod asking the Task Force on Standards for the Preparation for Professional Ministry in the Reformed Church in America to review the overall theological education program of the RCA. The TEA Board of Trustees also decided to review the TEA ministry in light of the future directions for ministry preparation in the RCA.

The review of the TEA ministry and its program has resulted in a solid affirmation of TEA. The TEA board feels strongly that TEA will continue to play a crucial role in the RCA. TEA has proven to be on the cutting edge of ministry preparation. The TEA Board of Trustees is convinced TEA will provide more effective means for the future ministry preparation of the ordained pastoral leadership of the RCA.

> The advisory committee recommended not to adopt R-1.

**R-1.**

To instruct the Task Force on Standards for the Preparation for the Professional Ministry in the Reformed Church in America to include the Theological Education Agency in the structure and design of RCA theological education and to consider new cooperative efforts with the RCA seminaries and Teaching Churches.

Reason: The Task force on Standards for the Preparation for the Professional Ministry in the Reformed Church in America will continue to evaluate the place of the Theological Education Agency (TEA) in RCA theological education.

> Upon a motion from the floor to amend R-1, Synod

**VOTED:** To [instruct] affirm the Task Force on Standards for the Preparation for the Professional Ministry in the Reformed Church in America's [to include] inclusion of the Theological Education Agency in the structure and design of RCA theological education and to consider new cooperative efforts with the RCA seminaries and Teaching Churches.*

**DISPENSATIONS**

The TEA Board of Trustees presents a request for a dispensation from the degree of Master of Divinity on behalf of Jesús García. 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:

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*Additions are in light-face type, deletions are enclosed in brackets.*
1. Jesús García was promised by the Classis of California that ordination with a dispensation would be sought for him after completing a specially designed educational track.

   a. García discontinued his work at Fuller Theological Seminary in favor of the specially designed educational track. This was done on the advice of the Classis of California.

   b. García completed the course work promptly and successfully.

   c. García was examined before the Classis of California and found competent in the areas required by the BCO pertaining to ordination.

2. Jesús García was informed that due to changes in denominational granting of dispensations as proposed by Western Theological Seminary and General Synod on similar requests, the educational track previously defined as adequate for ordination would not lead to ordination now.

   a. García has subsequently taken up course work at Fuller Theological Seminary and is officially under the care of the Classis of California and is enrolled in the TEA program.

   b. García will meet the additional requirements for TEA and the RCA through Summer Intensive Courses and RCA courses at Fuller Theological Seminary.

3. Jesús García has many responsibilities which make it difficult to continue his course work at Fuller Theological Seminary.

   a. García is forty-one years of age, well above the average age of those preparing for ministry.

   b. García serves a congregation on a full-time basis.

   c. García has a family to care for while receiving less than the Classis of California minimum for salary.

   d. Courses at Fuller Theological Seminary are a great stress on his personal academic ability (since much course work is done in English), budget, and time.

4. Jesús García is a successful leader in the church.

   a. García has proven himself to be competent in ministry. This is indicated by the five years served at Iglesia De La Redencion.

   b. Documentation to show this can be supplied on request.

➢ The advisory committee recommended not to adopt R-2.

R-2.
To grant Jesús García a dispensation from the degree of Master of Divinity requirement of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry.

Reasons:

1. The TEA Certification Committee does not concur with R-2 presented by the TEA Board of Directors.
2. The TEA Certification Committee is concerned that Garcia has not completed the foundational courses. 

The president ruled R-2 OUT OF ORDER since the dispensation request was submitted to the TEA Certification Committee under the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 10, Section 1 instead of under the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 10, Section 2. The TEA Certification Committee will proceed with the dispensation request for Garcia during the coming year under Section 2. Synod did not vote on R-2.

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 Mauro Pura. 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. Mauro Pura will have completed the equivalent course work required for the Master of Divinity degree as judged by Fuller Theological Seminary. It is his pursuit of the Ph.D. that does not allow Pura to actually collect the Master of Divinity degree.

2. Pura completed the additional requirements for TEA and the RCA through Fuller Theological Seminary RCA courses and Summer Intensive Courses.

3. Pura is very active in ministry at the present time.
   a. Pura has proven himself to be competent in ministry. This is indicated by his four years of ministry at the Crystal Cathedral with the Rev. Juan Carlos Ortiz.
   b. Documentation to show this can be supplied on request.
   c. Pura will complete an extensive supervised ministry which will be evaluated by TEA.

4. The Rev. Cornelius Kors, director of TEA, reviewed Pura’s academic record and considers it to be equivalent to the course work required for the Master of Divinity degree and the RCA Standards.

R-3.
To grant Mauro Pura 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 Steven Peterson. Initially, the Classis of Minnesota 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. Steven Peterson has completed the core course work typically required of Master of Divinity candidates, short of the full Hebrew requirements. This work was completed at Denver Theological Seminary and Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary. Not being able to remain at one location for his studies has mandated retaking and/or duplication of some of his required course work. This would be expensive, time-consuming, repetitive, and detrimental to the ministry in which he is presently
involved. He is currently taking Introductory Hebrew at Luther Seminary and has taken Old Testament classes there.

2. The Theological Education Agency, through its director, the Rev. Cornelis Kors, has reviewed Peterson's academic and professional record and has approved them as meeting the equivalent requirements of the Master of Divinity degree.

3. Peterson is a forty-one-year-old minister of youth at Peace Reformed Church in Eagan, Minnesota. He works with teens and families as well as leading contemporary and traditional worship. Peterson and his wife share the responsibilities of raising five daughters.

4. Peterson earned a master's degree in counseling, with a concentration in adolescent and family issues, from Mankato State University in 1985.

5. Peterson completed the summer intensive classes required by TEA.

6. Peterson's record of service gives proof of his competence and commitment:
   a. Peterson has been in full-time ministry for thirteen years and, prior to that, part-time ministry for two years.
   b. Peterson designed and developed effective youth ministries at Christ the King Lutheran Church in Mankato, Minnesota, Our Savior's Reformed Church in Lakewood, Colorado, and Peace Reformed Church in Eagan, Minnesota.
   c. Peterson was director of ministry development for Road Home Church in Eden Prairie, Minnesota. While in this position he assisted in developing the mission and strategy for launching a new church start.
   d. Peterson was certified by the American Lutheran Church in 1984 as a director of group ministries.
   e. Peterson was a guest lecturer in adolescent psychology at Mankato State University.
   f. Peterson was an advisor on the youth board of the Southwestern Minnesota District of the American Lutheran Church in 1985. During his tenure as advisor he was the keynote speaker at youth ministry training events. Peterson was also commissioned to write job descriptions for all members of the youth advisory board.
   g. Peterson taught a workshop at the Youth Specialties National Youth Workers Convention.
   h. While in Colorado, Peterson served as the classis youth chairperson for West Central Classis. Peterson also wrote materials on adolescent identity development which were subsequently published by David C. Cook Publishing Co. in its Pacesetter Series.

R-4.
To grant Steven Peterson a dispensation from the degree of Master of Divinity requirement of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry. (ADOPTED)
Report of the Board of Pensions

GENERAL FUND

A review of the activities of the Board of Pensions during the past year reveals no dramatic changes but several matters about which the news is genuinely good. For the first time in several years the General Fund ended the year without incurring a further deficit. That was so despite the fact that more than $700,000 was distributed to the most needy of the older retirees and surviving spouses by way of ongoing assistance, special assistance grants, and grants to surviving spouses. Since the General Fund is the beneficiary of all congregational and individual benevolence giving to the Board of Pensions, it is encouraging to know that the needs of this ministry have now been built into the budgets of a great many congregations.

Those engaged in active ministry also contribute indirectly to the needs of the retired through an administrative fee of one-half of 1 percent charged against the assets of the Reformed Church Annuity Fund. Since all of the board’s administrative expenses are then paid from the General Fund, careful control of administrative costs leaves some funds available for the General Fund’s assistance program. In addition, the $1.50 annual General Synod assessment provided by RCA congregations for the Board of Pensions goes entirely to provide assistance grants. A gesture of solidarity by the ministers of the Reformed Church in America with those who are their fathers and mothers in faith was in evidence when the planning committee of Spring Sabbath, which gathered more RCA pastors in one place than ever before (April 12-14, 1996, in St. Louis, Missouri), decided that the offering at the Sunday morning service would be designated for the Board of Pensions to support its ministry to widows and orphans. All of this has communicated clearly to the Board of Pensions and its staff that the Reformed Church in America truly stands behind its ministry.

R-5.
To offer a prayer of gratitude for the lives and ministry of the retired ministers, missionaries, lay workers, and surviving spouses; and further,

to commend their needs in their advancing years to a merciful God and the continued awareness of the churches; and further,

to give thanks for their continued ministry and presence among us. (ADOPTED)

APPRECIATION TO STAFF

At its March 1996 meeting the Board of Pensions strongly affirmed and commended the work and commitment of the Board of Pensions staff. The Board of Pensions then voted to recommend that the 1996 General Synod recognize these individuals by name and commend them for their significant contributions and efforts this past year for the Board of Pensions.

The Board of Pensions recommended:

R-6.
To recognize and commend the following Board of Pensions staff, the Rev. Alvin Poppen, Russell Hiller, Barbara Diekman, Char Peet, Samira Fahmy, Ellen Mers, Mabel Lee, and Beth Lefever,
utmost appreciation for their exceptional commitment, arduous efforts, and genuine care in serving the members of the Board of Pensions. (ADOPTED)

INSURANCE PROGRAM

Another item of good news concerns the Board of Pensions Insurance Program. At the end of 1992 a combination of understated premiums and unusually heavy claims had resulted in a year-end deficit of $1,954,390. Through the efforts of an actively engaged insurance committee of the board, a zealously cost-conscious insurance administrator, the professional assistance of Corporate Health Administrators, consistories which paid higher than expected premiums with only moderate objection, and the cooperation of a great many plan participants who helped to contain costs, this deficit was eliminated two years ahead of schedule. At the end of 1995 the balance in the Insurance Fund stood at $1,825,000 (pre-audit figure). The disappearance of a need for deficit recovery, added to an actual decrease in claims experience (largely due to managed care and other cost-saving methods) made it possible to pass on to participants in the preretirement segment of the medical insurance program a 10 percent decrease in premiums charged in 1996, while retaining the plan’s excellent benefits. Premiums for retirees were held at 1995 levels, although in some regions HMO alternatives greatly reduced costs for them as well.

Much attention was given during the year to insurance plan cost containment. In addition to the managed care provisions already cited, a new prescription plan, arrangements with network providers wherever these were available (these include some of the higher cost areas of the RCA and offer financial incentives to those who are able to choose health care from within the network) and a greatly expanded well-care program (emphasizing preventative care) were all put into place during the past year.

The “Call to a Minister of Word and Sacrament” is an official part of the Book of Church Order. The call expressly stipulates:

We promise to pay...the premiums for group life insurance, long-term disability insurance, and the medical insurance as offered by the Board of Pensions, except where equivalent coverage is already in effect, as long as you continue to be the minister of this church (BCO, Appendix 5, “Call to a Minister of Word and Sacrament”).

Thus, enrollment in the board’s insurance plans is not optional for installed ministers of congregations, except where “equivalent coverage” already exists. Because the board’s medical plan is specifically designed for the ministers of the RCA, it includes coverage for marriage counseling and provides fees for some forms of care which are not normally included in other plans, and in other ways seeks to be responsive to the particular needs of clergy. Thus, strictly “equivalent coverage” probably does not exist. However, when a minister’s spouse has full family coverage through an employer, it is not sensible to pay for duplicate insurance, and the “equivalent coverage” language is intended to make allowance for such situations. Reentry into the RCA medical plan is permitted without medical clearance for spouses within thirty days of the loss of such other group coverage.

“Equivalent” life and long-term disability coverage needs more scrutiny. There are some RCA congregations in which this provision has not been honored and where the supervision of classis has become lax. It is up to the classis in every instance to determine, when it makes its annual mandatory constitutional inquiry, whether in fact the “benefits received by the minister’s meet the terms of the original call...and the minimum standards of the classis” (BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 1f). If the answer is negative, prompt action is essential. When nothing is done and when lapses in enforcement are permitted to continue year after year, eventually people do get hurt. After-the-fact remedies for destitute ministers
and their survivors are almost always inadequate, and they tax Board of Pensions resources when RCA coverage, particularly for life and disability, is both excellent and available at modest cost.

R-7.
To urge classes to be scrupulous in their enforcement of the Book of Church Order requirement that installed ministers of congregations be covered by Reformed Church in America insurance (BCO, Appendix 5, “Call to a Minister of Word and Sacrament”); and further,

to make certain that when “equivalent coverage” is provided instead, such insurance coverage meets the requisite standard.

(ADOPTED)

REFORMED CHURCH ANNUITY FUND

The Reformed Church Annuity Fund is the major vehicle by which most ministers, missionaries, and lay employees of the RCA are making financial provision for their retirement years. As that point in the career path draws nearer, the recurring question posed by almost everyone is “Will I have enough?” To ensure that the response to that question can be “yes,” the RCA put in place some twenty-five years ago a unique system of establishing minimum contributions for installed ministers and appointed missionaries which is based on an external indicator which reflects the average income in RCA households. Known as the “Effective Buying Power per Household” (EBPH), perhaps no other feature of the plan has done as much to address the issue of “enough.” Without penalizing those who spend their careers in situations in which compensation is at higher levels, the EBPH minimum dues formula provides that over the years a sufficient accumulation of funds will accrue to an individual’s account so that when it comes time for retirement benefits to be paid out, a reasonable living standard is possible. For those who retired in 1995 and had served at least thirty years or more, the average income per year in retirement from annuity fund sources alone was $25,352. Since this is a relatively fixed amount, and life expectancy for clergy and their spouses tends to be somewhat longer than persons from other walks of life, frugality and saving during the early years of retirement is essential if the persistent erosion of inflation is not to cause hardship later. RCA retirees who retire at age sixty-five are advised to anticipate thirty more years of life for at least one member of a couple and to save from 20 percent to 30 percent of their annuity fund income during the first ten years.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Most RCA retirees also receive benefits from Social Security, which, together with other forms of savings, is one of the legs on a three-legged retirement income stool. In order to accommodate the convictions of certain religious groups within the United States, federal law permits newly ordained ministers to file for an exemption from self-employment tax on their earnings from service as an ordained minister, providing they are “conscientiously opposed to public insurance because of ...individual religious considerations (not because of ...general conscience), or...opposed because of the principles of (their) religious denomination” (Publication 517, Internal Revenue Service, 1995). The IRS further stipulates that economic reasons are not a valid basis for filing for such exemption and that the applicant must inform the ordaining body that he or she is opposed to public insurance.

It is the requirement to “inform” which brings those who are considering filing for exemption to the attention of Board of Pensions staff. In most instances the caller has been persuaded by some marketer of financial products they would be better served if they were to set aside
an amount equal to their self-employment tax each year and invest it in a plan the sales representative is prepared to offer. After this initial financial argument has been persuasive (the discipline necessary to make such investments on a regular basis until the time of retirement is usually assumed), a theological case is developed.

Unless the callers have already filed and the obligation to inform is met after the fact, it is often possible to convince these persons that they are about to do something unwise at best and dishonest at worst. The Reformed tradition views government as a necessary means by which order is preserved. Citizens exercise their duty and responsibility to the magistrate and thus to one another by, among other things, paying their taxes. (See John Calvin's *Institutes Of The Christian Religion*, Volume II, Book IV, pp. 267-306, passim.) Those who would offer a conscientious objection to public insurance need to deal with the reality that, in modern society, the care of widows, orphans, and the elderly depends on established government programs. The church does not generally assume those responsibilities except through private pension and insurance programs which are legally restricted to church employees. A minister of Calvinist persuasion will, it would seem, face a very difficult assignment if he or she is called before the IRS to give an account of his or her specific “religious considerations.” Some believe they will be able to make a persuasive case, but opposition to the care of the elderly is difficult to support from Scripture, and a failure to sustain an objection to Social Security on strictly religious grounds can have a significant financial result. It is necessary to inform prospective objectors that if they are challenged by the IRS no one in their official denominational structure will be able to support their view.

What justifies the attention of General Synod to this issue is the continued temptation placed before young pastors by persuasive salesmen, and the fact that Synod has not spoken clearly to say that the Reformed Church in America believes its ministers have an obligation to participate in the structures of government which care for the needy, including widows with young children and the elderly, and ought therefore to pay their self-employment taxes. In addition to its theological tradition, the RCA also has a financial interest in such participation. The RCA long-term disability insurance program is coordinated with (and assumes) Social Security benefits. Without these the cost of the plan would be much greater than it is. Further, medical insurance coverage offered to those who are sixty-five and older bases premiums on coordination with Medicare benefits. Without these, the true cost of RCA insurance for this group would be many times what is charged, and extending RCA benefits to those who do not have Medicare coverage can have a significant effect on our claims experience. While there are ways to get Medicare coverage even when one has previously opted out of Social Security, it does seem a challenge to one's integrity to be opposed to public insurance prior to retirement but then have a change of heart when it comes time to collect benefits. General Synod’s clear statement on this issue would let both the newly ordained and those who would sell them their products know where the Reformed Church in America stands.

R-8.
To affirm the responsibility of ministers of the Reformed Church in America who are U.S. citizens to participate fully in the Social Security system as it is presently constituted; and further,

to direct the general secretary to inform each newly ordained minister of this 1996 General Synod action at the time he or she is welcomed into the ranks of minister of Word and sacrament.

Upon a motion from the floor to amend R-8, Synod

VOTED: To affirm the responsibility of ministers of the Reformed Church in America who are U.S. Citizens to participate fully in the Social Security system as it is presently constituted; and further,
to direct the general secretary to inform each newly ordained minister of this 1996 General Synod action at the time he or she is welcomed into the ranks of minister of Word and sacrament, and further,

to communicate to all other RCA pastors this 1996 General Synod action.*<

(A motion was made and supported “to refer R-8 to the Commission on Christian Action to review the impending failure of Social Security to provide care for widows, orphans, and the elderly; and further, to also refer R-8 to the Commission on Theology to review the theological implications of clergy participation in the Social Security program.” The motion LOST.)

(The advisory committee recommended the adoption of R-8.)

SENIOR PASTORS

A ministry which is critical to the effectiveness of the Board of Pensions in serving the retirees on its rolls is carried on by its senior pastors. These ministers, themselves drawn from the ranks of the already retired, together with their wives, make regular visits and keep in contact in other ways with those retirees who reside in their region. The present senior pastors of the Board of Pensions, listed with their geographical region, are the following: the Rev. Eric Schulze (Far West, Western Canada); the Rev. Cornie Keunen (Midwest Plains, Minnesota to Texas); the Rev. Henry Mouw (Great Lakes); the Rev. Bruce Penn (Southeast); the Rev. Edwin Mulder (Middle Atlantic, New York City); the Rev. Russell Pater (New York, New England); and the Rev. John Verhoog (Ontario).

CLASSES AGENTS AND NEWSLETTER

During the year improved communication has been attempted through a network of agents in each of the classes. Communication among the retirees themselves is taking place through an occasional newsletter, In Touch, written of, by, and for RCA retirees and edited by the Rev. Glen O. Peterman, a retired RCA minister living in Neshanic, New Jersey. Peterman has volunteered his services, as do those who write and prepare the copy.

RETIRED CLERGY

During 1995 twenty-two RCA clergy retired from active service. Those who retired are being recognized by a display of their pictures and service records 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-9.
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.

*Addition is in light-face type.
The Reformed Church in America, with admiration, deep affection, and overflowing thanks to God, celebrates their lifelong service.

Clinton Baker
Lakewood, Ohio

John Busman
Lakewood, Colorado

James Cook
Holland, Michigan

Donald De Young
Kalamazoo, Michigan

Anne Guild-Donovan
West Henrietta, New York

Kermit Hogenboom
Jamestown, New York

William Jewett
Brielle, New Jersey

Cornie Keunen
Orange City, Iowa

Ronald Lowry
Newark, New Jersey

John Mongin
Kingston, New York

Robert Otto
Glendale, Arizona

Russell Pater
Rochester, New York

Norman Ratering
Zeeland, Michigan

Howard Schipper
Holland, Michigan

Brook Stephens
Sioux Center, Iowa

John Strik
St. Catharines, Ontario

Wayne Tripp
Cedar Grove, Wisconsin

Cornelius Van De Hoef
Artesia, California

Gerald Vander Velde
Mears, Michigan

Robert Van Earden
Chino, California

Patrick Vostello
Hudson, Florida

Moody Yap
Belmont, California

(ADOPTED)

Report of the Commission for Women

The Commission for Women met November 3-5, 1995, at the Carmel Retreat Center in Mahwah, New Jersey, and March 1-3, 1996, at Alma Mathews House in New York City. The meetings concluded with the commission members participating in and leading worship at the following RCA Churches: United Reformed Church in Clifton, New Jersey; Upper Ridgewood Community Church in Ridgewood, New Jersey; and Middle Collegiate Church in New York City.
The commission’s responsibilities include providing resources for developing awareness and raising consciousness concerning human liberation; providing information for appointments to partnership of women and men in professional and decision-making leadership of the denomination; assisting the church toward insuring inclusive attitudes, images, and language in all published materials; working for systematic change to enable the full participation of women in church and society; and collaborating with RCA agencies, commissions, and ecumenical agencies on issues affecting women.

RELATIONSHIP WITH REFORMED CHURCH WOMEN’S MINISTRIES (RCWM)

The Commission for Women and Reformed Church Women’s Ministries cooperate to enhance the use of the gifts and abilities of all women in the denomination. Representatives from RCWM and the commission act as liaisons between the two organizations.

The commission has communicated to women of the church through displays at Triennial, providing information about the commission and encouraging women in leadership at women’s events. The commission and RCWM continue to pursue avenues of cooperation in advocacy for women.

CELEBRATION OF WOMEN IN MINISTRY SUNDAY

The Commission for Women has been a strong proponent of Women in Ministry Sunday, held on the first Sunday in November, or whenever so designated by the local church, and has encouraged the participation of all churches. Worship resource materials and bulletin covers are available through the RCA Distribution Center.

EVENT FOR THEOLOGICALLY EDUCATED WOMEN

In 1978 General Synod instructed the General Synod Executive Committee (GSEC) to:

\[
\text{convene a meeting of...more than fifty Reformed Church women who have received their theological education in seminaries...for the purpose of affirming them in their Christian ministry and offering them our encouragement, support, and counsel (MGS 1978, R-9, p. 31).}
\]

In 1995 General Synod voted:

\[
\text{To designate $6,960 annually in the General Synod Operational Budget for funding national and regional gatherings of theologically trained women in the Reformed Church in America, beginning in 1996 (MGS 1995, R-28, p. 282).}
\]

These events are an important part of the commission’s work, and a subcommittee has been formed to plan and implement the events. The next event will convene at the Warwick Center in Warwick, New York, November 8-10, 1996.

SEMINARY ACCOUNTABILITY

The 1994 General Synod voted:

\[
\text{To instruct the Commission for Women to develop questions and/or guidelines for RCA seminaries to use to evaluate the treatment of women students; and further,}
\]
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 examples) 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, R-13, p. 276).

Both Western Theological Seminary and New Brunswick Theological Seminary responded to the questionnaires prepared by the commission. Upon reviewing these reports, the commission set up meetings with the women students at both seminaries. The information from these meetings is being compared to the official seminary reports, and the commission is planning the next step in this process. The commission is seeking to be an advocate for these students and a voice of accountability as it works in collaboration with the RCA seminaries to ensure that equal opportunities for ministry are available for women students.

WORLD ALLIANCE OF REFORMED CHURCHES (WARC)

The Commission for Women in the Reformed Church in America recognizes the worldwide responsibility that comes in being a part of the body of Christ. It is imperative that the church listen to all parts of the body, and especially to those with whom full communion is practiced.

In the fall of 1995 at the European Area Council, the WARC general secretary, Milan Opocensky, outlined five issues, including gender, that should be treated as status confessionis, or impinging on the heart of the Christian gospel. (It was the issue of status confessionis, or heresy, that finally brought about a Reformed stand against apartheid in South Africa.)

As participants in WARC, the RCA must be ready to deal with this issue and recognize “that claiming obedience to the gospel must come before obsolete church order, tradition, and the convenience of surrounding cultures... Not practicing a fully inclusive partnership is not just a question of equality of justice, but above all the credibility of our proclamation of the gospel is at stake” (“Hope and Renewal in Times of Change,” Milan Opocensky, WARC European Area Council, 1995).

The commission recommended:

R-10.
[To instruct the Commission on Christian Unity to pursue with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches the issue of gender equality treated as status confessionis.]

>Upon recommendation of the advisory committee, the following was substituted for R-10:

To instruct the Commission on Christian Unity to participate with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in its discussion of gender equality as status confessionis; and further,

to instruct the Commission on Christian Unity to identify and examine the issues, for report to the 1998 General Synod.

Reasons:

1. The substitute clarifies the reason and purpose.

2. The substitute also clarifies the intentions of R-10 and attaches specific outcomes.
Upon a motion from the floor to amend the substitute, Synod

**VOTED:** To instruct the Commission on Christian Unity to participate with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in its discussion of gender equality as *status confessionis*; and further,

to instruct the Commission on Christian Unity to identify and examine [these] the issues at stake in this discussion, for report to the 1998 General Synod.*<

**CONSCIENCE CLAUSE QUESTIONNAIRE**

The 1995 General Synod voted:

To instruct the Commission for Women to analyze the actual circumstances existing for women within the Reformed Church in America; and further,

...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 to present a report of these deliberations to the 1996 General Synod (*MGS 1995*, R-26, pp. 280-81).

The 1980 General Synod overwhelmingly approved the following amendments to the *Book of Church Order* which were sent to all consistories and classes with a statement of its purpose (*MGS 1980*, pp. 286-87):

...The classis shall examine students of theology for licensure and licensed candidates for the ministry for ordination. If individual members of the classis find that their consciences, as illuminated by Scripture, would not permit them to participate in the licensing, ordination, or installation of women as ministers, they shall not be required to participate in decisions or actions contrary to their conscience, but may not obstruct the classis in fulfilling its responsibility to arrange for the care, ordination, and installation of women candidates and ministers by means mutually agreed upon by such women and the classis (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 2, Section 7). (See also *BCO*, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 5, Section 2h; and Chapter 1, Part II, Article 13, Section 14.)

The amendments received the necessary approval by two-thirds of the classes of the RCA, including the majority of the classes in each of the six regional synods, and final approval by the 1981 General Synod (*MGS 1981*, p. 42).

In the spring of 1995 a questionnaire was sent by the commission to each RCA church asking about the use of these *BCO* clauses. In response to the questionnaire, 243 replies were received. Of that number, 144 said they were not aware of it ever being used, and 99 responded that they were aware of it being used. It has been visibly used in twenty-seven classes. Some classes use it regularly while others do so only on occasion. Many of the respondents referred to the same incidents. Sometimes respondents from a classis said it has been used within their classis, and other respondents from the same classis said it had never been used. It was possible to discern at least forty-four separate incidents being reported. Although not part of the questionnaire, thirty-six respondents urged that the *BCO* “conscience clauses” remain as they are now.

*Additions are in light-face type, deletion is enclosed in brackets.*
Closer review indicates the **BCO** clauses are often used in inappropriate ways, sometimes in direct conflict with the purpose of the **BCO** clauses. Of the forty-four individual situations identified, nineteen were inappropriate uses; i.e., not simply to protect the conscience of the individual, but to embarrass, stymie, and thwart the ordination of women to offices of elder, deacon, and minister of Word and sacrament. There are instances in which the **BCO** clauses made it possible for women to be ordained, but in these cases it was not without embarrassment and pain. The **BCO** clauses give an individual the right to abstain on grounds of conscience, but these clauses are often used in public ways that belittle and demean the women who are at the center of the issue.

Though it is not easy for a church to address a difficult issue, the church needs to take a serious look at the clauses again for two reasons. The first reason is that in 43 percent of the cases, the **BCO** clauses have been misused. The fact that they are often used to embarrass and make things difficult for some women needs to be addressed.

The second concern is the equality of ministry. The Preamble of the *Book of Church Order* states:

> The Equality of the Ministry. The Reformed Church in America uses the term “parity” to describe its concept of the equality of ministers. It is not meant that authority can never be exercised by one over the other. But in every instance this authority will be delegated by the proper body, and the authority will cease to be exercised when the need for it is no longer demanded. The principle of equality pertains also among churches, among elders, and among deacons. The principle of the equality of the ministry, conceived now in its broadest sense as including the functions of the elder and the deacon, is based upon the fact that the entire ministerial or pastoral office is summed up in Jesus Christ himself, in such a way that he is, in a sense, the only one holding that office. Every ministerial function is found preeminently in him. By his Holy Spirit he distributes these functions among those whom he calls to serve in his name (*BCO*, Preamble).

The equality of ministry statement is not consistent with the fact that some people deny the validity of authority of the ordination of women to the church offices.

**THE THEOLOGY OF THE CONSCIENCE CLAUSE**

**Background**

In 1958 the Committee on the Ordination of Women recommended that General Synod make the following declarative statement:

> Scripture nowhere excludes women from eligibility to the offices but always emphasizes their inclusion, prominence, and equal status with men in the church of Jesus Christ” (*MGS 1958*, p. 328).

The recommendation was adopted (*MGS 1958*, p. 331).

The 1972 General Synod took the declarative action which permitted the ordination of women to the offices of elder and deacon (*MGS 1972*, p. 96).

In 1979 the Judicial Business Committee ruled that ordaining women to the offices of the church was in conformity with the law of the church (*MGS 1979*, pp. 64-9).
In 1980 a compromise amendment was presented as a “Proposal to Maintain Peace and Diversity in the RCA Concerning Women as Church Officers” (MGS 1980, pp. 275-76). The amendment became known as the “conscience clause” and appears in the Book of Church Order in three places: BCO, Part II, Article 2, Section 7; BCO, Part II, Article 13, Section 14; and BCO, Part I, Article 5, Section 2.

Though some of the intent of the conscience clause seems quite genuine, it raises the question of good Reformed theology. Along with the priesthood of all believers, justification by faith, and Scripture as the only source of revealed truth, a key tenet of the Protestant Reformation is that Christians are compelled to live by their consciences.

The Authority of the Church and the Individual Conscience

In addressing the issue of “The Authority of the Church and the Individual Conscience” (The Church Speaks, James I. Cook, editor, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1985, pp. 52-55), the author states that if groups or individuals are offended by a decision or pronouncement of the church, they might appeal to the Belgic Confession.

If they felt a new statement or regulation was a deviation from the revealed will of God, they might “reject all (such allegedly) human inventions and all laws that might be introduced to serve God and through them, in whatever manner, to bind and coerce the conscience (art. 32)” (The Church Speaks, p. 53).

But the author goes on to state that the conscience is:

a notoriously fickle phenomenon and must be measured against the objective, revealed Word of God and the judgment of the church...The critical question is whether what is claimed as conscience is only expressive of one’s personal prejudices and blindness or whether it is accompanied by “godly sincerity,” divine wisdom, and the grace of God (2 Cor. 1:12) (The Church Speaks, pp. 53-4).

If an individual is compelled to disagree, as a last resort that person may “depart from that body which seeks to exercise control over him [or her]” (The Church Speaks, p. 55). Therefore, to place a “conscience clause” in any part of the Book of Church Order is to state that it is not a part of Reformed theology.

The Role of Conscience

In 1984 General Synod adopted the statement on “The Role of Conscience in the Belief, Practice, and Polity of the Reformed Church in America.” It states:

Members are assured fair hearings when their consciences lead them to disagree with practices or beliefs of the church. In its judicial procedure, the Reformed Church rightly provides for friend of the court advocacy on behalf of one whose conscience has placed him or her in jeopardy of discipline (MGS 1984, p. 256).

Nowhere is it stated that any person will be given an unchallenged and unlimited dispensation when disagreeing with the doctrines and teachings of the church. The statement says that it will allow the expression of conscience to be heard, allowing persons to state their biblical or natural order evidence to substantiate their belief. If individuals disagree, they must publicly present their case at a hearing.
Canons of the Synod of Dordt

The Canons of the Synod of Dordt state:

Adults by baptism are initiated into the Christian church and received as members thereof in full communion, and therefore are bound to partake of the Lord's Supper, which they shall promise at their baptism (Canons of Dordt, Article LIX, p. 83).

The Explanatory Article LIX of the 1792 Articles Explanatory of the Government and Discipline of the Reformed Dutch Church in the United States of America states:

In the church there is no difference between bond and free, but all are one in Christ. Whenever therefore slaves or black people shall be baptized or become members in full communion of the church, they shall be admitted to equal privilege with all other members of the same standing, and their infant children shall be entitled to baptism, and in every respect be treated with the same attention that the children of white or free parents are in the church. Any minister, who upon any pretence shall refuse to admit slaves or their children to the privileges to which they are entitled, shall, upon complaint being exhibited and proved, be severely reprimanded by the classis to which he belongs (Quoted in Meeting Each Other: In Doctrine, Liturgy and Government, Daniel J. Meeter, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1993, p. 135).

Once Article LIX was adopted as a confessional statement of the church, even though the actual practice did not meet the standard of the article, individuals could not refuse to comply by invoking a "conscience clause."

The church would be guilty of racism if a "conscience clause" had been written in to avoid compliance with the article. And yet a "conscience clause" has been inserted when the church is called to recognize the full membership and participation of women within the church.

The right to follow one's conscience, as illuminated by the Word of God, is a tenet of Reformed theology. Stating it in relation to one issue and nowhere else is inconsistent with the tradition.

