The Acts
&
Proceedings
of the 193rd Regular Session
of the
GENERAL SYNOD

REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA

Convened on the campus of
Augustana College
Sioux Falls, South Dakota
June 11-16, 1999

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

Beginning on page 46 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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ACTS AND PROCEEDINGS

THE GENERAL SYNOD OF THE REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA CONVENED IN ITS ONE HUNDRED NINETY-THIRD REGULAR SESSION ON THE CAMPUS OF AUGUSTANA COLLEGE IN SIOUX FALLS, SOUTH DAKOTA, ON FRIDAY, THE ELEVENTH DAY OF JUNE, A.D. ONE THOUSAND NINE HUNDRED AND NINETY-NINE, AT 10:20 A.M., CENTRAL DAYLIGHT TIME.


I. FORMATION OF THE SYNOD

OPENING OF SYNOD

The General Synod opened on Friday morning, June 11, 1999, with a worship service at Our Savior’s Lutheran Church near the Augustana College campus. Participants in the service were the Rev. Frederick Kruithof, president of the General Synod; the Rev. Vernon Hoffs, vice president of the General Synod; the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, general secretary of the Reformed Church in America; the Rev. Steven Stam, pastor of Third Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan, preaching; the Rev. Carolyn Holloway, pastor of DeWitt Reformed Church in New York City; Dr. John D. Witvliet, General Synod music director; and Emily Cooper, organist.

The Revs. Carolyn Holloway and Steven Stam presided as worship leaders and preachers for the daily worship services during the meetings of the General Synod (Friday-Wednesday, June 11-16, 1999). Music leadership for the worship services was provided by Dr. John D. Witvliet, director of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and Emily Cooper, office manager of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship.

Also participating in the daily worship services were Jacqueline Pederson-Kriens and Aimee Hegge, liturgical dance; and the Rev. Donald Jiskoot, General Synod chaplain.
WORSHIP

Friday Morning
Opening Worship Service—The Rev. Frederick Kuithof
The Rev. Vernon Hoff
The Rev. Carolyn Holloway
The Rev. Steven Starn
The Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson
Dr. John D. Witvliet

Closing Prayer—The Rev. David Bassett

Friday Afternoon
Opening Prayer—The Rev. Miriam Baar Bush
Closing Prayer—The Rev. Craig Wagner

Friday Evening
Opening Prayer—The Rev. Walter Opmeer
Closing Prayer—Elder Carol Mutch

Saturday Morning
Worship Service—The Rev. Carolyn Holloway

Sunday Morning
General Synod participants worshiped in the following RCA churches within the bounds of the Classes of Dakota, Minnesota, and West Sioux.

First Reformed Church
Faith Reformed Church
Bethany Reformed Church
Chancellor Reformed Church
Chandler Reformed Church
First Reformed Church
Bethel Reformed Church
The Reformed Church
First Reformed Church
First Reformed Church
Hope Reformed Church
First Reformed Church
First Reformed Church
Delaware Reformed Church
Bethel Reformed Church
Bethel Reformed Church
Salem Reformed Church
American Reformed Church
First Reformed Church
Calvary Reformed Church
First Reformed Church
Faith Reformed Church
First Reformed Church
Community Reformed Church
First Reformed Church
Good News Reformed Church
First Reformed Church
Reformed Church of Steen
Valley Springs Reformed Church
American Reformed Church

Boyden, Iowa
Brookings, South Dakota
Canton, South Dakota
Chancellor, South Dakota
Chandler, Minnesota
Colton, South Dakota
Davis, South Dakota
Dell Rapids, South Dakota
Doon, Iowa
Edgerton, Minnesota
George, Iowa
Hull, Iowa
Inwood, Iowa
Lennox, South Dakota
Leota, Minnesota
Lester, Iowa
Little Rock, Iowa
Luverne, Minnesota
Mitchell, South Dakota
Monroe, South Dakota
Rock Rapids, Iowa
Rock Valley, Iowa
Rock Valley, Iowa
Sioux Falls, South Dakota
Sioux Falls, South Dakota
Sioux Falls, South Dakota
Slayton, Minnesota
Steen, Minnesota
Valley Springs, South Dakota
Woodstock, Minnesota
Monday Morning
Worship Service—The Rev. Carolyn Holloway
Closing Prayer—The Rev. Barbara Morphew

Monday Afternoon
Opening Prayer—The Rev. Kevin Harney
Closing Prayer—The Rev. Allan Janssen

Monday Evening
Opening Prayer—Elder Edna Richards
Closing Prayer—The Rev. William Fennema

Tuesday Morning
Worship Service—The Rev. Steven Stam
Closing Prayer—Frances Stachour

Tuesday Afternoon
Opening Prayer—The Rev. Scott Van Arendonk
Closing Prayer—The Rev. Albert Spaan

Tuesday Evening
Opening Prayer—The Rev. Donald Heringa
Closing Prayer—Elder Jeanne Van Hassell

Wednesday Morning
Prayers—The Rev. Carolyn Holloway and the Rev. Steven Stam
Closing Prayer—The Rev. Ronald Sikkema

An installation service for the new officers of General Synod and a Communion service were held at Our Savior's Lutheran Church on Wednesday morning, June 16. Participants in the service included: the Rev. Dennis TeBeest, moderator of the Commission on Christian Worship; the Rev. Frederick Kruithof, president of General Synod; the Rev. Vernon Hoffs, preaching; the Rev. Gregg Mast, president-elect of General Synod; Carol Mutch, vice president-elect of General Synod; the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, general secretary of the Reformed Church in America; Dr. John D. Witvliet, 1999 General Synod music director; and Emily Cooper, organist.
ROLL CALL OF SYNOD

Regional Synod of Albany

Scott De Block, 3041 Troy-Schenectady Rd, Schenectady, NY 12309

Classis of Albany

MINISTERS
Gregg Mast, 110 N Pearl St, Albany, NY 12207
Glenn Van Oort, 1150 Maple Hill Rd, Castleton, NY 12033

ELDERS
Gary Hoffman, 321 County Route 412, Westerlo, NY 12198
Sandra Torrant, 3 Eastview Ter, Rensselaer, NY 12144

Classis of Columbia-Greene

MINISTERS
David Corlett, PO Box K, Claverack, NY 12513
James Ribbans, 23 Kinderhook St, Chatham, NY 12037

ELDERS
Henry Lauer, 1509 Rte 27, Craryville, NY 12521

Classis of Montgomery

MINISTERS
Donald Battjes, 914 Ridgwood Rd, Herkimer, NY 13350
James De Witt, 18 S Otsego St, Mohawk, NY 13407

ELDERS
Mary Dobrovolc, 141 Sunset Cir, Little Falls, NY 13365
Kenneth Palmer, 19 Walnut St, Mohawk, NY 13407

Classis of Rochester

MINISTERS
Harold Delhagen, 7784 Hamilton St, Williamson, NY 14589
John Zwyghuizen, 595 Clyer-Sherman Rd, Clymer, NY 14724

ELDERS
Calvin Bucknam, 992 Turner Rd, Palmyra, NY 14522
Eugene Ligtenberg, 52 Marble Dr, Rochester, NY 14615
Classis of Schenectady

MINISTERS

David DeVries, 331 Riverview Rd, Rexford, NY 12148
Thomas McCrossan, 3205 Harold St, Schenectady, NY 12306

ELDERS

Lloyd Hagen, 836 Touarnuna Rd, Amsterdam, NY 12010
Joanna Smith, 113 Sugar Hill Rd, Rexford, NY 12148

Classis of Schoharie

MINISTERS

Scott Crane, 103 Langley Rd, Amsterdam, NY 12010
Richard Dykstra, PO Box 267, Roxbury, NY 12474

ELDERS

Marilyn Douglas, 9 Colby Ave, Fultonville, NY 12072
Leon Smith, 232 Logtown Rd, Fultonville, NY 12072

Regional Synod of Canada

Albert Spaa, 8504 204 St, Langley, BC V2Y 2C2

Classis of British Columbia

MINISTERS

David King, 12760 227B St, Maple Ridge, BC V2X 2Z4
Russell Ooms, 10847-145A St, Surrey, BC V3R 2A8

ELDERS

Jerry Feenstra, 36239 Sandringham, Abbotsford, BC V3G 2M4
John Hooper, 7936 Superior Rd, Lantzville, BC V0R 2H0

Classis of Canadian Prairies

MINISTERS

Walter Opmeer, 11204 163A Ave, Edmonton, AL T5X 2A6

ELDERS

Doreen Leicht, 205 Loxam Dr, Sunset Beach, AB T9S 1R6
Aart Van Leeuwen, 1134 75th St, Edmonton, AL T6K 2S2
Classis of Ontario

MINISTERS

Ronald Sikkema, 201 Paradise Rd N, Hamilton, ON L8S 3T3
Joseph Veltman, Box 242, Maitland, ON K0E 1P0

ELDERS

Jacob Van Maanen, 71 Lincoln St, Chatham, ON N7M 4Y8
James Vellenga, 215 Huron St, East, Exeter, ON N0M 1S1

Regional Synod of the Far West

Eugene Fisher, 4233 Don Ortega Pl, Los Angeles, CA 90008

Classis of California

MINISTERS

Brian Anderson, 23331 Moulton Pkwy, Laguna Hills, CA 92653
Douglas McClintic, 24710 Washington Ave, Suite 7, Murrieta, CA 92562
Andres Serrano, 11226 E Excelsior Dr, Norwalk, CA 90650
Ronald Spence, 2222 Capertree Dr, Tustin, CA 92780
David Van Lant, 10012 Ramona St, Bellflower, CA 90706

ELDERS

Lawrence Bacon, 25453 Blackthorne, Murrieta, CA 92563
Walter Bouwman, 1628 E 169th St, Artesia, CA 90701
Edward Daehn, 34314 Olive Grove Rd, Wildomar, CA 92595
Gregory Solomon, 13131 Wichita Way, Moreno Valley, CA 92555

Classis of Cascades

MINISTERS

Victor Folkert, 555 2nd Ave W, Wendell, ID 83355
Brian Vriesman, 235 5th Ave E, Twin Falls, ID 83301

ELDERS

Martin Anker, 1008 Benson Ln, Lynden, WA 98264
Virgil Kroontje, 3814 S 284th Pl, Auburn, WA 98001

Classis of Central California

MINISTERS

Karl Overbeek, 1447 Bryan Ave, San Jose, CA 95118
Timothy Vink, 457 Mercedes Ave, Tulane, CA 93274

ELDERS

William Dirksen, 838 Vera Avenue, Ripon, CA 95366
Donald Werkhoven, 4555 Barrett Rd, Carmichael, CA 95608
Classis of the Rocky Mountains

MINISTERS

Barbara Morphew, 1975 S Garrison St, Lakewood, CO 80227
Bruce Vandusseldorp, 8085 E Hampden Ave, Denver, CO 80231

ELDERS

Dennis Handel, 16654 E Rice Cir, Aurora, CO 80015
Dorothy Mall, 1791 S Cape St, Lakewood, CO 80232

Classis of the Southwest

MINISTERS

Richard Koerselman, 1380 E Guadalupe Rd, Gilbert, AZ 85234
Robert Myers, 3151 Willow Creek Rd, Prescott, AZ 86301

ELDERS

George Birger, 8960 E Morrill Way, Tucson, AZ 85749
John DeKruif, 2510 W Carson Rd, Tempe, AZ 85282

Regional Synod of the Great Lakes

Randy Weener, 202 Cummings NW, Grand Rapids, MI 49504

Classis of Holland

MINISTERS

Frederick Eschenburg, 945 136th Ave, Holland, MI 49424
Marvin Hoff, 313 Glengarry Ct, Holland, MI 49423
Kama Jongerius-Zuidema, 595 Graafschap Rd, Holland, MI 49423
Blaine Newhouse, 10501 Riverwalk Dr, Holland, MI 49424
Cornelis Van Kempen, 133 E 34th St, Holland, MI 49423

ELDERS

Martin De Vries, 16577 James St, Holland, MI 49424
John Finch, 145 Columbia Ave, Apt 326, Holland, MI 49423
Marion Hoeve, 13900 Fox Trail Dr, Holland, MI 49424
Darrell Koopmans, 48 Lynden Rd, Holland, MI 49423
Howard Van Dam, A865 Clarewood Ct, Holland, MI 49423

Classis of Lake Erie

MINISTERS

Donald Poest, 3552 Grafton Rd, Brunswick, OH 44212
Gayle Wilson, 6611 Kingsdale Blvd, Parma Heights, OH 44130

ELDERS

Joyce Johnson, 15810 Cheyenne, Detroit, MI 48227
George Kinlen, 1382 Marion, Lincoln Park, MI 48146
Classis of Muskegon

MINISTERS

Miriam Baar Bush, 134 E Barney Ave, Muskegon Heights, MI 49444-1512
Mark Bush, 134 E Barney Ave, Muskegon Heights, MI 49444-1512
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Mark Nieuwsma, 1000 Waverly Ave, Grand Haven, MI 49417-2709

ELDERS

Sally Alderink, 4491 Leonard Rd, Coopersville, MI 49404
Avis Boelkins, 4716 Henry St, Muskegon, MI 49441
Richard Jorgensen, 2619 E Bard Rd, Muskegon, MI 49445

Classis of Northern Michigan

MINISTERS

William Morris, 7015 E Houghton Lake Rd, Merritt, MI 49667
Scott VanArendonk, 4775 1st St, New Era, MI 49446

ELDERS

Richard Stevens, 4165 Holiday North Ct, Traverse City, MI 49686
Ronald Stevens, 703 E Orchard Dr, Traverse City, MI 49686

Classis of North Grand Rapids

MINISTERS

William Fennema, 8846 128th St, Box 21, Sand Lake, MI 49343
Victoria Menning, 1224 Davis NW, Grand Rapids, MI 49504
Jay Sowers, 1700 Coit Ave NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49505

ELDERS

Lisa Glatz, 1312 Derby Dr NW, Grand Rapids, MI 49504
Henry Kooyman, 1010 Ferndridge SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546
Douglas Peterman, 3469 Keswick NW, Belmont, MI 49306

Classis of South Grand Rapids

MINISTERS

Dick Doeden, 2012 Griggs SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49506
Kevin Harney, 129 100th SE, Byron Center, MI 49315
Lynn Japinga, 67 E 29th St, Holland, MI 49423
Howard Motts, 2795 Rosewood St, Jenison, MI 49428
Clayton Smith III, 3746 Byron Center Ave SW, Wyoming, MI 49509
Eldert Zwart, 2121 Porter SW, Wyoming, MI 49509
ELDERS

Willis Kuiper, 4610 Jacob SW, Grandville, MI 49418
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Donald Van Doeselaar, 4512 Creek View Dr, Hudsonville, MI 49426
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Classis of Southwest Michigan

MINISTERS

David Bassett, 160 Robinson Rd, Jackson, MI 49203
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Daryl Vetter, 10442 Sprinkle Rd, Vicksburg, MI 49097

ELDERS

Thomas Drenth, 5212 Lands End, Kalamazoo, MI 49007
Egbert Schipper, 1349 11th St, Martin, MI 49070
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Classis of Zeeland

MINISTERS

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Robert Rook, 4691 Oak St, PO Box 1, Hamilton, MI 49419
David Smits, 1194 Euna Vista Dr, Holland, MI 49423

ELDERS

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Calvin Karsten, 7004 Van Buren, Hudsonville, MI 49426
George Meppelink, 3559 Perry St, Hudsonville, MI 49426
Wayne Schipper, 1997 Lakeway Dr, Holland, MI 49423
Lyle Veldheer, 13304 Blair St, Holland, MI 49424

Regional Synod of the Heartland

Gary Vande Kamp, 611 7th St, Sheldon, IA 51201

Classis of Central Iowa

MINISTERS

Joel Brummel, PO Box 178, Prairie City, IA 50228
Donald De Glopper, 815 Second Ave E, Oskaloosa, IA 52577
Forrest Harms, 3011 Pleasant St, West Des Moines, IA 50266
Donald Orange, 708 E 13th St, Pella, IA 50219
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ELDERS