The Commission for Women recommended:

R-11.
To instruct the Commission on Theology, in consultation with the Commission for Women, to study the Book of Church Order conscience clauses (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) in light of Reformed theology, for report of their findings, with recommendation, to the 1997 General Synod. (ADOPTED)
Reflecting on his first pastoral experience in a Welsh village, poet R.S. Thomas wrote: “I was vicar of large things in a small parish.” The Reformed Church in America is a denomination in which the average congregation has fewer than two hundred members. Sixty-five percent of parish clergy serve in these congregations. For them, the “large things” arise out of the day-to-day complexities of the human situation. While the challenges of ministry do not depend on the size of a congregation, the psychic reward of a mass of believers gathered for worship, spirits uplifted by congregational singing which is a foretaste of heaven, is the normative experience of relatively few RCA ministers. To sustain one’s zeal when the task is difficult and the rewards sparse requires both depth of commitment and continuous spiritual nourishment.

RCA Clergy Gatherings

Each January for the past sixteen years, clergy from the three Eastern synods have gathered with their spouses at the Warwick Conference Center in Warwick, New York, for a weekend called Freedom in Ministry in which the agenda is simple and uncluttered: mutual support, spiritual enrichment through worship and hymn singing, and some external stimulation through a series of presentations by a speaker chosen by a planning committee drawn from the participants. Scheduled to include a Sunday and subsidized by grants from classes, regional synods, and denominational funds, Freedom in Ministry has consistently provided the context for a ministry of mutual encouragement to clergy and their spouses. This year the model was expanded as RCA ministers and spouses came from every part of the church to St. Louis, Missouri, for a first-ever national clergy gathering called “Spring Sabbath.” Patterned loosely after Freedom in Ministry, greatly enhanced by the larger numbers and resources possible for a churchwide festival, Spring Sabbath registration exceeded even the most optimistic expectations. By the closing date for reservations, more than 650 had plans to attend. The event revealed how supportive it is when colleagues in ministry gather to express and share their common faith. Both the regional and denominational experience of such gatherings call forth the following recommendation. (See also the General Synod Council report, p. 71.)

➢ The advisory committee recommended to amend R-12:

R-12.
To direct the General Synod Council to make provision for a denominational Spring Sabbath to be held again in [1998] 1998; and further,

to provide for similar regional events for clergy and their spouses in 1997 [and 1998]; and further,

to pay for the denominational and regional events by gifts and endowment funds which the General Synod Council is directed to raise for this specific purpose, as well as funding by participant registration fees; and further,

to encourage local congregations to provide the necessary financial support and pulpit coverage so that their ministers and their spouses can attend these events. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED) *

Reason: The success and spiritual benefit of Spring Sabbath justifies offering a similar event one year earlier. ☢

➢ Synod viewed a video on the April 1996 Spring Sabbath event held in St. Louis Missouri. ☢

*Addition is in light-face type, deletions are enclosed in brackets.
Pastoral Care

The Book of Church Order assigns to classis specific responsibility for “the pastoral care of each enrolled minister and the minister’s immediate family.” The BCO then adds: “Pastoral care shall be exercised by such means as the classis deems appropriate” (BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 13, Section 3). This provision has stood as a requirement since 1981. Implementing it with some degree of effectiveness remains a challenge. In his state of the church address in 1962 General Synod President Norman Thomas pointed to the inevitable difficulty faced by classis pastoral relations committees when they attempt to fulfill a pastoral ministry to pastors and their families when he said: “No committee, however structured or dedicated, can establish an adequate pastoral relationship with a pastor and his wife.” Thomas went on to observe: “Most pastors’ wives live in an ecclesiastical wasteland....A fine young pastor’s wife had the courage to say, ‘the minister’s wife has no minister’” (MGS 1962, p. 286).

To what degree is this still true more than thirty years later? The 1995 General Synod directed Ministry and Personnel Services (MAPS) to encourage pastor-to-pastor ministries within the classes (MGS 1995, R-29, p. 284), and it is known that in a few classes such ministries are in fact going on. As it looked toward the twenty-first century, the GSC Ministry and Personnel Services Committee, at its January 1996 meeting, proposed the name “classis chaplain” as more accurately descriptive of someone doing pastor-to-pastor ministry. MAPS also called for installing chaplains in classes for clergy, spouses, and families by the year 2001. Efforts will be made in the coming year to encourage every classis to fulfill its pastoral obligation to its ministers and their families.

The advisory committee recommended to amend R-13:

R-13.
To direct the Office of Ministry and Personnel Services to [monitor] examine the manner in which classes comply with the Book of Church Order requirement to provide for the pastoral care of each enrolled minister and the minister’s immediate family (BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 13, Section 3); and further;

to direct the Office of Ministry and Personnel Services to report its findings to the 1997 General Synod. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)*

Reasons:

1. The word “monitor” carries with it a connotation of authority and mistrust.

2. The word “examine” expresses a sense of information gathering and sharing which is more in line with the proper relationship of denominational staff and classes.

Mentoring

As part of its long-range planning, the GSC Ministry and Personnel Services Committee also noted the provision in the Book of Church Order which requires newly ordained and installed pastors to have the benefit of a mentor (BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 13, Section 5). It was noted that although resources are available to assist classes in this task, there are still occasions in which mentor relationships are not established and others in which the relationship is less than effective. During the coming year resources to assist in mentor relationships will again be distributed.

*Addition is in light-face type, deletion is enclosed in brackets.
Clinical Pastoral Education

The GSC Ministry and Personnel Services Committee also recognized the merit of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE), particularly those programs which are parish-based. One of its goals is to have two such parish-based CPE programs in place within the RCA by 1999, four by 2001, and eight in place in different regions of the church by 2006.

R-14.
To direct the Office of Ministry and Personnel Services to take the necessary steps which lead to the establishment of two parish-based Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) programs within the Reformed Church in America by the year 1999. (ADOPTED)

Leadership

The 1995 General Synod urged classes to use an "RCA Leadership Profile" developed by the Gallup organization as one of the methods to be used when determining whether or not to take an applicant under care as a candidate for ministry. The Office of Ministry and Personnel Services was directed to survey and compile the "methods and tools" which classes presently use for this purpose, to monitor the use of the leadership profile by the classes, and to report to the General Synod of 1998 (MGS 1995, R-45, p. 301). The RCA Leadership Profile has now been distributed to each classis through its stated clerk, and the Gallup organization is available to conduct a telephone interview and provide an analysis of its findings on any prospective candidate. Gallup's fee for this service is $350. Initial reports indicate that some classes are already making use of this tool.

Interim Ministry

Interim Ministry continues to be a useful specialty within the RCA. To date nearly seventy RCA pastors have received training which qualifies them as "specialized interim ministers." Of this number, twenty-four are currently actively engaged in interim ministry. The Office of Ministry and Personnel Services maintains a roster of qualified interims, monitors their current availability, and provides their names upon request. Determination of when and where the services of an interim are required is left to the judgment of classis supervisors in consultation with regional synod staff.

Profiles

The minister and church profile system continues to be a much-utilized service of the Ministry and Personnel Services office. Hundreds of profiles are sent to search committees each year, and MAPS staff seek to be responsive both to the needs of the committees for viable candidates and the needs of the clergy to have a broadened range of opportunities open to them. Keeping their profiles up-to-date is the responsibility of individual ministers, who quite frequently are not interested in doing so until there is sufficient interest in having their profile in active circulation. While this sometimes results in MAPS being unable to respond promptly to a search committee's request for a specific profile which is current, the delay seems preferable to attempting to collect information which has no immediate use from persons who have little motivation to supply it, and who, quite frankly, have better things to do.

Chaplains Conference

A large number of RCA ministers do not serve congregations, as any review of nearly three hundred names on the list of specialized ministers in "Supplement B" of the General Synod Directory will attest. Those whose ministry takes place in hospitals, mental health
institutions, prisons, and the armed forces are invited to the annual Chaplains Conference which is held immediately prior to Synod. The Chaplains Conference has become a highly significant gathering for most who are regular attendees, especially for those who carry out their ministries in locations which are distant from RCA concentrations. The conference provides a major linkage with their denominational family. Denominational liaison with institutional chaplains is maintained throughout the year by way of visits and other personal contact from MAPS representatives.

Military Chaplain Retirements

Special recognition is appropriate for two long-term military chaplains who retired during the year. Chaplain (Major) Sidney Mauldin retired after serving as a U.S. Army chaplain since 1980. He is now pastor of Bethel Reformed Church in Harvey, Illinois. Chaplain (Captain) Thomas Marsden retired from the U.S. Navy after twenty-four years on active duty. In his final assignment with the U.S. Navy, Chaplain Marsden served as Force Chaplain for the Commander of the Naval Air Force, U.S. Atlantic Fleet. He continues to live in Virginia Beach, Virginia. It is of some concern that with his retirement the RCA presence within the U.S. Navy, U.S. Marine Corps, and U.S. Coast Guard chaplaincy is reduced to only two persons. Qualified replacements are urgently needed if the RCA is to continue to fulfill its responsibility. The director of Ministry and Personnel Services continues to serve as the RCA’s “endorsing agent” and provides the denomination’s official link to military chaplaincy.

R-15.
To give thanks to God for the faithful service of chaplains Sidney Mauldin, U.S. Army, and Thomas Marsden, U.S. Navy; and further;

...to encourage young RCA pastors who have the gifts necessary for effective ministry within the U.S. Armed Forces to make themselves available for such service. (ADOPTED)

Prison Chaplaincy

It is an indication of a larger societal issue that there is a growing need for the services of ministers to serve as chaplains in the expanding U.S. prison system. At latest count, eleven RCA ministers were giving full-time service within the walls of correctional institutions. Many more serve part-time in conjunction with other parish responsibilities, particularly in county jails. The need is great and the ministry is difficult. In order to give greater support to those who carry on this work, the Rev. Donald Jiskoot of Montgomery, Alabama, a retired federal prison chaplain who spent more than twenty years “in jail,” has volunteered his services to the Office of Ministry and Personnel Services as adjunct staff for in-person visits and other pastoral contact with prison chaplains. Similarly, Karin Granberg-Michaelson will provide liaison on behalf of Ministry and Personnel Services with those who serve in health care and mental health institutions. Both of these assignments began on June 1, 1996.

Continuing Education/Leadership Development

Work in continuing education for professional church workers includes a listing of opportunities printed in each issue of Servant Leader. Regional Synod of the Heartland pastors receive a monthly bulletin from Ecumenical Ministries of Iowa listing workshops and courses in the Iowa, Minnesota, and Missouri areas. Information about specific education opportunities is highlighted in regional synod newsletters. Pastors are encouraged by letter and telephone to use their continuing education time each year. There is a wealth of opportunities available to clergy who seek and ask. Clergy groups have been encouraged to do continuing education together. One group made use of St. Deiniol’s residential library in Wales; another is using Leadership Development funds to meet twice a year with a facilitator/leader.
Preretirement Planning Workshops

Preretirement planning workshops have been held in each of the RCA regional synods except the Regional Synod of Canada. Plans are in place to start the cycle again. The workshop is geared for clergy and spouses age fifty and up and covers use of time, housing and environment, health and wellness, pensions, and financial planning.

Personnel Functions

The personnel functions of Ministry and Personnel Services include advertising and screening, personal consultations, counseling, conflict management, professional development, and the legalities of human resources administration—including forms, records, files, and personnel information for all denominational staff.

The secretary for professional development and personnel services also administers and monitors the Student Loan Revolving Fund and the New Jersey Beneficiary Funds.

Sabbatical

The director of Ministry and Personnel Services has been granted a staff sabbatical for the period from July 1, 1996, to December 1, 1996. During his absence routine services will continue to be provided through extra efforts by MAPS staff members Joanne Fernandez and Ellen Mers. Arrangements have been made to continue to respond to the requests of congregational search committees with the profiles of appropriate ministers through regular visits to the MAPS office by the Rev. Eugene Heideman. He brings to this task both broad knowledge of RCA congregations and personal acquaintance with a great many RCA pastors.

FAMILY LEAVE POLICY

The Classis of Montgomery sent the following overture to the 1995 General Synod:

... to instruct Ministry and Personnel Services to update as a “family leave” policy the “Guidelines for Establishing a Maternity Leave Policy” approved by the 1982 General Synod as a study paper (MGS 1982, R-20, pp. 200-01).

In response to this overture from the Classis of Montgomery, the 1995 General Synod voted:

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 1995, R-43, p. 300).

The Office of Ministry and Personnel Services reviewed the 1982 “Guidelines for Establishing a Maternity Leave Policy” (MGS 1982, pp. 198-201) and a 1983 General Synod report (MGS 1983, pp. 232-34) on responses to this study sent during 1982-83 to the Commission for Women. The Office of Ministry and Personnel Services has determined that the 1982 guidelines do not need revision. An additional updated model policy is also recommended below.

Policies which deal with family leave are an important part of the classis pastoral concern for ministers, their families, and the churches they serve. The Office of Ministry and Personnel Services urges ministers, congregations, and classes to consult the 1982 and 1983 General Synod reports on maternity leave (MGS 1982, pp. 198-201, and MGS 1983, pp. 232-34). The Office of Ministry and Personnel Services also notes with concern the burden a family leave policy may place on a congregation. Classes, in their exploration of ways in which the needs of a given church can be met when a pastor is on leave, will have to consider coverage of pastoral duties and pulpit supply.
Since classes vary in their sense of need for such policies, the following policy is recommended to classes as a model in formulating their own family leave policies:

**R-16.**
To instruct the Office of Ministry and Personnel Services to send to the classes the following model to use in formulating their own classis policy on family leave:

**MODEL POLICY FOR FAMILY LEAVE**

1. Four to six weeks maternity leave for female ministers prior to or following the birth or adoption of a child, with full salary and benefits.

2. Six to eight weeks leave for pregnancy-related illness or disability, with salary and benefits.

3. The father may be granted two to three weeks leave following the birth or adoption of a child, with full salary and benefits.

4. Unpaid leave (with benefits) is usually not to exceed twelve weeks in a year when a family member has a serious health condition. Family members are defined as the spouse, children, and parents of the minister or family member of the household. (ADOPTED)

**R-17.**
To urge the stated clerks of classes to share a copy of their classis' family leave policy with the Office of Ministry and Personnel Services Office; and further,

to direct the Office of Ministry and Personnel Services to distribute copies of these policies received from classes in its annual distribution to classes of the salary and benefit guidelines. (ADOPTED)

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**From the Report of the Council for Hispanic Ministries**

**MINISTERS AND REMARRIAGE**

The ethical and moral standards of an RCA minister of Word and sacrament should be maintained at a high level in all circumstances. Divorces and remarriages of ministers are common today. The time will come when the church will begin to see second and third divorces and remarriages among ministers. Augustus Napier and Carl Whitaker state "In actuality, second and third marriages have a poorer probability of success than the first, and evidence is accumulating of a high incidence of depression among the divorced."²

The 1962 General Synod reviewed a paper prepared by the Christian Action Commission, "Basic Policy on Divorce and Remarriage" (*MGS 1962*, pp. 205-18), which asked the Synod to consider the following policy as appropriate for the RCA:
A pastor can in good conscience officiate in the remarriage of divorced persons if in his judgment and in the judgment of the congregation’s board of elders the persons have met the following requirements:

Recognition of personal responsibility for the failure of the former marriage, penitence and an effort to overcome limitations and failures, forgiveness of the former partner, fulfillment of obligations involved in the former marriage, and a willingness to make the new marriage a Christian one by dependence on Christ and participation in his church (MGS 1962, p. 215).

This statement, presented at the 1962 General Synod, provided a process for pastors and elders to follow. Although in 1962 the rate of pastoral divorces and remarriages was building momentum, the assumption may have been that pastoral divorces and remarriages would be negligible and uncommon. Unfortunately, statistics have shown that pastoral divorces and remarriages are increasing. While divorce is sometimes inevitable, remarriage is often hastily pursued and lacks “penitence, time, and the effort to overcome limitations and failures.” The procedures set in 1962, meant to guide pastors and elders in congregations in counseling divorced persons considering remarriage, are less helpful in cases of pastoral divorce and remarriage.

In response to an overture from the Particular Synod of Chicago, the 1973 General Synod directed the Theological Commission to study the issues of marriage, divorce, and remarriage from a biblical perspective (MGS 1973, p. 111). The Theological Commission presented to the 1975 General Synod a paper entitled “Biblical Perspectives on Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage” (MSG 1975, pp. 162-72). This excellent paper is instrumental in teaching and is meant to serve as a guide for officiating at marriages. However, the issue of ministers who divorce and remarry is not dealt with.

A church with a minister undergoing this type of stress is also afflicted. Boards of elders undertaking the pastoral challenge are placed in an awkward position because they are the guardians of the congregation, not the minister’s bishop. The counseling opportunity is rarely facilitated by the elders.

Equally serious, the congregation also suffers; its vision and focus are diminished. There may even be feelings of disloyalty. The consistory and congregation need tools to respond to the vision and function of ministry. How can local classes better provide guidance on issues such as these? Without guidance and direction, responses are shallow and incomplete.

The BCO places responsibility and care of the minister on the classis (BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 2, Section 1). However, due to the nature of the issue and the depth and intensity of a counseling process, classes are reluctant to take action. They find the process uncomfortable, to say the least. Close personal relationships, heavy agendas, and lack of a guiding process give permission to avoid confrontation. The search for life-affecting decisions often drives minister and spouse to solitude, searching for answers but too embarrassed to seek help. As a result, the process is left in the hands of psychologists and lawyers, who are experts in specific areas but who are usually unable to address the moral, ethical, and theological issues of divorce from a biblical perspective. Classes do not ignore the issues of divorce and remarriage. They do attempt to help. However, the tools needed for support are not available. The support becomes a review process ending in an analysis of the “legality of papers” or arguments presented. Unfortunately, acceptance of divorce or remarriage by the spouses is already in progress.

Also of interest, the 1962 General Synod “Report on State of Religion” points to another need concerning pastors’ wives:
Perhaps less obvious is the fact that most pastors' wives live in an ecclesiastical wasteland, almost totally neglected as far as their spiritual needs are concerned. A fine young pastor's wife had the courage to say, "The minister's wife has no minister." The dedicated wife who knows that salvation in Christ means wholeness of personality and who, therefore, resists the mold into which some would force her, sometimes faces a lonely struggle (MGS 1962, p. 286).

The rising incidence of divorces and remarriages in clergy families raises several challenging issues:

1. Is it logical to expect ministers and elder boards to apply the guidelines outlined in "Biblical Perspectives on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage," the report adopted by the 1975 General Synod (MGS 1975, pp. 169-71), when classes are allowing ministers of Word and sacrament to divorce and remarry without similar counseling or intervention? Are ministers and spouses exempt from the uniform standard for repentance, forgiveness, and restoration? Is a process for establishing merits for remarrying required?

2. If there is concern for the pastoral family (spouse and children), how can the classis help?

3. To what extent should classis involve itself and assist ministers and spouses in such dilemmas?

4. If the minister is under the stressful process of divorce or remarriage, what should elders and deacons be doing to keep the ministry healthy? What is the impact on the life of the congregation or ministry being served by the person? Can meaningful relationships be maintained under such circumstances?

5. Perhaps the proposed creation of a new ministry position, "Classis Chaplain" (see Report of the Office of Ministry and Personnel Services in the Church Vocations section), in which the incumbent would be charged in channeling and serving pastoral needs and concerns to those in ministry, would be helpful.

The advisory committee recommended not to adopt R-18.

R-18.
To instruct Ministry and Personnel Services to inform each ordained minister and board of elders in the Reformed Church in America about the papers, "Basic Policy on Divorce and Remarriage" (MGS 1962, pp. 205-18) and "Biblical Perspectives on Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage" (MGS 1975, pp. 162-72); and further,

to request each ordained minister and board of elders to review and study these papers. (NOT ADOPTED)


R-19.
To instruct Ministry and Personnel Services to study the issue of RCA clergy divorce and remarriage and prepare recommendations and/or guidelines on this issue, for report to the 1997 General Synod. (ADOPTED)
The advisory committee recommended:

R-20.
To instruct the Commission on Theology to review the 1962 paper, “Basic Policy on Divorce and Remarriage” \( (MGS\ 1962,\ pp.\ 205-18) \); and further,

to instruct the Commission on Theology to prepare an updated version of this 1962 paper, for report at the 1998 General Synod. \( \text{(ADOPTED)} \)

Reason: This 1962 paper is outdated, given the complexity of issues surrounding divorce and remarriage since 1962.

R-21.
To instruct Ministry and Personnel Services, in consultation with stated clerks of classes, to develop a model position description for Classis Chaplain; and further,

to present a progress report to the 1997 General Synod. \( \text{(ADOPTED)} \)

REPORT OF THE TASK FORCE ON STANDARDS FOR THE PREPARATION FOR THE PROFESSIONAL MINISTRY IN THE REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA

I. The Creation of the Task Force

The Reformed Church in America (RCA) has, in recent years, been experiencing the challenge of change. While at one end of the spectrum the church is on the decline, at the other end there is phenomenal growth and new life, although not in the traditional sense. Pews are no longer filled by a homogenous group of people, nor are pulpits exclusively filled by men. No longer are candidates for ministry principally young and from established congregations in rural or suburban settings, but are frequently older, coming from inner cities and even other countries. Because God has called the church into being for all God’s people—Jews and Greeks, slave and free, men and women—and has mandated that we “make disciples of all nations,” the RCA, in its response, is becoming increasingly a church reflective of the New Testament.

Although this becoming has been fraught with problems, the RCA, in seeking to be faithful to Jesus, has resolved to seek solutions and to design a process that will equip this church with the ministry it needs for the present and the future. New structures and new systems are being developed prayerfully and seriously to address:

- The challenge of providing nurture and care for our present and potential ministerial leadership.
- The challenge of identifying and properly preparing competent leadership for the church.
The challenge of welcoming all people into the full church as worshipers and leaders in a manner which values cultural differences.
The challenge of designing an equitable and systemized examination and ordination process for the ministry of Word and sacrament.
The challenge of bridging the gap between congregation and seminary.
The challenge of providing a balance between the classical and practical approaches to theological education.
The challenge of recognizing and supporting the church's "fourth office"—the Office of General Synod Professor of Theology.
The challenge of establishing new and strengthening old RCA connectional relationships.
The challenge of creating an environment which fosters and encourages ministerial formation.
The challenge of hearing and responding to the cries of all people.
The challenge of being the church of Jesus Christ.

As the gifts of God continue to be manifest within the RCA in new and different ways, and as a myriad of concerns and complaints have arisen among its members, it is evident that the wind of the Spirit—the wind of change—is blowing over the RCA.

That wind is, however, not affecting the RCA alone. During the past decade a conversation, focused on the nature of theological education in North America, has swirled around and within seminaries and theological schools. This conversation has already significantly impacted theological education and shows no signs of abatement. In fact, this conversation has been described as "not only the longest-lived but by far the liveliest conversation theological educators have ever managed to sustain among themselves ecumenically about the nature and purpose of their common enterprise." This conversation constitutes the second major factor in the creation of the task force.

The third factor occurred in 1992, when the General Synod dissolved the Board of Theological Education and constituted new boards of trustees for the seminaries and for the Theological Education Agency (MGS 1992, R-20, pp. 65-6; and MGS 1992, R-1, pp. 295-302). In so doing, the 1992 General Synod reserved to itself the responsibility of overseeing "the standards for the preparation for the professional ministry." The General Synod then lodged the responsibility for this oversight with the General Synod Council (GSC), and within GSC, with the Ministry and Personnel Services Committee (MAPS).

Ministry and Personnel Services, reporting to the 1994 General Synod, identified several "specific areas of concern" which the RCA has entrusted to MAPS for oversight, encouragement, implementation, and execution. The first of these is theological education.

MAPS described its responsibility for theological education as follows:

For many professional church workers, entry upon their career path is through a theological seminary. Therefore it is reasonable for a concern about ministry and personnel services to begin at the beginning. The particular mandate given by the General Synod, relating to "oversight of the standards of theological education" [sic] (MGS 1992, R-20, pp. 65-7), is still in the process of exegesis. One of the ongoing tasks will be 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 it requires (MGS 1994, p. 278).

(It should be here observed that General Synod's charge actually makes Ministry and Personnel Services responsible for overseeing the standards not "of theological education," but "for the preparation for the professional ministry.")
The GSC's Ministry and Personnel Services Committee recommended the creation of a task force to assist it and the MAPS office in the interpretation and implementation of this mandate. In response, 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 laypersons, 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); and further, to instruct this task force to propose standards for the preparation for professional ministry in the Reformed Church in America and the means to achieve these standards, for report to the 1995 General Synod.

(It must be noted that the record in *MGS 1994*, p. 278, is inaccurate. That record places a period after the word “certification” in the first paragraph and omits everything after that point. R-14, as presented to the 1994 General Synod by the GSC's Ministry and Personnel Services Committee and recommended by the Advisory Committee on Church Vocations, clearly included the second paragraph. Indeed, R-14 makes clear sense only when the second paragraph is present.)

Appointed to the task force (in order of membership definition) were:

**Laypersons**
- Barbara Liggett
- Frederick Wezeman

**Pastors**
- Vernon Hoffs
- Stanley Perea

**General Synod Professors of Theology**
- Norman Kansfield
- James Cook

**TEA Representative**
- Cornelis Kors

**CPE-Certified Clinical Pastoral Education Minister**
- Robert Anderson

The task force had the benefit of regular participation by two members of the denominational staff: the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson and the Rev. Alvin Poppen. It enlisted the assistance of three other resource persons: Barbara Alexander, Ella Campbell, and the Rev. Dr. Dennis Voskuil. The Rev. Harold Korver attended meetings, *ex officio*, as president of General Synod.

II. The Assignment Given to the Task Force

The task force met in November 1994; January, March, May, September, and November, 1995; and January and March, 1996. It understood its task to be:

**A. The development of clear standards by which the extent and quality of preparation for professional ministry can be measured.**

1. Such standards shall pertain to candidates for the Office of Minister of Word and Sacrament in such matters as:
a. Character and confirmation of calling.
b. Gifts, experience, and education.
c. Comprehension of the gospel and the history, theology, and church order of the RCA.
d. Capacity for leadership and leadership recruitment, pastoral care and counseling, Christian education, church administration, and evangelism.
e. Commitment to the unity of the church, the ministry of all Christians, and the proclamation of the gospel.

2. Such standards shall pertain to congregations, classes, and the General Synod in such matters as:
   a. Assessment and affirmation of the call of candidates.
   b. Assessment of the gifts, abilities, training, and experience of candidates.
   c. Certification of readiness for ministry.

3. Such standards shall pertain to the seminaries of the RCA in such matters as:
   a. Institutional character of an RCA seminary.
   b. Required denominational curriculum for RCA students.
   c. Role of General Synod professors of theology.

4. Such standards shall pertain to the Theological Education Agency (TEA) in such matters as:
   a. Seminary selection by candidates.
   b. Parameters of course and degree equivalency.
   c. Denomination-specific course work and its evaluation.
   d. Measures of minimum denominational experience.
   e. Role and definition of the Certification Committee.

5. Such standards shall provide for means of preparation other than the completion of a regular course of study within a seminary.

B. The development of a process by which such standards can be maintained and through which RCA candidates for the office of minister of Word and sacrament shall move.

III. A Theological Charter for the Office of Minister of Word and Sacrament

A. Persons who would serve as ministers of Word and sacrament within the RCA must possess a firm sense of God’s call and the following qualities:

1. Because we confess that ministers in themselves cannot do all that is asked of them, RCA ministers shall be prayerful.

2. Because we believe it is necessary for RCA ministers constantly to clarify and deepen their personal vision of God’s reign, they shall be committed to lifelong learning about God’s self-revelation, God’s church, and God’s creation, while joyfully interacting with people.

3. Because we believe that God does not intend RCA ministers to work alone and has showered a variety of gifts and callings upon the members of the church, the vocation of each RCA minister shall be carried out in relationship with other
ministers, while at the same time encouraging all members of the congregation, in their separate callings, to complement the work of ministry, in order that all may enjoy God's Sabbath of rest and restoration.

4. Because all their God-given partners in ministry deserve to find them trustworthy, RCA ministers shall be faithful, ethical, and dependable.

5. Because for persons in Christ the whole creation is made new, RCA ministers shall be open to the possibility of change in themselves and others.

6. Because we believe our times are in God's hands and that God's best is yet to be, RCA ministers shall remain hopeful that God's future will be realized.

B. Persons who would serve as ministers of Word and sacrament within the RCA shall demonstrate gifts and competencies for the following basic tasks for ministry:

1. The proclamation of the gospel and the gathering of the church.

   a. Because we believe that the Spirit of God inspired prophets and apostles to bear witness to the Word of God in their own languages of Hebrew and Greek, RCA ministers shall be capable of using these languages in the regular process of discerning the gospel of God for today's world.

   b. Because we believe that Holy Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, is the only rule of faith and life, RCA ministers shall be capable of competent and contextual exposition of the biblical message.

   c. Because we believe that "God our heavenly Father gathers from among the lost children of this world a church to life eternal, and that in this work of grace is pleased to use our ministry," RCA ministers shall be committed to and capable of the informed, truthful, and effective proclamation of God's grace to all people and of God's claim upon all of life.

   d. Because we believe that the church is the product of God's election, RCA ministers shall welcome all persons who respond to God's grace and shall work to form them into a faithful community for God's service.

   e. Because we believe that the Holy Spirit always works within the church to shape its corporate life in accord with Holy Scripture, and because our shared understanding of Holy Scripture is, in turn, shaped by the traditions of this particular part of Christ's whole church, RCA ministers shall be competent interpreters of the church's theological tradition as set forth in its constitutional documents:

      The Standards of Unity
      The Liturgy, with its Directory
      The Book of Church Order

   f. Because we believe that God in Christ Jesus became fully flesh and blood and dwelt with us, RCA ministers are called to forms of service which actually touch the physical and spiritual lives of people. At the same time, ministers shall resist the temptation to do for them what that they should do for themselves and shall do nothing to violate their integrity as persons.
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Because we believe that our only comfort in life and in death is that we belong—body and soul, both in life and in death—not to ourselves but to our faithful Savior, Jesus Christ, RCA ministers commit themselves to a ministry of reconciliation and healing and to building up a community of believers who shall support and care for each other.

2. The life of the church in discipleship and worship.

a. Because we confess that the mystery of God’s grace is at the center of the church’s life and that Word and sacrament are the means God has chosen to share that grace, RCA ministers recognize that their most important work is worship leadership celebrated around pulpit, font, and table.

b. Because we believe that the church, the elect fellowship of God’s people, is the context of Christian faith and life, RCA ministers shall be able to lead the church’s members to discover what it means to follow Jesus.

c. Because we believe that all people in all their diversity are created, claimed, and loved by God, RCA ministers shall be committed to and capable of welcoming all people into God’s community and of seeking their shalom.

d. Because we believe that the life of the church must be carried out “decently and in order,” and because we believe that the offices of elder and deacon, with the minister in consistory, are ordained by God for this ordering, RCA ministers shall be able to give voice to God’s call, leading and equipping persons for these offices, and joining them in building up the body of Christ.

e. Because we believe that the gifts and the call of God extend beyond the limits of the ordained offices, RCA ministers shall evoke, welcome, nurture, value, and encourage the exercise of the gifts, skills, and experiences which members bring to the body.

f. Because we believe the RCA to be but a part of the one church of Jesus Christ, RCA ministers shall be committed to and capable of a ministry which helps to build up the whole body of Christ and must both view and hear all other Christians as brothers and sisters in Christ.

g. Because we believe that the gospel brings people into the presence of almighty God, RCA ministers shall be able to conduct congregational worship which celebrates the worth, mystery, and transcendence of God.

h. Because we confess that in Jesus, God has drawn near to us in grace, forgiveness, and love, worship also celebrates an intimate trust in God. RCA ministers, therefore, exercise a priestly function in worship, standing between the transcendence of God and the need and conditions of the world. They shall be able to structure worship to be the true and glorious praise of God offered in language and media which are accessible and understandable to contemporary congregations.

3. The witness of the church to God’s reign in the world.

a. Because we proclaim the good news that everyone who believes in Jesus will not perish but have eternal life, and that all people everywhere are called to repent and believe in the good news, RCA ministers shall be able to hold before
the church in a compelling way the vision of God's reign, in order to equip the church for, to elicit its wholehearted support of, and to enlist its joyful participation in the worldwide proclamation of God's grace in Christ Jesus.

b. Because with our Lord, we pray "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth" (Matt. 6:10), RCA ministers shall offer leadership in the transformation of human society into the pattern of God's will and purpose. They shall, therefore, be competent to analyze the patterns, needs, and resources of the surrounding society.

c. Because we know that Jesus carried out his ministry from the margins of society, RCA ministers shall endeavor to experience reality from the perspective of those at the margins and to shape the proclamation of the message of God's grace so that it can be heard as good news to all.

d. Because Christians are anointed to bring good news to the poor and release to the captives, RCA ministers shall work for justice and well-being for all.

e. Because we confess with the psalmist, "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it" (Ps. 24:1), RCA ministers shall be committed to the care of the earth and the responsible use of its resources.

IV. Principles which Guide the Process of Ministerial Preparation

A. Assumptions

1. Each member of the church of Jesus Christ has been given gifts and is called to ministry by God. In God's name and for God's cause, the church confirms gifts and ministries. Therefore the church commits itself to train all of its members for ministry and some specially called persons for the ministry of Word and sacrament. We are concerned first for ministerial function and only incidentally about ministerial office.

2. Each person's gifts are intended to be used in combination with the gifts of all other Christians. Each person's ministry is to be carried out in coordination with the ministry of all other Christians. The gifts God gives to others are complementary to the gifts given to us. Our ministry is complementary to the ministries to which others are called.