Harlan Bergman, 6009 Weybridge, Johnston, IA 50131-8721
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Classis of Central Plains

MINISTERS

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ELDERS

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Classis of Dakota

MINISTERS

Norman Bouwens, 412 W 16th, Apt 4, Sioux Falls, SD 57104
Harlan Hayunga, 5500 Berkshire Blvd, #202, Sioux Falls, SD 57106
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ELDERS

Jerry Hoek, 307 S Glen, Cotton, SD 57018
Winfred Nydam, 38056 263rd St, Stickney, SD 57375
Duane Stahl, RR 2, Box 73, Castlewood, SD 57223

Classis of East Sioux

MINISTERS

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Milton Sikkema, PO Box 217, Hfers, IA 51238
Roger Voskuil, PO Box L, 800 3rd St, Alton, IA 51003

ELDERS

Carl Folkers, 5351 380th St, Archer, IA 51231
Edwin Karssen, PO Box 291, Alton, IA 51003
Paul Vande Berg, 710 E 15th St, Spencer, IA 51301

Classis of Minnesota

MINISTERS

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Irwin Van Leeuwen, 1720 N Burlington, Worthington, MN 56187
David Vander Leest, 434 Main St, Box 308, Leota, MN 56153
ELDERS

Lory Tichelaar, 614 22nd St NE, Rochester, MN 55906
John Tilstra, Rte 2, Box 130B, Laverne, MN 56156

Classis of Pleasant Prairie

MINISTERS

Gary Hegstad, 905 Caldwell, Box 156, Aplington, IA 50604
John White, 312 Goldfinch Dr, Tiffin, IA 52340

ELDERS

Stephen Janssen, 1535 Rock Island Dr, Ely, IA 52227

Classis of Red River

MINISTERS

Michael Bos, PO Box 1407, Colleyville, TX 76034
James O'Connell, 1400 W Frankford Rd, Carrollton, TX 75007

ELDERS

Kay Beck, 1000 Rainbow Dr, Richardson, TX 75081

Classis of West Sioux

MINISTERS

Verlyn Boone, 817 2nd St, Hull, IA 51239
Brian Hellenga, 215 1st Ave, Box 276, Little Rock, IA 51243
Douglas Van Aartsen, 503 Oak St, Ireton, IA 51027
Robert Vander Schaaf, 2253 Jay Ave, George, IA 51237

ELDERS

Marion Mouw, 124 4th Ave NE, Sioux Center, IA 51250
William Van Dyke, 2016 S Rustin, Sioux City, IA 51106
Howard Van Oort, 208 5th St, Ireton, IA 51027
Gerrit Vanden Brink, 405 S Cherry St, Inwood, IA 51240

Regional Synod of Mid-America

Henry Elgersma, 302 W Center St, Box 104, Baileyville, IL 61007

Classis of Chicago

MINISTERS

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David Van Kley, 10945 Colorado Ct, Orland Park, IL 60462
ELDERS

William Graffenius, 14 Walnut Dr, Lake in the Hills, IL 60102
Maurice Paterik, 16746 S Maple St, South Holland, IL 60473-2937

Classis of Florida

MINISTERS

William Bengston, 8283 Hillborough Ave, Tampa, FL 33615
Marlin Vander Wilt, 3005 Tuttle Ave, Sarasota, FL 34239

ELDERS

Horace Mason, 7505 US 19 No #46, Pinellas Park, FL 33781
Glenn Schneider, 7502 Oak Vista Cir, Tampa, FL 33634

Classis of Illiana

MINISTERS

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Kenneth Kuiper, 929 Janet Pl, Dyer, IN 46311
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Andrew Nearpass, 2740 Indiana Ave, Lansing, IL 60438

ELDERS

Norman Gaillard, 545 Begonia St SE, DeMotte, IN 46310
Randy Kooy, 524 W Division St, DeMotte, IN 46310
Stanley Reinsma, 27240 Dutton Rd, Beecher, IL 60401
John Taden, Box 37, Crescent City, IL 60928

Classis of Illinois

MINISTERS

Harmon Heeg, 500 N 6th St, Pekin, IL 61554
David Landegent, 701 14th Ave, Fulton, IL 61252
Earl Slotman, 518 13th Ave, Fulton, IL 61252

ELDERS

Harold Bonneur, 6238 Fulton Rd, Fulton, IL 61252
Robert Bosma, 3725 Lakeview Dr, Winnebago, IL 61088
Howard Vohland, 17971 E County Hwy 17, Canton, IL 61520

Classis of Wisconsin

MINISTERS

Steven Bakker, W4390 Church Rd, Box 278, Hingham, WI 53031
Gerald Dykstra, N3145 State Road 32, Sheboygan Falls, WI 53085
Daniel Jelsma, 521 S Madison, Waupun, WI 53963
Raymond Tilstra, 927 Superior Ave, Oostburg, WI 53070
Barry Vegter, Box 207, 107 E Winnebago, Friesland, WI 53935
ROLL OF GENERAL SYNOD

ELDERS

Donald Heidemann, 103 N Lawson St, PO Box 114, Waldo, WI 53093
Richard Hoadley, 2616 W Crimson Ct, Mequon, WI 53092
Herbert Inselman, 313 Center Ave, PO Box 82, Cedar Grove, WI 53013
Glenn Meerdink, 504 W Willow, Cedar Grove, WI 53013
Al Tillema, 102 N Sterk Rd, Cambria, WI 53923

Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics

Carol Mutch, 360 Darlington Ave, Ramsey, NJ 07446

Classis of Delaware-Raritan

MINISTERS

Ronald Lokhorst, 1500 N Hills Ave, Willow Grove, PA 19090
Martin Winters, 115 Clinton St, South Bound Brook, NJ 08880
Richard Tiggelaar, 715 Amwell Rd, Neshanic, NJ 08853

ELDERS

Deborah Grob, 151 E Burgundy Ln, Newtown, PA 18940
Ruth Henderson, 108 Bald Cypress Ln, Levittown, PA 19054
Joyce Lefens, 11 Wippoorwill Way, Belle Mead, NJ 08502

Classis of Greater Palisades

MINISTERS

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Fred Diekman, 264 Washington Ave, Hasbrouck Heights, NJ 07604
Roland Ratmeyer, 15 Highland Ave, Jersey City, NJ 07306

ELDERS

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Judith Ksiecz, 334 Princeton Ave, Jersey City, NJ 07305
James Miller, 42 Arlington Ave, Jersey City, NJ 07305

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James Esther, 100 College Ave, New Brunswick, NJ 08901
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Daniel Grab, 6011 Jefferson Blvd, Frederick, MD 21703
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June Quraishi, 76 Ackerman Ave, Saddle Brook, NJ 07663

Regional Synod of New York

Arthur Hessinger, 16 Frieda Ln, Wantagh, NY 11793

Classis of Brooklyn

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Daniel Ramm, 890 Flatbush Ave, Brooklyn, NY 11226

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Classis of New York

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ELDERS

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Classis of Queens

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Donald Heringa, RR 2, Box 72, Cavelle Dr, Wingdale, NY 12594

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Joan Tolliver, 117 S 2nd Ave, Mount Vernon, NY 10550

New Brunswick Theological Seminary

John Coakley, 17 Seminary Pl, New Brunswick, NJ 08901
Paul Fries, 17 Seminary Pl, New Brunswick, NJ 08901

Western Theological Seminary

George Brown, 101 E 13th St, Holland, MI 49423
James Brownson, 101 E 13th St, Holland, MI 49423
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Frederick Krulthof
Toni Macon
Wesley Granberg-Michaelson
Helen Monsees
Allen Pruis
Roger Vander Kolk
Charles Van Engen

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(students)
Brenda Berry-Taylor
Ryan Nace

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I. John Hesselink

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(students)
Miguel Arciniega
Young Min Jung
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    Samuel Kwon

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    Donald Cronkite

COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN UNITY
    Timothy Boeve

COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN WORSHIP
    Dennis TeBeest

COMMISSION ON CHURCH ORDER
    Allan Janssen

COMMISSION ON HISTORY

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COMMISSION ON NOMINATIONS
    Gary Van Heukelom

COMMISSION ON THEOLOGY
    Lynn Japinga

COMMISSION FOR WOMEN
    Gloria McCanna

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GENERAL SYNOD/JUNE 1999

REGIONAL SYNOD OF CANADA
Kathy Sikkema
Lucille Spaan

REGIONAL SYNOD OF THE FAR WEST
Sandra Fisher
Mary Beth Kenobbie

REGIONAL SYNOD OF THE GREAT LAKES
Sally Alderink
Susan Gerritsen

REGIONAL SYNOD OF THE HEARTLAND
Ruth Brummel
Frances Stachour

REGIONAL SYNOD OF MID-AMERICA
Chris Barthel
Marlys Ritzma

REGIONAL SYNOD OF THE MID-ATLANTICS
Faith Link
Michelle Ponder

REGIONAL SYNOD OF NEW YORK
Jane Konitz
Jarene Pagliarulo

ECUMENICAL DELEGATES

CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH OF NORTH AMERICA
Stanley Scripps

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA
Andrea DeGroot-Nesdahl

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF KOREA
Sang Hak Kim
Eui Woong Yu

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)
William Livingston

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
John Thomas

ECUMENICAL GUEST

WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES
Myra Blyth

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE PEOPLE

PARLIAMENTARIAN
Russell Paarlberg

WORSHIP LEADERS
Carolyn Holloway
Steven Stam
ROLL OF GENERAL SYNOD

CHAPLAIN
Donald Jiskoot

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Travis Vande Noord

HOPE COLLEGE
Jon Brown
Amy Evans

NORTHWESTERN COLLEGE
Matthew Foss
Christianne Smith

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Paul and Rebecca Armerding
Emory and Sharon Blanksma
Norvelle Goff
Bernardeth Kelley-Bent and Adrian Bobb-Mercado
Evon Laman
Rowland, Jr. and Jane Van Es

SEMINARIAN SEMINAR
Miguel Arciniega (TEA)
William Bennett (TEA)
Brenda Berry-Taylor (NBTS)
Peter Burrill (TEA)
Enid Garcia (TEA)
Oswaldo Garcia (TEA)
Marcia Gibbons (WTS)
William Grob (NBTS)
Young Min Jung (TEA)
Mark Kamper (WTS)
Bart Koefer (TEA)
En Young Kim (NBTS)
Hyeon Joong Kim (NBTS)
Ryan Nace (NBTS)
Jonathan Sherrill (WTS)
John Tilstra (TEA)
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CHRISTIAN ACTION

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Vice Moderator: Marlin Vander Wilt (Florida)

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Mark Bush (Muskegon)      David Van Kley (Chicago)
David DeVries (Schenectady)  David Van Lant (California)
Forrest Harms (Central Iowa)  Craig Wagner (Central Plains)
Barbara Morphew (Rocky Mountains)  

Elders:

William Barth (New Brunswick)  Joyce Johnson (Lake Erie)
William Dirksen (Central California)  Henry Kooymans (North Grand Rapids)
Paul Early (Nassau-Suffolk)  Joan Tolliver (Rockland-Westchester)
Mary Elmore (Mid-Hudson)  Donald Van Doeselaar (South Grand Rapids)
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Corresponding:

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Sandra Fisher (RSFW)  Frances Stachour (RSH)
Samuel Kwon (Council for Asian and Pacific American Ministries)  

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George Brown (Western Seminary)  Donald Orange (Central Iowa)
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Scott De Block (Synod of Albany)  Joseph Veltman (Ontario)
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Jerry Feenstra (British Columbia)  Joyce Lefens (Delaware-Raritan)
Allen Gilbert (Central Iowa)  John Tilstra (Minnesota)
Daniel Grab (New Brunswick)  Donald Werkhoven (Central California)
Edwin Karssen (East Sioux)  

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Corresponding:

Christina Barthel (RSM-AM)  Jane Konitz (RSNY)
James Bekkering (Hope College)  Jarene Pagliarulo (RSNY)
Shirley Boertje (RCWM)  Annie Lee Phillips (African-American Council)
James Bultman (Northwestern College)  David Roe (Central College)
Marilys De Wild (RCWM)  Mary Beth Kenobbie (RSFW)

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Vice Moderator: John Coakley (New Brunswick Seminary)

Ministers:

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Norman Bouwens (Dakota)  Paul Ruter (Orange)
Brian Hellenga (West Sioux)  Ronald Spence (California)
Daniel Jelsma (Wisconsin)  Richard Tiggelaar (Delaware-Raritan)
Russell Ooms (British Columbia)

Elders:

Loyal Doeschot (Central Plains)  Kenneth Russell (South Grand Rapids)
Dorothy Fletcher (Brooklyn)  Joanna Smith (Schenectady)
Kenneth Gibson (Passaic Valley)  Gregory Solomon (California)
William Graffenius (Chicago)  Al Tillema (Wisconsin)
Richard Jorgensen (Muskegon)  Gerard Van Otteren (South Grand Rapids)
James Miller (Greater Palisades)

Corresponding:

Mark Kraai (Church Herald)  Christina Van Eyl (Church Herald)

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CHRISTIAN UNITY

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Vice Moderator: Ronald Vande Bunte (New Brunswick)

Ministers:

Donald Battjes (Montgomery)  Robert Myers (Southwest)
William Bengston (Florida)  Mark Nieuwsma (Muskegon)
David Cooper (Greater Palisades)  Alan Schreuder (Central Iowa)
Harold Delhagen (Rochester)  Milton Sikkema (East Sioux)
Donald Heringa (Rockland-Westchester)  Raymond Tilstra (Wisconsin)
Terry Muller (Central Plains)
Elders:

George Birger (Southwest)  Robert Purdye (South Grand Rapids)
Lloyd Hagen (Schenectady)  Duane Stahl (Dakota)
Ruth Henderson (Delaware-Raritan)  John Taden (Illiana)
Melvin Hulst (Zeeland)  Jacob Van Maanen (Ontario)
Virgil Kroonije (Cascades)  Howard Van Oort (West Sioux)
Judith Ksiez (Greater Palisades)

Corresponding:

Timothy Boeve (Comm. on Christian Unity)  William Livingston (PCUSA)
Ruth Brummel (RSH)  Michelle Ponder (RSM-AT)
Andrea De Groot-Nesdahl (ELCA)  Stanley Scripps (CRC)
I. John Hesselink (General Synod Professor)  John Thomas (UCC)
Sang Hak Kim (PCK)  Eui Woong Yu (PCK)

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Moderator: Howard Major (Mid-Hudson)
Vice Moderator: Avis Boelkins (Muskegon)

Ministers:

Verlyn Boone (West Sioux)  John Needham, Jr. (Mid-Hudson)
James De Witt (Montgomery)  Roland Ratmeyer (Greater Palisades)
Dick Doedeu (South Grand Rapids)  David Smits (Zeeland)
Harлан Hayunga (Dakota)  Scott VanArendonk (Northern Michigan)
David King (British Columbia)  Bruce Vandusseldorp (Rocky Mountains)
Ronald Lokhorst (Delaware-Raritan)  Barry Vegter (Wisconsin)
John Meyer (Queens)

Elders:

Martin Anker (Cascades)  Darrell Koopmans (Holland)
Edward Daehn (California)  Johnnie Lovejoy (Brooklyn)
Lisa Glatz (North Grand Rapids)  June Quraishi (Passaic Valley)
Donald Heidemann (Wisconsin)  Sandra Torrunt (Albany)

Corresponding:

Susan Gerritsen (RSGL)  Dennis Te Beest (Comm. on Christian
Marlys Ritzma (RSM-AM)  Worship)

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CHURCH ORDER

Moderator: Randy Kooy (Illiana)
Vice Moderator: Daniel Ramm (Brooklyn)

Ministers:

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William Fennema (North Grand Rapids)  Adolf Pagliarulo (New York)
Lawrence LePoire (Zeeland)  Cornelis Van Kempen (Holland)
Howard Moths (South Grand Rapids)
ROLL OF GENERAL SYNOD

Elders:

Kay Beck (Red River)                          Edna Richards (Queens)
Walter Bouwman (California)                   Albert Spaan (Synod of Canada)
John DeKruijff (Southwest)                    Ronald Stevens (Northern Michigan)
Deborah Grob (Delaware-Raritan)               Howard VanDam (Holland)
Richard Hoadley (Wisconsin)                   Gerrit Vandenberg (West Sioux)
Stephen Janssen (Pleasant Prairie)            Howard Vohland (Illinois)

Corresponding:

Brigida Cabrera (Council for Hispanic Ministries)  Allan Janssen (Comm. on Church Order)
                                                      Faith Link (RSM-AT)

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CHURCH VOCATIONS

Moderator: Lynn Van Ek (Passaic Valley)
Vice Moderator: Debra Yurk (Southwest Michigan)

Ministers:

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James Beukehnan (Orange)                       Ronald Sikkema (Ontario)
Henry Elgersma (Synod of Mid-America)          Clayton Smith III (South Grand Rapids)
Gary Hegstad (Pleasant Prairie)                Glenn Van Oort (Albany)
Gordon Laman (Muskegon)                        Rodney Veldhuizen (Dakota)
Gregg Mast (Albany)

Elders:

Wayne Elberth (Orange)                         Stanley Reinsma (Illiana)
Eugene Fisher (Synod of the Far West)          Egbert Schipper (Southwest Michigan)
Herbert Inselman (Wisconsin)                   Richard Stevens (Northern Michigan)
Willis Kuiper (South Grand Rapids)             Lory Tichelaar (Minnesota)
Henry Lauer (Columbia-Greene)                  William Van Dyke (West Sioux)
Joan Lesko (Rockland-Westchester)

Corresponding:

Miguel Arciniega (TEA)                         Carol Myers (NBTS)
Brenda Berry-Taylor (NBTS)                    Ryan Nace (NBTS)
Marcia Gibbons (WTS)                          Annie Lee Phillips (African-American Council)
Ronald Hartgerink (WTS)                       David Schutt (TEA)
Young Min Jung (TEA)                          Jonathan Sherrill (WTS)
Norman Kansfield (NBTS)                       Dennis Voskuil (WTS)
Cornelius Kors (TEA)
Gloria McCanna (Comm. for Women)
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**Vice Moderator:** Victoria Menning (North Grand Rapids)

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- Gail Merrick (Illiana)  
- Andrew Nearpass (Illiana)  
- Donald Poest (Lake Erie)  
- Michael Scott (Minnesota)  
- Andres Serrano (California)  
- Douglas Van Aartsen (West Sioux)  
- Irwin Van Leeuwen (Minnesota)  
- Gary Vande Kamp (Synod of the Heartland)  
- Darwin Vander Wal (Southwest Michigan)  
- Timothy Vink (Central California)  
- Brian Vriesman (Cascades)  
- Randy Weener (Synod of the Great Lakes)  
- John White (Pleasant Prairie)

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- Sally Alderink (Muskegon)  
- Robert Bosma (Illinois)  
- Mary Dobrovolec (Montgomery)  
- John Finch (Holland)  
- Gary Hoffman (Albany)  
- Calvin Karsten (Zeeland)  
- Douglas Peterman (North Grand Rapids)  
- Arvid Pierson (Central Iowa)  
- Marieanna Trautmann (Queens)  
- Sally Wells (Southwest Michigan)

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**Ministers:**
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- Fred Diekman (Greater Palisades)  
- Richard Dykstra (Schoharie)  
- Frederick Eschenburg (Holland)  
- James Ribbons (Columbia-Greene)  
- Earl Slotman (Illinois)

**Elders:**
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- Calvin Bucknam (Rochester)  
- Carl Folkers (East Sioux)  
- Arthur Hessinger (Synod of New York)  
- Marion Hoeve (Holland)  
- Eugene Ligtenberg (Rochester)  
- Horace Mason (Florida)  
- Richard Moorehouse (Passaic Valley)  
- Marion Mouw (West Sioux)  
- Winfred Nydam (Dakota)  
- Wayne Schipper (Zeeland)  
- James Vellenga (Ontario)

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- Gerald Verbridge (Board of Pensions)
ROLL OF GENERAL SYNOD

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THEOLOGY

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Vice Moderator: Kama Jongerius-Zuidema (Holland)

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Jesus Cruz (Passaic Valley)          Scott Manetsch (East Sioux)
James Esther (New Brunswick)         Thomas McCrossan (Schenectady)
Paul Fazio (Zeeland)                  William Morris (Northern Michigan)
Paul Fries (New Brunswick Seminary)  Walter Opmeier (Canadian Prairies)
Kevin Harney (South Grand Rapids)    Ronald Sanford (Chicago)
Harmon Heeg (Illinois)               Martin Winters (Delaware-Raritan)
Lynn Japinga (South Grand Rapids)    

Elders:

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Dennis Handel (Rocky Mountains)      Maurice Paterik (Chicago)
Doreen Leicht (Canadian Prairies)    Leon Smith (Schoharie)
Robert Merillat (Mid-Hudson)         Lyle Veldheer (Zeeland)

Corresponding:

Lynn Japinga (Comm. on Theology)     Lucille Spaa (RSC)

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON WORLD MISSION

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Vice Moderator: David Butler (Queens)

Ministers:

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Joel Brummel (Central Iowa)         Roger Voskuil (East Sioux)
Robert deForest (Rockland-Westcheter) Gayle Wilson (Lake Erie)
Marvin Hoff (Holland)                Eldert Zwart (South Grand Rapids)
Kenneth Kniper (Illiana)            John Zwyghuizen (Rochester)

Elders:

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Harold Bonneau (Illinois)            Dorothy Mall (Rocky Mountains)
Cecilia Chiriboga (Greater Palisades) Glenn Meerdink (Wisconsin)
Paul Darby (New York)                George Meppelink (Zeeland)
Martin De Vries (Holland)            Peter Rusticus (South Grand Rapids)
Marilyn Douglas (Schoharie)          Glenn Schneider (Florida)
Charles Fitzgerald (Nassau-Suffolk)  Aart Van Leeuwen (Canadian Prairies)
Norman Gaillard (Illiana)            

Corresponding:

Brigado Cabrera (Council for Hispanic Ministries) Kathy Sikkema (RSC)
MINUTES AND JOURNAL

The Acts and Proceedings of the 193rd regular session of the General Synod were read by title.

During the Wednesday morning (June 16) meeting, the General Synod approved the journal of actions for the meetings held on Friday and Monday and authorized its officers to approve the journal of actions for the meeting held on Tuesday and Wednesday mornings.

RULES OF ORDER

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

TELLERS

The Revs. Toni Macon, Roger Vander Kolk, and Gary Van Heukelom were appointed as tellers. The following seminarians were also appointed as tellers:

- William Bennett
- Brenda Berry-Taylor
- Peter Burrill
- Marcia Gibbons
- William Grob
- Bart Keefer
- Mark Kamper
- En Young Kim
- Hyeon Joong Kim
- Ryan Nace
- Jonathan Sherrill
- John Tilstra

AGENDA AND SCHEDULE


The privilege of the floor was granted to Russell Paarlberg, parliamentarian.

The General Synod approved the list of delegates serving on advisory committees.

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

Pre-General Synod Workshops—Thursday evening

Pre-synod workshops were introduced in 1997 in response to requests from delegates to previous synods. The workshops provide an opportunity to learn about the life, mission, and organization of the Reformed Church in America apart from the business contained in the General Synod Workbook. At the 1999 General Synod three workshops were offered: “Homosexuality: Seeking the Guidance of the Church,” led by the Rev. Jeffrey Japinga; “Faithful Witnesses: Commitment to Evangelism, Revitalization of Existing Churches, and New Church Development,” led by the Rev. Richard Welscott; and “Discipling All Nations: The RCA in Mission Today,” led by the Rev. Bruce Menning.

General Synod Theme—Friday morning through Wednesday morning

The General Synod theme was “God’s Spirit upon Us: Celebrating (Isaiah 61:1-4).” The Rev. Carolyn Holloway, pastor of DeWitt Reformed Church in New York City and the Rev. Steven Stam, pastor of Third Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan, addressed the theme in their sermons throughout the week. Dr. John D. Witvliet, director of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, assisted in the design of the liturgies and provided music leadership in worship and throughout the meetings of the synod.
On Friday morning, General Synod participants met in plenary session. This session began with an opening worship and Communion service at Our Savior's Lutheran Church near the campus of Augustana College, followed by a procession of officers, delegates, and guests to the gymnasium in the Elmen Center for the plenary session. The Rev. Steven Stam preached the sermon.

**Saturday evening**

Reformed churches of the area provided a community night picnic and program.

**Sunday morning**

Synod delegates worshiped at area RCA churches (see p. 2).

**Sunday afternoon and evening**

Mission Services, Congregational Services, and Evangelism and Church Development Services of the General Synod Council (GSC) offered sixteen workshops for ministry and witness on Sunday afternoon. All workshops were open to community members as well as to delegates.

In a cooperative effort, GSC’s Mission Services, Congregational Services, and Evangelism and Church Development Services presented an evening of worship, prayer, and song for the community and General Synod delegates, staff, and guests in the Elmen Center of Augustana College. Jeff and Karen Barker of Northwestern College wrote and performed an original drama; the Rev. Peter Paulsen served as master of ceremonies; and John Grooters, Katha Petroelja, Darnisha Taylor, and Pam Van Putten provided music. The RCA Today 1999 video was also featured.

The Rev. Bruce Menning, director of Mission Services, introduced the missionaries on home assignment:

- Paul and Rebecca Armerding
- Emery and Sharon Blanksma
- Bernardeth Kelly-Bent and Adrian Bobb-Mercado
- Ruth Goff
- The Rev. Gordon and Evon Laman
- The Rev. Alan Schreuder

Missionaries commissioned during this presentation were:

- Greg and Ruth De Haan
- The Rev. Rowland, Jr. and Jane Van Es

Missionaries visiting General Synod were:

- Brian and Donna Renes

**Volunteer Program**

The Rev. Bruce Menning commissioned those who will be leaving on volunteer assignments:

- Ken and Erinn Bentley (Japan)
- Jill Floyd (Apache, Oklahoma)
- Greg Grylls (Kenya)
Urban Ministry

The Rev. Edwin Mulder, chair of the Urban Ministry Fund Drive Steering Committee, spoke about urban ministries and reported receiving $1 million in pledges and gifts toward the $5 million goal.

Ecumenical Breakfast—Monday morning

On Monday morning delegates were hosted at the ecumenical breakfast sponsored by the Commission on Christian Unity. A panel consisting of the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson and Debra Braaksma, official Reformed Church delegates, and the Rev. Frederick Kruithof, official visitor to the Eighth Assembly of the World Council of Churches held in Harare, Zimbabwe, presented a review of the meeting. Willa Brown shared her experience leading a padare (marketplace workshop) that shared the RCA's Children in Worship program. The Rev. Myra Blyth of the Geneva office of the World Council of Churches was the featured presenter.

Ecumenical Luncheon—Monday noon

An ecumenical luncheon was held on Monday noon in honor of the ecumenical delegates from other communions. Each brought greetings from their church. The ecumenical delegates were: the Rev. Stanley Scripps of the Christian Reformed Church; the Rev. Andrea DeGroot-Nesdahl from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; the Revs. Sang Hak Kim and Eui Woong Yu from the Presbyterian Church of Korea; the Rev. William Livingston of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and the Rev. John Thomas of the United Church of Christ. The Rev. Myra Blyth, the ecumenical guest of the World Council of Churches, also attended. The Rev. Dr. Marion de Yelder, general secretary emeritus, was honored for his long years of ecumenical work on behalf of the Reformed Church in America.

Ecumenical Presentation—Monday afternoon

The Rev. Dr. Eui Woong Yu, moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Korea, brought the following address to General Synod:

President Rev. Frederick Kruithof, General Secretary Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, members of the General Synod, and colleagues and friends in our Lord Jesus Christ, I really appreciate your invitation and warm reception. It is my honor and privilege to speak to this General Synod meeting. On behalf of the Presbyterian Church of Korea, I want to give you my sincere gratitude and warm greetings.

There has been a great relationship between your church and our church, and between your New Brunswick Theological Seminary and our seminaries. We should continue our meaningful journey together for God's kingdom and righteousness. I especially want to express my great joy and pleasure in our visit to New Brunswick Theological Seminary last week. President Rev. Dr. Norman Kansfield, thank you for your wonderful hospitality.

Angela Hoover (Kentucky)
Susan Kingma (Mexico)
Sarah Klassen (Gambia)
Sarah Kuipers (Slovakia)
Andras and Angelika Jo (India)
Betty Marple (Slovakia)
Amanda Meulenberg (New York City)
Mary Oyer (Taiwan)
Sonjia Rawie (Kentucky)
Jeff Trytko (Kentucky)
We are so grateful that you sent us a great missionary, the Rev. Horace Grant Underwood. He really was a great “messenger of God, servant of Christ, friend of Korea.” Your church, Grove Reformed Church in North Bergen, New Jersey, raised him; your seminary, New Brunswick Theological Seminary, educated him; and your denomination, the Reformed Church in America, prepared him as well. His marvelous sacrificial and devoted work gave us the light of truth, the gospel, and made us able to work for the Lord.

Please allow me to tell you our important activities. In 1994 we appointed a special committee, which carefully studied our church during the last three years and has produced a proposal for our church in the future. This proposal has a purpose of establishing “earth as a community of life where all creation lives together harmoniously for the glory of God.”

**Mission Activity**

When we had the International Consultation of the Korean Church’s Mission around the World last May, our theme was “The Mission of the Korean Churches in the New Millennium.” Three groups attending this meeting: 1) member churches of the Council of Presbyterian Churches in Korea, 2) churches that had sent missionaries to Korea, and 3) church leaders in countries where Korean missionaries have been sent. The purpose of the meeting was to have a better understanding of the missionary calling of the Korean churches in the worldwide context and to develop relationships with others for more effective mission activity in the future.

**Reconciliation of Korean Presbyterian Churches**

Since 1949 our Presbyterian Church in Korea has been divided into several Presbyterian denominations. The two major denominations are HapDong and ourselves, TongHap. Recently God opened our eyes to see each other and gave us warm hearts for reconciliation. We approached each other and had many formal and informal meetings and conferences together for the possibility of reunion. Even though this is a time of beginning, we strongly believe that God will give us power, support, and help to do this remarkable work of reconciliation.

**Reunification of South and North Korea**

I think you all know about the division of South Korea and North Korea. I really appreciate your constant effort and prayer for the reunification of our country. We all know that there are many different perspectives and strategies for this goal. Now allow me to share another strategy for this reunification. Please ask the United States government to stop the economic sanctions against North Korea. No matter how many methodologies we have for this reunification, we have to use God’s way all the time—to help poor people, feed hungry children, and take care of oppressed brothers and sisters in North Korea. They are all God’s children.

**Proposal for a Joint Project**

Now let me propose several joint projects for the Reformed Church in America and the Presbyterian Church in Korea.

First, I propose the development of an exchange program for church leaders and seminary professors. Let them observe each other’s ministries and the diverse phenomena of the church and modern society. And let them have a chance to study together for common purposes such as urban ministry, church development, education, evangelism, and world mission.

Second, I propose a joint project in foreign missions. I want to see your missionaries and our missionaries work together in a certain mission field.
Third, I propose a joint project for the Korean-American churches in the United States. When I visited New Brunswick Theological Seminary, I heard wonderful news about the plan to establish an Asian-American church study center. We will try to participate in this special institute with our best.

Thank you very much for hearing me. May God bless you, your denomination, your congregations, and your church leaders.

The Rev. Myra Blyth of the Geneva office of the World Council of Churches gave the keynote ecumenical address:

**The Future of the Ecumenical Journey after Harare**

At the Eighth Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) held in 1998 at Harare, Zimbabwe, churches from around the world reported being faced with many challenges. Foremost among these is globalization. Globalization is the illusion created by technology and media that we are all in the same situation. CNN captures this with advertisements that assure us that no matter where we travel we can enjoy the same hotels, the same standard of service, and the same decor. Whether it be Moscow, Delhi, New York, or Nairobi the world will look the same. But this virtual reality clouds the actual reality.

A primary challenge of the ecumenical movement is to offer, in contrast to this message of the market, an alternative reading on reality. Prophecy has always been a question of forth-telling, not foretelling. We may be fascinated by the words spoken by future watchers, trend setters, and image makers, but our task as a church is not to join the cacophony. Our task is to speak plainly about what we see and to imagine options that more closely correspond to how faith envisages reality should be.

A key purpose for bringing together in an assembly thousands of Christians from all corners of the globe and from every walk of life is, in fact, to do a reality check on the world we are living in:

To remind ourselves that how we see it is very relative, culturally bound, and confessionally impoverished.

To celebrate the enormous diversity within life and the richness which that diversity brings to our understanding of the one faith and expressions of that faith.

To live with the tensions that emerge from conflicting understandings of how to live out our calling as the people of God.

To learn how to grow in spirit and in truth through living, praying, and worshiping together.

The common understanding and vision statement adopted at the Eighth Assembly underlines that the future of the ecumenical movement rests on the commitment of the churches not only to stay together but to move forward together, going beyond institutional ecumenism to a new style of relational ecumenism.

The expectation from Harare is that through “spaces for encounter,” peoples, churches, and communities will be enabled to affirm together the values and vision of God’s people for the whole creation. Issues of identity, community, and life-centered ethics, as well as globalization, will be key to the ecumenical agenda in the twenty-first century.
This means practically that WCC member churches, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, will seek to create times and places that are safe, sacred, and sustainable. Safe because the space is open, welcoming, and inclusive. Sacred because the God-given dignity, rights, and integrity of individuals, communities, and creation are respected and reconciled. Sustainable because it promotes life and renewal.

The heavenly city described by John in Revelation 20 captures something of the nature and quality envisaged in the term "ecumenical space."

The city has twelve gates. These multiple entry points symbolize a broad and generous welcome. This sense of welcome is further strengthened by the fact that the gates stand open both day and night.

In spite of the advertisements, it is obvious that the world we inhabit, unlike the city of John’s dreams, is not equally open, accessible, and welcoming to all. Boundaries, borders, and identities are the stuff of wars and strife. This is for millions of people a daily reality.

The assembly report on globalization had this to say:

The logic of globalization needs to be challenged by an alternative way of life of community in diversity. Christians and churches should reflect on the challenge of globalization from a faith perspective and therefore resist the unilateral domination of economic and cultural globalization. The search for alternative options to the present economic system and the realization of effective political limitations and corrections to the process of globalization and its implications are urgently needed (PRCII Doc 5.3).

The alternative globalization offered by the gospel is not to build communities in which all distinctions are blurred into a relativistic sea of nothingness. Rather, it is to transform relations and relationships so that identity and diversity, particularity, and universality can be held together with integrity.

Put very practically, the gospel lived out in a truly ecumenical context enables each of us to say with conviction:

I know who I am only in relation to the other (the otherness of God and of my neighbor).

I learn more about myself and the world when I see through the eyes of the other.

I cannot point to another way but Christ, but neither can I set limits to the activity of God.

I belong to a faith community whose tradition from the earliest days is to live in critical dialogue with secular powers and with people of other faiths and ideologies, resisting the temptation either to dominate them or be co-opted by them.

The new focus on relational ecumenism, or ecumenism of the heart (adopted by the Eighth Assembly), means essentially to create open and inclusive spaces where diversity can be celebrated and disagreements addressed.

An example of what is meant by ecumenical space can be seen in the recent meeting of forty-five representatives from twenty-one churches who met in Budapest to discuss the response of the churches to the Kosovo crisis. Almost every church had adopted the
stance of its own government. It was the first time most of the participants had the opportunity to talk with each other, to hear firsthand how they saw the situation, and to understand what had caused them to arrive at such different and contradictory statements. There is in this crisis very little evidence of critical dialogue within nations. This meeting by its very composition meant the churches must at least be in critical dialogue with each other, see the world as others feel it, and be challenged to look again at the statements they have made.

The city has massive dimensions. The city of John’s dream is noteworthy not only for its multiple gates but also for its massive dimensions. This city is so big it stretches all the way from earth to heaven. Even the big-thinking Big Mac culture of the U.S. can’t compete with this construction. This is BIG. This transcends finitude. In this city the classic separations between the sacred and the secular, the material and spiritual, are reconciled.

In contrast to this scene, we are witnesses to how polarization, war, and fragmentation are destroying the world. And once again, God’s Word speaks to us about another logic and another way.

The Pacific churches have made a special contribution to the ecumenical movement because of the deeply sensitive approach of the Pacific peoples to the interrelatedness of all things. Their sensitive holistic understanding of the gospel is what the ecumenical movement seeks to affirm. This is what Harare called for when it committed the churches to help overcome divisions and polarization caused by violence and debt and to end the cycles of oppression and dominance that divide peoples, communities, and families.

In calling for an Ecumenical Decade to Overcome Violence, the Eighth Assembly recognized that what the world needs today from all the churches together is a clear witness to peace and nonviolence. The biblical notion of forgiveness and healing, justification and justice, truth and reconciliation, calls upon churches, ecumenical groups, and individual Christians to engage in constructive efforts to build a culture of peace. Called into one body, the peace of Christ indeed is a decisive mark of the very being of the church (Colossians 3:16).

The challenge to the churches is to give up being spectators of violence or merely lamenting it. Instead, they are being challenged to become active against violence within and outside the walls of the churches. Will the churches take up their responsibility to speak out boldly against any defense of unjust and oppressive structures? Will they speak out against the use of violence and gross violations of human rights committed in the name of their own nation or ethnic group?

Leaving behind what separates us, we have a unique message to bring to the violence-ridden world. We need as churches to take a leading role in proving that nonviolence is an active approach to conflict resolution. This is not simply one possible way. It is the necessary way for the sake of all human beings and the future of life on earth.

Perhaps our ecumenical vision, like that of the heavenly city, is disproportionate to our means and possibilities. But this is God’s agenda, not ours. It is not an act of arrogance but a step of faith that compels us to live as if more is always possible than is immediately apparent.

The city provides refreshment and renewal. The most basic resource for life—water—flows through the city without end, and its properties have healing, renewing powers. Those who drink from this stream shall live.
The assembly emphasized the importance of renewing and refreshing ourselves individually and as churches through ecumenical learning and formation. What we need, said the delegates, is a whole new generation of believers who have been able to access and benefit from opportunities of ecumenical learning. Scholarships, internships, parish exchanges, networks, consultations, website chatrooms...the possibilities are endless but the opportunities are rarely taken up.

Is it that we are hesitant about the principle of life-long learning? Or do church leaders reserve ecumenical experiences for an elite few? Or are we as churches protective against new and strange things that might be learned? These are all questions that need to be asked, given the incredibly low priority that ecumenical exposure receives in our churches and colleges.

John Hull, an education professor, suggests in his book *What Prevents Christian Adults from Learning?* that we need to acknowledge more often and more publicly that learning is not just a state of ignorance that needs to be overcome as fast as possible. Learning is of the essence of our humanity. Moreover, we need to become familiar with the idea that learning is also an attribute that we share with God.

God, of course, does not seek to learn in the way that we might learn. God does not need to overcome ignorance or compensate for forgetfulness. But God is the perfect learner in the sense that God is perfectly open, attentive, and responsive to whatever in creation is spontaneous, novel, and changing. The world was made in God's image. Inherent in creation, and perfectly reflecting the Creator, is the potential for spontaneity, surprise, and genuine novelty. God embraces and perfectly keeps pace with an ever-expanding and continually more detailed universe. We then are partners in learning with God when we are open and receptive to newness and change.

Unlike God, we are not instinctively open, attentive, and responsive to newness and change and renewal. Instead of embracing change as an opportunity for learning, we often put our energy into resisting and subverting it.

The ecumenical movement is totally dedicated to creating opportunities for exposure and learning, enabling people across cultures and continents to share their stories of faith. At this moment of spiritual hunger (yet of church decline in some parts of the globe) and of church growth (yet of growing fundamentalism in other parts) we need intelligent and rigorous approaches to sharing the faith—something that so often defeats our best efforts as churches in both mission and formation activities. The power of storytelling today is unquestioned, and the need to tell stories in a manner that is creative and relevant is urgent. Our question, like that of the Ethiopian official, is “Who is there to help us?” Are we giving the kind of leadership that helps people to learn, or are we fortifying the gates against “foreign ideas and influences?”

**Safe space** is where genuine dialogue occurs, where differences are respected and disagreements are addressed. **Sacred space** is where cultures, peoples, and communities are reconciled on the basis of a just peace. **Sustainable space** is where individuals and communities are renewed, refreshed, and transformed. Creating such spaces inside and outside the churches is the ecumenical agenda for the twenty-first century. This is not an optional extra for people who happen to like this sort of thing. It is of the essence of who we are as the church.

**Reception**

On Monday evening at the close of the session, a reception was held to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of *One Great Hour of Sharing.*
II. AGENDA OF GENERAL SYNOD

GREETINGS FROM THE GOVERNOR

The Honorable William Janklow, governor of South Dakota, welcomed the General Synod to the state, emphasizing the pivotal role of the church in today's world.

DISPOSITION OF COMMUNICATIONS

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

PRESENTATION AND REFERRAL OF NEW BUSINESS

No new business was presented by the delegates.
At a meeting of retired ministers and spouses in Holland, Michigan, in March of this year, John Maassen asked, "What do you think the Reformed Church will look like in 2025?" Suddenly my lifetime in the RCA raced before my eyes. What did it look like when I was born and baptized into it at Rea Avenue Reformed Church in Hawthorne, New Jersey, under the pastorate of my father? What do I recall it feeling like during my early formative years at the old Van Raalte-founded congregation near the inland sea in Holland? Where was it going at the time of my educational pilgrimage at Hope College and Western Theological Seminary? What new discoveries were gained as I spent two summer assignments in New York City? What kind of handle of understanding did I have for the RCA after ordination into my first pastorate in Philadelphia? What have I learned during all of my Michigan years? And, how prophetic were Arie Brouwer's words of some years ago when he suggested that if the denomination does not reverse its downward trend, it will zero out in 2024? I believe we have reason to celebrate "A Revitalized Church for a Renewed Future." The five-year strategic goals for the RCA are to be commended.

I've discovered, in reflecting on the above, that my lines have fallen in pleasant places, and, by the grace of God, will continue to do so. This is true not only for myself but for all of you attending the 193rd annual session of the General Synod. For me, it has been quite a trip and certainly part of a long learning curve. It has been enhanced by what began for me in Milwaukee two years ago, carried on in Holland last June, is continuing presently in Sioux Falls, and very likely will culminate next year in New York City. I thank you for the profound privilege you have given me in serving in this capacity. I have often felt inadequate, but you have been patient. As my "Prayer, Encouragement, and Care" theme has suggested, you have prayed for me, encouraged me, and cared for me. I hope that my efforts this year have been reciprocal.

I cannot proceed without thanking my wife, Sharon, for putting up with and accepting my schedule for this presidential year. Her journeys to and from the Kalamazoo airport have been numerous. The entire experience has also enabled her to wax nostalgic about her lifetime adventure in the RCA. Our three sons have provided support as well. Thank you, Wes Granberg-Michaelson, Chuck Van Engen, Ken Bradsell, Diane Bethmann, Mornier Rich, Norma Violante, and Joanne Fernandez for walking beside me. My profound thanks to the fine professionals at the Travel Center in Sioux Center, Iowa, for scheduling my journeys. And thank you, Second Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, for having the foresight to give me a five-month sabbatical, in the midst of a building program and staff shifting, which you then graciously extended to eight months so that my leadership responsibilities could be completed. Finally, I wish also to extend my gratitude to First Reformed Church in Kalamazoo for providing me with office space during the sabbatical leave.

In preparation for this report, I would also be remiss if I failed to offer my gratitude to Lou Lotz, Beth Marcus, Warren Burgess, Harold Korver, I. John Hesselink, Tony Vis, and the already mentioned Chuck Van Engen for what they authored on similar occasions since 1992. I read you all, and your contributions blessed my thinking and planning.

How does one capture the essence of such an exciting year? Did I contemplate this happening during all those times my parents trekked off to Buck Hill Falls, Pennsylvania, a site that regularly hosted General Synods in years past, and alluded to also by my predecessor, yet another P. K. (preacher's kid) in the long tradition? At the time of this writing I have visited in six of our eight regional synods, with the promise that I will still make the final two. I have been on both of our seminary campuses and on two of our three college campuses. I have spent time in many classes, preached in several states, and attended a host of denominational
meetings. We have wrestled with ministerial formation and the purposes and responsibilities of regional synods and classes, and we have examined the phenomenon of religious funding. Meaningful weekends were enjoyed on the eastern seaboard with two of our ethnic councils: the African-American and the Pacific and Asian American. I experienced the challenges that both councils face; and in turn, felt prayed for and encouraged. The outpouring of love was heartwarming.

Two years ago the Reformed Church adopted the Formula of Agreement on the campus of the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee. Early in my stint as president I was privileged to take part in a glorious celebration of what the four communions—the Presbyterian, the Lutheran, the United Church of Christ, and the RCA—had consummated, in the Rockefeller Chapel at the University of Chicago. Fifteen hundred people were present, and our own Hope College Chapel Choir was featured. Receptions the night before, hosted by the Lutherans and Presbyterians, enabled many to offer testimony as to what this historic agreement meant. Since that time I have heard of a smattering of local efforts to highlight this bringing together of the four churches for the first time in four hundred years.

In my travels to the heartland, the east, and the south, I have discovered reasons for cautious optimism. In Iowa I was thrilled with the stories of new church starts around Des Moines. I also agonized over the plight of the rural church. Synod executive Stan Vandersall took a three-month sabbatical to study the issue and to pen his findings. This report is worthy of our review.

In the less populated regions of the east, areas plagued by a rust-belt mentality, I learned of the struggles of small congregations. In that setting synod executive Don Troost and his colleagues have devised creative ways to stem the tide and to be supportive. I was positively impressed with their “Beginning and Beyond” retreat for rookie and veteran pastors of the region.

In New York City I saw evidence of the strong revitalization of historic congregations. On any given Sunday in the “Big Apple” the gospel of Jesus Christ is being proclaimed in nine languages from RCA pulpits. Praise God! Churches in which twenty and thirty people were once worshiping are now welcoming two to three hundred. Aged facilities are being pressed back into service, and outreach ministries abound. At Flatbush Dutch Church in Brooklyn and DeWitt Reformed Church in Manhattan, where I had the privilege of preaching in January, congregations are thriving. Brighton Heights Reformed Church, standing in the shadow of the Statue of Liberty and near the Staten Island Ferry, burned to the ground, and the surrounding community called for its rebuilding so that a spiritual presence could continue to be felt. My thanks to Jon Norton, executive minister of the synod, for enabling me to envision the rebirth.

At the conclusion of a ten-day sojourn in October I relished the opportunity to spend three days in spiritual retreat with twenty-one pastoral and lay leaders of the Synod of the Mid-Atlantic at the Warwick Center. Wes Granberg-Michaelson served as our teacher and guide as we talked about leadership in preparation for the new millennium.

While attending a fall session of the Mid-Hudson Classis, I was invited to take part in the twenty-fifth anniversary celebration of the ordination of Joyce Stedge Fowler as the RCA’s first female minister of the Word. In Kentucky a week later, my wife and I regaled to fresh new stories of mission and ministry in Jackson County. We met with Roger De Young and the Jackson County Ministries board in Berea and with Paul Rader and representatives of the Coalition for Appalachian Ministry. These people are doing church differently in the hills than many of us remember it being done in the past. And they are doing it with great effectiveness. Changes had to be made as old concepts died and new styles of outreach were born. We came away grateful that the Reformed witness is still being positively promoted.
In Florida we listened to pastors and spouses speaking of their loneliness on the fringes and their frustrations with small churches. They voiced concern about ministerial formation. Most of their students under care have gone through the TEA program. Many feel that they are being forced to go through too many hoops to realize their dreams for ministry. Many of us are confident that the newly forming Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency will address these issues. Concerns were also expressed about articles appearing in the *Church Herald* that pastors felt they were being forced to defend with newcomers in their congregations. An interesting debate ensued as I urged colleagues to view our magazine as a voice of the church and a tool challenging us to think and rethink our views. I am grateful for the *Church Herald*'s continued overall usage as a communication vehicle in the RCA. In Wisconsin as well as in New York I viewed differing worship styles and was blessed by many. I also became further sensitized to what the "worship wars" can mean for people and parishes.