3. The government of the RCA is shaped by its Book of Church Order. That document traces its basic shape and content back to the church order adopted by the Synod of Dort in 1619. This order established four offices:

   a. The Office of Minister of the Word (now called Minister of Word and Sacrament).

   b. The Office of Teacher of Theology (now called General Synod Professor of Theology).

   c. The Office of Elder.

   d. The Office of Deacon.

The RCA is unique among American Protestant traditions in preserving these four distinct offices and in affirming their parity.
4. Within the church of Jesus Christ there is a parity of gifts and a parity of ministries. There are not greater ministries and lesser ministries or greater gifts and lesser gifts.

5. The process described below concerns only the Office of Minister of Word and Sacrament.

B. The Role of the Candidate

1. The candidate is the primary person responsible for the initiating and sustaining of his or her learning process. This includes developing a learning contract, with feasible goals and objectives, which identifies a methodology for meeting the standards of the RCA for theological education and ministerial formation.

2. The candidate begins by discussing personal call and gifts for ministry with the local congregation and consistory. After the consistory has recommended the person to the classis, and the classis has taken the candidate under its care, a Candidate Care Committee (CCC) is appointed. The CCC serves throughout the process as the pivotal connection between the candidate, the seminary (or other learning environment), and the classis. This CCC shall, in some form, remain with the candidate throughout the educational process.

3. The candidate, together with the classis, plans a course of theological education and ministerial formation intended to meet the standards for personal qualities and professional competencies.

4. The candidate is responsible for sustaining progress within the process here proposed. The candidate shall systematically consult with and seek the advice of the CCC and the classis, thereby developing support for the challenges of candidacy.

C. The Role of Individual Members of the Church

1. Individual church members are to be constantly seeking to identify in other Christians the gifts that are necessary and desirable for service in the ministry of Word and sacrament.

2. The church needs to encourage all members to remain open to the call of God and the church to consider ordained ministry or other forms of ministry for which they have gifts.

D. The Role of Congregations

1. A congregation is the best and earliest context in which a person's gifts and calling for ministry can be recognized, encouraged, and evaluated. It is, therefore, each congregation's responsibility constantly to be identifying and nurturing gifted persons.

2. Congregations provide the best and earliest opportunity for persons to demonstrate leadership as external verification of their call. Congregations should urge such persons to use the available instruments to assess the character and quality of their ministry.

3. When a congregation is satisfied that a person possesses the call, the gifts (including the gift of leadership) for the ministry of Word and sacrament, it may, through its consistory, recommend to its classis that this person be enrolled as a candidate under its care.
E. The Role of Classes

1. It is the obligation of each classis to maintain a corps of ministers of Word and sacrament adequate in number and appropriate in training to the needs of its churches.

2. It is solely the responsibility of the classes to license and ordain ministers of Word and sacrament.

3. Each classis is expected to identify, recruit, encourage, and care for those who, in the judgment of the congregations, are gifted for and called to the ministry of Word and sacrament. Each classis should take advantage of the full range of tools available for candidate evaluation.

4. When a classis validates the call and gifts of a candidate, it becomes responsible to serve as the candidate's counselor and advocate for the remainder of the process.

5. If a classis determines that there are compelling reasons for a candidate to pursue a means of theological education and ministerial preparation other than the required seminary curriculum, it is the responsibility of the classis and the candidate to identify the elements of education and experience which will meet the standards, and to receive the approval of the Commission on Ministerial Formation (COMF) before the candidate begins.

F. The Role of the Candidate Care Committee

1. The Candidate Care Committee (CCC) serves throughout this process as the pivotal connection between the candidate, the seminary (or other learning environment), and the classis. Its principal purpose is to encourage, counsel, evaluate, and guide the candidate throughout the process of theological education and ministerial formation.

2. Its membership is representative of those entities which are most committed to the candidate's succeeding within this system: the classis, the seminary, the teaching church, and the candidate's own circle of personal friends and family.

3. The membership may change from time to time, but the CCC shall continue with the candidate from the point at which he or she is taken under the care of the classis until the candidate becomes a licensed minister.

G. The Role of the Regional Synods

1. The staff and resources of the regional synods shall support, assist, and encourage the classes in their responsibilities for identifying and caring for those called to the ministry of Word and sacrament.

2. Regional synod executives, in cooperation with classis personnel, shall be involved in the process of identifying teaching churches and of discovering churches where licensed ministers may serve their residencies.

H. The Role of General Synod

1. The General Synod is charged with the task of monitoring the quality of ministerial preparation. It alone sets the standards for theological education and ministerial preparation.
2. It is the responsibility of the General Synod to establish, support, and oversee institutions by means of which candidates for the ministry can receive theological education and pastoral formation of such quality as would meet the standards which the General Synod establishes. Since 1784 the Synod has supported New Brunswick Theological Seminary for this purpose. Since 1866 it has supported Western Theological Seminary for this purpose. Since 1984 it has supported the Theological Education Agency (TEA) to oversee RCA candidates preparing for the ministry of Word and sacrament at approved non-RCA seminaries. New Brunswick Theological Seminary, Western Theological Seminary, and TEA are fully owned by and accountable to the General Synod.

3. The General Synod, by these means, assures the denomination that its pastors are being trained in such a way that the unity and parity of ministers of Word and sacrament are being maintained.

4. The Certificate of Admission to Examination for Licensure (formerly known as the Professorial Certificate or Certificate of Fitness for Ministry) is the means by which General Synod’s professors of theology, in consultation with and upon the recommendation of the CCC, certify, on the basis of the candidate’s entire experience within the process of preparation, that the candidate demonstrates basic preparedness for ministry within the Reformed Church.

5. The General Synod shall exercise its oversight of ministerial preparation through a Commission on Ministerial Formation (COMP) with the following membership and responsibilities:

a. Membership

1. The commission shall have ten members. The membership shall include the president of New Brunswick Theological Seminary, the president of Western Theological Seminary, the director of the Theological Education Agency, one General Synod professor of theology from New Brunswick Theological Seminary, one General Synod professor of theology from Western Theological Seminary (one of the two General Synod professors of theology to be a member of the TEA certification committee), two pastors, one certified Clinical Pastoral Education minister, and two laypersons.

b. Responsibilities

1. The commission shall have oversight of the standards of theological education for the Reformed Church in America.

2. The commission shall provide and evaluate standard assessment instruments and procedures for persons received under the care of classis and enrolled as candidates for ministry.

3. The commission shall provide and evaluate a standard written examination for licensure.

4. The commission shall set objectives and guidelines for the residency requirement for candidates.

5. The commission shall set and monitor standards for continuing education and professional development and provide for an ongoing assessment of RCA ministers.
6. The commission shall study and evaluate the overall process of ministerial formation and make recommendations, as necessary, to the General Synod and its agencies.

I. The Role of Seminaries

1. The free-standing Protestant seminary is a distinctly North American institution. For more than two hundred years the seminary’s function has been to provide theological education at the post-baccalaureate level, aimed at preparing women and men for pastoral, professional ministry. RCA candidates who attend non-RCA seminaries are provided with oversight by TEA.

2. Any seminary in which a candidate may enroll shall be able to provide the following:
   a. An education grounded in the basic fields of theological study, usually guaranteed by accreditation by the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada.
   b. A diverse community of students, faculty, administrators, and staff who can lead, support, encourage, and correct the candidate.
   c. Broad experience in parish or other ministry settings, supervised by trained pastoral mentors, and reflected upon within the context of the seminary’s curriculum.

3. Each seminary within the RCA is called to be a community of learning and transformation, which nurtures its members to:
   - Be evangelical, ecumenical, inclusive, and collegial.
   - Understand ministry to be representational, diaconal, and prayerful.
   - Proclaim a message which is biblical, historical, sacramental, and contextual.
   - Lead evangelization, reconciliation, education, and administration.
   - Care passionately for the well-being of persons within and beyond the congregation.

J. The Role of Teaching Churches

The Teaching Church Program in the RCA is intended to provide candidates for the ordained ministry with a parish-based, in-ministry experience as part of the ministry preparation process. It places candidates in local congregational settings where there is a mutual effort among the candidate, pastoral staff, laypersons, and seminary faculty to equip and prepare the candidate.

A teaching church can be any type of RCA church which qualifies. The Commission on Ministerial Formation shall set standards for and arrange for the training of church supervisors and lay committees in order to maximize learning. The program itself is flexible in nature and adaptable to the many diverse possibilities in the RCA.

RCA teaching churches shall meet three qualifications:

1. Availability of supervision and an environment where candidates are affirmed in giftedness for ministry and learn ministry through personal experience.
2. Work cooperatively with an RCA seminary or TEA to provide both the opportunity for "in-ministry" learning and guided theological reflection on the experience.

3. Provide trained supervision, mentorship, and measured evaluation of the ministry experience.

The task of the RCA teaching church shall be to provide:

1. A setting for candidates to assess their learning needs and test their ministry skills.
2. A contract for reimbursed ministry time in accordance with the candidate's personal and seminary schedule.
3. A variety of ministry opportunities and exposure to the many functions of ministry.
4. A thorough evaluation of candidates through interviews with both staff and members prior to acceptance by the church to determine potential for a good match.
5. Training to RCA candidates in cooperation with the Candidate Care Committee (CCC) and classis.

The implementation of the Teaching Church Program includes:

1. Official identification of potential teaching churches by the classis, the regional synod, and COMF in cooperation with RCA seminaries or TEA.
2. Training of supervisors and lay committees coordinated by COMF.
3. Preparation and provision of guidelines by COMF for the administration of recommended interviews of candidates prior to admission into the Teaching Church Program.
4. Provision of individuals from the teaching church to serve on CCCs.
5. Establishment of clearly defined learning contracts with measurable goals and objectives in the teaching church setting to be regularly communicated to the CCCs.

K. The Role of Residency Churches/Ministries

A residency church/ministry is usually the candidate's first full-time placement in ministry. The Residency Church Program is intended to move licensed candidates into active full-time pastoral ministry. It confirms and substantiates gifts in a setting where ministry is fully practiced, but with the benefit of supervision and mentoring. Residency is a twenty-four month requirement for all licensed candidates.

A residency church is any congregation or ministry which meets the following requirements:

1. Attendance at an orientation/training seminar offered by COMF. At this event the church should be represented by a minister and elder if the licensed candidate is to serve within a multiple staff ministry, or by two elders if the licensed candidate is to be the only minister of Word and sacrament for the church. Other suitable individuals shall attend in the case of nonchurch ministry settings.
2. Availability of an RCA minister who is willing to serve as the supervisor/mentor of the resident.

3. Readiness to provide at least minimum salary and benefits to the resident with the possible exception of payments to the RCA Annuity Fund for the resident period.

4. Approval of the residency site and experience by the classis.

Guidelines for the goals, objectives, and operation of the residency church shall be provided by COMF.

Candidates may apply to COMF for exemption from all or part of the Residency Church Program if for at least two years they have successfully carried out a full-time ministry of approximately fifty hours per week that included:
- Leading consistory or local steering committee
- Weekly worship planning
- Equipping lay leaders
- Calling
- Teaching
- Preaching
- Maintaining devotional life

L. The Role of Mentor

Within this process mentors serve in two distinctly different contexts and therefore in different ways:

1. During the candidate’s seminary experience and within the curriculum and structure of the seminary attended, each candidate shall participate in supervised ministry within a parish approved by the seminary, or within another ministry approved by the seminary with the concurrence of the classis. In this context the supervisor is expected to mentor the candidate by serving as:
   a. Teacher
   b. Guide
   c. Advocate

2. Following licensure, candidates shall participate in the twenty-four month Residency Church Program in a ministry setting. Within this context mentors shall meet different needs. He or she shall serve as:
   a. Counselor
   b. Example
   c. Confidant and friend

V. Standards for Personal Qualities and Professional Competencies

A. Personal Qualities

A qualified candidate for the Office of Minister of Word and Sacrament within the Reformed Church in America shall demonstrate that he or she:

- Is grounded in covenantal relationship to God.
- Has integrity in word, deed, and relationships.
- Is passionate about the gospel.
Is faithful.
Cultivates depth in spiritual life.
Is emotionally mature.
Is compassionate.
Is self-confident.
Is self-aware, vulnerable, and understands his or her own fallibility.
Trusts in God’s providence.
Is trustworthy.

B. Professional Competencies

Every candidate for the Office of Minister of Word and Sacrament within the Reformed Church in America shall demonstrate that she or he is competent to:

1. Lead worship within a Reformed theological understanding of liturgy which enables people at worship to encounter God.

2. Preach a sermon which communicates clearly a scriptural message to a congregation, eliciting both new faith and discipleship.

3. Administer the sacraments of the Lord’s Supper and baptism in a manner which conforms to the liturgy of the RCA and provides for a living encounter with God.

4. Translate Greek and Hebrew so as to be able to read and interpret the Bible.

5. Demonstrate thorough knowledge of the Old and New Testaments.

6. Demonstrate an ability to identify the major themes and tenets of Reformed theology as expressed in the Reformed Standards of Unity and is able to place these within the larger framework of the history of Christian doctrine.

7. Articulate an understanding of the Bible as the Word of God, of the varying views of the Bible in Reformed theology, and of where and how God’s word is living in the church and world today.

8. Articulate an understanding of the history of Christianity, of the integrity of the various historic Christian traditions, and of the place of Reformed history within this broader context.

9. Equip a Christian community for its witness to the gospel.

10. Analyze the current issues confronting the church and society and address them theologically.

11. Exercise discipleship in the context of Christian community as modeled in the teaching and person of Jesus.

12. Demonstrate an understanding of RCA polity as set forth in the Book of Church Order.

13. Understand the locus of decision-making and the acceptable parameters of leadership within RCA polity.

14. Demonstrate stewardship in the administration of Christian resources; manage and motivate a congregation as a voluntary institution for purposeful ministry.
15. Function in the pastoral role within the intimacy and trust of human relationships, maintaining and negotiating appropriate boundaries.

16. Understand and demonstrate a Christ-like use of power as it relates to others.

17. Understand the Office of Minister of Word and Sacrament as call and trust.

18. Be emotionally and empathetically present with persons in their need and be able to sustain them in suffering.

19. Demonstrate the capacity to be a pastor in a congregation, promoting mutual care in community.

20. Demonstrate the capacity to live out, and to help the community to live out, the Christian faith in the context of faiths and/or cultures different from one’s own.

21. Engender fellowship and community within the congregation.

22. Understand and participate in a system of education within the church.

23. Understand how people of different age groups learn and grow in the faith.

24. Teach others at all levels of life development and maturity.

VI. Outline of the Process

A. At the heart of the process is an individual Christian, within the Christian community, who has discerned a call to the ministry of Word and sacrament.

1. The process begins when that Christian takes the initiative to petition the consistory of a congregation for recommendation to the classis as a candidate for the ministry.

2. Ideally, this person shall be well-known to the congregation, shall have had opportunity to serve in leadership within the congregation, and shall have had experience as an adult believer and decision-maker within the congregation.

B. The consistory assesses the person’s call and gifts.

1. When the call appears to be genuine, the consistory shall assess the person’s gifts for ministry with the use of instruments available from COMF. Previous service within the church shall be carefully evaluated, or when the former is lacking, the consistory may arrange opportunities by which the person can demonstrate leadership and skills for ministry. The person should be given at least one year of service in which to demonstrate gifts for ministry.

2. At the conclusion of this period, a thorough assessment of the person’s performance shall be made by the consistory, with input from members of the congregation and others who have experienced the person’s ministry.

3. The consistory may then recommend the person to the classis as a candidate for the ministry.
C. The classis, prior to enrolling the person as a candidate under its care, is responsible for:

1. Verification that the person has a basic awareness of the distinctive witness, history, and theology of the RCA and has been a communicant member of an RCA congregation for at least two years.

2. Verification that the person has fulfilled the leadership experience requirement within or under the care of a congregation (see B.2 above).

3. Assessment of the person’s gifts, skills, and experience through the use of assessment instruments recommended by COMF.

4. Assessment of the person’s leadership abilities through the use of evaluative instruments or other means recommended by COMF.

5. Assessment, by means of personal interview, of the person’s faith and values, in light of the Standards for Personal Qualities.

6. Approval of the person’s plan for theological education, rationale for seminary selection, and strategy for financing the entire process.

D. When a person is taken under the care of a classis as a candidate, the following shall occur:

1. The person is enrolled as a candidate under the care of the classis and comes under its supervision for all matters pertaining to candidacy for the Office of Minister of Word and Sacrament.

2. The candidate, the classis, and the candidate’s seminary shall jointly develop a Candidate Care Committee (CCC) to counsel, encourage, direct, and care for the candidate. Each CCC shall normally consist of four persons:

   a. One faculty member from the candidate’s seminary. (In the case of persons pursuing an approved alternate route, this person shall be a member of the faculty at the RCA seminary nearest to the candidate’s location or an RCA faculty member at a seminary in the candidate’s area.)

   b. One member of the classis.

   c. One person from the candidate’s teaching church.

   d. One person of the candidate’s choice.

   At least one member of the CCC shall be a minister of Word and sacrament and at least one member shall be someone who is not an ordained minister. Ministerial members shall have served at least three years in ordained ministry. The classis shall appoint the committee and designate the chair of the committee.

3. At this point the classis shall forward the names of the CCC, the results of its assessment of the candidate, and the proposed plan for theological education to COMF.
E. The candidate's theological education shall then proceed along one of three avenues:

1. The two seminaries of the Reformed Church in America.
   a. These are the primary sites for theological education to be recommended by classes to candidates.
   b. These seminaries have in place a required curriculum for RCA students.
   c. These seminaries have in place a program of supervised ministry which involves students in teaching churches.
   d. The faculties of these seminaries include professors of theology, who are responsible to the General Synod to teach in such a way that the needs of the whole church are met.
   e. Each CCC shall function within the context of the seminary's curriculum and its requirements.
   f. The CCC shall regularly submit progress reports to the faculty of the candidate's seminary, and the seminary member of the CCC shall report the candidate's progress at the seminary to the CCC. The CCC shall send a formal written report to the spring session of classis, with copies to the seminary and COMF.
   g. When the candidate has completed the requirements of the RCA course of study, the CCC may recommend the candidate to the faculty for the Certificate of Admission to Examination for Licensure. The certificate is granted by vote of the General Synod professors of theology, and the motion to grant shall be passed by three-fourths of the professors present and voting.

2. The Theological Education Agency (TEA)
   a. For candidates who receive the permission of their classis to attend a non-RCA seminary, TEA shall oversee their theological education. For a seminary to meet the standards established by the General Synod, the General Synod of 1990 determined that such a school should demonstrate the capacity to provide:
      i. An institutional structure and course of study fully accredited by the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada.
      ii. Instruction that is demonstrably compatible with Reformed theology as expressed in the three RCA doctrinal standards.
      iii. Location near RCA congregations which provide opportunities for regular participation leading to the creation and growth of RCA identity, loyalty, and collegiality.

The task force recommends three additional characteristics:

   v. Such a seminary should hold a high commitment to pastoral ministry.
vi. Such a seminary shall make available within its curriculum at least one unit of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) and a program of spiritual direction.

vii. Such a seminary shall recognize the RCA Standards of Unity as a valid statement of Christian faith for members of the RCA and shall not require the assent of RCA students to additional doctrinal standards or statements.

b. Candidates enrolled under TEA shall fulfill the same required courses and learning experiences as are part of the required curriculum in RCA seminaries. Part of these requirements are offered to candidates enrolled in TEA by summer intensives or at regional teaching church campuses with a sufficient number of candidates to warrant such offerings.

c. Each candidate shall have required involvement in an RCA teaching church, within the seminary’s supervised ministry/field education program.

d. The candidate shall enter into learning contracts, within the seminary’s supervised ministry/field education program, for the learnings that are to be pursued within the teaching church.

e. The role of the CCC is pivotal in the assessment of each candidate’s progress and fitness. TEA shall provide regular progress reports to the CCC on the candidate’s theological education.

f. The CCC shall report to the spring session of classis and to TEA. TEA shall communicate any concerns of the CCC, the classis, or COMF about the candidate to the latter’s seminary. A copy of each report shall be sent to COMF.

g. When the candidate has completed the requirements of the RCA curriculum, the CCC may recommend the candidate to TEA for the Certificate of Admission to Examination for Licensure. TEA processes this recommendation through a certification committee composed of:

i. Two General Synod professors of theology (one from each RCA seminary).

ii. Two other faculty members from RCA seminaries (one from each seminary). These may or may not be General Synod professors of theology.

iii. Two members of the TEA board.

iv. The director of TEA, convening the committee and participating without vote.

The motion to grant the certificate shall be passed by three-fourths of the committee present and voting.

3. Approved alternate route.

a. The completion of the required RCA curriculum is the normative method for ministerial preparation within the RCA. In certain circumstances candidates may obtain their theological education through an alternate method. All five of the following criteria shall be present for a candidate to apply for permission to pursue an alternate method of theological education:
i. The candidate shall be at least forty years of age.

ii. An urgent need shall exist for the candidate’s ministry.

iii. The congregation or locus of ministry shall have demonstrated difficulty in obtaining ordained ministerial leadership.

iv. The classis shall recognize both the gifts of the candidate for ministry and the difficulty facing the candidate in pursuing ordination through the normal process.

v. The candidate shall have demonstrated difficulty in obtaining access to theological education within a seminary.

b. The classis, on behalf of a candidate meeting these criteria, may apply to the Commission on Ministerial Formation for permission to pursue a special course of theological education.

c. The candidate shall apply to COMF for admission to the approved alternate route for ministerial preparation. This application ought, ordinarily, to be made through a local congregation and the classis.

d. Upon admission to the alternate route, a CCC shall be formed. The classis shall register the candidate for the alternate route with COMF.

e. Immediately following this registration, a thorough assessment of the candidate’s skills and experience, as related to the Standards for Personal Qualities, shall be carried out by the CCC with the assistance of an RCA seminary or TEA.

f. The candidate shall propose a program of theological education (utilizing the expertise of an RCA seminary or TEA), teaching church experience (or its equivalent), CPE, spiritual direction, and other means of preparation to be approved by COMF. In cases where English is not a candidate’s first language, significant portions of the candidate’s education may occur in the candidate’s first language.

g. At the conclusion of the equipping process, when the CCC is fully satisfied that the candidate has met the standards for admission to examination for licensure, the CCC shall recommend the candidate to two General Synod professors of theology. With the concurrence of both professors, the candidate may proceed to examination for licensure.

F. Examination for Licensure

Examination for licensure may occur at any point after the individual has been a member in full communion in a congregation of the Reformed Church in America for at least two years and after the candidate has received the Certificate of Admission to Examination for Licensure. The examination consists of two parts, a written component and an oral component.

1. Written Component

   a. At the conclusion of their course of study, all candidates shall pass a standardized minimum competencies examination. A fresh examination shall be prepared each year by a team of pastors and General Synod professors of theology.
selected by COMF. The commission shall approve the examination and shall safeguard its confidentiality.

b. Candidates are expected to demonstrate basic competence in each area of this examination and have an average score, for all area scores combined, which exceeds the minimum established by COMF.

c. This examination shall be administered by the classis.

2. Oral Component

a. The examination by the classis shall include a public oral examination of the candidate in the following areas:

i. Reformed theology, including a statement of the candidate’s personal faith.

ii. Reformed worship, including liturgy, preaching, hymnody, and the nature and administration of the sacraments.

iii. RCA structure and government, including congregational leadership and administration.

iv. History and program of the RCA.

b. These exams are developed, administered, and evaluated by the classis with the assistance of guidelines developed by COMF.

3. Candidates who pass this examination may be licensed by the classis.

a. They shall appear at the next General Synod in order to participate in the seminar for candidates, to celebrate their licensure, and to read before the General Synod the Declaration for Licensed Candidates* (BCO, Appendix, The Formularies of the Reformed Church in America).

b. They shall also be enrolled in the classis as licensed ministers and shall sign the Declaration for a Licensed Minister of Word and Sacrament (to replace current title Declaration for Licensed Candidates). Licensed ministers are corresponding members of classis, without the privilege of vote. They may serve as president of a consistory.

*To be retitled Declaration for a Licensed Minister of Word and Sacrament.

G. Residency as a Licensed Minister of Word and Sacrament

After a candidate has been licensed by the classis as a minister of Word and sacrament, the licensed minister shall be placed in a ministerial residency program within a congregation or other ministerial context.

The licensed minister, during this residency, is committed to the further development of pastoral and professional skills and is working toward a more autonomous practice of ministry.

The licensed minister shall be fully responsible for the ministry of Word and sacrament within the residency context and shall be fully compensated for service within it.
1. Residency shall be for a minimum of twenty-four months.

2. During the course of this residency the licensed minister shall pursue a course of continued study and experience which the licensed minister and the classis agree is helpful in the further development of the licensed minister's pastoral skills, as assessed within the examination for licensure.

3. Central to the experience of the residency is the role of a mentor, assigned to the licensed minister by the classis. This mentor shall have served in ministry for at least five years in the area in which the licensed minister is doing the residency.

4. Licensed ministers may continue in the residency placement for as long as this is deemed appropriate by the congregation, the licensed minister, and the classis.

H. Approval for Ordination

1. After the completion of twenty-four months in a residency program, the licensed minister may apply to the classis for ordination.

2. Before proceeding to ordination, the classis shall obtain an assessment of the candidate's development as a minister from persons who were intimately involved in the licensed minister's residency placement, from the supervisor of the residency church or ministry, and from other persons who have experienced the person's ministry.

3. Ordination of the licensed minister may occur when, in the judgment of the licensed minister's mentor and the classis, the licensed minister has demonstrated sufficient maturity, leadership, and understanding within the residency ministry to meet the standards.

4. A program for continuing education is to be submitted by the licensed minister and approved by the classis and COMF prior to ordination.

I. Ordained ministers are open to a call to any ministry approved by a classis within the RCA. They shall carry out a program of continuing assessment and education.

J. Ordination to the Office of Minister of Word and Sacrament follows the acceptance and approval of a call.

VII. Recommendations

The Task Force on Standards for the Preparation for the Professional Ministry in the Reformed Church in America recommends:

➢ The advisory committee recommended to amend R-22:

R-22.
To distribute the Report of the Task Force on Standards for the Preparation for the Professional Ministry in the Reformed Church in America to all RCA congregations, clergy, classes, regional synods, theological professors, and theological students for study and response; and further,

to request task force members be available to representatives of classes and other interested groups in the RCA for discussion and consultation; and further,
to request all responses be submitted to the task force (c/o James Cook, Western Theological Seminary, 101 E. 13th St., Holland, MI 49423) on or before [November 15, 1996] February 15, 1997; and further,

to instruct the task force to present a final report to the 1997 General Synod. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)*

Reasons:

1. The advisory committee was seeking to insure that this report elicits as broad a response as possible.

2. The February 15, 1997, deadline gives additional time to respond.<

R-23.
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 study written responses received from RCA congregations and present a final report to the 1997 General Synod. (ADOPTED)

(The adoption of R-23 had a cost effect on the 1997 General Synod Operational Budget. See Report of the Committee of Reference, p. 428.)

VIII. Referrals to the Task Force from the 1995 General Synod

A number of matters from the 1995 General Synod were referred to the Task Force on Standards for the Preparation for the Professional Ministry in the Reformed Church in America. The task force reports, as follows, on the status of these referrals:

A. Examination of Pastors for Teaching and Teaching Ministry

The 1995 General Synod considered the following recommendation presented by the Task Force on Remembering Baptism, Professing Faith, and Membership Terminology:

R-4.
To request classes in their examination 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 (MGS 1994, p. 136).

The 1995 General Synod did not adopt R-4. Instead, the 1995 General Synod voted:

To refer R-4 to the Task Force on Standards for the Preparation for the Professional Ministry in the Reformed Church in America (MGS 1994, p. 136).

The task force notes that this matter is included within the standards and processes proposed in the task force’s report above.

Also, at the 1995 General Synod, the Task Force on Remembering Baptism, Professing Faith, and Membership Terminology recommended a revision to the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 8, Section 6a, to provide for an examination of

*Additions are in light-face type, deletion is enclosed in brackets.
ministerial candidates in the area of “Christian educational theory for and practice with children, youth, and adults” (MGS 1995, R-3, pp. 135-36). The 1995 General Synod adopted R-3 and two-thirds of the classes approved the revision (see the Report of the General Synod Council’s Policy, Planning, and Administration Services section, Amendments to the Book of Church Order).

B. Certification and Licensure of Lay Preachers/Pastors and Preaching Elders

The Classis of Mid-Hudson overtook the 1994 General Synod to “study the feasibility of setting up a process to certify qualified laity for ministry” (MGS 1994, pp. 248-49). The Classis of Mid-Hudson sent another overture to the 1995 General Synod requesting a revision of the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, to allow a classis to appoint elders from within its bounds to provide preaching and pastoral services to its churches (MGS 1995, pp. 241-42).

The 1995 General Synod referred the matter of certification of lay preachers/pastors to the task force and to the Commission on Theology (MGS 1995, p. 218). The matter of preaching elders was referred by the 1995 General Synod to the task force (MGS 1995, p. 242).

The Commission on Theology has prepared a full report on preaching elders for the 1996 General Synod (see the Report of the Commission on Theology in the Theology section). If the task force is continued, the task force will be available to work with the Commission on Theology on the matter of lay pastors/preachers and preaching elders.

C. Establish General Synod Council Committee on Ministerial Preparation and Oversight of Theological Education

The 1995 General Synod considered the following recommendation presented by New Brunswick Theological Seminary:

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 (MGS 1995, p. 249).

The 1995 General Synod also considered the following overture from the Classis of California:

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 (MGS 1995, p. 296).

The 1995 General Synod referred the above R-1 and the above overture to the task force (MGS 1995, p. 249; and MGS 1995, p. 297).

In response, the task force has included in its report above a recommendation to create a Commission on Ministerial Formation.
D. Leadership Recruitment

The 1995 General Synod considered the following recommendation presented by New Brunswick Theological Seminary:

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 (MGS 1995, p. 250).

The 1995 General Synod referred the above R-3 to the task force (MGS 1995, p. 250).

In response, the task force included this matter within the standards and processes of its report presented above.

E. Create Additional Intensive Courses

The 1995 General Synod voted:

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...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 (MGS 1995, p. 267).

If the task force is continued, this matter will be taken up during the course of the coming year.

F. Offer Spanish Language Courses for Those Preparing for Ministry

In response to an overture from the Classis of California, the 1995 General Synod voted:

To instruct the Task Force...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 (MGS 1995, p. 298).

While the task force has attempted to be especially sensitive to the needs of ethnic traditions within the RCA, the task force has not had opportunity in the course of its work to date to fully evaluate and respond to this matter. If the task force is continued, this matter will be on its agenda for the coming year.

G. Dissolve the Theological Education Agency

The Classis of Albany overruled the 1995 General Synod to “begin the orderly dissolution of the Theological Education Agency” (MGS 1995, p. 298).
In response to this overture, the 1995 General Synod voted:

To instruct the Task Force...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 (MGS 1995, R-41, p. 299).

While the task force intentionally structured TEA into every process of its report presented above, the task force has not had opportunity to “evaluate the impact of TEA in relation to the overall theological education program of the RCA.”

If the task force is continued, this evaluation will occur during the course of the coming year.

H. Develop “Teaching Churches”

In response to a proposal presented by the president of General Synod, the Rev. Harold Korver, in his report to the 1995 General Synod, the 1995 General Synod voted:

To instruct the Task Force...to develop processes to identify, establish, and equip “teaching churches” throughout the Reformed Church in America, for report to the 1996 General Synod (MGS 1995, R-44, p. 301).

The task force is pleased to report that “teaching churches” represent a central component of the proposed process in the report of the task force presented above.

Notes:
3. Based on the Heidelberg Catechism, Question and Answer 1.

Overtures

*RCA Medical Insurance*

1. The Classis of Pleasant Prairie overtures General Synod to investigate and report on new options for insuring RCA pastors, missionaries, and staff, with particular attention given to finding a national health care provider to take over the RCA self-insured program.

Reasons:

1. Because health care costs are skyrocketing nationwide, the RCA medical insurance plan is now significantly more expensive than other medical insurance plans offered by nationwide insurance companies. Smaller RCA congregations can no longer afford to pay the increased costs the RCA medical insurance plan needs each year. By joining a national insurance company, health care costs are spread out with many others and this reduces the need for large premium increases.
2. The RCA is a ministry, not a health insurance management company. By turning over the insurance needs of RCA personnel, the RCA can better focus on its mission throughout the world.

➢ The advisory committee recommended:

R-24.
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. Comparisons of the RCA insurance program are done regularly and a current comparison shows that a comparison insurance program would be significantly higher in cost if provided by a commercial insurance carrier.

2. The current RCA insurance program is both excellent in its coverage and competitive in its costs.

3. Information on the RCA health insurance program's cost comparisons is available from the RCA insurance office.<

Revise “Pastoral Ministry” Term

2. The Classis of Orange overtures General Synod to revise the term “pastoral ministry” in the BCO, Chapter I, Part II, Article 7, Section 1d, for recommendation to the classes for approval, in order to identify gifts (in addition to pastoral ministry) for all phases of ministry, such as missionary work, chaplaincy, etc.

Reasons:

1. The term “pastoral ministry” is limiting and excludes other ministries.

2. The RCA has many specialized ministries that are not “pastoral” ministries.

3. The need for missionaries (medical personnel, Bible translators, professors, and others) should not be excluded from the prayerful consideration of consistory for identification of these individuals and from prayer for development of these particular gifts of ministry.

4. The Book of Church Order in its Preamble declares an equality of ministry among ministers of Word and sacrament and elders and deacons.

➢ The advisory committee recommended:

R-25.
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. There was a lack of sufficient information on Overture 2.