Interspersed throughout the year have been other forms of learning experiences. I've personally retreated at the Hermitage in Three Rivers, Michigan, where I read, wrote, walked, and rested. At Princeton Seminary I was blessed by the annual Festival of Preaching where Barbara Lundblad, Eugene Lowry, Edgar Evans Crawford, and Charles Rice stimulated my creative juices. For three additional days I again read and wrote and enjoyed the ambiance of a great Ivy League and theological setting. In Knoxville, Tennessee, with the Children's Defense Fund, I viewed the dedication of the Langston Hughes Library at the Alex Haley Farm and heard from Hillary Clinton, Maya Angelou, Rita Dove, architect Maya Lin, Toni Morrison, Andrew Young, and John Hope Franklin. It was a fascinating and stimulating weekend!

During a midweek stretch in January I was privileged to be part of a small RCA delegation meeting with Chuck Olsen in Kansas City. We learned more of the worshipful-work model, and we were urged to have more spiritually focused and worshipful agendas for all of our church meetings. These include the telling of the stories of our own and our congregation's pilgrimages. Following up on our general secretary’s recommendation of last year, I propose:

P-1
To instruct the General Synod Council, through its Coordinating Committee and its Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee, to explore ways to incorporate "worshipful work" and other discernment models into the schedule, agenda, and meeting process of the General Synod Council, its committees, and its task forces.

> Upon recommendation by the Committee of Reference, P-1 was referred to the Advisory Committee on Church Order. See p. 230.<

Perched high above all of even this was the opportunity that Sharon and I had with fourteen others from the RCA as we attended the Eighth Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Harare, Zimbabwe, in December. The theme for this 50th anniversary celebration was "Turn to God, Rejoice in Hope." A moving Sunday presentation rehearsed the highlights of the previous seven assemblies, beginning with the first in Amsterdam in 1948.

With an official delegation of nine hundred, representing 327 denominations, and an occasional daily walk-in population of almost five thousand, we rocked to the enthusiasm and integrity of the African church. Each worship endeavor produced by yet another segment of the world church was a treat. We were nourished by a host of speakers and stimulated by participation in a variety of *padarex*. These small groups enabled us to rub shoulders with believers speaking many languages, dressed in the colorful attire of their native lands and challenging us to think and stretch in new directions. On our final Sunday many of us were gripped by a morning Eucharist service at the Anglican Cathedral where George Leonard
Carey, the Archbishop of Canterbury, preached. We were mesmerized in the afternoon by the visit and presentation of Nelson Mandela in the Great Hall of the University of Zimbabwe. Never has the Lord’s Prayer been recited in so many languages or the hymn, “The Church’s One Foundation” been sung with such enthusiasm.

I am grateful that the RCA is an active participant and that its contributions are highly regarded, primarily because they are filled with biblical integrity and offered from a foundation of sound wisdom and scholarship. Our general secretary spoke often with clarity, compassion, and conviction.

Throughout the fortnight we agonized over the stories of abuses brought upon women and minorities. The delegates and visitors were warned that profiteering has replaced prophecy. We were challenged by messages calling for debt reduction for the poor nations of the world. Reviewed for us was the report of the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women that had convened the week prior. We listened to the concern of certain of the Orthodox bodies and witnessed the withdrawal of one, namely the delegation from Bulgaria. The World Council of Churches will continue its dialogue with that entity. Seven new church fellowships were welcomed, two with a degree of skepticism because of their continued practice of polygamy.

We prayed over the efforts to reach a more unified consensus over the document, “Toward a Common Understanding and Vision.” On the home turf of the African church we stood amazed at the health, enthusiasm, and vigor of Christians on that vast continent. They face an uncertain future with guarded optimism and a spirit of song and dance in their hearts.

One of the several hundred padares was hosted by our own Willa Brown and Phyllis Palsma. Visitors learned about the highly successful Children in Worship program, a ministry that has enhanced church life for the young throughout our denomination. Delegates from Africa, Asia, and Europe were enthralled, and they questioned why the program has not been brought to their corners of the world. They pleaded with our personnel to send ambassadors with the good news. Christian educators in the Reformed Church are to be commended for assisting in the creation of this fine worship and teaching tool. We ought not to hoard it as a success story for ourselves. Therefore, I propose the following:

**P-2**
To instruct the General Synod Council, through its Congregational Services Committee and staff team, to explore the possibility and potential for establishing a world outreach training team for the Children and Worship ministry, taking into consideration the funding requirements for this venture; and further,

to encourage the Congregational Services Committee and staff, in concert with Mission Services, to carry out this assignment in consultation with partnering world churches and with Sonia Stewart from Western Theological Seminary; and further,

to ask the Congregational Services Committee to report to the General Synod Council on this matter by April 2000.

Upon recommendation by the Committee of Reference, P-2 was referred to the Advisory Committee on Christian Education, in consultation with the Advisory Committee on World Mission. See p. 142.

Although some may have felt that my 1998-99 presidential-year theme of “Prayer, Encouragement, and Care” to have been somewhat mundane, general, or nebulous, I have felt
We need to stand up with and for our Lord to boldly affirm that, in Christ, the best is yet to be. It has been stated that the church is something like a collapsing pumpkin, but the life is in the seed. God covets (can God do that?) the kindling within us of a renewed passion for Christ that sets ablaze a revival in the Spirit. This revival will put us at the forefront of leading our neighborhoods, our urban centers, yea our nation, back to Christ. There are questions about financial management and concerns about "475" not hearing the cries from the trenches. I personally feel that our leaders have expended a great deal of energy and have displayed attitudes of caring in their attempts to be in touch with regional synods, classes, and churches. As of this writing, I am quite sure that our general secretary has visited each of our forty-six classes. He has communicated his dream and enunciated the heart and fibre of the Statement of Mission and Vision. He has also attempted to listen well to the clientele of the RCA. Communication is important. Confusion is disillusioning.

In speaking with and sending questionnaires to denominational colleagues, I sense fears from some that the Reformed Church is adapting in method, thought, and style to the culture of our day. Media, they say, is forcing the message. I concur that we ought to be driven more by a vision of biblical Christianity than cultural Christianity. Our historic theology should be promoted through fresh interpretation. This, of course, is the Reformed view of the Word at it very best. The people of our pews are yearning for theological reflection. Creeping congregationalism has been apparent for some time. And yet, the local church, at the cutting edge of mission, should be encouraged by higher judicatories—and most notably by the classes—as mission centers, to be at the forefront of proclaiming the grace of God and experiencing a renewed passion for Jesus Christ, stimulated always by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

Loud is the call for our structures to be servant-oriented. "Stay in touch with pastors and churches" is the plea. We are small enough as a denomination for ideas to be exchanged and for pastors and people to be supported and encouraged. Over the years collegial relationships have been a source of salvation for me. For well over ten years I have met on a regular basis with four RCA pastors to pray and to hold one another accountable. We share our joys and discouragements about ministry and family. From our notes in succeeding sessions, we question each other about personal learnings that have revitalized our lives. Although there is much material on the market regarding this subject, I would propose, because of the loneliness I perceive in the lives of pastors and laity:

P-3
To instruct the General Synod Council, through its Ministry and Personnel Services Committee and staff team, to develop and make opportunities available for establishing collegial support groups; and further,
to make these opportunities available at least annually to RCA ministers of Word and sacrament, elders, deacons, lay church workers, and other church workers.

Upon recommendation by the Committee on Reference, P-3 was referred to the Advisory Committee on Church Vocations. See p. 266.

In addition to the above, I have sensed a tension developing again among leaders of various segments of our church, causing mistrust and misunderstanding and at times breeding an unhealthy cynicism and elitism. Building on a proposal Tony Vis offered two years ago in Milwaukee (MGS 1997, R-25, p. 355), I propose:

P-4
To instruct the general secretary to bring together ten to fifteen ministers in a retreat-type setting to discuss the differing theological, philosophical, social, and other perspectives that make it difficult for members of the Reformed Church to dialogue as sisters and brothers in Christ.

Upon recommendation by the Committee of Reference, P-4 was referred to the Advisory Committee on Church Vocations. See p. 267.

I applaud the degree of health that I detect on the campuses of our two theological seminaries. It has been pure joy to visit both sites and to dialogue with students, faculty, and alumni. I sense, however, that there is a missing ingredient that formerly existed between the student bodies, administrators, and professors. There was a time when more fellowship and collegiality existed between the two institutions. Students and faculty annually got together on each other's turf. I propose that this practice be revived.

P-5
To urge the General Synod Council, through its Ministry and Personnel Services Committee and staff team, to coordinate a biennial gathering of students studying for ministry in the RCA at Western Theological Seminary, New Brunswick Theological Seminary, and at other seminaries throughout North America, as well as faculty from the RCA seminaries and RCA professors teaching at other schools of theology, for the purpose of conversation, mutual understanding, learning, and worship; and further,

to urge the Ministry and Personnel Services Committee and staff to work cooperatively on this program with the director of the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Committee, the presidents of the RCA seminaries, and the RCA professors of theology; and further,

to urge the planning team to also develop strategies for annual faculty exchanges among New Brunswick and Western seminaries and other seminaries (insofar as this is feasible) where RCA students are studying for ministry.

Upon recommendation by the Committee of Reference, P-5 was referred to the Advisory Committee on Church Vocations. See p. 267.
As our denomination pursues exciting new possibilities for ministry in the sprawling urban centers of our nation, mirroring our Statement of Mission and Vision and under the direction of Stan Perea and Dick Welscott, I propose:

**P-6**
To urge all RCA classes to explore, with the director of Evangelism and Church Development Services and the coordinator of urban ministry, the potential of the classes for involvement in the development of and/or support for new city ministries; and further,

to instruct the director and coordinator to report annually to the General Synod Council through its Evangelism and Church Development Services Committee and Mission Services Committee, regarding how these classis projects are developing.

Upon recommendation by the Committee of Reference, P-6 was referred to the Advisory Committee on Evangelism and Church Development, in consultation with the Advisory Committee on World Mission. See p. 290.

Although the demographics of North America have been changing so that we can no longer rightly refer to our church as being east or west, there is nevertheless a growing perception in the eastern sector of our historic denomination that it is a somewhat forgotten factor in the life of the RCA. Over the past decade there has been an absence of eastern presidential leadership for General Synod. This has been perceived by eastern synods as rejection by the rest of the church. Although I am not sure that there is a committee that can or should study the perception, I encourage the broader denomination to recall yet again the remarkable contributions being made by these the oldest branches of the tree known as the Reformed Church in America.

As I alluded to very early in the report, my home congregation graciously provided me with sabbatical time for the presidential pilgrimage. What a blessing that has been! In speaking with several of my predecessors, I sensed that they would have coveted such a sabbatical for themselves. They have remarked that the responsibilities have grown through the years. I understand that Wilbur Washington's church was given financial assistance to provide additional pastoral help during his term, and I know that our Presbyterian friends demand that their moderator be given a one-year sabbatical. John Buchanan, pastor of Fourth Presbyterian Church in Chicago, told me that he was away from home three hundred days during his leadership year. I know that the Presbyterians are much larger than we are and that Fourth Church has a large and capable staff that stood in the gap in John's absence. Many of our own congregations could not afford the luxury of such an arrangement. Nevertheless, I propose:

**P-7**
To instruct the General Synod Council, through its Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee and its staff director, to study the merit of recommending to General Synod that the president of synod be offered a sabbatical year from other professional responsibilities during his or her term of presidency, for report to the General Synod Council not later than April 2000.

Upon recommendation by the Committee of Reference, P-7 was referred to the Advisory Committee on Church Vocations. See p. 268.

The pastors of our denomination have been warmly ministered to by two Spring Sabbaths in St. Louis, Missouri. Glorious opportunities were provided for inspiration, solid input and reflection, rest and dialogue, renewal of old friendships, and the establishment of new ones.
Certain denominations offer this kind of rendezvous on a yearly basis, and colleagues from such communions have waxed eloquently over the benefits. I dare say that it would not be possible or feasible for us to do this yearly, and we do anticipate a mission convocation in New York City at Hofstra University in 2000. However, I counsel the leaders of the RCA to continue to dream dreams about such valuable encounters in the life of our fellowship.

Last year in Holland our general secretary urged the General Synods of 1998, 1999, and 2000 to refrain from deliberative debate and policy decisions regarding the issue of homosexuality. We have talked together about that since. Wes was urging the church to avoid a premature, divisive, legislative outcome on this issue. He counseled us to be pastoral and to listen and to learn. I urge you, the General Synod of 1999, to follow the counsel of the 1998 General Synod. Let me read for you the action last year’s synod took:

To instruct this General Synod to refrain from deliberative debate and policy decisions specifically relating to homosexuality, as these matters have already been thoroughly addressed by the previous synods, and to urge this same action upon the 1999 and 2000 General Synods; and further,

to request all commissions, agencies, assemblies, and institutions related to the General Synod to refrain from taking any action that would be in obvious contradiction of our stated positions, as expressed especially in 1978, 1979, 1990 and 1994; and further,

to instruct the General Synod Council, through its Congregational Services Committee, to help enable congregations and classes to enter a process of intentional discernment over the next two years concerning the pastoral challenges raised by the existence of persons of homosexual orientation within our churches and within the communities in which we are called to minister, utilizing the study guide and other resources, in order to fulfill the actions called for on this matter by the 1994 General Synod (MGS 1998, p. 511).

A copy of this recommendation as it was passed by the General Synod of 1998 is available for you at the back of this room.

The subject is a prime one in society today. Churches and denominations are not exempt. We know of the furor the subject has caused at Hope College. I mention this at this particular point because it was during my visit to New York City that I learned further of Middle Collegiate Church’s ministry with gays and lesbians on the lower east side of Manhattan. One cannot help but be impressed with such compassionate pastoral outreach. It seems to me that this is what Christ would have done. Every human being is precious in God’s sight, and it is imperative for us to reach out to those who are often lonely and ostracized. Such have been referred to as the lepers of today’s era. The last word has not been offered regarding the subject. I have been touched by our denomination’s guide, Homosexuality: Seeking the Guidance of the Church, prepared by Congregational Services. I have also appreciated John R. W. Stott’s book, Same Sex Partnerships?, which deals in a concise but compassionate way with the subject. Hope College, in true liberal arts character, despite the pain experienced by both sides of the discussion, has offered the opportunity for opposing views to be presented. In the church today we must, as well, offer an opportunity for discussion with a sense of compassion and care and bathed in much prayer. The church, above all, must provide safe space for personal sharing and listening. I propose:

P-8
To urge every classis and regional synod, in cooperation with the General Synod Council’s Congregational Services, to schedule during the next thirty months (June 1999 to December 2001) forums for study and discussion by adults and older youth on the subject of sexual identity; and further,
to direct the Office of Christian Education, in cooperation with the Commission on Theology, to develop implementation designs that include resource support and trained and knowledgeable leaders who are available for these events, and to assist classes and regional synods with scheduling and planning the conferences.

Upon recommendation by the Committee of Reference, P-8 was referred to the Advisory Committee on Christian Education and Discipleship. See p. 143.

Thank you for your listening ears. I love the church and long with you for what it potentially can become. I care for his church and the work of the kingdom, and I care for you. I am encouraged, and I hope you are also. Receive this presidential report of the last General Synod of the twentieth century with love and also with a willingness to be agents of change in an arena that calls us to be different, even peculiar, with that unique biblical formula of ours that discovers us ever reforming according to God's rich Word.
Dakota. The land where we meet is open and boundless, with big skies and distant horizons. Stars fill evening heavens here more brilliantly than in New York or Los Angeles. The spaciousness of this place invites wonder and encourages reflection for travelers who journey through.

The first white travelers to encounter the rivers and plains of Dakota were Meriwether Lewis, William Clark, and their company of nearly fifty men. The expedition was called the Corps of Discovery. Their mission, given to them by President Thomas Jefferson, was "to explore the Missouri River, and such principal stream of it, as, by its course and communication with the waters of the Pacific Ocean...may offer the most direct and practicable water communication across this continent for the purposes of commerce" (Dayton Duncan and Ken Burns, *Lewis and Clark*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997, p. 14.)

By the time the Corps of Discovery reached Dakota, Lewis and Clark were overwhelmed by the vast expanse known as the Great Plains, its rich variety of wildlife, and landscapes both beautiful and treacherous. Their expedition was already taking far longer than planned, with countless unforeseen obstacles. The challenges, however, were molding them into a unified ensemble. So, in spite of the obstacles, they pressed forward with a clear commitment to their mission.

We also have come to Dakota, two years into our own journey of discovery. We too are directed by a statement of mission and vision, the Reformed Church in America's Statement of Mission and Vision. The first sentence tells us why we exist—"to be the very presence of Jesus Christ in the world." It is a calling we have received from God. The power to fulfill it is given to us by the Holy Spirit.

The second sentence, like Lewis and Clark's orders, tells us what we are to be doing, "following Christ in mission." We are to do that in the world—in the midst of all that is broken, in the face of all that is unknown and challenging, among so many who have lost their way. We are to follow Christ in mission because God so loves this world.

We are to be a presence, the body of Christ. We are to do mission. And it is through our congregations that these things happen.

Two General Synods ago, in 1997, we affirmed with enthusiasm and joy this Statement of Mission and Vision that represented our best attempt to imagine where we were heading and what it would look like. Like Lewis and Clark, we committed to our mission and to the discoveries that would allow us to fulfill it. But we couldn't be certain of what obstacles would be encountered and what surprises would be discovered along the way.

Now, two years later, we're in Dakota. And though major challenges surely remain ahead, we must pause to ask and to record what we have discovered so far.

In 1997 General Synod asked each classis to prepare its own statement of mission and vision to guide their ministry into the future and to be shared with this General Synod of 1999. This request was made in recognition of the vital importance of classes to the health of our denomination. Beyond question, the organization or "polity" of our denomination places major responsibilities with the classis for enabling the shared ministry of congregations. Support and supervision of ministers of Word and sacrament, care for those training for ministry, decisions and directions for new church development, and supervision of congregations in times of transition or crisis: these are but a few examples.
I reported last year on visits with nearly all of our forty-six classes. I have watched with interest and in prayer as classes have worked, reflected, prayed, and prepared themselves for the journey ahead. And I have been encouraged and inspired by what I have seen and heard and experienced. Let me share some examples, starting right here in Dakota.

(At this point in the report the general secretary interviewed representatives of the Classis of Dakota and the Classis of New Brunswick regarding their vision as a classis and how it is affecting ministry within their classis.)

Two classes, among many in the RCA: committed to help equip their congregations for ministry and to support the work of a thousand churches who do one thing: follow Christ in mission.

Many other classes have developed inspired plans for ministry in the coming years. To be honest about the mission, however, is to also acknowledge that some classes have paid little or no attention to the request of General Synod. They may have been preoccupied with internal matters, or were unconvinced that focusing their mission together will make a real difference, or simply were overwhelmed by the magnitude of the task. And is that a surprise to any of us? For we all know that classes often find themselves ill-equipped for the very tasks and responsibilities that are expected of them. All that a classis does is typically carried out through the voluntary effort of pastors and elders, whose time and energy are already committed to the service of other tasks. Further, committee chairs of classis often rotate, providing little continuity. And the typical style of classis meetings focuses their attention on short-term administrative matters rather than on longer-term challenges of shared mission, ministry, and mutual support.

In spite of these obstacles, the Statement of Mission and Vision dares us to "imagine classes and synods as communities of nurture and vision—accountable, responsible, sustained by prayer, alive to the Spirit." That means finding more resources and capacity for our classes to carry out their work. A growing number of classes are now seriously considering using part-time or full-time staff to do so. Several have already done so. We must continue to explore together how all classes can find the capacity to carry out the tremendous responsibilities placed upon them.

Over two years ago I stood in a parking lot in Orange City with my colleague, Al Poppen, discussing these matters, having just finished a dinner and discussion with a classis. We had noted with some surprise that various members of the classis did not even know one another. Al remarked to me, "What we're trying to say is that classis is more than a meeting."

As we have journeyed together these two years, with the Statement of Mission and Vision as our guide, we have discovered that mission requires healthy classes, empowering, proactive, and creating communion for their members. But that is not all we have discovered.

Mission Changes Meetings.

If mission changes classis meetings, it can also change consistory meetings, regional synod meetings, staff meetings, and, for that matter, any church-related board or committee meeting. Look at the last paragraph in our Statement of Mission and Vision. It reads, "To live out this vision by consistories, classes, synods, and staff, our decision-making will be transformed by a pervasive climate of worship, discernment, and biblical reflection. We will no longer do business as usual, nor our usual business."
What does a meeting look like that is “transformed by a pervasive climate of worship”? Well, Reformed services of worship begin with the “Approach to God” and then the “Word of God” and, finally, the “Response to God.” Last month I was invited to attend the Mission Council meeting of the Regional Synod of Albany. And this “meeting” looked a lot like that, like a worship service. We began by lighting the Christ candle where the moderator sat, then shared in the call to worship and a hymn. Then we introduced one another, reviewed the agenda, approved minutes, received procedural reports, and joined in a prayer of confession. These were the Approach to God.

We then listened to the Word of God. One member, an elder, shared biblical reflections and the story of her faith journey. Together we affirmed our faith and then shared in the Lord’s Supper. The elements were blessed using our RCA liturgy and passed from one member to another as we sat at our tables, arranged in a square.

Now we moved in Response to God by “presenting our offerings.” This included reports from the four commissions of the Albany Mission Council covering all the work of the synod. This was followed with the offering of concerns from the past (old business) and concerns for the future (new business). Then the group gave thanks to God, joining in prayers of intercession, the Lord’s Prayer, and the Doxology, and ended with an “adjournment to serve” and the benediction.

When you gather together for a meeting, do you think of it as approaching God in order to do God’s work? When we meet, do we listen for the Word of God? Have you ever thought of your committee reports as an offering to God, a response to God? At this meeting of the Synod of Albany, it wasn’t just semantics, applying headings that have traditionally been reserved for worship to a meeting. The change went deeper than that. Our business became God’s work, integrally linked to engaging in the mission to which God has called us. Faith stories were shared. Biblical/theological reflection moved to the center of our meeting instead of being segregated to the sidelines.

If we don’t have a clear sense of where we are going and what our challenges are—a sense of mission—our meetings are much more likely to center around “administrivia.” But when mission and future direction are the focus, then the style of how we meet will change. Administrative matters remain important; and, in some ways, budgets and structures require even more attention, because they are no longer routine. But neither are they the center of focus. Instead, we look outward, engaging the world and imagining the future. Mission changes meetings.

Those who planned the meeting in Albany were utilizing a model called “Worshipful Work,” drawing on the work of Presbyterian pastor Charles Olsen, whose books Transforming Church Boards and Discerning God’s Will Together (with Danny Morris) are receiving attention in various circles of the RCA. Other approaches are being used as well that focus meetings around the task of discerning God’s will instead of simply getting through the business agenda.

One dramatic example will be experienced at next year’s General Synod. A Mission Convocation, with every congregation in the RCA invited to participate, will take place in the middle of General Synod. Our task will be to discern where God’s Spirit is leading us in mission as we enter a new century. Chuck Van Engen, last year’s General Synod president, will share with you later today these historic and exciting plans.

Mission changes meetings. Our mission ought even to change the way we engage each other at this year’s General Synod.
Mission Needs Money.

Mission needs money. Perhaps this is self-evident. Maybe its corollary is as well: a compelling vision attracts resources. Here's one example: in listening to local congregations, especially established congregations, staff heard clearly their concern about intentionally preparing people, especially new Christians, for discipleship. The result: plans were laid for an adult discipleship process sometimes called the catechumenate, patterned after the first-century church—plans that will be funded by a gift of nearly $200,000 from RCA individuals who believe in the initiative. A compelling vision attracts resources.

But most often, when the General Synod—and indeed, when many of our members—hear "money," we think "assessments." And when we think "assessments," too often we think "taxes." The truth is, mission needs computer systems that maintain records and share information. Mission needs meetings such as this General Synod, and its commissions and task forces, to call the church together for decision-making and guidance. Mission needs staff who enable all this to take place. Mission needs racial/ethnic councils to support our firm commitment to a multicultural future. Mission needs the Church Herald, which serves effectively and fruitfully to link us together and equip us for mission and ministry. Mission needs all these things; in short, mission needs the assessment budget.

But because we know how desperately congregational mission also needs resources for ministry, we worked hard over the last four years to raise assessments by no more than the increases in the cost of living. We have been faithful in that commitment. It has not been without an internal price. The internal costs of technology, salaries for qualified staff, and efficient administration have increased more rapidly than the inflationary rate of the economy.

Originally, staff proposed to the General Synod Council in April an increase of 4.75 percent to the year 2000 assessment to cover the basic and essential costs of stepping out in mission. After deep discussion—including efforts by the General Synod Council that resulted in a list of the top twelve priorities for our denominational efforts—we decided to reduce this to 3.75 percent. Doing so means we will reduce the number of face-to-face meetings and travel, utilizing wherever possible other technology. But it also means that we will be hampered in moving forward with certain ideas for creative ministry which, I believe, would serve congregations well.

At the same time as internal costs increase more rapidly than inflation, we also face some significant one-time costs related to making all our computer systems Y2K compliant, and replacing aging computer hardware as part of this process. Initially staff planned to propose a one-time assessment for nearly $500,000, which would have placed additional financial obligations in this coming year on congregations. But after discussion, we decided to make every effort to raise this amount through special contributions from individuals in the RCA who would fully understand this need and would desire to respond. With real joy and gratitude, I can tell you that $330,000 has been contributed. I hope that before General Synod ends we can close the remaining gap. This is a tremendous demonstration of loyalty to the RCA and a commitment to prepare ourselves for the future.

All of this having been said, we must remind ourselves that the Statement of Mission and Vision calls us—that God calls us—to go beyond maintenance to new, creative, and engaging ministry. And mission needs money. The corollary, we are confident, is that a compelling vision attracts resources.
The Urban Ministries Fund Drive is one opportunity to support a compelling vision. The Reformed Church in America is returning its attention to the city. Urban ministry is the new place of challenge and growth in mission as we enter the twenty-first century. Let’s be honest. Many of our churches have fled the city since World War II. We moved geographically and emotionally to places that seemed more familiar and in which we felt more at ease. But now it’s time that we turn our faces and hearts back to the city. And the truth is that the rapid pace of urbanization means the “city” is again becoming the home environment for many of our congregations. Did you notice that one of the goals of Dakota Classis is to establish an urban ministry church start right here in Sioux Falls?

Recently I spoke about the challenges of urban ministry with some faithful, loyal RCA laypeople in the Midwest. This question was raised: “Does Reformed theology and polity—our style of church government—really seem relevant to those groups in inner city settings?” I was surprised.

Reformed theology and polity is not Dutch. It is not white. It is not American. It is not suburban. Churches rooted in Reformed theology and polity have taken root in every continent, within the widest diversity of the world’s cultures.

When our Mission and Vision Statement imagines a denomination “that prays in many languages and beholds the face of Christ in every face,” it is describing a biblically-rooted hope that we can make a reality in the urban centers of North America.

Effective urban ministry in the RCA requires three things: leadership, resources, and partnerships. It will take money—about $5 million. Although we have not entered yet into the public phase of this campaign, I’m pleased to tell you that we already have raised nearly $1 million in pledges and gifts to this end. You will be hearing more about the Urban Ministries Fund Drive during the Mission Services report.

There is more good news. The RCA Foundation was recently endowed with a gift from Marvin and Jerene DeWitt of Zeeland, Michigan, of $1 million. This will undergird the denomination’s capacity to encourage giving for the sake of our common mission.

Mission needs money. A compelling vision attracts resources. We are grateful for the growing generosity of those in the RCA who believe in our mission and want to participate financially in moving us toward God’s future.

Mission Requires Cooperation.

Think of it this way: When a human baby is born, he or she is extremely dependent, relying on others for food, for bathing, for changing. But over time, as the child grows, he or she displays expressions of independence and autonomy. By the time a youth reaches adolescence, such independence is the primary objective of life. As a parent of a seventeen-year-old son and a fifteen-year-old daughter, I could speak at length on this topic. But then, in maturity, as adults, we discover patterns of interdependence. We swing back to some sort of middle ground in which we are clear about our own identity, but know that healthy lives share trust, vulnerability, accountability, and faithful support with others.

Of course, many people never really make it to interdependence. They get stuck in what psychologist Karen Horney has called “neurotic self-sufficiency.” They develop a destructive obsession to exist without needing, or admitting the need, for anyone else.
As with the individual, so it can be with the church. Some congregations are content to remain dependent, and some forms of church government encourage this. Congregations are simply told what to believe, how to act, who their pastor will be, and where you will go if you don’t agree. The structure is authoritarian, but predictable and stable. Congregations and their members are highly dependent.

Other expressions of the church highlight independence and autonomy. It’s up to congregations to make up the rules, find their own way, and fend for themselves. Denominational wisdom and accountability are resisted with adolescent suspicion and disregard.

A third way rejects both rigid hierarchy and radical congregationalism in favor of interdependent cooperation. That is at the heart of the Reformed tradition. Authority is neither centralized in one place, nor decentralized to every place. Rather, it is shared collegially, in accountable, trusting communities. That is what the consistory, the classis, the regional synod, and the General Synod are to be.

When Meriwether Lewis and William Clark set out from St. Louis, there were fifty individuals in the Corps of Discovery. Each one had proved, on his own, the strength and resiliency to be a survivor on the frontier. But not one of them was strong enough or resilient enough to overcome the enormous obstacles of the journey alone. Lewis and Clark needed interdependence to succeed: the dogged determination and individual skills of fifty strong and unique men, and the dedication of those same fifty men to a single objective, despite their differences. Lewis and Clark reached Oregon only because they found that delicate balance.

Our mission also requires cooperation between the various structures and assemblies of the Reformed Church in America. We cannot afford to be divided by our structures if we intend to be together in our mission.

Last month it was my privilege to visit the annual meetings of five out of our eight regional synods. All of our regional synods have undergone important changes in the past few years. The synods of Albany and of the Great Lakes have highly developed programmatic structures serving congregations. The Synod of the Heartland has done exceptional work in new church development. The Synod of New York reoriented its work a few years ago specifically to serve its classes and congregational concerns. The Synod of the Far West has recently focused efforts on pastoral assessment and congregational revitalization. The Synod of Mid-America has gone through a process of re-evaluation, focusing itself in a new mission statement. The Synod of Canada faces the task of linking a relatively small number of congregations across a huge geographical area. And the Synod of the Mid-Atlantics, with interim staff, has been spending nearly two years in focused discernment about its future.

In all cases, the regional synods seem to be worshiping and praying together more, seeking clarity about future directions related to our understanding of being the church in mission. Yet, regional synods remain orphans in our denominational structure. The General Synod Council, acting as the board of directors for the General Synod, has no intrinsic relationship or accountability to the life of the regional synods. As general secretary, nothing in our structure compels my office to listen, share, and act out of relationship to our eight regional synods. And, conversely, no avenue draws regional synods into a mutual relationship of sharing and support with each other or with the work of the General Synod’s agencies and programs.