2. Since the inclusion of this Book of Church Order revision was just adopted at this 1996 General Synod meeting (see R-5, p. 64), the advisory committee judged Overture 2 premature. <
The Reformed Church in America Building and Extension Fund, Inc. (RCABEF) is a New York not-for-profit corporation. It functions under the ecclesiastical authority of the Reformed Church of America through the General Synod Council. Its purpose is to support the work of the General Synod Council of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America by rendering financial assistance in the erection of church buildings. In fulfillment of this purpose, it maintains and operates two separate loan funds. One is the Church Building Fund (CBF). The other is the Extension Foundation Fund (EFF).

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 EFF is the sale of promissory notes. Such notes are offered in fixed maturities of 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 EFF notes are established quarterly by a subcommittee of the RCABEF board.

At the end of 1995 the corporation had assets in excess of $29 million. Of this amount, over $22 million was in the form of loans outstanding to RCA congregations, with another $2.4 million committed to RCA congregations but not yet funded. At the end of 1995, 104 CBF loans and 52 EFF loans were either outstanding or committed but not yet funded. Following this report is a list of all churches who currently are borrowers from the RCABEF.

During 1995 thirteen loans were paid off. The RCABEF rejoices with these congregations who have become debt-free, and pray that their freedom from debt will help them fulfill their call to ministry in their community. During 1995 nine commitments for loans totaling $2,575,000 were issued to RCA congregations. The RCABEF rejoices with these congregations as well, and prays that the facilities which are built or remodeled will glorify God and help the congregations fulfill their call to ministry in their community.

In 1995 the RCABEF also saw results of efforts begun in 1994. First, the loan application and approval process was carefully reviewed and thoroughly discussed. The result was a streamlining of the process by eliminating one step and allowing two other steps to occur simultaneously (rather than seriatim). Second, new loan servicing software has been selected and purchased, and now is in the process of being activated. When this project is completed, the process of invoicing churches for their payments, processing payments when received, and tracking delinquent payments should be more efficient and effective. Third, careful attention has been given to those congregations who, for one reason or another, have been unable to remain current on their loans. As a result of coordinated efforts by the RCABEF and the applicable classes and regional synods, the commitment and dedication of the churches themselves, and (most importantly) God’s grace, loan delinquencies (both in terms of number of delinquent loans and total amount delinquent) have been reduced significantly.

Despite the progress and accomplishments of 1995, much remains to be done. Indeed, as long as the RCA maintains its commitment to the development of new churches and the expansion or redevelopment of existing churches, the work of the RCABEF will never be done. As it continues its work, the RCABEF asks for your prayers and gives God all the glory.
Bethel Reformed Church, Fort MacLeod, Alberta
Christ Community Church, St. Albert, Alberta
Bethel Reformed Church, Abbotsford, British Columbia
New Life Community Church, Burnaby, British Columbia
Grace Community Church, Surrey, British Columbia
Elmwood Reformed Church, Winnipeg, Manitoba
Bethel Reformed Church, Brampton, Ontario
Emmanuel Reformed Church, Woodstock, Ontario
New Hope Community Church, Gilbert, Arizona
Christ Community Church, Glendale, Arizona
Prescott Community Church, Prescott, Arizona
Hope Community Church, Scottsdale, Arizona
Christ Community Church, Buena Park, California
Eden Korean Church, Buena Park, California
Canyon Lake Community Church, Canyon Lake, California
Corona Community Church, Corona, California
Regional Synod of the Far West, Corona, California
Crossroads Community Church, Elk Grove, California
New Hope Community Church, Glendora, California
Calvary Community Church, Hemet, California
Church of the Cross, Modesto, California
Palm Canyon Community Church, Moreno Valley, California
Church of the Chimes, San Jose, California
Rancho Community Reformed Church, Temecula, California
New Hope Community Church, Aurora, Colorado
Springs Community Church, Colorado Springs, Colorado
Our Saviour's Church - Lakewood, Colorado
Faith Community Church, Littleton, Colorado
West Broward Community Church, Sunrise, Florida
Christ Community Church, Palm Springs, Florida
First Reformed Church, Tampa, Florida
Rolling Hills Community Church, Zellwood, Florida
North Atlantic Community Church, Roswell, Georgia
Adventure Life Reformed Church, Altoona, Iowa
Christ's Family Reformed Church, Davenport, Iowa
Bethany Reformed Church, Des Moines, Iowa
Calvary Reformed Church, Des Moines, Iowa
Heartland Reformed Church, Pella, Iowa
New Life Reformed Church, Sioux Center, Iowa
Hope Reformed Church, Spencer, Iowa
Twin Falls Reformed Church, Twin Falls, Idaho
Church of the Good News, Chicago, Illinois
Downers Grove Community Church, Downers Grove, Illinois
Peace Community Church, Frankfort, Illinois
Peace Reformed Church, Mt. Prospect, Illinois
Pembroke Community Reformed Church, St. Anne, Illinois
Faith Community Church, West Chicago, Illinois
Christ's Community Church, Fishers, Indiana
Christ's Community Church, Fort Wayne, Indiana
Crossroads Church, Overland Park, Kansas
Boston Taiwanese Christian Church, Arlington, Massachusetts
Reformed Church of Corinth, Byron Center, Michigan
Christ Community Church of Canton, Canton, Michigan
Church of the Saviour, Coopersville, Michigan
Open Door Reformed Church, Dorr, Michigan
Resurrection Reformed Church, Flint, Michigan
Thornapple Community Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan
Glen Lake Community Reformed, Glen Arbor, Michigan
Trinity Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan
Covenant Community Church, Hudsonville, Michigan
Hager Park Reformed Church, Jenison, Michigan
Church of the Savior, Niles, Michigan
Southridge Reformed Church, Portage, Michigan
Fourth Reformed Church, Oshtemo, Michigan
Gun Lake Community Church, Wayland, Michigan
Classis of Lake Erie, Canton, Michigan
Riverside Reformed Church, Bloomington, Minnesota
Peace Reformed Church, Eagan, Minnesota
Minnesota Valley Community Church, Prior Lake, Minnesota
Christ Community Church, Blue Springs, Missouri
Classis of Illinois, Pekin, Illinois
Westwood Church, Omaha, Nebraska
First Reformed Church, Lincoln Park, New Jersey
Ocean Reformed Church, Manahawkin, New Jersey
Pinelands Reformed Church, Toms River, New Jersey
Community Church of Colonie, Albany, New York
Shin Kwang Church of New York, Bayside, New York
Mott Haven Church, Bronx, New York
United Reformed Church of Williamsbridge Road, Bronx, New York
New Lots Community Church, Brooklyn, New York
First Reformed Protestant Dutch Church of the Town of Princetown,
Duanesburg, New York
Helderberg Reformed Church, Guilderland Center, New York
Nakwon Reformed Church, Sunnyside, Long Island, New York
Siloam Church, Flushing, New York
Pitcher Hill Community Church, North Syracuse, New York
First Reformed Church, Rochester, New York
New Life Community Church, Sayville, New York
Grace Christian Church, Staten Island, New York
Reformed Church of Syracuse, Syracuse, New York
Clarkstown Reformed Church, West Nyack, New York
Pulneyville Reformed Church, Williamson, New York
First Reformed Church, Wynantskill, New York
First Reformed Church of Cary, Cary, North Carolina
Red River Reformed Church, West Fargo, North Dakota
New Hope Reformed Church, Powell, Ohio
Newtown Reformed Church, Langhorne, Pennsylvania
The Reformed Church, Willow Grove, Pennsylvania
Good News Reformed Church, Sioux Falls, South Dakota
Christ Community Church, Dallas, Texas
Reformed Church of Plano, Plano, Texas
St. Thomas Reformed Church, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands
Servants of Christ, Federal Way, Washington
Trinity Reformed Church, Kent, Washington
Church of the Good Shepherd, Lynnwood, Washington
East Valley Reformed Church, Yakima, Washington
Trinity Community Reformed Church, Brown Deer, Wisconsin
New Life Community Church, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF EVANGELISM AND CHURCH DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

Vision Statement

At a retreat of the General Synod Council (GSC) in January 1996 in San Juan Capistrano, California, the GSC Evangelism and Church Development Services Committee adopted a new vision statement. The statement, which follows, was also heartily endorsed by the Council of Field Secretaries at its meeting in February 1996. Specific strategies and goals are in the process of being developed by Evangelism and Church Development Services staff at this time. The vision states:

All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you (Matt. 28:18-20).

Our purpose is to cast a vision for reaching people with the good news of God's grace, power, and justice through Jesus Christ in every social and economic context through a denomination-wide ongoing commitment to Christ's command to make disciples, in every congregation, assembly, and institution of the Reformed Church in America.

We believe congregations that have caught this vision will:

- Announce and share the good news of God in Christ [Word].
- Seek to demonstrate God's rule of love and justice [Deed].
- Call individuals to repentance, to confession, and to conversion to new life in Christ.
- Invite and receive new believers into the Christian community; ground them in the study of Scripture and the basic teachings of the faith; initiate them into the sacramental life and worship of the church; help them discover their relationship to God and enlist them as participants in God's reign; awaken and nurture in them the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the disciplines of the spiritual life; and send them out to work and witness for God's reign, supporting them in prayer.

In this way, authentic evangelism forms genuine disciples.

("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, November 1994).

We believe that the local congregation is the primary focus for witness and mission, whether it be city, rural, or suburban, regardless of its size. It is our purpose to affirm, assist, and equip the local church to be faithful to that mission in the world. This vision is accomplished through the various objectives, projects, and ministries that are developed by the Evangelism and Church Development Services Committee/Unit of the General Synod Council.
Video

The first video produced by Evangelism and Church Development Services has been distributed to all On the Way churches with a very positive response as churches use it to stimulate discussion on what changes can be made in their ministry to reach out to people in the community. TRAVARCA reports that the Evangelism in a Changing World video is experiencing brisk circulation with an enthusiastic response by users. The video, which features three RCA congregations throughout the United States that have made real efforts to touch the heart of their communities, can be used as an adult or youth Sunday school class for up to six weeks. It may also be used in a consistory retreat format, used as the basis of an evangelism committee discussion, or shown to the entire congregation. A study guide comes with the video and provides opportunity for a variety of ways to respond to the message.

New Member Classes Materials

More than eleven thousand persons attended new member classes in RCA churches last year. As a result, the RCA Distribution Center has depleted its supply of Belonging, a packet of materials for new members. Evangelism and Church Development Services will subsidize a third printing of this popular packet first published in 1992. Churches may obtain copies for participants in new member classes by calling the RCA Distribution Center in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Revitalization

"Revitalization" is a key word in churches today. Many are finding that before evangelism becomes a priority in ministry, revitalization must first take place.

If members were excited about their church (or their faith), they would be telling other people about it anyway. Evangelism, then, flows out of a sense of purpose, excitement, and mission. And this "sense" must exist before evangelism makes any sense. Under most circumstances, an evangelistic program is useful only to channel a pre-existing interest in outreach (C. Kirk Hadaway and David Roozen, Rerouting the Protestant Mainstream, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995, 67-68).

Consistories and churches are focusing on this theme in their retreats. A study of consistorial reports over the last two years shows that city and rural, small and large, new and old churches are reporting new interest and enrollment in Sunday schools, vacation church schools, youth groups, mission work groups, volunteer projects, and other significant expressions of spiritual challenge and growth.

Also, there is evidence that a number of RCA congregations are experiencing a "turnaround." Stagnant or declining congregations are being renewed and revitalized. While there is no formula for instant renewal, some of the key factors are a strong emphasis on prayer, key leadership (clergy and lay), and utilization of denominational evangelism workshops and materials. Other programs that seem to be contributing to positive change include Consecration Sunday, the Fifty-Day Spiritual Adventure, and involvement by men of the church in Promise Keepers.

Evangelism Events

The Reformed Church in America, along with eight other mainline denominations, has been invited to participate in planning several cooperative evangelism conferences in 1998 and 2000 for the purpose of strengthening congregational evangelism in mainline U.S. Protestant congregations. Each partner organization/denomination is asked to make a five-year commitment (1997-2001) to this coalition. The alliance/coalition will focus for those five
years on the concept of “Building the Church for 2025.” The group sees this process as an intentional development of a new paradigm for ecumenism; one that is a task-oriented coalition rather than a councillor model. The new paradigm will focus on a shared task rather than on doctrine or theory. The goal is to establish 1998 and 2000 as the years in which the cooperative alliance/coalition will sponsor four major evangelism events in four locations throughout the United States. Evangelism and Church Development Services is exploring the RCA’s participation in this opportunity.

REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF CONGREGATIONAL EVANGELISM

On the Way

Since its inception in 1986 the On the Way evangelism emphasis has enrolled 370 congregations. Its purpose is to encourage congregations to do evangelism effectively. Each year participating congregations receive a special packet of evangelism resources.

The 1995-96 resource packet was prepared and mailed to each participating church in November 1995. For the first time the packet contained a video resource, Evangelism in a Changing World, which was produced for the 1995 General Synod. (Additional copies are available through the RCA Distribution Center at $39.95 each.) Among other enclosures were three magazine articles, two sermons by RCA ministers written in response to the policy statement of the National Council of Churches of Christ (see MGS 1995, pp. 304-05), and a recommended reading list.

As reported to the 1995 General Synod, a survey of participating churches was conducted by the Rev. Donald R. Baird, associate for congregational evangelism, to determine whether On the Way should continue after 1996 (MGS 1995, pp. 305-06). The results were tabulated in a four-page report and distributed to all On the Way churches. Although far too extensive to be reprinted here, the report shows (for example) that most responding congregations found the material in On the Way packets to be “new and interesting” (52). Other responses were: “new but dull” (3), “old but interesting” (11), and “old and dull” (1). Materials were also found to be “helpful in their context” (47), “helpful for lay persons” (27), and “helpful for clergy” (49). Other responses consisted of: “not helpful in our context” (9), “not helpful for lay persons” (8), and “not helpful for clergy” (1). Again, an overwhelming number found that topics addressed were “relevant and helpful” (62). Other responses included: “interesting, but not especially helpful” (11), “irrelevant, dull, and a waste of time” (0), and “interesting, and while not very helpful, did provide a good read” (12). Suggestions for the future ranged all the way from charging a much larger fee for re-enrollment to discontinuing the emphasis immediately. The vast majority, however, indicated that On the Way should continue.

It is clear that a large majority of congregations have found On the Way books, packets, and materials very helpful and want the emphasis continued. If it is to continue, churches need to be reminded that On the Way is a covenantal relationship. The RCA provides congregations with an annual On the Way resource packet—including at least one new book or major resource. Congregations have the responsibility to pray for and to work at doing effective evangelism.

If On the Way continues, congregations need to be given the opportunity to renew their covenant. In addition, other congregations need to be encouraged to participate because of On the Way’s proven track record.

During the first decade of On the Way, congregations upon their enrollment contributed $100 to help cover the costs of materials provided. It was a very good investment. The value of materials received more than covered the enrollment fee. Survey responses indicated that congregations re-enrolling are willing to pay a larger fee. The costs of the emphasis will be covered from fees plus existing RCA On the Way funds.
The advisory committee recommended to amend R-1:

R-1.
To reaffirm for five years the On the Way evangelism emphasis; and further,

[invite] encourage all RCA congregations during 1996 to enroll or renew their enrollment in On the Way. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)*

Reason: The advisory committee affirmed the intent of R-1 but believed this amendment strengthened the emphasis of R-2.

The survey surfaced a number of new and creative ideas that might provide new ways the RCA can assist congregations to do evangelism more effectively as it moves into the twenty-first century. The Office of Evangelism will continue to study the survey report to determine further evangelism initiatives.

Regional Evangelism Trainers

The 1995 General Synod explained a plan to enlist and train gifted persons as regional evangelism trainers (RETs) from each RCA regional synod to provide assistance to the Rev. Donald Baird in his role as associate for congregational evangelism (MGS 1995, pp. 306-08). The demand for workshops presently requires a ten-month lead time. Regional synod executives were asked to nominate persons who might be willing to serve, and over forty persons were invited to serve as RETs.

Twenty-five persons are currently receiving instruction in order to serve the RCA as RETs. These individuals are being prepared to conduct evangelism workshops to assist the leadership of local congregations to devise strategies for more effective outreach in the context of the local church. The first phase of training was conducted in May 1995 at Camp Manitou near Chicago. The second phase will be attendance at a workshop conducted by the associate for congregational evangelism. It is estimated that 50 percent of the RETs will be fully certified before the 1996 General Synod.

RETs are not volunteers. They receive a stipend (plus necessary transportation, room, and board) from the RCA Office of Evangelism for each workshop they conduct. Congregations are not charged. Congregations are invited to call their regional synod or the Office of the Associate for Congregational Evangelism for a list of certified RETs.

At the request of the RETs, the associate for congregational evangelism has written a detailed manual (printed by the RCA Distribution Center) for their use.

R-2.
To encourage RCA congregations to use the services of a regional evangelism trainer or the associate for congregational evangelism to conduct an evangelism workshop. (ADOPTED)

A gathering of RETs was held in April 1996 following the clergy Spring Sabbath in St. Louis, Missouri. Eighteen RETs attended. The featured speaker was the Rev. Mark Mittelberg, associate director of the Willow Creek Association. Other participants included John Groeters, the Rev. Anthony Vis, and the Rev. Harold "Shorty" Brown. Such gatherings are planned on an annual basis for the purpose of team building and instruction. Plans for the future include enlisting and training additional RETs.

*Additions are in light-face type, deletion is enclosed in brackets.
Evangelism Workshops and Seminars

During the 1995-96 program year the associate for congregational evangelism conducted weekend workshops, witnessing seminars, and consultations for twenty-five congregations in Arizona, New York, New Jersey, Michigan, Minnesota, California, and Iowa.

Workshops are designed to provide specific helps in specific contexts. Held on Friday evenings and Saturday mornings and afternoons, the workshops have an intensive eight-hour schedule. In each case local church leaders are urged to participate with persons who control change. Although time prevents a sufficient discussion of ideas which emerge during a workshop, a process is provided for follow-up. At the end of a workshop, participants list ideas they believe would work best in their congregation and community. Ideas are compiled by the associate for congregational evangelism, who returns a detailed summary to the church and adds his own suggestions, commentary, and assessment.

There is no charge for a workshop. The services of the associate for congregational evangelism or regional evangelism trainer are provided to RCA congregations by the General Synod Council. 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 the average Christian who finds it difficult to engage others in faith conversations begin with Bible study and use role-playing techniques to strengthen learnings. Lasting three hours, seminars are usually held for groups from twelve to sixty on weekday evenings and have been held for individual congregations, groups of churches, and classes. Suggestions are made during the process for follow-up training.

R-3.
To encourage RCA congregations to use the services of the associate for congregational evangelism to conduct a witnessing seminar.
(ADOPTED)

The contract position of associate for congregational evangelism has come to require a greater number of days per year than originally envisioned. Therefore, the General Synod Council has increased the contract from a one-third part-time position to one-half part-time position.

REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF CITY CONGREGATIONAL MINISTRIES

In its efforts to search for a revitalized metropolitan mission for the twenty-first century, the Office for City Congregational Ministries (CCM) and the racial/ethnic councils (African-American, American Indian, Hispanic, and Pacific and Asian American) planned and executed a very successful consultation, Celebrating City Ministries, in Newark, New Jersey, April 20-22, 1995. Valuable insights into local and global ministry were provided by the Rev. Dr. Raymond Bakke, executive director of International Urban Associates and cofounder of the Seminary Consortium for Urban Pastoral Education (SCUPE). The participants were motivated in plenary sessions, focus groups, and workshops by skilled workshop leaders.

Inasmuch as all the racial/ethnic councils were represented, the event truly portrayed the RCA’s desire to be re-formed and reforming according to the Word of God:
Re-formed in its "already but not yet" acceptance of an African root, Hispanic root, Pacific and Asian root, and American Indian root alongside its beloved traditional Dutch root. The RCA's diversity is not yet fully manifested in most of the Sunday morning worship services of RCA churches.

Reforming according to the Word of God:

For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another (Rom. 12:4-5).

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. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many (1 Cor. 12:13-14).

Out of this unity amidst diversity, the Newark Covenant was born (see MGS 1995, pp. 309-10), and the 1995 General Synod adopted a recommendation to regularly and periodically schedule similar gatherings (MGS 1995, R-3, p. 310). To this end, the CCM advisory committee will meet prior to Spring Sabbath (April 11-12, 1996) in St. Louis, Missouri, to plan the 1997 event.

Reflection upon the CCM event of 1995 presents several questions:

Will we ever see such unity in RCA churches?

Is possible that ethnic groups—united in Jesus, yet maintaining their cultural identities, and gathering to celebrate, share, and create—reflect the emerging new paradigm?

Is this the new model of ministry that will revive, rebuild, and restore not only urban communities but also the church of Jesus Christ?

Perhaps the 1997 event will provide greater clarity!

Visits were made during 1995 to twelve RCA churches in the New York metropolitan area. CCM continues to advocate partnering between affluent and inner-city churches. In March 1996, for instance, partnering occurred between First Reformed Church in Orange City, Iowa, and Fordham Manor Reformed Church in Bronx, New York.

REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF SMALL MEMBERSHIP CHURCHES

The movie Mr. Holland's Opus traces the vocational life of a high school music teacher over thirty years. Near the end of his career, forced out by educational economics which regard the arts as nonessential, Mr. Holland sees himself as having lived a life in which nothing important happened. Yet his was a life in which the core issues of identity, gifts, and purpose were clarified for hundreds of students.

The parallel is strong between Mr. Holland and the RCA's small membership churches and the pastors who serve them.

Each Sunday more than twenty-five thousand Reformed Church members, in over four hundred congregations, will gather to worship in groups of less than one hundred. Most of the people who attend RCA smaller congregations do so, not because they have to, but because they want to. They make an intentional choice to seek God in places of intimacy for worship, fellowship, service, and education in order to clarify their identity, gifts, and purpose.
Small membership churches are the image of the RCA. The RCA is a denomination held together by a diversity of relationships and histories, intertwining people who seemingly have no common ground; it is the RCA’s strength. That same diversity and history is found within most RCA small membership churches; it is their strength.

In the cities, Anglos and people of color listen together to God’s promise of faithfulness to those who will remain faithful in the lean years. In the hectic suburbs, frazzled families, who have been transferred across the country, discover the roots that they thought they left behind as they worship in neighborhood congregations. In rural areas, farmers share communion with commuters who travel hours each day to jobs. They become surrogate family for each other, filling in for those children who have left the farms and for those parents who have gone south for retirement.

Small membership congregations are important to the RCA because, in these often-crisis-laden congregations, the RCA is discovering new ways and means to minister that can aid larger congregations as they try to understand small group dynamics and can aid new church development pastors as they struggle with a sense of isolation. The issues of small group dynamics and pastoral isolation are the issues that RCA successful small membership church pastors have faced for years; they have a wealth of knowledge and instinct they can share. For too long there has been a reluctance to acknowledge and honor the gifts and the wisdom of small membership church pastors and lay leaders. For too long RCA small membership churches have been seen as a problem to be solved. They are not; they are a blessing to be invoked. The failure to call upon these small membership churches is a loss that has been far greater to the denomination than to the local congregation.

The primary service provided by the associate for small membership churches is consultation and referral through toll-free telephone service, (800) 291-4464, or through electronic mail, rca_smc@aol.com. This service is available to all RCA congregational and denominational leaders who wish to engage the associate for small membership churches in creative problem-solving or in sharing resources and experiences. Over the past year, 161 such contacts and follow-ups were made with congregational leaders. Additionally, the associate for small membership churches has been actively involved with New Brunswick Theological Seminary and Western Theological Seminary in the development of their supervised ministry programs to give students exposure to small church life.

The issues of clergy morale, the financial realities of programs and buildings, and a perceived sense of denominational indifference toward small membership churches continue to trouble many who serve in RCA small churches, but as with Mr. Holland, there are those “good and faithful servants” who quietly and effectively go about their business of bringing the gospel to the world where they have been called. It is a privilege to be in contact with them, to learn from them, and to salute them as they continue to serve their Lord.

REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF NEW CHURCH DEVELOPMENT

The new church development section of Evangelism and Church Development Services is responsible for the following areas:

1. Coordinating New Church Starts

The RCA has learned that one of the most effective ways to begin a new congregation is to have an established congregation be a parenting church. This means that key lay people from the parenting congregation form a sponsoring committee to design this ministry from its inception to its organization as a congregation.
2. Receiving Congregations by Adoption

One of the ways congregations have been received into the RCA is through adoption. The following guidelines were written to facilitate the process.

GUIDELINES FOR RECEIVING CONGREGATIONS BY ADOPTION

Background

A request to be part of the Reformed Church in America can originate from, and be presented to, different agents. A person or group interested in becoming part of the RCA may contact the denomination, the regional synod, the classis, or an RCA minister and request information about how to proceed. The Book of Church Order (BCO) is clear that it is a classis responsibility to supervise and receive congregations into its fellowship (BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 2, Section 5). Although it appears that the simple solution may be to say, "This is a classis issue and the classis needs to deal with churches or ministers on an individual basis," nonetheless it is necessary to take into consideration the racial/ethnic diversity within the country and the fact that many RCA classes have no experience in dealing with diverse racial/ethnic groups.

Guidelines

1. An initial meeting is to be scheduled with those persons expressing interest in becoming part of the RCA. This meeting can be held with regional synod persons, members of a classis, or a combination of both. It may also be helpful to have a member of the appropriate racial/ethnic council present at an initial meeting. The purpose of the initial meeting is to hear about the vision for ministry and to inform the inquiring party of the polity and theology of the RCA.

2. If interest in becoming part of the RCA continues to be expressed after hearing a clear articulation of the polity and theology of the RCA, the focus of the dialogue changes. Persons conferring with interested individuals should:

   a. Scrutinize the credentials (education, ordination, and sponsoring body) of the pastor interested in transferring into the RCA. Explain that the denomination’s BCO requires all entering pastors be examined in "the theology, history, government, and disciplinary procedures of the Reformed Church in America" (BCO, Part II, Article 12, Section 3). Give information concerning the content of the exam.

   b. Explore the polity and theology of the current denomination and the polity and theology of the individual interested in becoming an RCA pastor. If differences exist, a second meeting paying special attention to those areas is recommended.

   c. Examine the differences between the RCA and the denomination of the interested individual or group.

   d. Explain the RCA’s expectations concerning assessments and askings.

   e. Ask what expectations the interested individual/group has; i.e., What are they looking for from the RCA? Why do they want to join?
3. When the above issues are dealt with, and the interested individual/group believes they wish to continue discussion, another meeting is scheduled. If the classis has not been represented at the first meeting, it must be included in any subsequent meetings.

Also, if the classis has not been part of the first meeting, a log of that meeting shall be sent to the appropriate stated clerk for the classis' information and records.

4. Subsequent meetings are to include clergy and lay leaders from the interested group, RCA personnel from the first meeting, representatives from the classis, and, if appropriate, representatives from the related racial/ethnic council.

Agenda at these meetings shall include:

a. Discussion of a "courtship" period; i.e., a minimum period of six months during which the interested group has a chance to relate to the RCA and the RCA has a chance to get to know and understand the group. To take full advantage of this period:

   1. A sponsoring RCA church (or churches) is urged to take the group under its care. Invitations are to be extended for the interested group to attend a minimum of three consistory meetings, a minimum of two classis meetings, and a minimum of two worship and fellowship times.

   2. It is recommended that a sponsoring committee be formed to become the liaison between the interested group and the classis. This committee monitors the "courtship" period and is in touch with key persons from the group interested in joining the RCA, answers questions, and keeps a dialogue going between the two parties.

   3. During this period the pastor is given examples of specific questions that may be asked on the classis exam. A mentor is assigned to the pastor at this time if one is needed and/or desired.

b. An open and honest discussion of expectations needs to take place. For instance, if the new group expects loans for buildings, the rules regarding how long a congregation must be a member of the RCA before funds are loaned need to be articulated.

5. During the "courtship" each party will have the opportunity to become better acquainted and will be better able to reach a conclusion about affiliation or membership in the RCA. If the decision regarding affiliation is positive, the following shall be arranged:

a. If necessary, the pastor will be examined.

b. In consultation with the classis and regional synod executive, an application to be placed in the denominational plan will be completed and sent to the Council of Field Secretaries.

c. Classis will arrange a service in which the congregation is received into the fellowship of the RCA.
d. The classis will ensure that the church is properly incorporated and that the church’s articles of incorporation properly confirm the relationship of the church to the denomination. Specifically, the church’s articles of incorporation should specifically confirm the following:

1. The church is a member church in the Reformed Church in America and is subject to (and shall be governed by) the Reformed Church in America’s Book of Church Order (BCO).

2. Upon any dissolution of the church all of its assets shall be transferred as provided in the BCO.

3. The articles and bylaws of the church may not be amended or modified without the prior written consent of the classis.

(For examples of specific language to be used in articles and bylaws for a church, contact the Rev. Richard Welscott, coordinator for new church development.)

R-5.
To refer the above (in bold) Guidelines for Receiving Congregations by Adoption to stated clerks of classes; and further,

to urge RCA classes to implement these guidelines. (ADOPTED)

3. 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.

The fifth RCA Assessment Clinic was held in August 1995 at Thorn Creek Reformed Church in South Holland, Illinois, with seven couples and two individuals attending. The participants were helped to evaluate their gifts in communication, group process, interpersonal relationships, conflict management, faith development, and visioning. At the conclusion of the clinic, candidates were encouraged to pursue new church planting, to seek some personal growth and skill development before entering such work, to remain in their present ministry, or to explore other opportunities.

Another tool used in evaluation is an interview developed by the Gallup organization. This interview process was designed to help an individual evaluate his or her particular abilities as the individual relates to RCA new church development. This tool was developed in 1994 and is used extensively by classis and regional synods interested in beginning a new congregation. To date more than seventy persons have been interviewed by Gallup.

R-6.
To encourage RCA congregations and pastors to identify persons who have skills to begin new RCA congregations and to assist those persons in pursuing the option of beginning a new congregation. (ADOPTED)

4. Consultations

The coordinator for new church development is available to the regional synods as a resource person. In that capacity each regional synod executive has been contacted in the past year, and assistance was given when requested. Several church evaluations have been completed and various possibilities for new churches have been explored.
5. Denominational Plan

An application to be placed in the denominational plan, which all new RCA congregations must complete, requests information dealing with the purpose of the ministry, the supervision of the ministry, and the financial plan to support the ministry. Once completed, the application must be submitted to the classis, the regional synod, and the Council of Field Secretaries for approval before submission for final approval to the General Synod Council.

The following churches were approved for placement in the denominational plan in the past year:

- Cornerstone Church, Bourbonnais, Illinois
- Primera Iglesia Reformada, Clifton, New Jersey
- New Hope Community Church, Shelby, Michigan

R-7.
To pause for a time of prayer to support the following three ministries that have been entered into the denominational plan from June 1995 to June 1996:

- Cornerstone Church, Bourbonnais, Illinois
- Primera Iglesia Reformada, Clifton, New Jersey
- New Hope Community Church, Shelby, Michigan (ADOPTED)

The Rev. Richard Welscott, coordinator for new church development, led General Synod in a time of prayer.

6. Reception of New Congregations

The following congregations celebrated their organization between June 1995 and June 1996:

- Christ’s Church, St. Peters, Missouri
- Choongsyn Korean Reformed Church, Flushing, New York
- Harvest Community Church, Wichita, Kansas
- Sheffield Reformed Church, Sheffield, Ontario
- Fourth Corner Community Church, Bellingham, Washington
- Cornerstone Church, Bourbonnais, Illinois
- Emmaus Christian Fellowship, Langley, British Columbia

R-8.
To adopt the following resolution:

BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred and ninetieth regular session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting at Northwestern College in Orange City, Iowa, on the twelfth day of June, 1996, gives recognition and heartily celebrates the organization of the following congregations:

- Christ’s Church, St. Peters, Missouri
- Choongsyn Korean Reformed Church, Flushing, New York
- Harvest Community Church, Wichita, Kansas
- Sheffield Reformed Church, Sheffield, Ontario
- Fourth Corner Community Church, Bellingham, Washington
- Cornerstone Church, Bourbonnais, Illinois
- Emmaus Christian Fellowship, Langley, British Columbia (ADOPTED)
The Rev. Richard Welscott, coordinator for new church development, presented plaques to representatives of the above newly organized churches recognized at the 1996 General Synod. The Rev. Stephanie Doeschot, pastor of Christ’s Church in St. Peters, Missouri, addressed the Synod on behalf of these new churches.

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.

The coordinator for new church development is responsible for supervising the distribution of $9.8 by ’98 funds raised for capital and program grants. One individual from each of the RCA’s regional synods serves on the $9.8 by ’98 Grant Committee, which reviews all applications. This committee has met, and the first distribution of funds took place in April 1996.

R-9. To encourage each RCA congregation to participate in the $9.8 by ’98 fund drive. (ADOPTED)

From the Report of the General Synod Council’s Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee

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 I, 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 1996 General Synod.

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:
BUILDING THE CHURCH FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

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. 27:14; 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. 4:3, 5-6; Matt. 16:16, 18; Eph. 2:20; 1 Cor. 12:7; 1 Pet. 4:10-11; 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 overflowing 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.
(Matt. 28:19 (KJV); Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8; John 10:16; John 14:2; Luke 14:23; John 4:35, 38; Acts 2:47; Acts 6:7; Col. 1:5-6; Rev. 7:9)

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;
Debtor's 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 Report

REPORT OF WORDS OF HOPE

Fiftieth Anniversary Milestone Award

During 1995 Words of Hope celebrated its fiftieth year of gospel broadcasting with special anniversary celebrations in Grand Rapids, Michigan; Sioux Center, Iowa; and Pella, Iowa. On February 3, 1996, National Religious Broadcasters (NRB) officially recognized Words of Hope's fiftieth anniversary by awarding its Milestone Award during the opening plenary session of NRB's fifty-third annual convention.

International Broadcasting

Sudan: Words of Hope is preparing new broadcasts in four African languages previously unreached via missionary radio. These include radio programs to the Sudan's Dinka and Nuer people groups. In previous decades these peoples richly benefitted from RCA missionary outreach. They have been victims of intense religious persecution in recent years. In September 1996 Words of Hope plans to begin broadcasting the hope of the gospel to these suffering believers via FEBA's (the United Kingdom-based Far East Broadcasting Associates) shortwave transmitters in the Seychelles Islands in the Indian Ocean. Sudanese production teams will be based in Kenya.

Mozambique: Also in September 1996 Words of Hope plans to add its third and fourth Mozambican languages when broadcasts begin in Sena and Makonde from FEBA/Seychelles. Words of Hope already broadcasts daily programs to Mozambique's Lomwe and Makhuwa
peoples from Trans World Radio in Swaziland. Observers confirm that in the past two years at least three hundred new Lomwe and Makhuwa congregations have been spawned by listeners to these broadcasts.

**Twi:** In 1995 Words of Hope began broadcasting its nightly Twi programs from a 500,000-watt transmitter near Johannesburg, South Africa. Signal coverage and listener response has been excellent.

**Arabic:** The Arab world is one of the most strategic mission fields. In God’s providence, Words of Hope’s Arabic radio ministry has been highly effective, based on mail response from Muslim listeners and inquirers. The primary radio outlet is one of the most listened-to stations in the world: the French-owned Radio Monte Carlo, Cyprus. (Radio Monte Carlo also operates sister stations in Monaco and France.) Even international broadcasters like the BBC acknowledge that RMC/Cyprus reaches more Middle East listeners than any other station. During evening hours Trans World Radio takes over the programming and features Arabic language gospel programs such as Words of Hope.

Words of Hope’s Arabic broadcaster is convinced that "Radio broadcasting is indeed the most important means for penetrating Arab and Muslim countries. We have in our files tens of thousands of people who have written before, but now we have at least three hundred people writing every month and those are the ones who are writing for the first time. The majority of those are people of Muslim background, and it’s exciting to see the number growing from countries that are closed to any other form of public proclamation of the gospel—like Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, and Saudi Arabia. It’s exciting to see people actually engaged in Bible studies underground in countries like Saudi Arabia. We now have brethren in Christ, native to the Islamic holy city of Mecca."

**English:** Words of Hope’s weekly English programs with the Rev. David Bast, Words of Hope’s president and broadcast minister, are currently broadcast on about 130 stations in North America, as well as half a dozen major international medium and shortwave stations. The English program was recently added to the ASTRA satellite in Europe, receivable by millions of European satellite dish owners. Words of Hope is the only North American program presently offered to Europe via ASTRA. Words of Hope’s English programs are also being broadcast via satellite to the Republic of South Africa.

**Japanese TV Documentary:** During the first three weeks of February 1996 an NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corporation) production crew visited Quito, Ecuador, to produce a forty-five-minute television documentary program about Words of Hope’s Japanese broadcaster. Kazuo Ozaki directs HCJB’s Japanese service and also serves as Words of Hope’s Japanese program producer. Kazuo described the opportunity as overwhelming: “Having a non-Christian TV network wanting to present our ministry is truly a work of God. It gives viewers great access to the gospel, introducing true stories of listeners who have found peace, joy, and love through their difficulties via our Japanese broadcasts. We have a lot to tell!” The “Beyond the Andes” documentary was aired in March 1996 on Japan’s nationwide ETV (Educational TV) network.

**International Programming Consultation:** Words of Hope recently convened an international programming consultation to evaluate the effectiveness of its current programming efforts and to explore additional strategy options. The participants included specialists in audience research, cross-cultural program production, audience follow-up, and international broadcasting. The group affirmed Words of Hope’s current approach and offered valuable suggestions about ways to enhance future programming effectiveness.
Global Partnerships

World by 2000: Words of Hope is an active participant on the steering committee of the cooperative World by 2000 initiative to extend the reach of missionary radio to every people group of at least one million persons. Words of Hope has been directly involved in launching one-third of the sixty-three megalanguages which have been added for broadcast since the World by 2000 project was launched in 1985.

AD2000 & Beyond Movement: World evangelization requires coordinated efforts among many different types of ministries. That is why Words of Hope and its World by 2000 partners are working closely with the more general and broadly based AD2000 & Beyond Movement. The movement’s purpose is to encourage, motivate, and network church leaders by inspiring them with the vision of reaching the unreached by the year 2000 through consultations, prayer efforts, and communications.

In December 1995 Words of Hope’s Lee DeYoung, vice president for broadcasting ministries, represented World by 2000 at a meeting in Colorado Springs, Colorado, of 262 Christian leaders representing 140 mission agencies and denominations from 77 countries. The group considered the future thrust of pioneer missionary outreach. Participants developed a series of coordinated plans for implementing the AD2000 & Beyond Movement’s “Joshua Project 2000” plan for strategic missionary outreach. The World by 2000 partners, including Words of Hope, are already broadcasting gospel programs in the languages of 557 of the 1,685 people groups targeted by Joshua Project 2000. Further, new broadcasts in the languages of 205 additional groups are targeted.

The five-year Joshua Project 2000 plan focuses on a priority list of 1,685 people groups with populations exceeding 10,000, less than 5 percent of whom are Christian. Adopting churches and agencies would send research and prayer teams to each of the targeted groups to lay preliminary groundwork for evangelism and church-planting. For each of the 1,685 Joshua Project 2000 people groups, at least ten adopting congregations will need to be recruited worldwide.

Literature Online

Exponential growth seems to characterize Words of Hope’s site on the Internet’s World Wide Web. Launched in April 1995, the web site is part of the Muskegon-based Gospel Communications Network. The number of file downloads for Words of Hope’s daily devotional guide grew from 533 in April 1995 to more than 35,000 during February 1996. Users access the service from more than thirty different countries, including Singapore, Sweden, Korea, and Norway. Words of Hope plans to continue adding many more ministry resources throughout 1996. The web address is http://www.gospelcom.net/woh.

Grateful Thanks

Words of Hope is very grateful to RCA regional synods, classes, congregations, and members who have faithfully supported the ministry through their prayers and gifts. During 1995, RCA congregations contributed a total of $918,747, including $677,969 in regular giving and $240,778 in specially designated gifts.

➢The Rev. David Bast, president and broadcast minister of Words of Hope, addressed Synod. Synod viewed a video presentation about the Words of Hope ministry.➢
From the Report of the General Secretary

P-1 (p. 45) was referred to the Advisory Committee on Evangelization and Church Growth and the Advisory Committee on World Mission.

In response to P-1 (p. 45), the advisory committee recommended:

R-10.
To instruct the General Synod Council’s Evangelism and Church Development Services Committee and Mission Services Committee, in cooperation with the racial/ethnic councils and the Council of Field Secretaries, to develop a vision and implementation plan for new congregations from 1998 to 2005, with special attention to urban areas; and further,

to develop a variety of models for these new congregations in different economic, cultural, and ethnic settings, for report to the 1997 General Synod. (ADOPTED)<

P-2 (p. 46) was referred to the Advisory Committee on Evangelization and Church Growth.

In response to P-2 (p. 46), the advisory committee recommended:

R-11.
To instruct the General Synod Council’s Evangelism and Church Development Services Committee, in cooperation with the Council of Field Secretaries and the Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee, to engage in a study of revitalized congregations; and further,

to propose, using that study as a basis, specific plans and strategies for such revitalization that can be implemented through the General Synod Council in cooperation with regional synods, classes, and consistory; and further,

to make this study a priority during 1997 and 1998, for report to the 1998 General Synod. (ADOPTED)<

(A motion was made and supported to amend R-11 by deleting the words “and 1998, for report to the 1998 General Synod” and inserting the words “for report to the 1997 General Synod.” The motion LOST.)
REPORTS ON FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Report of the General Synod Council’s Finance Services Committee

1997 INCOME PROJECTIONS BASED ON ASKINGS DEVELOPED BY THE GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL

It is the responsibility of the General Synod Council (GSC) to provide, for consideration by the 1996 General Synod, a projection of anticipated income to be received during 1997 from RCA congregations in support of General Synod Council mission programs. Formerly referred to as the General Synod Mission Budget, this “budget” used to incorporate 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.

Mission askings today are becoming very difficult to define in the strict sense. What exactly is a “mission asking”? One would like to think that all dollars given to the church are for the work of missions. The term “askings” could perhaps be better defined today as voluntary contributions, so for the balance of this report, the term “contributions” will be used instead of the term “askings.”

Although the Board of Pensions, RCA seminaries, and RCA colleges used to be included in this report, it is impractical to continue this practice. The RCA seminaries, as well as the RCA colleges, do not have the same fiscal year-end as the General Synod Council; nor do they prepare budgets in a similar manner, making it difficult for any meaningful combined reporting.

The projection of contributions for various programs of the General Synod Council has the following objectives:

1. To provide guidance for local congregations as they review their pattern of giving to the programs of the General Synod Council.

2. To coordinate the fund-raising efforts of the participants in the General Synod Council as well as those of the other RCA agencies that operate programs with benevolent contributions.

3. To provide income expectations for the budgeting of programs in the General Synod Council.

In formulating projections for the coming year, it is customary to begin with a review of the pattern of giving in prior years. A multiple-year study of the actual giving to the General Synod Council follows, together with a graph showing the pattern of giving to the GSC between 1987 and 1995, the budget agreed upon for 1996, and the requested askings for contributions in 1997.
GSC Contribution Income
1987-1997

(1996 and 1997 are projections)
### Contributions to the Programs of the General Synod Council

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>Designated Gifts</th>
<th>RCWS Disaster Relief</th>
<th>Overseas Church Income</th>
<th>Undesignated</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>$6,231,380</td>
<td>$107,059</td>
<td>$281,990</td>
<td>$344,028</td>
<td>$6,964,457</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>$6,292,246</td>
<td>$172,832</td>
<td>$212,550</td>
<td>$332,830</td>
<td>$7,010,458</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>$6,033,892</td>
<td>$204,199</td>
<td>$252,536</td>
<td>$299,215</td>
<td>$6,789,842</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>$6,297,041</td>
<td>$88,862</td>
<td>$217,142</td>
<td>$372,623</td>
<td>$6,975,668</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>$6,225,278</td>
<td>$312,352</td>
<td>$145,788</td>
<td>$314,253</td>
<td>$6,997,671</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>$6,575,841</td>
<td>$351,153</td>
<td>$112,625</td>
<td>$280,992</td>
<td>$7,320,611</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>$6,061,482</td>
<td>$609,101</td>
<td>$156,901</td>
<td>$334,824</td>
<td>$7,162,308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>$6,103,936</td>
<td>$234,563</td>
<td>$121,018</td>
<td>$379,583</td>
<td>$6,839,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>$6,632,100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$185,000</td>
<td>$385,000</td>
<td>$7,202,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>$7,193,055</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$400,000</td>
<td>$330,000</td>
<td>$7,923,055</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**R-1.**

To approve the 1997 contribution income projection of $7,923,055. (ADOPTED)

➢ The advisory committee recommended:

**R-2.**

To encourage all RCA congregations to use the information from the RCA Stewardship and Communication Services report (see pp. 378-83) that explains the need for funds to meet the 1997 RCA contribution income projection of $7,923,055 and from the RCA Mission Services report that explains the mission vision of the RCA (see pp. 406-16). (ADOPTED)

Reason: Informed people give. <
MARTHA ANTOINETTE QUICK FUND

The Martha Antoinette Quick Fund was established under the last will and testament 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 1959, 50 percent of the income from the Quick Memorial Fund has been allocated for the work of church planning and development, while 40 percent has been allocated in some fashion to the RCA colleges and seminaries, with the remaining 10 percent being allocated to “special needs” arising at the General Synod meeting. Beginning in 1984, and continuing until the present day, the Theological Education Agency (TEA) has been the recipient of the 10 percent that had been traditionally allocated for “special needs.”

In 1997 allocation of the Quick fund monies, it is probably a good time to examine that allocation with respect to need, especially since no change has been made in the allocation since 1984. At the 1995 General Synod meeting the president’s report had several recommendations which focused on the urgent need to enhance the leadership within the Reformed Church in America (MGS 1995, pp. 25-31). Many of the recommendations in that report are now taking form, but unfortunately they have no source of funding. Without some way to fund these activities, many good projects related to the development of stronger leadership will die before they bear fruit. It is being proposed, therefore, that the 20 percent allocation that has been heretofore assigned to the RCA colleges instead be allocated to leadership development program needs within the Reformed Church in America.

Although RCA colleges, like other worthy causes, are always in need of additional funding, the RCA colleges have access to avenues of support which some sectors of the RCA do not have. Further, the relatively small amounts traditionally allocated to Hope, Central, and Northwestern, while not insignificant, do not loom large in their total budgets. This is not so for the budgets available to fund clergy leadership development and pastoral support. Further, the “special interest and concern” which the donor had for church extension can be given additional application by focusing on the leadership issues which are known to be the critical factor in the development of new congregations.

The principal balance of the Quick Fund as of December 31, 1995, stood at $1,119,721, with distributions split among the various recipients during 1995 amounting to $69,185.
The advisory committee recommended to amend R-3:

R-3.
To allocate the 1997 income from the Martha Antoinette Quick Memorial Fund as follows:

50 percent for the church planning and development work of the General Synod Council;

20 percent [for] to the RCA leadership development [and pastoral support] fund;

10 percent for student aid grants at New Brunswick Theological Seminary;

10 percent for student aid grants at Western Theological Seminary; and

10 percent to the Theological Education Agency for operating expenses. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

Reason: The amendment specifies the funds to an already existing account for leadership development for pastors.

REPORT ON SPECIAL APPEALS

In past years the General Synod Council (GSC) has received a report from the treasurer on 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).

It is no secret that fund raising has recently taken on a new look. Much more attention is given to solicitation of funds through direct mailings, especially targeting those individuals who have a special interest in the project being promoted. Most areas of the church are constantly raising funds outside their current operating budgets and under the old definitions would be considered as making special appeals.

This transformation has led to an increased focus on the subject by the Office of Stewardship and Communication. This office has begun and will continue to work in harmony and partnership with the various agencies of the church to coordinate all fund-raising efforts. Along with this new focus will come the responsibility of producing future reports on special appeals.

This being a transition year, however, the RCA treasurer produced the following routine list of those who are involved in some phase of a special appeals fund drive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Campaign</th>
<th>Dollar Cost</th>
<th>Status/Phase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Synod Council</td>
<td>$9.8 by '98</td>
<td>$9.8 million</td>
<td>Solicitation, Collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synods of Mid-Atlantics and New York</td>
<td>Warwick Conference Center</td>
<td>$6 million</td>
<td>Collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synod of Mid-America</td>
<td>Manitoqua Ministries</td>
<td>$800,000</td>
<td>Collection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additions are in light-face type, deletions are enclosed in brackets.
### Agency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Campaign</th>
<th>Dollar Cost</th>
<th>Status/Phase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Synod of New York</td>
<td>Virgin Islands</td>
<td>$500,000</td>
<td>Solicitation, Collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hurricane Marilyn</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disaster Relief</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Brunswick Theological Seminary</td>
<td>Asian-American Program</td>
<td>$600,000</td>
<td>Collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Brunswick Theological Seminary</td>
<td>Endowment Fund Drive</td>
<td>$4 million</td>
<td>Solicitation, Collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Theological Seminary</td>
<td>Campaign for Western</td>
<td>$12 million</td>
<td>Solicitation, Collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northwestern College</td>
<td>Call to Commitment Expanding the Vision</td>
<td>$15 million</td>
<td>Collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope College</td>
<td>Hope in the Future</td>
<td>$50 million</td>
<td>Collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central College</td>
<td>Agenda for Leadership</td>
<td>$7.6 million</td>
<td>Collection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 funds will be used for five pioneer broadcasts per year for five years to unreached language peoples in the Indian subcontinent, Indonesia, Russia, and parts of Asia and Africa. 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.

### GENERAL SYNOD ASSESSMENT FORMULA

At its June, 1995 meeting, the General Synod voted:

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 Council Finance Services Committee to present a final report to the 1997 General Synod (MGS1995, R-7, p. 350).

In an attempt to begin the accomplishment of R-7, it was suggested that additional persons be added to the GSC Finance Services Committee in order to gain complete perspective of the matter at hand. An ad hoc committee was established by Gerald Verbridge, as moderator of the GSC Finance Services Committee, in consultation with General Secretary Wesley Granberg-Michaelson.
The ad hoc committee is comprised of the following individuals:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Louis Benes</td>
<td>GSC Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shari Brink</td>
<td>GSC Finance Services Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewell Cooper</td>
<td>GSC Finance Services Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harry De Bruyn (chair)</td>
<td>GSC Finance Services Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donald De Vries</td>
<td>GSC Finance Services Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wesley Oranberg-Michaelson</td>
<td>RCA General Secretary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victor Eimicke</td>
<td>GSC Finance Services Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen Hammel</td>
<td>GSC Finance Services Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vernon Hoffs</td>
<td>GSC Finance Services Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew Lee</td>
<td>RCA Treasurer and Director of Financial Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gregg Mast</td>
<td>GSC Policy, Planning, and Administration Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack Tice</td>
<td>RCA Controller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gerald Verbridge</td>
<td>GSC Finance Services Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenneth Weller</td>
<td>GSC Stewardship and Communication Services Committee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because it was inconceivable for the ad hoc committee to complete a study of this magnitude within the allotted time of regular GSC meetings, it was decided to establish separate meeting times which would closely correlate to the scheduled GSC meeting dates. During the past year the ad hoc committee met three times, once in January 1996, and once in March 1996, and once in May 1996.

In preparation for the January 1996 meeting it was decided to gather ideas from all corners of the denomination for this General Synod assessment formula. In that regard, an article from the RCA treasurer was published in the September 1995 Church Herald and the fall 1996 Servant Leaders to solicit ideas. Both articles requested individuals to pass their ideas along to their stated clerks of classes. Stated clerks were also informed of this action and were asked to forward the acquired data to the Office of Finance no later than January 1, 1996.

The material collected from this “appeal for ideas” was very sparse. A total of five classes responded, and two individuals wrote to share their ideas. This lack of response leads one to believe that although most people are opposed to assessments, there might not be a more equitable way to raise the required funds.

At its January 1996 meeting the ad hoc committee explored several preliminary assumptions about the current assessment formula that seem to be underlying the issue. They are as follows:

1. The present formula is “unfair.”
2. Small congregations are burdened by it.
3. There is a lack of ownership by congregations in the assessment process.
4. Ownership of the process would make the payment more acceptable.
5. The present formula may encourage inaccurate reporting.
6. Any formula must pass a “fairness test” on both the process of establishing the assessment amount and the levying of the assessment to secure that amount.
7. Trust, transparency, and accountability must be both perceived and real in dealing with assessments.
8. A fairness test must include a financial component related to the ability to pay.
9. The final formula should be uniformly used by the General Synod, regional synods, and classes.
10. Growing churches must be encouraged by the formula.
11. Total church income (not giving) should be considered in drafting a new formula.
12. Consideration should be given to including baptized members in the formula.
13. The new formula could include both income and membership, with the possibility of certain items being excluded or given "weighted" consideration.
14. The *Family Finances* brochure should be expanded to include data for the regional synods and classes.
15. Work should be done to increase perception of ownership of programs for which assessments are levied.

In addition to the above assumptions, the ad hoc committee felt a new assessment formula should be created that will produce accuracy in reporting of the data, should encourage churches to grow in numbers and income, should ease the burden for financially strapped churches, should not place an inordinate burden on financially sound churches, should not result in a dramatic shift of payment responsibility, and must be relatively simple to calculate and understand!

The Office of Finance, together with periodic input from the ad hoc committee members, will continue to prepare alternative models for assessment, based on the statistical information provided from the consistorial report forms.

**FUNDING FOR THEOLOGICAL STUDENTS**

In response to a proposal presented by the president of General Synod, the 1995 General Synod voted:

> 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 (*MGS 1995*, R-12, p. 356).

At its October 1995 meeting the GSC Finance Services Committee suggested that the development of a plan for funding theological education for RCA students await the report of the Task Force on Standards for the Preparation for the Professional Ministry in the Reformed Church in America, which is to be presented at the 1996 General Synod. This task force is developing a new model for theological education, and the committee reported that it is premature to develop a funding plan prior to the final report of the task force. A report on development of a plan to fund theological education for RCA students will be presented at the 1997 General Synod.

The Classis of Mid-Hudson submitted the following overture to the 1995 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
repa\protect\cking 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 (MGS 1995, p. 299).

In response to the above overture, the 1995 General Synod voted:

- to refer Overture 4 to the General Synod Council Finance Services Committee for study and report to the 1996 General Synod; and further,


At its October 1995 meeting the GSC Finance Services Committee noted that the RCA already has a student fund for RCA theological students. The GSC Finance Services Committee also noted that the Report of the Task Force on Procedural Steps Toward Ordination presented at the 1993 General Synod (MGS 1993, pp. 325-37) gave clear direction to classes for the financial support of theological students/candidates for ministry. GSC then voted, at its October 1995 meeting, to request the Office of Ministry and Personnel Services to do the following: 1) inform the stated clerks of classes about the existence and guidelines of the student fund for theological education, 2) review the guidelines of this fund and propose any revisions to the General Synod Council for approval, 3) strongly encourage classes to develop a policy for the financial support of their theological students/candidates for ministry, and 4) suggest that classes use as a resource for the development of this financial support policy the report of the Task Force on Procedural Steps Toward Ordination presented at the 1993 General Synod (see MGS 1993, pp. 325-37).

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 the supervision of SAC staff.

INTRODUCTION

The mission of the stewardship program is:

To provide financial resources and promote personal and spiritual growth for the ministry of the RCA through fund raising, gift planning, and stewardship education programs.

STEWARDSHIP

The stewardship program area of SAC has experienced a year of growth and revitalization. Establishing the RCA Foundation has redefined SAC's work. The 1995 General Synod adopted bylaws for the RCA Foundation (MGS 1995, R-9, pp. 232-36). The members of the GSC's Stewardship and Communications Services Committee are the board of directors for the foundation.
The Rev. Norm Tellier continues to coordinate the work of the Office of Gift Planning. Four new part-time or contract staff positions have been added through funding from the RCA Foundation and SAC. The Rev. Walter Pickup is working in the area of estate and gift planning in the regional synods of Mid-America and the Great Lakes. Dian Little is working in the area of fund raising and stewardship education in the Regional Synod of the Far West. Larry Humme is working in the area of individual donor special gift development and fund raising. Jane Richardson is coordinating stewardship education and annual giving programs.

STEWARDSHIP EDUCATION

Stewardship education is an urgent priority in the RCA—for congregations, for members, and for the denomination. Resources and programs are offered to help develop biblical attitudes and behavior as Christian stewards. Jane Richardson began her work on January 1, 1996, for an eighty-day per-year (one-third time) contract to coordinate stewardship education and annual giving programs for the RCA.

A network of stewardship associates will be developed to assist RCA congregations in the delivery of stewardship services. These individuals will be identified and recruited to be trained as stewardship associates in partnership with regional staff. After they are trained, denominational and regional offices will promote utilization of their services in RCA congregations, primarily as guest leaders/stewards for Consecration Sundays.

Print Resources

Last year one issue of a new stewardship periodical was sent to pastors in all RCA congregations. The magazine, A Stewardship Magazine for Congregational Leaders, is published twice a year by the Presbyterian Church (USA). This year both issues of the magazine will be offered free of charge through Servant Leaders to anyone calling (800) 968-7221 to request them.

The Spiritual Discipline of Tithing resource packet contains print and audiovisual materials for worship, Bible study, reflections on culture, and the identification and sharing of personal attitudes and experiences concerning money and giving. Outlines are included for using this material both in a retreat setting and as a six-week, one-hour adult study.

The Steward’s Life material includes the stewardship statement approved by the 1984 General Synod (MGS 1984, R-4, p. 244), a four session study guide based on the statement, and a series of four bulletin covers. A companion children’s study course, My Life: A Steward’s Life, is also available.

Three booklets especially designed for stewardship education in smaller membership churches are: Stewardship in the Small-membership Congregation, Biblical Stewardship Principles, and Faithful, Hopeful, Loving (which includes a commitment time). These booklets are published by the Ecumenical Center for Stewardship Studies.

The RCA Resources for Ministry catalog lists more than fifteen additional print and audiovisual resources for use in stewardship education for pastors, key leaders, and the congregations.

ANNUAL GIVING

In these times of frequently limited or diminishing resources, an annual giving program is increasingly important in many congregations. A good annual giving program assists congregations in budget planning, goal setting, stewardship education, the annual campaign, and capital campaigns.
The RCA offers limited staff assistance to congregations in their annual giving programs.
Regional mission services staff and the (one-third time) stewardship education coordinator can allot only a small portion of time for consultation with congregations in annual giving programs. The corps of associates to be trained this year will add significantly to the human resources pool.

**Print Resources**

Two similar print resources, *Consecrating Stewards* (published by the United Church Press) and *Consecration Sunday* (published by the Upper Room), are available through the RCA Distribution Center to assist congregations with the popular commitment or loyalty Sunday annual giving program. Both of these resources are developed upon the need of the giver to give, rather than the congregation’s need to receive financial support for a church budget.

Annual giving campaign materials, including posters, bulletin folders, bulletin inserts, letterhead, commitment cards, and bookmarks, are all available through the RCA Distribution Center and can be used in a variety of annual giving program approaches.

**DIRECT GIVING**

The worldwide mission program of the RCA is generously supported by RCA congregations through Partnership in Mission (PIM) shares, special offerings, and undesignated gifts. Additional funds contributed through assessments and benevolent gifts support staff and programs in Congregational Services and Evangelism and Church Development Services.

The 1992 General Synod recommended that the RCA strengthen its funding sources through the solicitation of financial gifts from individuals (*MGS 1992*, R-26, p. 71). This recommendation has been carried out in the development of a direct giving program that includes special mailings to RCA members and a new program of individual donor solicitation for special gifts.

**Direct Mail**

The direct mail program has included a year-end and Lenten appeal each year. These mailings have been sent to approximately 28,400 RCA members. Seven mailings have been sent to RCA members since the program was initiated. Contributions from these mailings have totaled approximately $700,300. The list of names that is used for direct giving appeals has been developed from a variety of sources including the Consistorial Report Form. The *Church Herald* name and address list has not been used for the direct mail program. Provisions in the direct giving guidelines allow individuals and congregations to ask that their names be deleted from the direct giving list.

Each September a letter is sent to all RCA pastors and congregations listing all the year-end special financial appeals. The following is a list of the special appeals for 1995.

**Lenten Appeal.** The 1995 Lenten appeal was designated for world hunger relief.

**Children in Worship.** Contributions from this appeal were used to present the Children in Worship program and to provide material for two Children in Worship centers in the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa.

**Social Witness.** This appeal was for Reformed Church World Service public witness programs and projects carried out through the RCA Office of Social Witness.
Advent Packet. Each year Congregational Services produces a special Advent packet that includes a Sunday school Christmas offering. The 1995 offering helped support the expansion of the Children and Worship ministry among the congregations of the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa.

Children’s Christmas Fund. The Board of Pensions sends a special appeal each year at Christmas to benefit the dependent children of deceased RCA ministers.

Special Thanksgiving Offering. The General Fund of the Board of Pensions gives assistance grants to ministers, missionaries, and their spouses who retired before the RCA Annuity Fund could be of much financial benefit.

Special Project Appeal. Mission Services annually asks congregations to consider extra gifts for RCA mission projects and programs as they allocate year-end benevolence contributions.

Year-end Direct Giving Appeal. The 1995 year-end appeal was for financial support for Reformed Church World Service in areas of hunger, health, and emergency relief.

SPECIAL GIFTS

The new program for special gifts will serve to identify and solicit funding for special programs and projects from individual donors. The coordinator of special gifts, Larry Hamme, will work with individuals across the RCA who express an interest and have an ability to financially support the denomination and its programs. This office will work with individual donors to the PPM and $9.8 by ’98 fund drives by presenting exciting and challenging opportunities for their financial support of current and future GSC programs. The Special Gifts Office will work toward developing and maintaining a donor prospect base for the RCA. The office will develop a long-range program of direct giving solicitation with RCA members and friends.

CAPITAL CAMPAIGNS

The coordination of capital campaigns is also the responsibility of SAC. This includes providing consultation and support for RCA congregations that are undertaking capital campaigns. During 1995 two RCA congregations were assisted in the development and implementation of capital campaigns by the Rev. Wayne Antworth. These congregations are seeking to raise a total of approximately $1,350,000 in pledges for 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, pp. 313-20), challenging the RCA 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. As of February 15, 1996, over 120 congregations have been organized, developed, identified as potential sites, or closed under the 98 by ’98 church growth program. The small number of churches that were closed did not meet the objective of financial self-sufficiency, although they all met the objective of reaching people for Jesus Christ.
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 the 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.

As of February 1, 1996, a total of $6,529,891 had been raised in pledges and gifts toward the campaign goal of $9,800,000. Disbursement of the $9.8 by '98 funds began in spring 1996.

The $9.8 by '98 Disbursement Committee held its first meeting on January 25, 1996. At the time of this meeting there were no formal requests for funds. The committee, however, did adopt procedures for determining capital and program grants through the $9.8 by '98 fund drive. The application process begins at the classis level. Once an application is approved by the classis and regional synod, it is reviewed by the committee. The committee determines whether the application will be submitted to the General Synod Council's Evangelism and Church Development Services Committee for final approval.

The fund raising for the $9.8 by '98 campaign was divided into two phases—the leadership/major gift phase and the congregational gift phase. The leadership/major gift phase began in 1993 and will continue throughout the course of the fund drive. As of February 1, 1996, a total of $2,255,901 in pledges and gifts were received during this phase. In addition, $3,277,452 in pledges and goals were received from the congregational phase of the campaign. The fund drive also received $804,970 from legacies and $192,000 from miscellaneous donors.

As of February 1, 1996, a total of 544 congregations are committed to financially participate in the fund drive. Of the remaining RCA congregations, 103 have not yet made a decision regarding their financial participation and only 259 congregations have decided not to financially participate in the fund drive. These figures do not include responses from the RCA's Canadian congregations. A plan for implementing the $9.8 by '98 campaign in Canada is currently being proposed to the Regional Synod of Canada.

The collection phase of $9.8 by '98 will continue throughout the campaign until the end of the fund drive in 1998. Promotion of the fund drive will continue for the duration of the campaign. Promotion materials include the $9.8 by '98 video, the Campaign Newsletter, and bulletin inserts. In addition, articles and advertisements will appear in the Church Herald and RCA Today.

The $9.8 by '98 Steering Committee, under the leadership of Andrea Van Beek, an attorney in Orange City, Iowa, and Jerrald Redeker, a retired banker from Holland, Michigan, concluded their work at the fall 1995 meeting. The committee members are to be commended for their dedication and service to the $9.8 by '98 campaign. Over the course of their tenure...
on the committee, they selflessly gave of their time and talents. The campaign also received the assistance of over two hundred RCA volunteers who participated during the leadership and congregational phases of the campaign. Their efforts on behalf of the fund drive are very much appreciated.

The campaign has also benefited from the hard work of its staff. Everett K. Hicks, campaign director, and the other campaign staff—Howard Vanderhart, Larryl Humme, Larry Miller, Jane Richardson, Raisa Nemikin, Joan Suda, and Lynn Taylor—conducted the campaign throughout all the regional synods of the Reformed Church in America. The $9.8 by '98 campaign has been coordinated by the Rev. Wayne Antworth, director of Stewardship and Communication Services. The ongoing work of the campaign will be handled by Larryl Humme, Raisa Nemikin, and Joan Suda.

The $9.8 by '98 fund drive has been blessed by the generosity of RCA members. Many stories of sacrificial giving have emerged. For instance, an anonymous donor gave a portion of the proceeds from the sale of his fall crops. A midwestern women's group donated the funds raised from an apple dumpling sale and a house tour. The members of a church that had closed its doors contributed to the campaign because they wanted to help strengthen RCA church starts. A church located on an American Indian reservation gave generously to help the campaign with its goal to “reach more people for Christ.” Leadership gifts from several dedicated RCA members and the participation of seven pilot churches gave the campaign a solid start and challenged others to participate generously.

Churches and individuals across the denomination have caught the vision of reaching others for Jesus Christ. The prayers of and support by Reformed Church in America members are especially requested as the $9.8 by '98 campaign continues forward to its conclusion in 1998.

Report of the RCA Foundation

The RCA Foundation was incorporated in 1994. Its major functions are to provide gift planning services to the denomination, manage endowment funds for the denomination and other assemblies of the RCA, and provide stewardship services through stewardship education and special gifts fund raising. It accomplishes these tasks through its Office of Gift Planning and Office of Special Gifts, and in cooperation with the Office of Finance.

The Office of Gift Planning is charged with promoting before the members of the RCA the various methods of making a gift to the church. 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 publication features a member of the RCA who has made a planned gift and explains how similar gifts may be made. Each issue includes a tear-off response form which is used extensively by those who receive the newsletter.

The office distributes a large supply of literature on the value of having a will and how gifts can be made in other ways. These materials are also sent on request and are distributed at workshops and displays.
In 1995 the office had one full-time staff person, the coordinator of gift planning, the Rev. Norman J. Tellier. Presentations on estate planning and/or financial planning were offered to groups in churches. In addition, a presentation on endowments was made to deacons, consistories, and other decision-making bodies. The coordinator's presentation suggests the establishment of endowment funds by RCA congregations and gives 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.)