Of course we have worked hard at developing personal relationships and sharing communication. Like much in the RCA, we tend to get around difficulties in structures by drawing on our relational networks. In areas like new church development, educational
ministries, and youth work we have specific groups in place to accomplish this. Yet, the structure itself inhibits rather than fosters cooperation throughout the church for the sake of mission.

For many years general secretaries and regional synods have struggled with each other over how to coordinate their efforts. I have no wish to perpetuate this struggle or to wage a battle for turf.

Rather, we need to think creatively about how we can strengthen and facilitate patterns of cooperation between regional synods, their classes, and the work of the General Synod. Equipping congregations for ministry requires that we do so. And that is what our congregations expect. Few in our pews understand the complexity of structure. Most simply expect that the staff and resources of the Reformed Church in America should function in a seamless, cooperative way to serve congregations and enable common mission. That is a reasonable expectation which we should fulfill. Mission requires cooperation.

A Task Force on the Roles and Responsibilities of Regional Synods and Classes is now in its third year of work, reflecting on these issues and gathering information. To them, and to you, I have no recommendation, only advice and a promise: that the time has come, and is now, to put aside our past divisions and join ourselves in a common commitment to mission. I personally pledge to do that in the next year and ask my colleagues to hold me accountable to that promise.

Let me also say a word to you as delegates about the staff that serves you, as well as the staff of our regional synods and classes. Times of change can be especially stressful on a staff. Focusing a denomination around mission for a new century is a daunting goal, filled constantly with new discoveries, but also fraught with daily frustrations and pressures. There are additional meetings, tasks, and initiatives. Meanwhile, the normal operations of our denominational life need ongoing attention.

This is a committed group of extraordinary servants of the church. They are pouring themselves out, daily, for a denomination they love. They need your expressions of care and your encouragement that they take care of themselves. In this time of transition, maintaining our spiritual center in the midst of organizational change is what will carry us through.

Mission Builds Unity.

When Lewis and Clark embarked on their mission, the group they gathered was widely diverse. They came from a variety of backgrounds; nine were French-Canadian, and three were sons of Indian mothers and white fathers. Several had been part of the army operating in what was then the "frontier" of the Midwest. Others were simply attracted by the lure of so challenging a venture.

The seeds of potential conflict were present. Any number of issues could have broken the core into divisive, argumentative factions. Lewis and Clark knew this, and in the early time of their expedition, on the way to Dakota, they put much effort into building this potentially unruly group into a cohesive, unified team. In doing so, their focus was on their mission.

The Corps of Discovery's journey took far longer than first planned. By August of the first year, 1804, they had reached what today is Sioux City. There they buried the first and only fatality of the entire expedition, Sgt. Charles Floyd, who died of what was probably a burst appendix. They continued on through the great plains of Dakota, terrain vast and enchanting, filled with herds of buffalo—all sights which they had never seen nor imagined. By winter they reached Mandan, North Dakota, and camped until spring. Before they set out in March, Lewis sent a letter back to President Thomas Jefferson that described the state of the group:
At this moment, every individual of the party are in good health and excellent spirits; zealously attached to the enterprise, and anxious to proceed; not a whisper of discontent or murmur is to be heard among them; but all in unison act with the most perfect harmony. With such men I have every thing to hope, and but little to fear (Ibid, p. 85).

I wonder, when we leave Sioux Falls, if the same will be said about the Reformed Church in America.

We are diverse, and thankfully so. We enjoy a growing diversity of ethnicity and culture among our members. Geographical locations continue to exhibit different textures, styles, and expressions of the church’s ministry. We are home to a variety of theological perspectives within the Reformed tradition. All this is healthy and good.

Yet, the potential for unruly divisiveness is also present. Some would take their particular expression of theology and make it universal for the whole of the denomination. Others would impose their understanding of worship and liturgy as the only true means to practice Reformed faith. And there are those who would use contemporary ethical disputes in society as “wedge issues” to define who is true to Christian faith and who should be cut off from our fellowship.

When we are tempted to do this, we must refocus on our mission. We must remind ourselves again that only 40 percent of Americans today regularly attend places of worship. That our society has become a foreign and strange terrain for the church today. That our culture presents a new landscape that we have not shaped and do not control. We need to bring the gospel of God’s love and grace in Jesus Christ into active engagement with the culture. People need to hear, see, and feel the transforming, saving power of God’s love in their lives. This will happen only as we turn our attention to those outside our doors rather than argue with those inside.

Two years ago General Synod president Tony Vis called upon each congregation in the RCA to understand itself as a “mission station”; to define its relationship to the culture as mission. This requires far-ranging changes. And we must embark on this journey together.

Our program effort called “Faithful Witnesses” charts our course. We are committed to enabling a majority of our congregations, and all our classes and regional synods, to be involved with new church starts. These will include a variety of models and also draw on the rich resources of our racial/ethnic councils. In the coming five years we plan to start eighty new RCA congregations.

Further, a promising effort is underway to involve pastors and congregations—two hundred over the next couple of years—in focused work to revitalize the mission and ministry of these local churches. These combined initiatives, I am confident, will reverse the decline in RCA membership. But they depend upon our being “radically attentive to the world outside our doors.”

One simple step might help as we prepare for the Mission Convocation at General Synod 2000. Let’s ask each consistory to reflect on what it means for their congregation to be in mission in their local vicinity. Each year the consistory report form asks detailed questions about the number of members and participants inside our congregations. But what about those outside? Can we study the communities where we are called to be in mission as thoroughly as we analyze the internal life of our congregations?

Therefore I make this single proposal to you:
P-1
To ask each consistory, in preparation for the Mission Convocation at General Synod 2000, to reflect on the meaning of being in mission in the congregation’s local vicinity, including the numbers of those not involved in any worshiping community; and further,

to include in the consistorial report form for the coming year an appropriate question or questions that would encourage this reflection and shared response, which can then be utilized as a resource in the work of the 2000 Mission Convocation and General Synod.

Upon recommendation by the Committee of Reference, P-1 was referred to the Advisory Committee on Evangelism and Church Development in consultation with the Advisory Committee on Church Order. See p. 289.<

“A thousand churches in a million ways doing one thing—following Christ in mission, in a lost and broken world so loved by God.” That is our call. We have set out on this journey. There is much to discover. As we stay focused on our mission, we will strengthen our bonds of community with one another. Mission builds unity.

This also unites us with the wider church. The ecumenical movement has always grown from the church’s common experience of following God in mission. When missionaries from Presbyterian, Baptist, Episcopal, Methodist, Reformed, and Lutheran denominations found themselves in India together in mission, differences that divided them in North America suddenly seemed short-sighted and unimportant. Mission in a foreign culture drew them together as members of one body.

Two years ago, when we adopted our Statement of Mission and Vision, we also approved the Formula of Agreement. Together with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the United Church of Christ, we entered into a relationship of full communion with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. This is making a difference. The mission staffs of these four denominations have been meeting together discussing how we can cooperate together for the sake of our common calling. Likewise, we are sharing approaches to educational ministries, communication, evangelism, new church development, and racial/ethnic ministry. All four denominations have made urban ministry a priority; we face similar challenges and our staff is encouraged by the possibilities of working cooperatively.

You will hear on Monday about the Eighth Assembly of the World Council of Churches held last December in Harare, Zimbabwe, and the active participation of the Reformed Church in America. We also have continued to knock on the door of the National Association of Evangelicals. All this is supported by our commitment to mission. Mission builds unity.

A few weeks ago I was listening to a Reformed Church pastor share about his congregation’s life. A new couple had come to the church with young children, including a six-year-old girl. Like so many in today’s culture, they had not been part of any church but felt beckoned to explore.

Their daughter went to a Sunday school class. It was during Lent. The teacher was telling the story of the crucifixion of Jesus. As this story progressed, the six-year-old child became more and more attentive. Her eyes began to fill with tears. The teacher told how the soldiers drove nails through the hands and feet of our Lord, hanging him on the cross. With that the six-year-old blurted out, “They did what?” She began to cry out loud.

Having never heard this story before, she was horrified at the cruelty. She could not understand how people could be so mean. “But why would they do that to Jesus?” she asked the teacher.
We love to gather and sing, “Tell me the old, old story of Jesus and his love.” But, my friends, in our culture today, this is no longer an old story. It is a new story—a dramatic, inspiring, compelling, redeeming story that people are dying to hear and waiting to see made flesh.

We have arrived in Dakota, two years into a journey of discovery. We are directed by a Statement of Mission and Vision “to be the very presence of Jesus Christ in the world.” It is a calling we have received from God. The power to fulfill it is given to us by the Holy Spirit.

The camp is established. But soon we must choose whether to move on to face the next challenge, the next obstacle. I hope and pray we will prepare ourselves and our church to leave, in the words of Meriwether Lewis, “zealously attached to the enterprise, and anxious to proceed...all in unison” with “everything to hope” and nothing to fear, as we follow Christ in mission.
GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL/GENERAL SYNOD BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The General Synod Council (GSC) has served the Reformed Church in America since July 1, 1993. The Book of Church Order (BCO) states:

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

The Bylaws of the General Synod (Book of Church Order, Chapter 3, Part 1, Article 3, Section 6) assign to the General Synod Council the following responsibilities:

a. To administer the affairs of the Reformed Church in America between the sessions of the General Synod.

b. To initiate studies and evaluations of policy, strategy, and long-range planning within the denomination and to submit to the General Synod any recommendation considered useful for the development, effectiveness, and efficiency of the life, work, and organization of the Reformed Church; specifically to review all General Synod commissions at least once during each five-year period and to recommend to General Synod a continuation of, a reconstitution of, or a discontinuation of such commissions, with the understanding that necessity for continuation shall not be assumed.

c. To be the program agent of the General Synod, establishing and reviewing policies, and through its staff, seeking to implement and administer such programs as are appropriate to the denomination.

d. To maintain a permanent archive for the collection of official records and documents of the Reformed Church in America, its churches, assemblies, and agencies.

e. To oversee the standards for the preparation for the professional ministry in the Reformed Church in America.

f. To recommend the assessment and mission askings for the General Synod.

G. To serve as the Board of Directors of the Corporation.

h. To supervise the office of the general secretary.

i. To recommend the time and place for the session of the General Synod and to prepare an agenda and schedule for the General Synod.

j. To authorize its Coordinating Committee to serve as the Committee of Reference during the sessions of the General Synod. As such it shall receive referrals from the General Synod and formulate and present appropriate resolutions to the General Synod. It shall also receive and act upon applications for leaves of absence from the sessions of General Synod.

k. To perform such other duties as shall be delegated and referred to it by the General Synod and to submit an annual report of its work to the General Synod.
The GSC report is presented in two ways. First, matters of a general nature to be heard and acted upon directly by the General Synod are reported here. They are identified by "#" in the outline below. Second, other matters of the seven General Synod Council committees are reported through appropriate advisory committees as indicated by the parenthetical note following the title of the item in the outline below. Referrals from the General Synod of 1998 are dealt with throughout the report.

Ad Interim Administration

# Regional Synod Minutes
# Ad Interim Appointments
# Transfer of Hemlock Farms Congregation
# Debt Reporting
# Revisions of Consistorial Report Form

General Synod Meeting

# Referral of Business
# Communion Offering
# Seating of Delegates
# Dates and Sites
# Amendments to the Book of Church Order
# Amendments to the Bylaws of the General Synod and Special Rules of Order of the General Synod in the Book of Church Order

Budget

# 2000 General Synod Operational Budget
# Other 2000 General Synod Assessments
# Total 2000 General Synod Assessments

Supervision

# Personnel and Evaluation Committee

Other

# General Synod Theme
# Classes and Regional Synod Stated Clerks Consultation
# 1998 Statistical Report of the RCA
# Appointment of General Synod Treasurer and Assistant Treasurer
Report of the Board of Directors

# Annual Report

From the General Synod Council Committees

1. GSC Congregational Services Committee
   Office of Christian Education (Christian Education and Discipleship)
   Office of Hunger Education (see 5. Mission Services)
   Office of Social Witness (Christian Action)
   Office of Worship (Christian Worship)
   Office of Diaconal Ministries (Christian Education and Discipleship)
   Office of Communication and Production Services (Christian Heritage and Communication)
   Task Force on Consistories (Christian Education and Discipleship)

2. Evangelism and Church Development Services
   Reformed Church in America Building and Extension Fund (Evangelism and Church Growth)
   Office of Evangelism and Church Development Services (Evangelism and Church Growth)
   Faithful Witnesses
   Revitalization
   New Church Development

3. GSC Finance Services Committee
   Office of Finance Services (Financial Support)

4. GSC Ministry and Personnel Services Committee
   Office of Ministry and Personnel Services (Church Vocations)

5. GSC Mission Services Committee
   Office of Mission Services (World Mission)
   Changes in Missionary Personnel (World Mission)
   Office of Hunger Education (World Mission)
6. GSC Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee

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

Necrology (Christian Heritage and Communications)

Task Force on Purposes and Responsibilities of Regional Synods and Classes (Church Order)

Review of Commissions (Church Order)

Articles of Incorporation Project Report (Church Order)

Committee of Reference

# Referrals

# 2000 General Synod Assessments

# Leaves of Absence

# Resolutions

AD INTERIM ADMINISTRATION

Regional Synod Minutes

The GSC received, and found to be in good order, the 1998 minutes of the regional synods of Albany, Canada, the Far West, the Great Lakes, the Heartland, Mid-America, the Mid-Atlantic, and New York.

Ad Interim Appointments

To the General Synod Council:


The Rev. David Van Lant, representing the Classis of California, to fill the unexpired term of the Rev. Dr. Vernon Hoffs, Class of 2000.

To the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency:

The Rev. Dr. George Brown, Class of 1999, and Dr. Brad Lewis, Class of 2001, to fill vacancies.

To the editorial council of the Church Herald:

The Rev. Livingstone Chen to fill an at-large vacancy, Class of 2001.

To the RCA Building and Extension Fund Board of Directors:

Thomas Leach to fill the unexpired term of the Rev. Stanley Perea, Class of 2000.
To the RCA Foundation:

To fill at-large vacancies:

Valery Craane  Class of 1999
Ed Mondore  Class of 2000
Harry DeBruyn  Class of 2001
Marilyn Norman  Class of 2001

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

Transfer of Hemlock Farms Congregation

In September 1998 the General Synod Council received from the Classis of Orange, in the Regional Synod of New York, and the Classis of Passaic Valley, in the Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics, a request that the GSC, acting within its responsibilities "to administer the affairs of the Reformed Church in America between the sessions of the General Synod" (BCO, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 6a) transfer the Church at Hemlock Farms, in Hawley, Pennsylvania, from the Classis of Passaic Valley, in the Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics, to the Classis of Orange, in the Regional Synod of New York. The consistory and representatives of the two regional synods supported the request. The congregation is located within the bounds of the Classis of Orange and more than a one-hour drive from the closest congregation in the Classis of Passaic Valley. The congregation is located a short distance from three RCA congregations in the Classis of Orange. The General Synod Council acted on the request at its October 1998 meeting (GSC 98-145). The transfer was effective January 1, 1999.

Debt Reporting

At the June 1997 stated clerks' meeting in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the clerks agreed by consensus that the indebtedness information requested on Addendum B of the Consistorial Report form is sufficient for the purpose of debt reporting. It is not necessary to also request indebtedness information on another form.

At its January 1998 meeting the GSC Finance Services Committee received this report from the stated clerks. By consensus the committee instructed the secretary for General Synod operations to no longer send the church indebtedness form to stated clerks of classes.

The GSC Finance Services Committee will review addendum B annually at the October GSC meeting. These procedures will begin in October 1999.

Revisions of the Consistorial Report Form

Beginning in 1998, Part II, section D, "Committee Chairpersons," was deleted from the Consistorial Report form, and congregations were informed that Part II, section B, item 2, "Other Church Staff," need not be completed. This was done in order to substantially reduce the data input time and consequent cost that the inclusion of this information generated. This information was no longer accessed and therefore need not be requested from the congregations. In addition, the indebtedness form that had previously been included in the Consistorial Report form mailing will no longer be utilized as per the decision of the January 1998 GSC Finance Services Committee, as noted above.
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 1999 General Synod communion offering for the Kosovo refugees.