As of January 1, 1996, Larryl B. Humme was hired as the coordinator for special gifts. The role and function of this office is to match specific funding needs of the denomination with a variety of funding sources. Primarily, this office works with individuals across the RCA who express interest and ability to financially aid the denomination and its programs. One of Humme's objectives is to contact individuals who have given to the PPIM and $9.8 by '98 fund drives and to share with them exciting and challenging ways they can financially support current and future programs of the RCA. The Office for Special Gifts also works toward developing and maintaining a donor prospect base for the RCA as well as developing a long-range program of direct giving solicitation.

In January 1996 the Rev. Walter E. Pickup was hired to work half-time as a gift planner in the states of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and Wisconsin. Pickup is an ordained RCA minister who has been working in the financial services industry for the past few years. He is uniquely qualified for the position he fills. He is also working to become certified as a financial planner.

During 1995 the Regional Synod of the Far West formed a stewardship committee which made a proposal to the foundation for working with churches in stewardship education and fund raising. Representatives of the foundation worked with the committee and came to an agreement with the regional synod to form a joint venture. As a result, Dian Little was hired in January 1996 to work as stewardship consultant for the Regional Synod of the Far West. She will be developing a network of stewardship representatives in the churches in the regional synod and working with donors. The Regional Synod of the Far West contributes to the cost of this position.

The Office of Gift Planning has a partnership program with several organizations who pay the foundation to represent them in gift planning. At the current time the following organizations are members of the partnership:

- Northwestern College
- New Brunswick Theological Seminary
- Regional Synod of Albany
- Regional Synod of the Far West
- Regional Synod of the Great Lakes
- Regional Synod of the Heartland
- Regional Synod of Mid-America
- Geneva Camp and Conference Center, Holland, Michigan
- Bethany Home, Ripon, California
- 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 City
The Office of Gift Planning is an affiliate member of the Council of Reformed Charities.

The major work of the Office of Gift Planning is to promote giving through bequests and to generate life income gifts. These gifts include gift annuities, a pooled income fund, charitable trusts, and other instruments. In 1996 the foundation will move forward with registration of its gift annuity program in those states that require registration and in which it expects foundation staff will generate annuities. As a result of new legislation there will be other legal requirements which must be met during 1996.

The work of the office resulted in life income gifts totaling $1,657,104 during 1995. These gifts were received in the following forms:

**Life Income Gifts—1995**

**Gift Instruments**

- **Pooled Income Fund**
  - $22,200 (1.3%)
- **Gift Annuities**
  - $133,904 (8.1%)
- **Revocable Gift Agreements**
  - $1,000 (0.1%)
- **Trusts**
  - $1,500,000 (90.5%)

These gifts were designated as follows:

**Life Income Gifts—1995**

**Destinations**

- **Local Church**
  - $1,421,904 (85.8%)
- **RCA Missions**
  - $34,700 (2.1%)
- **Classis**
  - $8,000 (0.5%)
- **Partners**
  - $27,500 (1.7%)
- **RCA Foundation**
  - $150,000 (9.1%)
- **Board of Pensions**
  - $15,000 (0.9%)
The congregations of the RCA are asked the number and amount of bequests and planned gifts received by them each year. In 1994 RCA congregations reported receiving 276 bequests totaling $4,358,190 and sixteen planned gifts totaling $404,321. The planned gifts came in the form of trust distributions, matured annuities, life insurance, and securities. Total bequests and planned gifts reported by RCA congregations amounted to $4,762,511. The distribution of these gifts by synods is as follows:

### 1994 Bequests and Planned Gifts Distribution by Synod

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Synod</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>$1,026,561</td>
<td>(21.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-Atlantics</td>
<td>$789,361</td>
<td>(16.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-America</td>
<td>$407,354</td>
<td>(8.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>$10,906</td>
<td>(0.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Far West</td>
<td>$470,949</td>
<td>(9.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Lakes</td>
<td>$431,907</td>
<td>(9.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heartland</td>
<td>$1,051,955</td>
<td>(22%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The GIFTS Philanthropic Fund allows donors to make a gift at any time, to be distributed to charitable organizations 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. During 1995, $99,614 was received in this fund, of which $38,200 was distributed to charities.

The Office of Gift Planning also promotes the RCA Building and Extension Fund investment notes. This 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. In 1996 the offering circular will undergo a complete revision to bring it into compliance with the guidelines of the North American Society of Securities Administrators.

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

**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 seventy-seventh year, Dominie Van Bunschooten went home to his reward and was buried in the church.
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.

The Office of Gift Planning administers the Van Bunschooten 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 its annual dinner during the week of General Synod.

The RCA Foundation is also responsible for managing the RCA Endowment Fund. The services of the Office of Finance are used in order to accomplish this management. It is also possible for the foundation to manage endowment funds of local RCA congregations and other assemblies and organizations.

In only one year of operation, the RCA Foundation has made great strides forward. New staff has been added, and a record amount of gifts was received in 1995. The foundation board is active and working. All these are good signs for the future of the foundation, and thus, for the support of the ministries of the Reformed Church in America.

From the Report of the General Synod Council's Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee

REVIEW PROCESS FOR GENERAL SYNOD OPERATIONAL BUDGET

The 1995 General Synod voted:

To affirm the decision of the General Synod Council, at its March 1995 meeting, to request its Policy, Planning, and Administrative 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,

... to request the General Synod Council present a report to the 1996 General Synod on the review process developed (MGS 1995, pp. 348-49).
The General Synod Council, at its October 1995 meeting, approved a two-part annual review process for the General Synod Operational budget supported by assessments. In adopting the process, the General Synod Council instructed staff to begin implementation immediately for the 1996 and 1997 budget cycles. The review process is as follows:

A. Annual Review Process for Already-Approved Assessment Budget

1. Annually, at the fall meeting of the General Synod Council, unit directors will review with their committees projected expenditures for the assessment budget already approved by General Synod for the upcoming budget year. Any modifications anticipated because of staffing changes, realignments of portfolios, or changes in program and mission that affect the assessment budget will be reported by the unit directors to the treasurer and to the director of Policy, Planning, and Administration Services by November 1.

   a. If adjustments can be managed within the assessment amount already approved by the General Synod, the treasurer will report the adjustments in the expense budget from assessments to the general secretary and unit directors.

   b. If, in the judgment of the RCA's treasurer and the director of Policy, Planning, and Administration Services, the anticipated adjustments cannot be managed within the assessment budget approved by the General Synod, they will advise the general secretary and will request that the unit expense budgets from assessments be placed on the agenda for discussion and decision for the November meeting of the Administrative Council.

   c. The general secretary and unit directors will determine the expense reductions that will need to be implemented prior to the start of the new budget year so that expenses to the assessment budget do not exceed anticipated revenue.

B. Annual Review Process for the New Budget Planning Cycle

1. Annually, at the fall meeting of the General Synod Council, unit directors will review with their respective committees anticipated expenditures from the assessment budget for the next budget planning cycle (the budget planning cycle that gets underway in December/January for the following budget year). Unit directors and GSC committees will consider mission and ministry programs that are in place, new programs slated for implementation, General Synod referrals that will require staff time and budget expense, and other initiatives (theme programs, special events, etc.) that will impact staffing and programmatic costs.

2. As part of the process outlined in number 1 above, unit directors and GSC committees will consider on a regular review cycle (three to five years) all of the programs and projects carried out through a unit, and the staff assignments/administrative allocations from assessments for these programs. Unit directors and GSC committees will consider if and how the program and staff/administrative assignments are fulfilling current and/or anticipated mission and ministry priorities for the church. Unit directors and GSC committees are responsible to plan for the orderly phasing out or redesign of obsolete programs, projects, and administrative functions, and to use this review process as a means to evaluate staff assignments and position descriptions.

3. Annually, by December 15, the director of Policy, Planning, and Administration Services and the RCA treasurer will meet with each of the directors of GSC units receiving assessment funds to review assessment needs for the next budget
planning cycle. (By December 15, 1995, for example, there was a review of anticipated assessment requests for the budget year beginning January 1, 1997.) The conference with each unit director will include a review of staffing, administrative, and program needs in order to meet present ministry objectives; to respond effectively to General Synod referrals; and to participate effectively in cooperative work with regions, classes, ecumenical partnerships, and other GSC staff. Programs, projects, and administrative functions subject to discontinuation or redesign will also be reviewed.

4. Annually, prior to the staff budget meeting (February), unit directors with responsibility for budgets funded with assessment income will meet with the general secretary, the treasurer, and the director of Policy, Planning, and Administration services to:

a. Review the needs anticipated by GSC units and project the assessment income that will be available to support the budget in the following year.

b. Review the proposed use of assessment resources to support ongoing and developing ministry, mission, and administration; and to assist with the orderly redesign or phaseout of current programs, projects, or administrative functions.

c. Reach consensus on the use of assessment revenue in the next budget planning cycle.

d. Prepare a recommendation on the assessment amount to support the General Synod operational budget for consideration by GSC at its spring meeting.

5. Unit directors will communicate with staff in their units no later than the annual staff budget meeting (mid-February) what the anticipated assessment allocation will be for the next budget cycle, and will advise their staff to plan expense budgets for program and administration accordingly.

6. The director of Policy, Planning, and Administration Services will report annually through the GSC Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee at the spring GSC meeting on the projected use of the assessment for the General Synod Operational Budget for the next budget cycle. The report will include information about plans for the orderly phasing out or redesign to meet present and future needs of the RCA's ministry and mission programs and projects, and administrative functions funded through the General Synod Operational Budget.

The general secretary and RCA staff began partial implementation of the process in December 1995 as directed by GSC. Full implementation of the review process for the already-approved (1996) assessment budget was not possible because the plan called for steps to be implemented at the fall meeting of GSC. The regular review cycle of the process, identified in part B above, also could not be implemented this past year. Other aspects of the process were followed, although not always within the precise time frame outlined in the proposal.

The process provided a helpful and disciplined project management schedule for the general secretary and the unit directors. The process enabled staff to work deliberately and cooperatively to develop a proposed 1997 General Synod Operational Budget from assessment revenue. As a result, the proposed assessment for operations being presented to the 1996 General Synod is within the anticipated annual rate of inflation for the United States economy. This was accomplished while responding positively to directives from the 1995
General Synod and the General Synod Council to increase programmatic support (and thus expenditures) provided through the Office of Information Systems, Evangelism and Church Development Services, and Congregational Services areas.

Significant reductions were made in several ongoing operations after an evaluation of spending trends and actual costs assigned to accounts in prior years. The process also led RCA staff to conclude that some programs carried within previous assessment budgets belonged more appropriately within the mission budget, with the funds to be raised from supporting congregations, individual contributions, or other revenue sources. Support for operations of the RCA Archives and the Office of Historical Services and RCA staff support for the Ecumenical Office will be sought through mission contributions beginning in 1997.

RCA staff anticipates full implementation of parts A and B above by fall 1996. The process needs to be more fully integrated with a wider and more thorough review process for all programs, projects, and administrative costs funded from other revenue sources, and with initial steps being taken within the GSC to develop a sound, comprehensive, and ongoing strategic planning process for the Reformed Church in America.
REPORTS ON THEOLOGY

Report of the Commission on Theology

The Commission on Theology met twice during the past year in Holland, Michigan, on October 6-7, 1995, and February 2-3, 1996. The commission presents two reports in response to referrals from the 1995 General Synod. At the conclusion of this report, the commission will also report on other work in progress.

UNION CHURCHES WITH NONREFORMED CONGREGATIONS

The 1995 General Synod asked the Commission on Theology to explore the question of whether it is theologically appropriate to modify the RCA church order to allow for congregations in the Reformed Church in America to form union congregations with congregations from denominations outside the Reformed tradition (MGS 1995, pp. 237-38). In response, the commission notes first of all that this question raises many issues which should be addressed in addition to theological ones. Issues of compatible church polity, liturgy, ordination standards, among others, are also of great significance, but extend beyond the commission's usual range of concern. Here the commission focuses its attention more specifically on the doctrinal and ecumenical dimensions of the question.

It is obviously impossible to expect complete doctrinal uniformity between two congregations uniting from different denominations, even if the two congregations are basically Reformed in outlook. Union congregations need to be recognized as grassroots experiments in ecumenicity and treated that way with respect to doctrinal questions. Ecumenicity requires a delicate balance between affirming oneness in Christ and wrestling with and respecting differences. What is needed is not so much uniformity as a common frame of reference and agreement regarding the essentials of Christian faith. Of particular importance for the functioning of a union congregation is the ability to share a common framework of understanding regarding offices, sacraments, and core confessional commitments.

In ecumenical relations, this discernment of a common frame of understanding and of common essentials in Christian faith is expressed through the process by which denominations formally recognize each other. The result is an agreement of full communion based on the mutual acknowledgment of evangelical doctrine, worship, order, and practice. Full communion does not imply total agreement, nor suggest church union, but rather that the denominations recognize each other's expression of Christian faith as authentic. The Reformed Church in America is presently in full communion with a number of Presbyterian and Reformed denominations and is currently discussing entering into such an agreement with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Where full communion exists at the denominational level, the commission sees no theological impediment to the formation of union congregations.

THE COMMISSIONING OF PREACHING ELDERS

The Context of the Question

The Commission on Theology received from the 1995 General Synod a request to study the question of the licensure or certification of lay preachers (MGS 1995, p. 218). This question arose by way of an overture from the Classis of Mid-Hudson presented to the 1994 General Synod (MGS 1994, pp. 248-49).

This is a question which has been explored for some time now in the Reformed Church. In 1984 a Committee on Plurality and Flexibility of the Ministry issued a report to the General Synod which, among other things, called for changes in the Book of Church Order to create
a position of a licensed elder, authorized to preach and administer the sacraments. The recommendation was not adopted by the 1984 Synod (MGS 1984, pp.174-82). In 1988 a Committee on Ecclesiastical Office and Ministry issued another report. This report affirmed the importance of lay ministry in general, and while it made no recommendations regarding lay preachers, it did say that “the RCA may also want to consider opening the ordained ministry of the Word to gifted elders who have proven their effectiveness in the area of pastoral leadership for an appropriate period of time” (MGS 1988, p. 135).

A number of general observations were arrived at as the commission discussed this referral from the 1995 Synod and heard reports about areas of the church’s life where this issue has arisen. It is clear that some congregations, classes, and regional synods have already begun various strategies for using nonordained people in preaching ministries and also for training and recognizing them in a variety of ways, even though there are currently no provisions for such practices within the Book of Church Order. This seemed a genuine cause for concern to the commission and underscored the need to address the situation both theologically and in terms of church polity as quickly as possible.

The commission also noted the complex and diverse ways in which the question of lay preachers has arisen within the life of the church. Because the question has arisen in a number of very different contexts, there are a variety of issues which must be addressed in a comprehensive way if the problem is to be addressed adequately on a denominational level.

One of the issues is financial. Many small-membership congregations may find it difficult to afford a full-time ordained minister of Word and sacrament but may find that there are lay people with gifts of preaching in their midst. Such congregations may believe that the presence of such gifted persons offers not only an opportunity for ministry, but also a way out of a difficult economic constraint. From the perspective of one licensed to such a ministry, the possibility of such licensure raises additional questions. Would such a person be classified as a minister for federal and state tax purposes, with the accompanying economic benefits and/or burdens such classification would bring? Would such a move evoke legal challenges from federal, regional, or local governing authorities?

In other congregations the issue is empowerment of the laity. Some churches seek to use lay preachers, not as a substitute for the preaching ministry of an installed pastor, but as a supplement to that ministry and as a sign of the priesthood of all believers and the giftedness of all God’s people.

Another issue may have to do with difficulties some candidates for ministry experience in obtaining formal theological education. Lay people with gifts for preaching and church leadership may feel called to exercise those gifts but may find it difficult or impossible to pursue theological education to fulfill ordination requirements. Such persons may find the option of a certified or licensed lay preaching ministry an attractive one. This may be particularly true among immigrant congregations where access to theological education in one’s own language is difficult.

The relationship between “licensed lay preachers/preaching elders” and other avenues into ministry which are currently provided for in the Book of Church Order is an issue in some RCA judicatories. For example, the BCO currently allows for a person without formal theological education to seek a dispensation and be ordained as a minister of Word and sacrament (BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 10, Section 2). The request for a different kind of licensure or other authorization apparently arises, however, out of a desire to authorize a ministry of preaching which is not as broad as that of the minister of Word and sacrament, and which does not involve the need to pursue a dispensation from the requirements of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry.
A final issue has to do with the integrity and high standards which the RCA seeks to maintain for the Office of Minister of Word and Sacrament. Concerns have been raised regarding the long-range impact upon that office as a result of the addition of a second preaching office or role with less stringent requirements.

Lay Preacher or Preaching Elders?

Recently in the life of the RCA, two different approaches have been proposed for an authorized preaching ministry exercised by those not ordained to the Office of Minister of Word and Sacrament. Some have requested the RCA to establish a process for licensing or certifying "lay preachers." Others have requested a process for certifying or licensing "preaching elders." The commission believes that the choice of terms is significant and must be clarified before further action is taken. In what follows, this report will argue that the term "lay preacher" is inappropriate within the Reformed tradition and that any action taken in this area would be more helpfully taken under the category of "preaching elder."

Preaching as the proclamation of the gospel and as a witness to God's action in the world is a function of the whole Christian community. Preaching in this broad sense arises from the experience of divine power and life, to which the believer is constrained by God to bear witness. In this broad context, it is inappropriate and theologically dubious to speak of any kind of "licensure," "authorization," or "certification" to announce the gospel. This would restrict the freedom and obligation of all Christians to proclaim the good news by word and deed. Ultimately, the authorization to witness to the gospel is granted by the Holy Spirit, who moves men and women to bear witness to the reality of God's reign in their lives and in their world.

The Office of Minister of Word and Sacrament is intended to guide and direct the whole church in its proclamation of the gospel in word and deed. The minister of Word and sacrament does not preach as a substitute for the congregation's proclamation. Rather, the preaching office exercised by the minister of Word and sacrament empowers the congregation to witness to the presence and power of God. The ordained preaching ministry has this particular focus and responsibility as one part of the broader mandate given to all Christians to bear witness to God's power and presence disclosed in the gospel. The preaching office is thus a particular means of grace by which God's salvation extends to the church, and through the church to the world.

Why then are not all Christians "ordained"? In a limited sense, all Christians are, since they are set apart from the world and charged by God with the task of offering themselves to God as spiritual sacrifices. But ordination also commonly refers to something more specific. The church recognizes certain gifts and sets certain people apart for specific ministries through the laying on of hands and prayer. (For further discussion, see the report on the laying on of hands in the 1995 Minutes of General Synod, pp. 369-81). The church has found it expedient to single out certain gifts and ministries for special treatment—those which pertain to the overall health, welfare, and functioning of the church itself. These gifts and ministries require the acknowledgment and consent of the church in order to be exercised effectively. The church formally and publicly acknowledges these gifts and ministries, not because they are more important, but because such acknowledgment and consent by the church is essential if these ministries are to be exercised effectively by those who hold them.

The question of the certification of lay preachers or preaching elders needs to be viewed in the context of this understanding of the place of ordination. All Christians are witnesses, since the announcement of God's reign is the work of the laos, the people. Yet this does not obviate the need for the Office of Minister of Word and Sacrament, which is devoted to guiding and equipping the church for this central task.
Yet if one speaks of the certification or licensure of "lay" preachers, there is a danger of losing this crucial distinction, since the people of God, the laity, need no additional "certification" or "licensure" to carry out their basic task of announcing the reign of God. Such language is unhelpful and should be avoided.

The language of "lay preachers" is unhelpful not only because it weakens the involvement of all God's people in witnessing to the gospel, but also because it confuses the distinction in role between the ordained and nonordained. In 1988 the Committee on Ecclesiastical Office and Ministry urged that the word "lay" be used consistently to refer to the unordained ministries of the church, meaning those ministries which are not directly involved with the oversight and guidance of the church in its mission in the world (MGS 1988, p. 131). The laity is called to witness to the gospel in encounter with the world; it is not called to the oversight and guidance of the church in that mission. That is the responsibility of the ordained offices.

However, the Office of Minister of Word and Sacrament is not alone in its responsibility to guide and direct the whole church in its proclamation of the gospel. The elder also bears special responsibility, along with the minister of Word and sacrament, for evangelization, catechesis, discipline, and the proper interpretation of Scripture. Hence it may be more helpful, in achieving the intent of language about "certification of lay preachers," to speak of a process whereby elders might receive some form of authorization to preach in a local congregation.

But why, in the first place, should the Reformed Church in America consider a second preaching role at all? Why should elders be authorized to preach at all? Is not the Office of Minister of Word and Sacrament sufficient to guide and direct the church in its mission in the world? In 1984 the General Synod rejected a proposal for licensed preaching elders, arguing that such a move would remove the need for a congregation to call a minister of Word and sacrament, that it would bypass normal supervision of theological education, that it would weaken opportunities for alternatives such as yoked congregations, that it would weaken the Reformed concept of an educated clergy, and that it would make the (then) present oversupply of ministers even worse (MGS 1984, pp. 181-82).

The RCA must continue to discern whether these reasons are of sufficient weight to prevent it from proceeding with the creation of a second preaching role in the RCA. This paper will not offer all the answers to these issues, but is intended to guide the RCA in its consideration of them. While this paper will address some of these practical concerns, it will also address the theological issues at stake in the question. From a theological perspective, the subject provides an opportunity to address the question of the relationship of elder to minister of Word and sacrament in more detail than has been done in the past, and further to clarify the church's understanding of ordination and its relationship to lay ministries.

From a practical perspective, although there may be an oversupply of ordained ministers in some parts of the RCA, this is not at all universally the case now, particularly in some rural areas and among racial/ethnic congregations. Several sectors of the RCA have spoken out with some urgency about the need for strategies which will effectively deal both with a shortage of ordained ministers and with the need for classes to oversee effectively the preaching of the Word in their bounds. The present wording of the Book of Church Order grants extraordinary freedom to local consistories to invite unordained people to preach "in occasional or special circumstances" (BCO, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 6e). The frequent appeal to "special circumstances" in the use of unordained preachers leaves classes needing more guidance from the church in overseeing such situations. The commission felt that these concerns were of sufficient weight to deem the question of authorized preaching elders worthy of fuller exploration.
Some Basic Assumptions Regarding Preaching Elders

The idea of a "preaching elder" requires some clarification regarding the nature of such a function and its relationship to the offices, life, and polity of the church. This understanding varies, even within the Reformed family of churches. Some Presbyterians, for example, speak of ministers as "teaching elders" and elders as "ruling elders." This distinction has not played a significant role in the polity of the Reformed Church in America, however, and it does not seem to be helpful in addressing the issue now faced. In what follows, this report attempts to clarify how such a function should be interpreted within the context of the offices, life, and polity of the Reformed Church in America.

Elders authorized to preach should continue to be elders, and the distinction between ministers and elders should be maintained. Yet this distinction has not always been articulated with theological precision in the RCA's history. In general, however, Reformed theology understands that a crucial role of the elder is to participate in the oversight of the preaching of the Word, whereas the minister's role is the actual preaching of the Word itself.

In traditional Dutch Reformed practice, these roles were often expressed by a handshake extended to the minister by the senior elder after the sermon, indicating the judgment of the elders that the sermon was in accordance with the Word of God. While this practice has now fallen into disuse, its theological underpinning persists in the use, for example, of the constitutional questions which must be answered by the elders and ministers (BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7 Section 1). In this way, discernment and proclamation complement each other in the governance of the church by the Word of God.

If elders were to preach, it must be recognized that this distinction of role would become somewhat blurred. The commission does not believe that such blurring distorts the function of the offices unduly if other safeguards are in place. Nevertheless, preaching elders must realize that when they enter the pulpit they relinquish their supervisory and discerning role and become subject to the discernment and supervision of their preaching by the board of elders.

There are other important distinctions between ministers of Word and sacrament and elders as well. In one of the few General Synod reports where this distinction is addressed, the 1980 study on the nature of ecclesiastical office and ministry states that the elder stands beside the minister in connection with both sermon and sacrament, but is distinguished from the minister of Word and sacrament by virtue of the elder's continued involvement in the world. The elder does not forsake a worldly calling to engage in ministry but represents the "sanctification of the world," the leavening of Christian faith in all of life (MGS 1980, p. 104). While this distinction should not be interpreted to preclude a "tent-making" approach to the Office of Minister of Word and Sacrament, it does suggest that preaching elders should not be entirely dependent on the church for their livelihood but should maintain a vocation in the world, though they should be able to receive a stipend for their preaching ministry. Congregations should not view preaching elders as an inexpensive way to obtain a preacher. A full-time preaching ministry should continue to be exercised only by ordained ministers of Word and sacrament.

Another important distinction between the Office of Minister of Word and Sacrament and that of elder has to do with the scope of the office. Through the granting of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry, ministers are certified for their calling, not merely by a local congregation or classis, but by the General Synod, acting through one of the RCA seminaries or the Theological Education Agency as its agent. The ordination of an elder takes place in a local congregation; the ordination of a minister of Word and sacrament takes place in the classis and is preceded by a denominational certification.
Because of this difference, ministers of Word and sacrament are empowered to represent the whole church and to serve the whole church in a way that elders are not. The state recognizes their authority to solemnize marriages and their distinctive social role in its tax code. The state does not recognize elders in these ways, nor has the church ever sought such recognition for elders. Moreover, although ministers are often invited to preach or celebrate the sacraments in congregations where they are not the installed pastor, elders are rarely if ever asked to exercise their functions in other congregations. Rather, the elder has always been centrally concerned with a particular local congregation and its life, though the elder also represents that congregation in the assemblies and judicatories of the RCA. To put it a bit differently, the difference in the process of ordination means that the authority of the elder is bound more closely to a local congregation than the authority of a minister of Word and sacrament. The commission believes that this distinction should be preserved if elders are to be authorized to preach. Elders should be authorized to preach in a particular congregation rather than in the RCA as a whole or even in the classis as a whole. (In unusual cases such as yoked parishes, it might be appropriate for the classis to authorize a preaching elder to preach in more than one congregation.) The authorization of a preaching elder is distinguished in this way from the license to preach granted by a classis to a candidate for ministry, which does not carry the same restriction.

The congregational preaching done by elders ought to be carried out under the supervision of a classis in order that the Scriptures might continue to guide the local congregation with their full depth and richness. In some cases such supervision could be delegated by the classis to the installed minister of the congregation in which the elder is preaching.

Careful consideration should be given to a case where there might be an authorized preaching elder in a congregation with no installed minister. Since the celebration of the sacraments is already within the purview of elders, no particular authorization would be required here. However, any authorization of an elder to preach should not imply permission or authority to exercise any other pastoral functions beyond those normally exercised by elders.

Finally, since the authorization to preach does not inhere in the Office of Elder as it does in the Office of Minister of Word and Sacrament, an elder should be authorized to preach for a particular period of time, in a particular place. In other words, the authorizing of elders to preach should not be construed as another ordination or office which would continue to be valid until it is demitted. Rather, it is a commissioning and authorizing of an elder for a specific task, in a specific time and place.

“Licensure,” “Certification,” or “Commissioning”?

The RCA has also heard different proposals regarding how such preaching elders should be authorized. While some proposals have spoken of “licensure,” others have used the term “certification.” The Reformed Church in America has also begun to use the term “commissioning” to speak of a special commitment to a task which does not involve ordaining or installing into an office of the church. The Commission on Theology believes that “commissioning” is a better term than either “licensure” or “certification” for this authorization. Both licensure and certification are currently used with respect to the Office of Minister of Word and Sacrament. (A license to preach is given to candidates for ordination during their seminary training, and the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry qualifies ministerial candidates to take their final theological examinations for ordination.) The use of “commissioning” avoids confusing the distinction between preaching elders and ministers of Word and sacrament. Moreover, it emphasizes that the authorization of elders to preach is for a particular time and place.
Some Suggestions for Implementation

With the previous considerations in mind, the commission suggests that the following guidelines might be a useful starting point for a denominational discussion regarding the commissioning of preaching elders. The commission suggests that the implementation of such a policy be guided by the following considerations:

1. The congregation must petition the classis to commission a preaching elder, and if the preaching elder is to serve where there is no installed minister, the congregation must demonstrate in its petition that its circumstances make the calling of an ordained minister of Word and sacrament impossible.

2. Ordinarily, the person seeking commissioning as a preaching elder must already be an ordained elder and a member of the great consistory of the congregation in which he or she will be preaching. If the elder is not already serving on the active consistory and is commissioned to a regular preaching ministry, he or she becomes a member of the consistory for the duration of the commission when commissioned by the classis.

3. Commissioned preaching elders must maintain their vocation in the world and must not be primarily dependent on the church for their financial support.

4. The classis must examine the candidate prior to commissioning as a preaching elder in order to determine whether the requisite gifts, knowledge, and skills are present. Such examination must be based on a program of study in the following areas: New Testament introduction and history, Old Testament introduction and history, biblical exegesis and interpretation, sermon composition and delivery, systematic theology, and RCA doctrinal standards. The particular form and content of this program of study must be approved by the classis. The classis may waive all or part of the program of study if the elder can demonstrate that such study or its equivalent has already been completed. In no case, however, shall the classis waive the examination.

5. Since the normal safeguards of education and certification are not present for elders in the same way they are for ordained ministers, the classis must supervise their preaching ministry more closely than that of ministers of Word and sacrament. Such supervision should be regular, careful, and thorough; in the case of congregations where there is no installed minister, this supervision should entail a minimum of one personal meeting with the preaching elder per month.

6. The commissioning must be reviewed and renewed on an annual basis, including an evaluation by the local consistory and the supervising classis. Commissioning is renewed only at the request of the local congregation. When the commissioned preaching elder has primary responsibility for preaching in a local congregation, commissioning is to be renewed only when the calling of an ordained minister continues to be impossible. The classis may revoke or refuse to renew a commission for the preaching elder if the classis believes that the Word of God is not being rightly proclaimed.

7. Commissioning is only for preaching in specific places designated by the classis, under the supervision of the classis and the local consistory. It does not qualify the preaching elder to accept invitations to preach regularly in places not designated by the classis, nor to engage in any other form of ministry outside the normal functions of an elder.

8. Because the commissioning is within the context of the office of elder, the authority of which is located in the local congregation, commissioned preaching elders are not permitted to exercise ministerial functions which assume recognition by the larger
society. That is, they may not act as ordained ministers in the solemnizing of marriages. Likewise they should not be classified as ministers for tax purposes. They may be voting delegates to classis only if they are regular elder delegates from a local congregation. They also may serve as nonvoting delegates to classis at the discretion of the classis. In their preaching ministry they are amenable to the classis through the commissioning and supervision process; in all other matters, they are subject to the discipline of their local consistory in the same way that all elders are.

9. The addition of the role of commissioned preaching elder requires a variety of modifications to the Book of Church Order. In addition to changes reflecting the policies above, the commission recommends that Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 6e of the BCO be amended to read (deletion in brackets): “However, a consistory may authorize, in occasional [or special] circumstances, other persons to preach.” The new role of preaching elder would remove the need for consistories to appeal to “special circumstances” in order to justify asking a person who is not a minister of Word and sacrament to preach on a regular basis. The assumption would be that consistories should be free to allow unordained persons to preach on an occasional basis, but that a regular preaching ministry should be carried out only by ordained ministers and commissioned preaching elders.

R-1.
To distribute the study, “The Commissioning of Preaching Elders,” to RCA congregations for study, comment, and response to the Commission on Theology by January 31, 1997; and further,

to direct the Commission on Theology, in consultation with the Commission on Church Order and the Task Force on Standards for the Preparation for the Professional Ministry in the Reformed Church in America, to determine from the responses received from RCA congregations if it is appropriate to propose revisions in the Book of Church Order which would incorporate the principles of the study, “The Commissioning of Preaching Elders”; and further,

to instruct the Commission on Theology to report to the 1997 General Synod its findings from responses received from RCA congregations and to present, if appropriate, any proposed revisions for the Book of Church Order.

Upon a motion from the floor to amend R-1, Synod

VOTED: To distribute the study, “The Commissioning of Preaching Elders,” to RCA congregations for study, comment, and response to the Commission on Theology by January 31, 1997; and further,

to direct the Commission on Theology, in consultation with the Commission on Church Order and the Task Force on Standards for the Preparation for the Professional Ministry in the Reformed Church in America, to determine from the responses received from RCA congregations if it is appropriate to propose revisions in the Book of Church Order which would incorporate the principles of the study, “The Commissioning of Preaching Elders”; and further,
to instruct the Commission on Theology to report to the 1997 General Synod its findings from responses received from RCA congregations and to present, if appropriate, revisions of this paper and any proposed revisions for the Book of Church Order.*<

(A motion was made and supported "to refer R-1 to the Commission on Theology with the instruction to provide a clear Reformed understanding of ecclesiastical office and ordination to support such commissioning." The motion LOST.)

(The advisory committee recommended the adoption of R-1.)

OTHER WORK IN PROGRESS

The Commission on Theology continues to consult with GSC Congregational Services in the development of the homosexuality study program adopted by the 1994 General Synod (MGS 1994, p. 376). The actual writing of the curriculum, however, is under the direction of the minister of education and faith development. The commission will review all materials before final production.

The commission has also explored two other possible studies. One study would focus on missionary ecclesiology and another study would attempt to bring together the many RCA studies on ecclesiastical office into some coherent framework. Neither of these projects is currently underway.

Overtures

Revision to the Constitutional Inquiries

1. The Classis of Northern Michigan overtures General Synod to amend the Book of Church Order, Chapter I, Part II, Article 7, Section 1a, for recommendation to the classes for approval (addition is underlined):

   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 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 in conformity with
      i. the Word of God?
      ii. the Standards of the Reformed Church in America?
      iii. the truth that divine redemption from sin is only through faith in the perfect work of the Lord Jesus Christ alone, the only mediator between God and man?

*Addition is in light-face type.
Reasons:

1. There is evidence that alternative ways of salvation are being proclaimed in the RCA.
   a. Recent developments in the RCA, as reported in the Grand Rapids Press, indicate the presence of heterodox teachings in the RCA concerning salvation. A number of ministers of Word and sacrament deny that Jesus Christ alone is the way to salvation. They teach God’s grace is mediated through other religious traditions, too.
   b. Other ministers of Word and sacrament, while affirming salvation is in Jesus Christ alone, deny that saving faith in Jesus Christ is required for salvation.
   c. These teachings and beliefs are contrary to the Word of God and the RCA Standards.
   d. These teachings and beliefs being associated with the RCA greatly hinders the RCA’s testimony and mission.

2. The Word of God and the RCA Standards teach only one way of salvation.
   a. The Word of God plainly teaches that Jesus Christ alone is Lord and the only savior from sin.

   The teaching of the exclusive lordship of Jesus Christ, and that he alone is the Savior, is well attested to in Scripture. In the gospel of John, Jesus makes seven great “I am” statements concerning himself. For example, Jesus said: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6); and Jesus said: “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25). These statements by Jesus must be interpreted as his exclusive claim to be the only mediator of eternal salvation or language means nothing and scriptural interpretation is impossible. Other statements of Jesus in which he refers to himself as the “gate,” the “good shepherd,” the “bread of life,” the “light of the world,” and the “vine,” are metaphorical, but teach the same concept of exclusivity.

   The teaching of the apostles is: “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). The apostle Paul taught: “For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself a ransom for all” (1 Tim. 2:5).
   b. The Word of God teaches and the RCA Standards bear witness to the truth that human beings are justified through faith in Jesus Christ.

   The Heidelberg Catechism Q. 60 asks: “How are you right with God? The Heidelberg Catechism A. 60 states: “Only by true faith in Jesus Christ...out of sheer grace, God grants and credits me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, as if I had never sinned nor been a sinner, as if I had been as perfectly obedient as Christ was obedient for me. All I need to do is to accept this gift of God with a believing heart.” (See also Rom. 3:21-28, Gal. 2:16, Phil. 3:8-11, and Eph 2:8-9.)

   The Heidelberg Catechism Q. 20 asks: “Will all people then be saved through Christ just as they were lost through Adam?” The Heidelberg Catechism A. 20 states: “No. Only those are saved who by true faith are grafted into Christ and accept all his blessings.” (See also Matt. 7:14, John 3:16, and Rom. 11:16-21).
3. The current "constitutional inquiry" questions in the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 1a-i, need to be strengthened by adding the above proposed specific statement about what the Word of God and the RCA Standards teach about salvation.

   a. At the present time RCA ministers who teach heterodox views are affirming the two general questions asked in the *BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 1a.

   b. Classes need the additional proposed specific question concerning the truth of the gospel in order to fulfill their responsibilities of superintendence over their enrolled ministers (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 2, Section 1).

4. All RCA ministers should be required by their respective classes to preach the same gospel.

   a. We confess our faith together in the RCA, not just as individuals.

   b. The Nicene Creed states: "We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church."

   c. The church must be one in essential doctrine, and that doctrine must be grounded in apostolic teaching (see 2 Pet. 3:2).

5. The truth of the exclusive lordship of Jesus Christ and the necessity of saving faith for justification from sin is at the very core of the Christian gospel and is the only view of salvation taught in Scripture and the RCA Standards. The RCA cannot continue to stand as one holy, catholic, and apostolic church and tolerate heterodox beliefs. The truths of the exclusive lordship of Jesus Christ and the necessity of saving faith for justification from sin deserve "constitutional inquiry" status in the RCA *Book of Church Order*.

6. Those in the RCA teaching heterodoxy (that there are other ways to salvation besides Jesus Christ and that salvation is possible in Christ without saving faith) are disrupting the unity of the RCA by bringing in destructive heresies which cannot be tolerated if Christians are to be loyal to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the duty of modern-day church elders to protect the church from false teaching (see Acts 20: 18-38 and 2 Pet. 2).

➢The advisory committee recommended:

**R-2.**

To amend the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 1a, for recommendation to the classes for approval (addition is underlined):

> 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 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 in conformity with
      i. the Word of God?
      ii. the *Standards* of the Reformed Church in America?
      iii. the truth that divine redemption from sin is only by grace through faith in the perfect work of the Lord Jesus Christ alone, the only mediator between God and humankind? (ADOPTED) (YES-148, NO-112)

   d. The *Standards* of the Reformed Church in America, Chapter 5, Part II, Article 1, Section 1a, need to be strengthened by adding the above proposed specific statement about the Word of God and the RCA Standards teach about salvation.

   e. Classes need the additional proposed specific question concerning the truth of the gospel in order to fulfill their responsibilities of superintendence over their enrolled ministers (BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 2, Section 1).

   f. All RCA ministers should be required by their respective classes to preach the same gospel.

   g. We confess our faith together in the RCA, not just as individuals.

   h. The Nicene Creed states: "We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church."

   i. The church must be one in essential doctrine, and that doctrine must be grounded in apostolic teaching (see 2 Pet. 3:2).

   j. The truth of the exclusive lordship of Jesus Christ and the necessity of saving faith for justification from sin is at the very core of the Christian gospel and is the only view of salvation taught in Scripture and the RCA Standards. The RCA cannot continue to stand as one holy, catholic, and apostolic church and tolerate heterodox beliefs. The truths of the exclusive lordship of Jesus Christ and the necessity of saving faith for justification from sin deserve "constitutional inquiry" status in the RCA *Book of Church Order*.

   k. Those in the RCA teaching heterodoxy (that there are other ways to salvation besides Jesus Christ and that salvation is possible in Christ without saving faith) are disrupting the unity of the RCA by bringing in destructive heresies which cannot be tolerated if Christians are to be loyal to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the duty of modern-day church elders to protect the church from false teaching (see Acts 20: 18-38 and 2 Pet. 2).
Reasons:

1. As the RCA stands on the verge of the millenium, the RCA enters a new phase of its witness. The church is now in a post-Christendom culture. In order for the church to engage effectively in the pluralistic culture, it is helpful to be reminded by this essential mandate.

2. All RCA ministers and elders have covenanted to preach the whole gospel of Jesus Christ. The RCA confesses that faith together, and not simply as individuals. It is helpful to be publicly held accountable to that covenant on an annual basis. <

**Salvation Only in Jesus Christ**

2. The Classis of California overtures General Synod to reaffirm the words of Acts 4:12:

There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.

Reasons:

1. Given recent concerns raised in the RCA, pastors and members in the denomination are wondering if there has been a change in the RCA’s historic position on this matter.

2. The Classis of California believes it is crucial that this aspect of RCA identity be very clear.

➢ The advisory committee recommended:

R-3.

To adopt the following resolution:

BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninetieth regular session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Orange City, Iowa, on the thirteenth day of June, 1996, joyfully and gladly reaffirms its confession that God's unique, unrepeatable, and decisive activity in Jesus Christ is the only sure hope for this world. God's work in Christ alone reveals the deepest truths about God, our life, and our world. God's work in Christ alone saves all who believe. Indeed, there is salvation in no one else, as the Old and New Testaments themselves teach.

Further, this position marks not the end, but the beginning of the church's attempts faithfully to witness to the gospel. In our culture, there is an increasing tendency to view religious issues merely as matters of personal preference. Such an attitude renders the church's confession more difficult for many to understand and to embrace. Increasing contact with adherents of other religious traditions and those outside the Christian faith also stretches the boundaries of Christian understanding, as Christians recognize truth and value in religions and perspectives other than their own, even while challenging them with Christ's unique claims about himself.
Therefore, in light of these changes in our world, the Reformed Church in America seeks fresh guidance on how to interpret and to live out its faith in the uniqueness of Christ in the midst of a pluralistic world with diverse religious perspectives; and further,

The 1996 General Synod directs the Commission on Theology to engage in a study on “Christian Witness to the Uniqueness of Christ Among People of Other Faiths” which will both interpret the nature and character of Christian claims regarding the uniqueness of Christ and also guide Christians in understanding and assessing the religious experience and claims of those outside the Christian faith. (ADOPTED)

Reason: R-3 seeks both to state the RCA’s position clearly and succinctly, and to invite an ongoing exploration of the deeper theological and educative issues involved in that position.<

(A motion was made and supported to amend R-3 by deleting in the third paragraph the words “to interpret and.” The motion LOST.)

(A motion was made and supported to amend R-3 by inserting in the fourth paragraph the words “in consultation with the General Synod Council’s Evangelism and Church Development Services Committee” following the words “Commission on Theology.” The motion LOST.)

(A motion was made and supported “to extend a special invitation to a pastor and a congregation to return to the RCA and to continue to participate with the RCA in the ongoing conversation about what it means to be Christ’s servants in the world today, faithful to the gospel that together we profess.” The parliamentarian ruled the motion OUT OF ORDER since this is a classis matter.)

(A motion was made and supported “to have the one hundred nineteenth General Synod send a communication to the Rev. Dr. Richard Rhem, the Christ Community Church of Spring Lake, Michigan, and the Classis of Muskegon expressing Christian love to all parties and to offer to them all our prayers.” The president requested this motion be reviewed with the parliamentarian. After consultation with the parliamentarian, a resolution was presented. See Report of the Committee of Reference, R-21, p. 432.)

3. The Regional Synod of Mid-America overtures General Synod to affirm its confessional Standards for biblical authority and for salvation through faith in Christ alone.

Reasons:

1. The testimony of Scripture teaches the authority of the Bible and that salvation is through faith in Christ alone. (See 2 Tim. 3:15-16, Rev. 22:18-19, John 14:6, and Gal. 1:8-9.)

2. The RCA confessional Standards define biblical authority and state that salvation is through faith in Christ alone. (See the Belgic Confession, Articles 2-7, 10, 18-23; the Heidelberg Catechism, Q. and A. 1-23; and the Canons of Dort, Articles 2-7.)

3. The RCA finds its strongest unity in biblical faith.
The advisory committee recommended:

R-4.
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The substance of Overture 3 was dealt with in R-3 (see pp. 402-03) prepared by the advisory committee for Overture 2.

The Bible as the Word of God

4. The Classis of California overtures General Synod to reaffirm its historic position that the Bible is the Word of God, our only rule of faith and life.

Reasons:

1. Given recent concerns raised in the RCA, pastors and members in the denomination are wondering if there has been a change in the RCA's historic position on this matter.

2. The Classis of California believes it is crucial that this aspect of RCA identity be very clear.

The advisory committee recommended:

R-5.
To reaffirm the historic position of the Reformed Church in America that the Bible is the Word of God, our only rule of faith and practice, as articulated in the Belgic Confession and interpreted in the 1963 General Synod adoption of a “Revised Declaration on Holy Scripture” (MGS 1963, pp. 264-67). (ADOPTED)

Reason: Current controversies have raised uncertainties in the minds of some regarding the position of the Reformed Church in America on the authority of Scripture. The advisory committee believed that reassurance regarding the RCA's position is pastorally helpful.

Scripture and Homosexuality

5. The Classis of California overtures General Synod to reaffirm as the position of the Reformed Church in America that Scripture is the foundation of the RCA's response to persons of homosexual orientation and Scripture does not condone a continuing homosexual practice.

Reasons:

1. Ministry to persons of homosexual orientation is encouraged and supported in the Reformed Church in America. The Classis of California strongly affirms this ministry.

2. The 1990 General Synod (MGS 1990, R-11, p. 461), the 1994 General Synod (MGS 1994, pp. 375-76), and the 1995 General Synod (MGS 1995, R-5, p. 388) votes made clear the RCA's concern for persons of homosexual orientation and the scriptural condemnation of homosexual practice. However, questions remain in the minds of RCA ministers and members as to the role of Scripture in the deliberations of General Synod with regard to ministry to persons of homosexual orientation.
3. A statement by General Synod at this time would clarify both the RCA’s commitment to ministry to persons of homosexual orientation and the role of Scripture in all such ministries.

➢ The advisory committee recommended:

R-6.
To reaffirm the Reformed Church in America’s position that Scripture is the final authority for all areas of life and ministry, including ministry to and with persons of homosexual orientation; and further,


to call the Reformed Church in America to continue in the process of repentance, prayer, learning, and growth in ministry which was initiated by the 1994 General Synod (MGS 1994, pp. 375-76) and reaffirmed by the 1995 General Synod (MGS 1995, R-5, p. 388). (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. The RCA needs to address the question of homosexuality in a balanced and comprehensive way, guided by Scripture which is studied and reflected upon in the ongoing life of the whole church.

2. R-6 affirms the process presently under way in the preparation of study materials by Congregational Services, in consultation with the Commission on Theology. ≤

From the Report of the President

P-2 (p. 34) was referred to the Advisory Committee on Theology.

➢ In response to P-2 (p. 34), the advisory committee recommended:

R-7.
To instruct the Commission on Theology to produce a brief statement of faith, utilizing the model, “A Brief Reformed Credo” (see pp. 33-34), for report to the 1997 General Synod. (ADOPTED)

Reason: This statement is needed to introduce new believers to the Reformed faith, to aid in worship, and to provide a resource for remembering baptism and professing faith. ≤
REPORTS ON WORLD MISSION

Report of the General Synod Council's Mission Services Committee

LIGHT FOR THE WORLD

The torch has been lit. Since April 1996 runners have been carrying a torch from Los Angeles, California, zigzagging 15,000 miles across the United States and expecting to arrive in Atlanta, Georgia, by mid-July 1996. That torch will light the flame which beckons athletes from around the world to the 1996 Olympics.

The Reformed Church in America (RCA) has also been given a torch to carry. The theologian Emil Brunner stated: "The church exists by mission as fire exists by burning." The fire and wind of the Holy Spirit is blowing through this old church as it is called to join with the church worldwide to be light to neighbors and nations.

The glow of mission begins in the life and faith of the local congregation and reaches out to every village and city, land and race. The RCA Mission Services Unit has been given the task of challenging and enabling every member of the Reformed Church in America to join with the Christian community around the world in making Christ known among all people through word and witness. In the past year Mission Services staff developed four goals to move the RCA’s mission program into the twenty-first century. At a Mission Is One meeting in the fall of 1995 some RCA staff studied, revised, and expanded these goals. During its January 1996 meeting/retreat, the General Synod Council’s Mission Services Committee created a list of objectives with proposed timelines to help accomplish these goals. These goals and objectives follow with some examples to illustrate how they will be lived out and in fact are already happening in some places.

FAN THE FLAME

The first goal is to assist and affirm RCA congregations as they seek to understand and be engaged in mission locally, regionally, and globally.

Objective: To provide a working definition of mission, including a theology of the Holy Spirit, with possible ties to the three-year denominational theme, with a draft report by October 1997 and a final report in March 1998.

Objective: To develop an ongoing strategy for the Mission Services Unit to become a resource and an enabler in assisting classes and local congregations in becoming mission service stations and agencies for mission in the RCA.

Wyckoff Reformed in Wyckoff, New Jersey, is an example of how congregations are finding new forms of mission. For many years Wyckoff has faithfully supported the global RCA mission program with prayers and gifts. However, the Wyckoff Mission Committee felt the need to do more for the church’s neighbors. A Mission Action Committee was formed to identify and become involved in ministry which required more than writing a check. Several opportunities presented themselves. The committee found four adults working at the Italian restaurant one block from the church who needed to be tutored in English. Members of the church began volunteering one day a week at the local Center for Food Action to receive donations of food, clothing, and school supplies and then distribute these items to those in need. An Aid to Single Parents Program was designed to support those who no longer have a partner to assist them in meeting the needs of their family. For the past several years, church members have worked together to raise the money and assist in building a new home through Habitat for Humanity in the Paterson, New Jersey, area. The first year money for the home is raised, and the second year the $40,000 home is built.
Each year, Rehoboth Reformed Church in rural McBain, Michigan, plans a two-week mission conference. In the process of planning a conference in the fall of 1995, they found out that their RCA partner in mission, Apache Reformed Church in Apache, Oklahoma, was in need of a new van. The congregation was already committed to six full RCA mission shares representing various ministries around the globe, but they responded to the challenge and in one mission offering gave enough to purchase the van. They even had money left over to give extra support for the Rev. George and Mary Anne Montanari, who serve at the Apache Reformed Church, and for Dr. Moises Ocampo, who trains paramedics in Chiapas, Mexico! Four members of the congregation traveled with their pastor to Apache, Oklahoma, in March 1996. During a Sunday morning worship they turned over the keys of the new van to their Apache brothers and sisters. The pastor reports that the people at Rehoboth are not unusually rich; they are just committed to being light in the world. Since Joy Zomer is a daughter of their congregation, they have now decided to add an additional share of support in the Zomers, who became RCA missionaries in Budapest, Hungary, in January 1996.

Through the diaconal ministries program, many other RCA congregations are fanning the flame of mission service to others locally and globally. The annual denominational diaconal ministry gathering and the Deacon’s Bench help to equip deacons from each of the eight regional synods to become leaders in ministries of mercy, service, and outreach.

As a result of attending a diaconal workshop, Morningside Reformed Church in Sioux City, Iowa, restructured its consistory. The deacons now minister through three committees: mission, stewardship, and outreach. The mission committee leads the congregation in mission education and awareness of denominational mission projects, and assists and encourages participation in local and global ministry and mission.

BUILD A SEARCH LIGHT

The second goal is to build flexibility into the current RCA structure for mission in order to live out the RCA’s calling to mission.

**Objective:** To determine a plan for gift discernment and allocation for personnel decisions; i.e., who should be a missionary, where should he or she serve, how do mission personnel decide, etc. A draft report is due October 1997 and a final report by October 1998.

**Objective:** To develop a strategic plan, setting priorities—with appropriate criteria for evaluation, planning, site selection, program selection, and partner selection (including parachurch organizations, etc.)—for the entire mission program. A draft report is due October 1996 and a final report by March 1997.

In a new attempt at working together in mission, Third Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan, the Classis of Holland, Mission Services staff, the pastor, and members of a Japanese worshipping group are meeting together to form a ministry with Japanese people in southwest Michigan. Currently, forty to fifty Japanese people from the area worship together at Third Reformed Church on a monthly basis. The pastor, the Rev. Andy Nakajima, who became a Christian through the RCA mission program in Japan and is a graduate of Western Theological Seminary, is now reaching out to the growing number of Japanese students and business people in communities like Holland, Kalamazoo, Lansing, and Battle Creek, through an expanding circuit ministry of worship, Bible studies, and networking with local RCA congregations. This ministry is an example of how the various levels of the church can work together in what was once global outreach and is now local mission.
LINK THE LIGHTS

The third goal is to promote an environment of coordination, cooperation, and communication which overcomes compartmentalization among staff, synods, classes, etc.

Objective: To develop a plan for consultation and cooperation with other units of the denomination, and a procedure for Mission Is One activity, with a report by October 1996.

Currently, RCA staff from Evangelism and Church Development Services, Mission Services, and the racial/ethnic councils are negotiating how they can work together in the area of city ministry. Through increased financial flexibility, the use of “if raised” funds, and the pooling of supplies, money, and volunteers, it is hoped that new resources can be invested in city churches. RCA disaster response teams, job training, and employment programs developed in cooperation with congregations, classes, regions, and ecumenical partners are also part of the long-term plan.

Since 1993, staff from Congregational Services, Mission Services, and the regional synods have collaborated in the RCA diaconal ministries program.

SPOTLIGHT THE CITY

The fourth goal is to pay particular attention to ministry in cities as a place where the RCA discovers and models its practice of Mission Is One.

Objective: To develop a comprehensive strategy for urban (metropolitan) renewal and urban mission, keeping in mind the pressing needs of those in urban settings, especially the poor. A draft report is due October 1996 and a final report by October 1997.

Objective: To broaden the base for financial support to provide additional resources for mission outreach in national and international cities. A draft report is due March 1997 and a final report by October 1997.

A chain link fence separated El Dorado Park Community Church in Long Beach, California, from its neighbors in the city of Hawaiian Gardens, one of the most densely populated areas of Los Angeles County. In 1982 two young adults looked through the fence and saw children who needed Christ’s love and compassion. With the help of other young people from the El Dorado Park Community Church, they organized a week-long vacation Bible school called “Resurrection Celebration.” As a result, The Way Out Ministries was born and continues to minister to a community where drugs, alcohol, neglectful parents, and gangs are commonplace. Bible studies, counseling, and tutoring programs such as the Survivors (boys) and Victors (girls) clubs seek to build self-esteem and provide alternatives to gangs.

Through Reformed Church World Service, grants have been provided to support programs in cities which assist hungry children, in particular, and undergird programs for needy children throughout the year. The hunger education program also highlights the problem of hunger in the United States.

Proposals for future investment in city ministries call for establishing a 501(c)(3) program for the RCA in order to utilize funds from government and corporate grants, networking with World Vision in a new model of congregational cooperation, and the addition of staff or missionary appointments to city ministry. Liquidation of RCA real estate assets overseas where appropriate would be considered to provide new sources of funding and endowments.
for long-term commitments to the city. Expansion of diaconal ministries into urban areas and learning from churches and agencies who have successful urban leaders and projects will be necessary if this goal is to be realized.

EXCHANGE LIGHTS

The fifth goal is to encourage cross-cultural interactions as an important expression of mission.

Objective: To provide guidelines for ecumenical relationships, especially as they relate to the choice of mission fields, mission partners, etc. This should include references to the staff and offices of the Commission on Christian Unity and to the paper, "An Ecumenical Mandate for the Reformed Church in America" (see Report of the Commission on Christian Unity in the Christian Unity section).

As its last action before disbanding, the Task Force on South Africa recommended that the 1995 General Synod request the Office of Volunteer Services and the supervisor of RCA mission programs in Africa to explore possibilities for short- and long-term volunteer opportunities in Southern Africa, and likewise the possibilities for short- and long-term volunteers from South Africa to serve in the U.S. and Canada. This recommendation was adopted by the General Synod (MGS 1995, R-3, p. 405). In February 1996 the coordinator for volunteer services and the supervisor of RCA mission programs in Africa traveled with an RCA delegation to South Africa. The delegation, which included members of the African-American Council and representatives from RCA seminaries, investigated a mutual sharing of volunteers with the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa.

INCREASE THE WATTAGE

The sixth goal is to encourage reverse flow mission partnerships as opportunities to learn from each other about mission and witness.

Objective: To provide opportunities for local congregations to experience cross-cultural mission by encouraging them to become a "receiving" and a "sending" place.

In addition to exchanging volunteers with church partners, such projects as cross-cultural and intercultural worship experiences, mission study tours, and college and seminary exchanges must be encouraged in local RCA congregations. Some RCA congregations have already formed sister relationships with congregations in Japan and Eastern Europe. Other RCA congregations are reaching out to international students and workers in their communities.

Students at Western Theological Seminary are required to have a cross-cultural experience for graduation. In January 1996, twenty students, two professors, and two RCA pastors visited congregations and coworkers of the National Presbyterian Church in Mexico in Chiapas, Mexico. Lessons were learned from indigenous brothers and sisters who maintain a vibrant witness in spite of dire poverty and persecution for their faith. Such pilgrimages of interaction and reflection change perspectives and impact lives in ways that cannot be duplicated in the classroom.

R-1.
To affirm the above goals (in bold) for leading the Reformed Church in America mission program into the twenty-first century. (ADOPTED)
The advisory committee recommended:

R-2.
To instruct Mission Services, in cooperation with Congregational Services, regional synods, and classes, to plan regular mission events for youth with an emphasis on celebration, education, inspiration, and opportunities for mission service; and further,

to request Mission Services present a plan to the 1997 General Synod. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. Mission Services has been given the task of challenging and enabling every RCA member to join with the Christian community around the world in making Christ known among all people through word and witness.

2. The goal for Mission Services is to lead the RCA mission programs into the twenty-first century (see R-1, p. 409, above).

3. R-2 creates a vision for worldwide mission.

4. R-2 creates an avenue for youth to realize that young people, too, are a part of Mission Is One.

5. R-2 helps to fulfill the goals of cross-cultural exposure and "reverse flow" as young people have contact with missionaries and mission agencies.

GUIDELINES FOR FUTURE DIRECTION

While these goals and objectives are not totally new to the way the RCA has done mission in the past, they do call for a significant shift in the use of finances and personnel. In planning the budget for 1997, Mission Services staff realized the need for some missiological principles to guide them in the future allocation of mission funds and programs. Five principles were established.

PRINCIPLE 1: MISSION SERVICES SHALL EVALUATE MISSION INSTITUTIONS IN LIGHT OF CURRENT NEED.

Mission institutions such as schools and hospitals have been built because the RCA believes the gospel is holistic. Just as Jesus healed the sick and fed the crowds as he preached about God's reign, so, too, the RCA has included a concern for the whole person by offering medical care, educational programs, assistance to refugees, and support for those who seek justice in its witness.

Over time, national governments or other social agencies have often assumed the vital work of these institutions. While the RCA can be grateful for this impact, difficult questions must be asked of people and programs who have faithfully served the Lord for so long. Has this ministry been completed? Is it time to move on to serve more basic needs elsewhere? Who is being served by this institution, and are these needs now being met by other agencies? Can RCA partner churches assume more financial support and supervisory control over the personnel or program?
Jackson County Ministries in Kentucky provides an example of how an institution (Annville Institute), originally started as an educational mission to the children of Jackson County, has evolved primarily into a ministry (Barnabas Home) supported by the state to at-risk children who have been bounced between foster homes and have no place to call home.

**PRINCIPLE 2: MISSION SERVICES SHALL STRIVE FOR MUTUAL SUPPORT AND AGREEMENT IN ITS RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARTNER CHURCHES AND AGENCIES.**

If difficult decisions must be made regarding budget and program, they cannot be made in isolation. The RCA has always been committed to consulting with and responding to the requests of its mission partners. For example, currently the Protestant Church in Oman (PCO) is seeking to develop an interior ministry for the rural areas of Oman. Nearly 40,000 expatriate nurses and teachers have been hired by the government of Oman and assigned to rural wadis and villages to provide social services for the people of Oman. Many of these nurses and teachers are Christians from India and Pakistan. Since they are assigned to lonely, isolated areas, they have asked the church to serve them with the Word and sacraments in their small house churches.

The PCO wants to serve these Christians, but also to use their house churches as mission outposts to reach the people of Oman. The PCO has asked the RCA and the Anglican Church to each provide a chaplain for this joint venture. The PCO has invited the RCA to study its plan for this ministry, to offer suggestions for modifications, and then to jointly identify the necessary resources to put the plan in place. Even if there is agreement on this plan, what resources will the RCA have at its disposal? Mission giving from RCA congregations has been flat for the past ten years. New programs cannot be considered without phasing out established programs in Oman or asking the PCO to increase its share of support in these programs. Whether in Oman or Omaha, agreements must be decided mutually.

**PRINCIPLE 3: MISSION SERVICES STAFF SHALL EVALUATE PERSONNEL NEEDS IN THE SABBATH YEAR AND CONSIDER PHASING OUT INSTITUTIONAL PROGRAMS IN THE THIRD SABBATH YEAR.**

Though the RCA has made long-term commitments to its partners in the past, it is not interested in building kingdoms or maintaining lovely traditions. New RCA missionaries will be appointed for seven-year terms, which can then be phased out or renewed for another seven-years. Current missionaries will be evaluated for future need every seven years. When changes are needed, these missionaries will be available to serve in other areas of the world. Where possible, mission programs in existence for twenty-one years or more will be phased out in negotiation with RCA mission partners.

Examples of this principle can be seen in the agreement with the National Presbyterian Church in Venezuela. The Rev. Robert and Helen Wierenga were appointed as church planters with the Presbyterian Church, to serve for seven years. The plan is that at the end of 1997 the Wierengas will leave Caracas and a national pastor will replace them at the Esperanza Church.

In 1982 the RCA, at the request of the Moravian Church, placed medical missionaries Dr. Edward and Gillian Capparelli in Cauquira, Honduras. The Capparellis understood that the need for their work would be evaluated at the end of seven years. In the seventh year Ed’s work was affirmed and extended three more years because there were no national doctors ready to take over the Cauquira clinic. At the end of the tenth year the medical torch was passed on to Dr. Norvelle Goff Rudy and then to Dr. Maylo Wood, both of whom are Miskito Indians.
Dr. Norvelle Goff Rudy, her husband, Dr. Gerard Rudy, and Dr. Maylo Wood serve as RCA mission program associates. This means that they are under the supervision of an RCA partner church, mission agency, or parachurch organization, and that their salaries are established and regulated by the partner. The RCA makes a major contribution to the church partner for the support of the mission program associate's work.

The mission program in Chiapas is also being turned over to the national church. The medical clinic and paramedic program are already directed by nationals. The Rev. William and Peggy De Boer were replaced at the Chol Bible School in Palenque two years ago by a Chol teacher. Three other RCA missionaries have left Chiapas since 1993 as their translation or administration work was completed, and they have not been replaced. The disciples who were taught in Chiapas are now teaching and leading others. Missionaries serve for a time, but the church goes on.

**PRINCIPLE 4:** *As much as possible, the standard of living for RCA missionaries shall be commensurate with the local culture.*

While it is understood that North American missionaries must prepare for their eventual reentry into the North American standard of living, it is important to walk as equals among the people whom the RCA serves. Thus, missionary salaries would be set in agreement with partner churches and be appropriate to the level of the people with whom they serve. If that amount is less than what the missionary would be paid in North America, the extra funds would be set aside until the missionary returns to his or her home area. This policy will begin with newly appointed missionaries and will be encouraged for current RCA missionary personnel.

When the Rev. Roger and Carolyn Schrock served as world mission program associates with the Sudan Council of Churches (SCC), they worked under the management guidelines and personnel policies of the SCC. One of those policies was that an expatriate worker would receive the same remuneration as a Sudanese who had similar training and was performing similar tasks.

This meant that their house was a grass-roofed, mud-walled structure similar to that of their neighbors. A vehicle was provided not for them, but for the project. The people of the community had a sense of ownership and responsibility for it. Food purchases were of the local variety because imported food was too expensive. This principle enables the body of Christ to live in unity and avoid a consumptive lifestyle which erects barriers between missionaries and the people they serve.

RCA missionaries in Chiapas and Kenya spent their first years on the field living in local villages not only to learn tribal dialects, but also to understand cultural customs and to build relationships with the local people.

**PRINCIPLE 5:** *Where possible, missionaries shall be moved to mission program associate status.*

The RCA already has twenty-one world mission program associates (WMPA) serving in India, Japan, Taiwan, Honduras, Chiapas, Nicaragua, and Oman. Where possible, the school, hospital, or church partner provides full or partial salary for these WMPAs and the RCA provides benefits, travel, and program costs. This form of mutual support makes a true partnership. This kind of relationship will be encouraged both for missionaries presently serving and those who will be appointed although fully supported missionaries will continue to be needed in some areas.
Such a transition to the WMPA status will become a reality in Hong Kong, where the Rev. Wendell Karsen will become pastor of the Union Church on October 1, 1996. His salary, housing, and work expenses, along with direct supervision, will be the responsibility of the Union Church. The RCA will be responsible for benefits, which will allow for continued relationships between the Karsens and supporting RCA congregations.

A new opportunity for this kind of cooperation between partner church, missionary, RCA congregations, and area supervisor will take place in 1997 when Deborah Schneider Wilson will become a Reformed Church WMPA working with the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC) in Cambodia. The RCA will provide for Wilson's personal support while the RCA's partner, CRWRC, provides program support. At present, Cambodia is the place where need and opportunity are the greatest. In researching the needs of several Southeast countries, Wilson has found that war and political turmoil have devastated lives. She says, "The economic consequences have been extreme, and bare subsistence enterprises support most of the families. Christians have faced persecution and repression. Emotional trauma and fear are very evident." With a per capita annual income of $150, Cambodia is one of the poorest countries in the world. It has one of the highest birth rates and a death rate nearly twice that of the rest of Asia. Wilson's proposal creates six Cambodian community development organizations that will work with fifteen to twenty-five families in twenty communities. Over a five-year period this program will assist eighteen hundred to three thousand families.

**THE LIGHT CONTINUES TO SHINE . . .**

While the RCA must plan and prepare for mission work in the future, it can be grateful for the way its light continues to shine in many difficult places.

**Kuwait**

For many years RCA missionaries have faithfully proclaimed the light of the gospel with the people of Kuwait, though few Kuwaitis have publicly confessed Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Recent reports can help us understand why. After nearly ten years of learning and study, Hussein, a first class Kuwaiti, professed the Christian faith, and it cost him dearly. His wife has divorced him and has sought a court order to limit his visitation rights to his children. Hussein has lost his construction business and has been disinherited by his family. His passport has been withdrawn by the government, and his friends are fearful for his life because apostasy is an offense punishable by death according to the tenets of Islam. Hussein was approached by leading persons in society to recant. His response was that he could not and would not. This story became headline news. When fellow Christians, fearful for his life, approached Hussein, he said that in life or in death he would be true to Jesus. Pray for those whose cost of bearing the cross is heavy.

**War Zone of the Sudan**

In southern Sudan, where the horrors of war have displaced 80 percent of the people from their homes, where social infrastructures of education and health are almost nonexistent, and where more than one million people have died in the last ten years, the church of Jesus Christ is growing at a phenomenal rate. At the beginning of the civil war in 1983 it was estimated that 17 percent of the population was Christian. Now it has reached 70 percent. One of the pastors in the RCA's partner church, the Presbyterian Church of Sudan, baptized 9,288 people in his first year of pastoral ministry. One of the other churches in southern Sudan has more than 3,000 new hymns as a way of sharing the light of Jesus Christ.

The Rev. Dr. Haruun Ruun, a Sudanese national who loves the people of his church, has replaced the Rev. Roger Schrock as director of the dynamic New Sudan Council of Churches. Ruun was mentored by Schrock and now gives national leadership to the indigenous church.
Roger and Carolyn Schrock received part of their support from the RCA while in the Sudan as mission program associates. Schrock was appointed in October 1995 to the Mission Services staff and serves as supervisor of RCA mission programs in the Middle East and as coordinator for mission stewardship in the Synod of the Heartland.

Nile Theological College

Twenty-three students stepped forward to receive their diplomas at the first graduation ceremony at Nile Theological College in Khartoum, Sudan, in December 1995. RCA missionaries the Rev. Peter and Patty Ford and Barbara Kapenga are part of the college faculty. Ford is also the academic dean. With membership in the Presbyterian Church of Sudan exploding to over five hundred thousand members, trained leadership is crucial to this developing church.

Orma People

Unrest, shootings, and threats by Somali shfta robbers forced three RCA missionary couples to leave their development and evangelistic work among the Orma people of eastern Kenya three years ago. After many prayers, visits, and dialogue with the Orma leaders and the RCA partner, the African Inland Church, it was decided that Delvin and Debra Braaksma and Roger and Susan Scheenstra could safely return. The Braaksmas have found a home in the nearby city of Mombasa, where many of the Orma people come to visit them as they share the Word of God and show evangelistic films. Debra Braaksma has produced the first Orma primer; Delvin Braaksma makes visits by car to assist these nomadic people with the veterinary needs of their cattle. Roger and Susan Scheenstra have recently moved back to the village of Daba, where they lived previously, to renew their medical, veterinary, and spiritual ministries. Volunteers Bill and Carolyn Overway, from Holland, Michigan, have joined them to teach the Scheenstra children and to help with construction.

Reformed Church World Service (RCWS)

East Timor, Chechnya, Rwanda, Japan, Cuba, Sudan, Kenya, Bangladesh, Yugoslavia, Chiapas, Canada, and over thirty sites in the United States are places where the light has been shining through RCWS. Everything from food to medicine to community organization to development to rebuilding churches and homes destroyed by hurricanes to speaking out on behalf of the poor and needy were a part of carrying the torch and sharing the light through gifts given for Reformed Church World Service.

Synod viewed a video, A Celebration of Help and Hope, commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of Church World Service.<

RCA Volunteers

A large portion of the mission team in the RCA is volunteers. Hundreds of people have left the comfort of the pew and traveled around the world to lend a hand or wipe away a tear. The RCA’s Office of Volunteer Services was set back with the departure of Charla Ten Clay in August 1995. Ten Clay was the coordinator for volunteer services for nine years. The Rev. Richard Vander Voet was appointed as coordinator effective February 1, 1996. Future opportunities for volunteers in the RCA shine brightly.

Synod viewed an RCA Today video on the destruction caused by Hurricane Marilyn to the St. Thomas Reformed Church building. Synod also viewed slides presented by the Rev. Jeffrey Gargano on the destruction to the church building and parsonage and on the repair work completed by RCA volunteers.

Synod recognized RCA volunteers in attendance at the 1996 General Synod who went to St. Thomas, Virgin Islands and assisted in repair work on the St. Thomas Reformed Church building and parsonage.

FINANCES BRIGHT IN 1995

The good news about the RCA mission program’s bottom line in 1995 is that RCA congregational giving was up and expenses were down. Partnership-in-mission (PIM) share contributions were up $361,632; legacy income was up $99,810; and investment income was up $42,104. These are three reasons to be grateful and to celebrate God’s goodness and the RCA’s faithfulness. Concern over the major deficit that was experienced in 1994 caused Mission Services staff to cut expenses by 5 percent in every area of mission program. This resulted in a decrease in mission expenses of $263,424. The combination of increased giving and decreased expenses resulted in ending the year with an excess of $50,350.

In order to keep up with increased missionary salary and travel expenses for the 1996 mission program, the General Synod Council, at its March 1995 meeting, recommended that congregations increase their partnership-in-mission share amounts from $3,200 in 1995 to $3,400 in 1996. Mission Services staff is hopeful that RCA congregations will respond generously and make possible another positive financial balance in 1996.

Projecting similar increases in expenses for 1997, the General Synod Council, at its March 1996 meeting, recommended another $200 increase in mission share contributions for 1997. The average increase for the cost of mission personnel and program in international settings has been a little more than 4.5 percent per year. Using the 1987 partnership-in-mission base of $2,500 and a yearly increase of 4.5 percent as the cost of living factor, the 1996 PIM share would be $3,715. Thus, the 1996 PIM figure of $3,400 and even the suggested figure of $3,600 for 1997 is not out of line with expenses.

R-3.
To encourage each RCA congregation to have a partnership-in-mission share in the RCA mission program, and to ask those who already have partnership-in-mission shares to increase their shares accordingly to $3,600 in 1997. (ADOPTED)

The advisory committee recommended:

R-4.
To challenge RCA congregations to increase their financial giving to the RCA mission program by adding in 1997 at least one new partnership-in-mission share. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. While RCA congregational income has increased steadily over the years, giving for wider RCA mission activities from these same RCA congregations has remained relatively stagnant.
2. In 1995 only 3.7 percent of RCA congregational giving was designated for RCA mission programs. The RCA needs to be a better steward in fulfilling the Great Commission of making disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19).

3. A new RCA focus on mission in cities and interest in RCA volunteer opportunities requires increased financial support.<

CHANGES IN MISSIONARY AND STAFF PERSONNEL

Appointments

The Rev. Roger Schrock was appointed as coordinator of mission stewardship in the Synod of the Heartland and supervisor of RCA mission programs in the Middle East. Roger and his wife Carolyn served as RCA mission program associates with the New Sudan Council of Churches from 1991 to 1995. Carolyn Schrock is presently coordinating volunteers for cleanup work in St. Thomas, the Virgin Islands.

The Rev. David and Joy Zomer were appointed as missionaries in Budapest, Hungary.

Resignations/Completions of Service

Elaine Tanis was appointed as supervisor of RCA mission programs in Asia in 1989. She served in the Grand Rapids, Michigan, office from 1989 to 1995.

Charla Ten Clay was appointed as coordinator for RCA volunteer services and liaison for RCA mission programs in Appalachia and the Caribbean area in 1986. She served in the Orange City, Iowa, office from 1986 to 1995.

Volunteer Services Assignments

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<td>Other Way Ministries, Grand Rapids, Michigan</td>
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<td>Ann Heerde</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Project Hospitality, Staten Island, New York</td>
<td></td>
<td>Jennifer Steele</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Deaths

The Rev. John R. Kempers died on Nov. 27, 1995. He served as a pioneer missionary in Chiapas, Mexico, with his wife, Mabel, from 1925 to 1965.
The Rev. Albert De Voojd, Jr. died on December 10, 1995. He served as a missionary in Chiapas, Mexico, with his wife, Nita, from 1953 to 1964.

Synod recognized RCA missionaries in attendance at the 1996 General Synod.<

Synod recognized former RCA missionaries in attendance at the 1996 General Synod.

Report of the American Indian Council

Greetings from the eight Indian churches that make up the American Indian Council (AIC). With the revised format of this year's General Synod, this may quite possibly be our only opportunity to share warm feelings and a continued appreciation for the Reformed Church in America.

Winds of change seem to be on the increase throughout the United States, not only on the national level—particularly in regard to how Congress is responding to the needs and concerns of Native American people—but also on the denominational level, specifically in recognizing that all congregations may well be mission churches in their own setting. The American Indian Council has always been grateful for the RCA's commitment to mission programs in Mescalero and Dulce, New Mexico; Apache and Lawton, Oklahoma; Macy and Winnebago, Nebraska; and the two urban congregations in Omaha and Lincoln, Nebraska.

The winds of change by way of restructuring within the RCA have affected the AIC and the RCA Native American congregations. The council was moved to the GSC's Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee, and Nola Aalberts was appointed as supervisor of RCA mission programs among Native Americans. Also, new appointments to various judicatories and the possible vacancy of the position of executive director are all indications that change is in the air. New ministers in Macy and Winnebago, Nebraska, and a request to begin an urban Indian church in the Sioux Falls, South Dakota, area (where approximately 1,500 Native Americans live) have fanned the winds of change. This council has always appreciated the effort of the RCA to become a more diverse and inclusive communion. In fact, the council has on occasion and at various meetings asked the question: What other denomination goes as far as the RCA in financially committing itself to diversity?

The Native American Youth Camp was hosted by Mescalero Reformed Church in the summer of 1995. The theme, "Building a Nation," brought approximately forty-eight youths and eight staff together for a full week of social and spiritual encounters. Only one AIC congregation was unable to participate. The 1996 host for the Native American Youth Camp will be Apache Reformed Church in Apache, Oklahoma. This event continues to be the highlight of each AIC congregation's youth program and has increased youth involvement in congregational life. In addition, the financial commitment to this event is being shared more and more by participating young people.

The Reformed Church in America first began its ministry to Native Americans in the early 1600s. However, these early efforts in mission work with Indians in the Mohawk and Hudson river valleys came to a halt around the turn of the eighteenth century because of the hostility of European settlers and their increased desire for Indian land.
It wasn't until the 1890s that the Women's Board of Domestic Missions revived mission work among Native Americans, this time among the Indians of the Central Plains. In 1894 the women's board called the Rev. Frank Hall Wright into service. He faithfully carried the doctrine of the RCA to the Comanches, Fort Sill Apaches, Arapahos, and Cheyennes. As a result of Wright's missionary effort, Columbia Memorial Reformed Church was organized in Colony, Oklahoma, an event which older Indians say happened around 1896.

This past year marked the RCA's involvement in one hundred years of ministry to Native Americans.

To celebrate this milestone, the American Indian Council recommended:

R-5.
To request Policy, Planning, and Administration Services and Mission Services, in consultation with the American Indian Council, to include in the 1997 General Synod meeting an appropriate observance of the one hundredth anniversary of the Reformed Church in America's involvement in ministry with Native Americans. (ADOPTED)

From the Report of the General Secretary

P-1 (p. 45) was referred to the Advisory Committee on Evangelization and Church Growth and the Advisory Committee on World Mission.

➢ In response to P-1 (p. 45), the Advisory Committee on World Mission consulted with the Advisory Committee on Evangelization and Church Growth to prepare R-10 on p. 369. The Advisory Committee on Evangelization and Church Growth presented R-10 to this General Synod for adoption (see p. 369).<
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 1998
Gerrit (Jerry) Koobs .................................................. Classis of Ontario#
Gene Poll ................................................................... Classis of Illinois#

Class of 1999
*Richard Bates ............................................................ Classis of North Grand Rapids#
*Louis Benes ............................................................... Classis of South Grand Rapids#
Shirley Beyers .......................................................... Classis of Montgomery#
Regina Brannock ....................................................... At-Large
*Shari Brink .............................................................. At-Large
*Kathleen Hart Brumm ............................................. Classis of Orange#
*John Buteyn, Jr. ....................................................... Classis of Red River#
*Jewell Cooper .......................................................... At-Large
*Donald De Vries ...................................................... Classis of Central California#
*Marilyn Franken ..................................................... Classis of Holland#
*Nelson Hymans ...................................................... Classis of Central Plains#
*Toni Macon ........................................................... Classis of Mid-Hudson#
*Helen Monsees ...................................................... At-Large
*John Opmeer ............................................................ Classis of British Columbia#
*Allen Pruis ............................................................. Classis of Wisconsin#
*Nancy Ryan ........................................................... Classis of New Brunswick#
Marvin Tinklenberg .................................................. Classis of Minnesota#
Pacia Vanus ............................................................ Classis of Schobanie#
*Charles Van Engen ................................................ Vice President of General Synod
*Roger Van Liere ...................................................... Classis of Florida#
*Moody Yap ........................................................... At-Large#

BOARD OF TRUSTEES, NEW BRUNSWICK THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
Class of 1999
*John Collier ............................................................ NBTS#
*James Ebbers .......................................................... NBTS#
Clifford Feakes ...................................................... NBTS#
Eugene Fisher .......................................................... Regional Synod of the Far West
Sei Chang Jhoung ...................................................... NBTS#
Brad Langstraat ...................................................... Regional Synod of the Heartland
*Carol Myers ........................................................... Regional Synod of the Great Lakes
*John Tysse ............................................................. NBTS#

BOARD OF TRUSTEES, THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION AGENCY
Class of 1999
Vernon Hoffs .......................................................... TEA#
David Schutt ........................................................... Regional Synod of the Far West
Betty Sikkink ........................................................... Regional Synod of the Heartland
BOARD OF TRUSTEES, WESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Class of 1997

Rong Fu Lu ............................................................... Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics

Class of 1999

Barbara Alexander .................................................... Regional Synod of New York
Herman Chapman ...................................................... Regional Synod of Mid-America#
Karen Hanson ............................................................ WTS#
Anthony Vis .............................................................. WTS#

EDITORIAL COUNCIL OF THE CHURCH HERALD

Class of 1999

*Anna Gonzales .......................................................... Regional Synod of the Far West#
Sophie Mathonnet-Vander Well .................................. Regional Synod of Albany#
*Michael Otte ............................................................ Regional Synod of New York#
*Ruth Staal ................................................................ At Large

COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN ACTION

Class of 1999

Eddy Aleman
*Donald Cronkite
Terry Troia

COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN UNITY

Class of 1997

Douglas Estella

Class of 1999

Liala Beukema
*Heino Blaau
*Loreen Danihoff

COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Class of 1998

Marcia Bradsell

Class of 1999

*Timothy Mulder
*Amy Van Gunst

COMMISSION ON CHURCH ORDER

Class of 1999

*William Bouwer
John De Koster

COMMISSION ON HISTORY

Class of 1999

John Oquendo
J. Jeffrey Tyler

COMMISSION ON JUDICIAL BUSINESS

Class of 1999

*Adrienne Flipse Hausch ............................................ Regional Synod of New York#
*Melvin Vos .............................................................. Regional Synod of the Heartland#
COMMISSION ON NOMINATIONS
Class of 1997
*J. John Hesselink ....................................................... Past President of General Synod

Class of 1998
*Louise Smith ............................................................. Regional Synod of the Great Lakes

Class of 1999
Jesus Cruz ............................................................... Council for Hispanic Ministries
Charles Doornbos ..................................................... Regional Synod of Mid-America
Astrid Zabriskie ......................................................... Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics

COMMISSION ON THEOLOGY
Class of 1999
Douglas Anderson
Thomas Boogaart
*Lynn Japinga

COMMISSION FOR WOMEN
Class of 1999
Fran Baron
Gary De Witt

WORLD ALLIANCE OF REFORMED CHURCHES
Class of 1999
Jeffrey Gargano ......................................................... Commission on Christian Unity

BUILDING AND EXTENSION FUND
Class of 1999
*Jack Dalenberg ....................................................... At-Large
Simon Lin ................................................................. At-Large

BOARD OF TRUSTEES, CENTRAL COLLEGE
Class of 2002
Mark De Cook
Donald Vogel

BOARD OF TRUSTEES, HOPE COLLEGE
Class of 2000
Lauretta Eckman
John Jong-Pyo Lee
Peter Semeyn

BOARD OF TRUSTEES, NORTHWESTERN COLLEGE
Class of 2000
Mary Ann Wierks

BOARD OF DIRECTORS, SOUTHERN NORMAL SCHOOL
Class of 1997
Micheal Edwards
Robert Terwilliger

Class of 1998
*Bernita Babb
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 1996-97 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, none required additional editorial attention by the Synod.
REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE OF REFERENCE

REFERRAL OF GENERAL SECRETARY PROPOSAL

P-3 (p. 51) was referred to the Committee of Reference.

In response to P-3 (p. 51), the Committee of Reference recommended:

R-1.
To request the general secretary to schedule visits with the pastors and members of classes of each region over the next twenty-four months for times of reflection and dialogue about our fellowship, our unity, and our commitment to be in mission and witness together; and further,

to review models of innovation and change presently underway in the functioning of classes; and further,

to prepare interim reports as necessary and a final report with recommendations for the revitalization of classes to the General Synod no later than 1998. (ADOPTED) 

Overtures

The Committee of Reference received the following overtures for consideration and recommendation to the General Synod:

Deadlines for Responses from Classes or Consistories to General Synod

1. The Classis of South Grand Rapids overtures General Synod to adopt a policy that when referrals are made to classes or consistories for which a response is sought, the deadline for responses will be no earlier than April 1 of the following calendar year.

Reasons:

1. Each year General Synod or its agencies refer matters to RCA consistories and classes with a deadline date for response early in the following year. This is an unrealistic date since the "Orange Books" are not available until mid-September following the General Synod meeting held in June. A printed list of the 1995 General Synod referrals was not received by RCA pastors until after September 2, 1995 (Labor Day). Also, thirty-two classes meet sometime in October. If General Synod referrals are assigned at this October meeting, RCA pastors, consistories, and classes cannot be expected to study the referrals and have reports prepared until the winter sessions of classes. However, after the first of the year, only twelve of forty-six classes meet in January. Ten classes do not meet until February and twenty-four classes do not meet until March.
2. Comments over the past years from commissions receiving General Synod referrals indicate there are rarely more than a few responses from RCA classes and consistories. This may be unfairly interpreted as meaning there is general approval in the denomination of proposed General Synod reports. In fact, there may have been woefully inadequate response time.

The 1995 General Synod commended the thirteen-page paper, "An Ecumenical Mandate for the Reformed Church in America," to congregations, consistories, classes, etc., of the RCA for "study, reflection, and response on a process guided by the Commission on Christian Unity" (MGS 1995, R-3, p. 186) and then instructed the commission to bring the final version to the 1996 General Synod for adoption. The commission mailed "An Ecumenical Mandate for the Reformed Church in America" the first week in December 1995, asking for responses by February 12, 1996. The commission surely did not have widespread responses, because the time frame precluded them.

3. There can be a temptation at the General Synod level to ignore the fact that grassroots input from the RCA can significantly improve or alter documents which may have been proposed by only a small group of people. There can also be the temptation to assume that any document presented at General Synod which is to be referred must have final resolution within a year. Waiting a second year will rarely hinder the effect of proposals and could greatly increase credibility and unity around General Synod actions. This overture requests the General Synod and its agencies to recognize that the study and review process should be molded by a realistic awareness of classis responsibilities and priorities, and that a sincere desire to allow adequate time for broad input is well worth waiting the additional year in order to obtain representative responses.

4. If the April 1 deadline for responses to General Synod referrals is adopted and few responses come in by this deadline, then there is a reasonable basis for concluding there was adequate time to respond, and that perhaps there is general acceptance for the General Synod documents referred.

5. Commissions could also schedule April meetings in order for responses from classes to be adequately considered.

➢The Committee of Reference recommended:

R-2.
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. Deadlines have been extended in past years at various times when additional time has been requested by commissions and agencies.

2. The existing deadline for approval by classes for amendments to the Book of Church Order is less than one year. ❖

Correspondence to Canadian Government Officials Written by Executive Secretary of the Regional Synod of Canada

2. The Classis of Canadian Prairies overtures General Synod that when General Synod instructs the general secretary and/or other RCA staff, commissions, and agencies to write letters to the prime minister of Canada or other ministers of the
Crown, General Synod instruct the executive secretary of the Regional Synod of Canada (rather than the RCA general secretary) to act—only for the purpose of writing these letters—as the official Canadian representative of the Reformed Church in America.

Reasons:

1. The Classis of Canadian Prairies seeks to be pragmatic. The reason for any such letter is a request by the General Synod for action from the Canadian government, prime minister, or other minister of the Crown.

2. The indigenous principle carries more weight. An official letter from an RCA office and from the hand of an RCA Canadian executive secretary is more effective than a letter from church headquarters in another country.

3. The Classis of Canadian Prairies still honors denominational identity. The executive secretary of the Regional Synod of Canada can indicate that the letter is sent on the basis of a General Synod decision.

➢ The Committee of Reference recommended:

R-3.
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The general secretary already has authority to delegate such communications and exercises it on occasion.

Review of Purpose and Responsibilities for Regional Synods

3. The Classis of Greater Palisades overtures General Synod to conduct a full review of the purpose and responsibilities of regional synods within the Reformed Church in America. The review should include the following:

a. Take into account the historical evolution of responsibilities of regional synods within RCA church order.

b. Consider for what purposes and programs the regional synods may appropriately assess classes within their bounds.

c. Make recommendations that clarify what programmatic responsibilities the regional synods may assume without violating the prerogatives of the classes within their bounds.

Reasons:

1. The RCA Constitution assigns no specific calling to regional synods other than as a judicatory.

2. The Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part III, Article 2, Section 4, permits such a broad interpretation as to allow regional synods to function with widely varying understandings of proper missions and purposes for regional synods.

3. A cursory examination of the front pages of the RCA Plan Calendar which list staffs of regional synods suggests a wide disparity in the self-determined functions of the eight RCA regional synods.

4. Because of a lack of clear definition, the self-determined programmatic activities of the eight regional synods duplicate the activities of the General Synod and the RCA classes.
5. General Synod must perform this review of the purpose and responsibilities of regional synods and give guidance because General Synod is the judicatory to which regional synods are accountable.

6. The current status and situation with respect to regional synods stands in opposition to the principle expressed in the Preamble of the Book of Church Order: "That purpose is achieved most effectively when good order and proper discipline are maintained by means of... governmental agencies.

7. The recent restructure of the RCA (July 1, 1993) stopped short of performing a review of the purposes and responsibilities of regional synods (see MGS 1992, pp. 73-76) and thereby perpetuated the disparity among regional synods.

➢ The Committee of Reference recommended:

R-4.
To direct the moderator of the General Synod Council, in consultation with the general secretary and the director of Policy, Planning, and Administration Services, to appoint a task force comprised of eight persons with representation from the General Synod Council, the General Synod Council unit directors, regional synod executives, and stated clerks of classes; and further,

to direct this task force to conduct a review of the purpose and responsibilities of regional synods and classes; and further,

to direct this task force to propose any necessary structural changes arising out of its work; and further,

to direct this task force to take into account the following:

1. The historical evolution of responsibilities of regional synods and classes within the RCA church order and the relationship of these assemblies and their responsibilities to each other and to the General Synod and the General Synod Council;

2. The purposes and programs that are most appropriately assigned to regional synods and classes without violating the prerogatives of the General Synod; and

3. The need to develop a coordinated and integrated funding strategy for the work of the RCA carried out through the General Synod, the regional synods, and the classes;

and further,

to direct this task force to report to the 1998 General Synod.

(ADOPTED)

Reason: The recent restructure of the RCA (July 1, 1993) stopped short of performing a review of the purposes and responsibilities of regional synods (see MGS 1992, pp. 73-76).

(R-4 had a cost effect on the 1997 General Synod Operational Budget. See 1997 General Synod Operational Budget, p. 428.)
1997 GENERAL SYNOD OPERATIONAL BUDGET

The Committee of Reference reported the cost effect of three items added to the 1997 General Synod Operational Budget by this General Synod.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Budget</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continue the Task Force on Standards for the</td>
<td>$18,100</td>
<td>$.11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Preparation for the Professional Ministry in the RCA</td>
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<tr>
<td>(R-23, p. 343)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Basic Services Cost</td>
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<tr>
<td>Appoint a Task Force to Study Relationship of</td>
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<td>Reformed Church Women’s Ministries to RCA Structure</td>
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<tr>
<td>(p. 133)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Basic Services Cost</td>
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<tr>
<td>Appoint a Task Force to Study Purpose and</td>
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<td>$.06</td>
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<td>Responsibilities of Regional Synods and Classes</td>
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<tr>
<td>(R-4, p. 427)</td>
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<td>Basic Services Cost</td>
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(The above three items were included in the 1997 General Synod Operational Budget adopted by this General Synod. See pp. 66-69.)

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-5.
WHEREAS the delegates and guests of General Synod have been graciously received by Northwestern College; and

WHEREAS the hospitality, meals, and meeting space have contributed to the welfare and productivity of the delegates;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninetieth General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Orange City, Iowa, on the fourteenth day of June 1996, expresses its heartfelt gratitude to president James Bultman, the staff, and student volunteers of Northwestern College for their magnanimity in hosting the delegates of the General Synod. (ADOPTED)
R-6. WHEREAS the mayor pro-tem of Orange City, Darrell Beltman, and the citizens of Orange City warmly welcomed the delegates of the General Synod and provided hospitality and entertainment for their leisure;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninetieth General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Orange City, Iowa, on the fourteenth day of June 1996, conveys its appreciation to mayor pro-tem Beltman and the citizens of this fine community. (ADOPTED)

R-7. WHEREAS the members of area churches provided transportation for and hospitality following Sunday worship; and

WHEREAS these kind people hosted the delegates of General Synod with extreme grace and generosity;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninetieth General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Orange City, Iowa, on the fourteenth day of June 1996, expresses its sincere appreciation to the pastors and members of these churches. (ADOPTED)

R-8. WHEREAS Norma Violante has given scrupulous attention to every detail in order to provide for the delegates' comfort and the efficiency of their work; and

WHEREAS Norma Violante has done so with aplomb and gentle humor;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninetieth General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Orange City, Iowa, on the fourteenth day of June 1996, expresses its appreciation to Norma Violante and conveys its admiration for a job well done in coordinating her first General Synod. (ADOPTED)

R-9. WHEREAS Laurie Bolluyt, Pam De Haan, and Brenda Jacobs of the General Synod Council office in Orange City, Iowa, have given tirelessly of their time, talent, and energy in providing administrative and word processing assistance to the General Synod;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninetieth General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Orange City, Iowa, on the fourteenth day of June 1996, expresses its gratitude to Laurie Bolluyt, Pam De Haan, and Brenda Jacobs. (ADOPTED)

R-10. WHEREAS the delegates and guests of the General Synod were enlightened and inspired to make liturgy "holy play" and to understand liturgy as a part of daily life;
THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninetieth General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Orange City, Iowa, on the fourteenth day of June 1996, expresses its gratitude and appreciation, with prayers for God's blessings, to the Rev. Dr. Donald Saliers. (ADOPTED)

R-11.
WHEREAS the Rev. John Paarlberg coordinated a most creative series of worship services and utilized the gifts and talents of the Commission on Christian Worship in prompting the delegates to consider the intertwining of liturgy and life; and

WHEREAS First Reformed Church in Orange City welcomed the delegates and guests to its house of worship;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninetieth General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Orange City, Iowa, on the fourteenth day of June 1996, commends the Rev. John Paarlberg for the richness and diversity of the worship services and for using the gifts of the Commission on Christian Worship, and expresses its gratitude to the Rev. Steven Vander Molen and First Reformed Church. (ADOPTED)

R-12.
WHEREAS the Rev. Dr. I. John Hesselink presided with gentle patience and thoughtful, challenging, theological reflection during his tenure as president of General Synod and focused the church on an understanding of its theological heritage and future;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninetieth General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Orange City, Iowa, on the fourteenth day of June 1996, expresses its thanks to almighty God for the dedicated service of the Rev. Dr. I. John Hesselink. (ADOPTED)

R-13.
WHEREAS the Rev. Anthony Vis, vice-president of General Synod, has faithfully discharged his duties this past year;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninetieth General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Orange City, Iowa, on the fourteenth day of June 1996, expresses its gratitude to the Rev. Anthony Vis and pledges to him its prayers during his term as president of the General Synod. (ADOPTED)

R-14.
WHEREAS the Rev. Dr. Charles Van Engen has been elected vice-president of the General Synod;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninetieth General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Orange City, Iowa, on the fourteenth day of June 1996, expresses its congratulations and commends the Rev. Dr. Charles Van Engen to God's care. (ADOPTED)
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 patience and careful reflection, to the end that all things were done decently and in order;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninetieth General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Orange City, Iowa, on the fourteenth day of June 1996, expresses its thanks for their dedicated service. (ADOPTED)

WHEREAS the many elder delegates offered their tireless energies and careful consideration 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 ninetieth General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Orange City, Iowa, on the fourteenth day of June 1996, enthusiastically expresses its thanksgiving to God for the dedication and love for the church of its elder delegates. (ADOPTED)

WHEREAS Ken and Beth Van Prooyen have generously and graciously given of their vacation time to serve the General Synod as sound technicians for the past twenty-two years;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninetieth General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Orange City, Iowa, on the fourteenth day of June 1996, expresses its thanks to Ken and Beth Van Prooyen for their dedicated service. (ADOPTED)

WHEREAS the staff of the Reformed Church in America who are present at the General Synod have given of themselves with enthusiasm, energy, and dedication;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninetieth General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Orange City, Iowa, on the fourteenth day of June 1996, expresses its appreciation and affirmation and offers its prayers for God’s blessings upon these staff persons. (ADOPTED)

WHEREAS Ms. Andrea Van Beek has served the General Synod as its parliamentarian with skill, competence, decorum, and humor;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninetieth General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Orange City, Iowa, on the fourteenth day of June 1996, offers Andrea Van Beek its deepest thanks. (ADOPTED)
R-20.
WHEREAS Chaplain (Captain U.S. Navy, retired) Thomas Marsden
has offered pastoral counsel and care to the delegates by serving as
the General Synod chaplain;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninetieth
General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in
Orange City, Iowa, on the fourteenth day of June 1996, expresses its
appreciation to Chaplain Thomas Marsden for his ministry among
us. (ADOPTED)

R-21.
WHEREAS Christ Community Church in Spring Lake, Michigan,
the Classis of Muskegon, and the Rev. Dr. Richard Rhem are
engaged in continuing difficult conversations;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninetieth
General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in
Orange City, Iowa, on the fourteenth day of June 1996, expresses its
Christian love to all parties and offers to them all our prayers.
(ADOPTED)

R-22.
WHEREAS Marc Woodridge, percussionist, the Rev. Dr. Donald
Lindskoog and Dr. Rodney Jiskoot, organists, and members of the
choir have offered their gifts and abilities in enabling us to lift our
voices in praise to our God;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninetieth
General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in
Orange City, Iowa, on the fourteenth day of June 1996, expresses its
gratitude to Marc Woodridge, the Rev. Dr. Donald Lindskoog, Dr.
Rodney Jiskoot, and members of the choir. (ADOPTED)

R-23.
WHEREAS the Rev. Timothy Brown, through serving as our
worship leader in a thoughtful and passionate manner, caused
delegates to consider living the transformed life;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninetieth
General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in
Orange City, Iowa, on the fourteenth day of June 1996, extends its
sincere gratitude and appreciation to the Rev. Timothy Brown for
his daily worship leadership. (ADOPTED)

R-24.
WHEREAS the Rev. Terry MacArthur energized the delegates in
their worship with the gifts of his musical leadership; and

WHEREAS the Rev. Terry MacArthur taught the delegates to sing
a new song unto the Lord in foreign tongues and familiar hymns
with new sensitivity;
THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninetieth General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Orange City, Iowa, on the fourteenth day of June 1996, gives thanks to God for the world-embracing musical gifts of the Rev. Terry MacArthur and extends to him its wishes for God's blessings upon his ministry. (ADOPTED)

R-25.
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:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>General Synod Council</th>
<th>Theological Education Agency Board of Trustees</th>
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<tr>
<td>Aruillia Craig</td>
<td>Richard Koerselman</td>
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<td>Harold Korver</td>
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<td>Phyllis Palsma</td>
<td>Raymond Lokers</td>
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<td>New Brunswick Theological Seminary Board of Trustees</td>
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<td>Samuel Kwon</td>
<td>Editorial Council of the Church Herald</td>
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<td>Jerilyn Luiders</td>
<td>Craig Hoffman</td>
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<td>Oliver Patterson</td>
<td>Northwestern College Board of Trustees</td>
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<td>Allen Ramirez-Moncayo</td>
<td>Evelyn Vander Meer</td>
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<td>Western Theological Seminary Board of Trustees</td>
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<td>Ann Boss</td>
<td>Reformed Church Women's Ministries</td>
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<td>Mary Fitzgerald</td>
<td>Marjorie Anderson</td>
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<td>John Rottenberg</td>
<td>Commission on Church Order</td>
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<td>Norman Schouten</td>
<td>Jewell Cooper</td>
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<td>Commission on Christian Action</td>
<td>Commission on Nominations</td>
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<td>Robin Klay</td>
<td>James Esther</td>
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<td>Jack Klunder</td>
<td>James Veld</td>
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<td>Commission on Christian Unity</td>
<td>Commission for Women</td>
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<td>Terry Troia</td>
<td>Gloria Dalman</td>
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<td>Commission on History</td>
<td>Victor Ebert</td>
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<td>John Coakley</td>
<td>Commission on Theology</td>
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<td>Douglas Estella</td>
<td>I. John Hesselink</td>
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<td>Building and Extension Fund</td>
<td>Council on Theology</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gene Kooiman</td>
<td>David Timmer</td>
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<td>Council for Pacific and Asian</td>
<td>World Alliance of Reformed Churches</td>
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<td>American Ministries Executive</td>
<td>Wilbur Washington</td>
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<td>Committee</td>
<td>Council for Hispanic Ministries Executive</td>
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<td>Lemuel Bhatia</td>
<td>Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hee Soo Lee</td>
<td>Brigada Cabrera</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chanthalone Sivongsay</td>
<td>Gladys Rivera</td>
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The Rev. Terry MacArthur led the General Synod in a closing time of singing following the resolutions.
ELECTION OF OFFICERS

The Rev. Anthony Vis, pastor of the Meredith Drive Reformed Church in Des Moines, Iowa, was elected president. The Rev. Dr. Charles Van Engen, associate professor of theology of mission at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, was elected vice-president.

III. CLOSE OF GENERAL SYNOD

CLOSE AND ADJOURNMENT

President I. John Hesselink presented president-elect Anthony Vis with the traditional bell and gavel and the presidential cross.

The 190th General Synod concluded its business and adjourned at 9:15 p.m. central time on Friday, June 14, 1996, to meet in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, June 14-20, 1997.

I. John Hesselink, President
Anthony D. Vis, Vice-President
Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, General Secretary