The Seating of Delegates

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

The general secretary will report on classes payments of 1998 and 1999 General Synod assessments at the General Synod meeting.

Dates and Sites

1999 General Synod


At its April 1997 meeting, GSC determined to reduce the length of General Synod meetings from six and one-half days to five days. It was anticipated that this would result in a savings in operating costs for future General Synod meetings.

Therefore, the number of days for the 1999 General Synod meeting were subsequently reduced by revising the dates from June 12-18 (Saturday through Friday) to June 11-16 (Friday through Wednesday) (MGS 1998, R-3, p. 69).

2000 General Synod

The General Synod of 1998 accepted the invitation of the Regional Synod of New York to host the General Synod meeting, June 9-14, 2000, and to use the facilities of Marble Collegiate Church (MGS 1998, R-4, p. 69). Following the 1998 meeting of General Synod it was determined that the facilities of Marble Collegiate Church are not large enough to accommodate the General Synod. Hotel and university dormitory facilities in the area were either unavailable or too expensive for use by the RCA. Alternate facilities were not available within the bounds of the city of New York without exceeding the budget for General Synod operations. Hofstra University, located on Long Island within about forty-five minutes of downtown Manhattan, became available. The Mission Convocation 2000/General Synod 2000 planning team has reviewed the Hofstra site, and the General Synod Council has approved plans for the 2000 meeting using the alternate site.
R-3
To change the location of the 2000 meeting of the General Synod to Hofstra University in Hempstead, New York. (ADOPTED)

The General Synod of 1998 instructed the General Synod Council and its Mission Services Committee to convene a global/local mission convocation of the Reformed Church in America, to be held in the spring of 2000; and further, to plan the convocation to be self-funded, paid for by the churches and persons who participate (MGS 1998, pp. 501-503). In July 1998 the moderator of the General Synod Council convened an ad hoc planning team for the 2000 Mission Convocation. In October 1998 the GSC’s Mission Services, Evangelism and Church Development Services, Congregational Services, and Policy, Planning, and Administration Services met jointly to receive the instruction from the 1998 General Synod and to hear the report from the ad hoc planning team. The planning team recommended developing the Mission 2000 Convocation and the 2000 meeting of the General Synod to function in conjunction with each other. The GSC voted to direct the moderator (the Rev. Dr. Charles Van Engen) to appoint a design team and also designated the vice president of General Synod (the Rev. Dr. Vernon Hoffs) as the convener and chair of the team (GSC 98-136). The design team was instructed to develop a plan for the Mission Convocation 2000 to meet in conjunction with General Synod 2000 and to report to the GSC in April 1999.

The Mission Convocation 2000/General Synod 2000 planning team met in January, March, and May 1999. The team reported to the General Synod Council in April 1999 and provided the following proposed theme, schedule, organizational design, and operational budget.

Theme

The theme for the Mission Convocation 2000/General Synod 2000 will be “Mission 2000—Discerning the Spirit, Engaging the World.” Its mission statement is:

We are a thousand churches in a million ways doing one thing—following Christ in mission in a lost and broken world, so loved by God. We come to celebrate our Christ-given mission and ministry, ready to be guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit working among us in the twenty-first century.

- Worshipping together, celebrating what God is doing in our midst—personally, locally, and globally.
- Hearing and telling the stories, discovering how the Spirit of God is working in the world.
- Begin discerning how to use the resources God has given us to respond to the challenges of mission in the twenty-first century.
- Encouraging and equipping one another to live out our mission.
- Partnering for ministry in the twenty-first century.

### MISSION 2000—EVENT SCHEDULE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GENERAL EVENT</th>
<th>Friday 6/9</th>
<th>Saturday 6/10</th>
<th>Sunday 6/11</th>
<th>Monday 6/12</th>
<th>Tuesday 6/13</th>
<th>Wednesday 6/14</th>
<th>Thursday 6/15</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Breakfast</td>
<td>Prayers</td>
<td>Prayers</td>
<td>Prayers</td>
<td>Prayers</td>
<td>Prayers</td>
<td>Prayers</td>
<td>Prayers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6:00 a.m.- 8:00 a.m.</td>
<td>8:00 a.m.-8:40 a.m.</td>
<td>9:00 a.m.</td>
<td>10:15 a.m.-10:45 a.m.</td>
<td>12:00 a.m.</td>
<td>12:00-2:00 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immersion Groups (A1)</td>
<td>Discernment Groups (A3)</td>
<td>Box lunch</td>
<td>Free time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>leave for NYC</td>
<td>Discernment Groups (A4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Urban Plunge” folks</td>
<td>Read the Pentecost</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>leave for NYC</td>
<td>Letter/write personal response</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morning Sessions</td>
<td>9:00 a.m.</td>
<td>Discovery Groups (A1)</td>
<td>Participants visit area churches.</td>
<td>Discernment Groups (A4)</td>
<td>Convocation</td>
<td>General Synod</td>
<td>General Synod</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Break</td>
<td>10:15 a.m.-10:45 a.m.</td>
<td>remain at Hofstra Univ.</td>
<td>Some remain at Hofstra for worship</td>
<td>Convocation Closing Event</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session End</td>
<td>12:00 a.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Convocation Ends</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td>GS only</td>
<td>Box lunch</td>
<td>Free time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Friday, 6/9**
- Breakfast: 6:00 a.m.-8:00 a.m.
- Morning Sessions: 9:00 a.m.
- Break: 10:15 a.m.-10:45 a.m.
- Lunch: 12:00-2:00 p.m.

**Monday, 6/12**
- Discernment Groups (A3)

**Wednesday, 6/14**
- Convocation

**Thursday, 6/15**
- Convocation Ends
### MISSION 2000—EVENT SCHEDULE (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Afternoon Sessions</th>
<th>Break</th>
<th>End</th>
<th>Dinner</th>
<th>Evening Sessions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2:00 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td>3:15 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td>5:00 p.m.</td>
<td>7:30 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:15 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5:00 p.m.</td>
<td>7:00 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:15 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7:30 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:00 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9:30 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:30 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Discovery Groups (#2)
- **General Synod**

#### Immersion Groups (#2)
- **General Synod**

#### Free time
- **(Compilers draft the Pentecost Letter)**

#### General Synod
- **General Synod**

#### General Synod
- **General Synod**

#### International Foodcourt

#### Convocation begins
- **Worship-Extravaganza**
  - **Discernment Groups (#2)**
- **Pentecost Celebration (Local churches invited to join Convocation)**
- **Regional Synod of New York Party**

#### Reception
- **General Synod**
- **General Synod**

#### Formation of Discernment Groups (#1)
- **Reception**
- **General Synod**
- **General Synod**

Opening of General Synod and Convocation—Worship and Celebration

The Convocation involves multiple Bible study, reflection and discovery groups, seeking organized in a number of groups like review committees.

G.S. Delegates present the convocation's findings, insights, vision, concerns to the G.S., along with doing regular G.S. business. New initiatives, networks, cooperative plans arise out of the process of the working groups during the consultation.

The Church Engaging the World
## General Synod/Mission Convocation 2000
**Proposed Budget and Funding Plan Report**

### I. Revenue Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Synod 2000</th>
<th>Convocation</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Registration (1900 @ $125.)</td>
<td></td>
<td>$237,500</td>
<td>$237,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fees (housing, meals, day charges, etc.)</td>
<td>$320,000</td>
<td>$320,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special gifts</td>
<td>$200,000</td>
<td>$200,000</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessments</td>
<td>$390,096</td>
<td></td>
<td>$390,096</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant travel</td>
<td>$408,670</td>
<td></td>
<td>$408,670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>1,562,470</strong></td>
</tr>
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</table>

### II. Expenses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Synod 2000</th>
<th>Convocation</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant travel (includes air, airport ground transportation, personal auto)</td>
<td>$86,796</td>
<td>$408,670</td>
<td>$495,466</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discovery site transportation</td>
<td>$12,500</td>
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<td>$12,500</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunrise service transportation</td>
<td>$26,000</td>
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<td>$26,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Room/Board</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>$60,768</td>
<td>$168,800</td>
<td>$229,568</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meals</td>
<td>$59,060</td>
<td>$187,500</td>
<td>$246,560</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beverage services</td>
<td>$6,300</td>
<td>$13,500</td>
<td>$19,800</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Facilities/Arrangements</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Insurance</td>
<td>$4,300</td>
<td>$24,000</td>
<td>$28,300</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supplies</td>
<td>$400</td>
<td>$2,200</td>
<td>$2,600</td>
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<tr>
<td>Telephone installations</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
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<td>$1,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contingency</td>
<td>$4,000</td>
<td>$6,000</td>
<td>$10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rentals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fax machine</td>
<td>$100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Photo copy equipment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Round top tables</td>
<td>$2,570</td>
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<td>$9,710</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chairs</td>
<td>$10,080</td>
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<td>$40,480</td>
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<td>Tablecloths</td>
<td>$1,920</td>
<td>$10,100</td>
<td>$12,020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plants (platform)</td>
<td>$800</td>
<td>$800</td>
<td>$1,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hofstra U. Fees</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rental</td>
<td>$4,500</td>
<td>$3,000</td>
<td>$7,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janitorial services</td>
<td>$1,800</td>
<td>$1,200</td>
<td>$3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security services</td>
<td>$1,800</td>
<td>$1,200</td>
<td>$3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff services</td>
<td>$1,800</td>
<td>$1,200</td>
<td>$3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air conditioning</td>
<td>$5,600</td>
<td>$3,750</td>
<td>$9,350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Platform setup</td>
<td>$600</td>
<td>$600</td>
<td>$1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electrical setup/services</td>
<td>$1,500</td>
<td>$1,500</td>
<td>$3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tarp (floor)</td>
<td>$400</td>
<td>$400</td>
<td>$800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honoraria</td>
<td>$5,000</td>
<td>$35,000</td>
<td>$40,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video/sound/lighting/computers/technical support</td>
<td>$30,000</td>
<td>$75,710</td>
<td>$95,710</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printing/promotion/mailing</td>
<td>$90,000</td>
<td>$20,000</td>
<td>$120,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
At its April 1999 meeting the General Synod Council received an invitation from Central College to host the 2001 General Synod meeting. In its discussion of the 2001 meeting, the GSC was reminded that Mission Convocation 2000/General Synod 2000 as it is now being planned involves a year of preparation (1999-2000) and a year of learning, prayerful engagement, and mission implementation (2000-2001). This is envisioned by the planning team as the first stage of follow-up to the convocation and as a year of recommitment to local and global mission at the start of the millennium. Therefore the GSC members, on the advice of the standing committee on Policy, Planning, and Administration Services, voted to send to the General Synod for its consideration a proposal that the Reformed Church in America not meet in General Synod for one year (2001) and that 90 percent of the actual budgeted cost of the synod meeting be returned to the classes with encouragement that the funds be used to begin or expand localized mission activities in partnership with congregations or to equip elders, deacons, and laity of congregations for mission involvement. Ten percent would be retained by the General Synod and committed to resources and programs to support education for mission in congregations through the work of the GSC’s Congregational Services Committee and its ministry staff teams.

Central College has been contacted by the General Synod office and has agreed to extend its invitation to General Synod to meet on the college campus in 2002 if the synod decides not to meet in 2001. Prior to acting on a recommendation that the church not meet in General Synod in 2001, the delegates of the 1999 General Synod will need to adopt the following changes in the Book of Church Order, Chapter I, Part IV, Article 4, Section 1, and Article 5, Sections 1 and 2 for recommendation for approval by the classes. The delegates will also need to adopt in first reading an amendment to the Bylaws of the General Synod, Chapter 3, Part 1, Article 3, Section 3.

R-4
To adopt the following revisions to the Book of Church Order (BCO), Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 4, Section 1, and Part IV, Article 5, Sections 1 and 2, for recommendation to the classes for approval (deletions are stricken out):

Article 4, Section 1. The General Synod shall meet annually at such time and place as shall have been determined at its previous session. All meetings of the General Synod shall begin and end with prayer.

Article 5, Section 1. A president shall be elected from among the delegates to preside at the next session of the General Synod, and to undertake such other duties as may be assigned by the synod. It shall
be the duty of the president to state and explain the business to be transacted, to enforce the rules of order, and, in general, to maintain the decorum and dignity belonging to the church of Jesus Christ. The president shall be a member of the General Synod until the close of the next annual session.

Article 5, Section 2. After the president has been elected, the synod shall elect a vice president from among the delegates. The vice president shall be a member of the General Synod until the close of the next annual session of the synod.

R-5
To adopt in first reading the following amendment to the Bylaws of the General Synod, Chapter 3, Part 1, Article 3. General Synod Council, Section 3, Term of Office, for recommendation to the 2000 General Synod for approval (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken out):

Section 3. Term of Office

The term of office for the elected members shall be three years. They shall be subject to re-election for one additional term. They shall be ineligible for two years after they have served two consecutive terms. General Synod officers shall serve as members of the council for one additional year until the conclusion of the next meeting of the General Synod following the expiration of their term as an officer of the General Synod General Synod term of office.

The General Synod Council presents to the 1999 General Synod two recommendations for its consideration. If the General Synod votes in favor of the first recommendation, the date in the second recommendation will be 2002. If the General Synod votes “no” on the first recommendation, the date in the second recommendation will be 2001.

R-6
That the church not meet in General Synod in 2001 so that the church may move from the Mission Convocation 2000 into a year devoted to learning, prayer, and the implementation of mission locally and globally; and further,

that 90 percent of the resulting direct assessment cost savings in 2001 be returned to the classes and that the Reformed Church in America tithe the remaining savings in 2001 to educational ministries; and further,

to request Central College to postpone its invitation to host General Synod to 2002.

R-7
To accept the invitation of Central College to host the 200 _ meeting of General Synod.

Upon a motion from the floor, the synod

VOTED: To refer R-4, R-5, R-6, and R-7 to the Committee of Reference.
The General Synod in 1998 adopted and referred to the classes for approval five amendments to the Book of Church Order. The amendments are recorded in the 1998 Minutes of General Synod, pp. 368-375, 291, 292, 294, and 295.

Proposed Amendments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposed Amendments</th>
<th>Approved</th>
<th>Disapproved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Placement of the responsibilities of the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency in the Book of Church Order</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(MGS 1998, p. 368-375)</td>
<td>(BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 8, Section 3, p. 39)</td>
<td>(BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 9, Section 2, p. 41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 12, Section 5, p.46)</td>
<td>(BCO, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 7, Section 6, p. 68)</td>
<td>(BCO, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 2, Section 8, p. 64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 8, Section 4, p. 40)</td>
<td>(BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 9, Section 3, p. 42)</td>
<td>(BCO, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 2, Section 8, p. 64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 10, Sections 1-2, pp. 42-43)</td>
<td>(BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 10, Sections 1-2, pp. 42-43)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Revise “Pastoral Ministry” term in the Book of Church Order</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>(MGS 1998, p. 291)</td>
<td>(BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 1d, p. 30)</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Consistory vacancies</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>(MGS 1998, pp. 292)</td>
<td>(BCO, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 10f, p. 14)</td>
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</tr>
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<td>4. Transfer of ministers from other denominations</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(MGS 1998, p. 294)</td>
<td>(BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 12, Section 4a, p. 45)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Transfer of members</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(MGS 1998, p. 295)</td>
<td>(BCO, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 16, p. 15)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-8 To declare amendments 1-5 to have been approved by the classes for incorporation into the 1999 edition of the Book of Church Order.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Upon a motion from the floor, the synod

VOTED: To amend R-8 by dividing R-8 to take out item 1 and to refer it to the Advisory Committee on Church Order.

(Item 1 from R-8 was referred to the Advisory Committee on Church Order. See p. 229.)
To adopt R-8 as amended. (Clarification: this declares amendments 2-5 to have been approved by the classes for incorporation into the 1999 edition of the Book of Church Order.)

Amendments to the Bylaws of the General Synod and Special Rules of Order of the General Synod in the Book of Church Order

The 1998 General Synod approved in first reading for recommendation to the 1999 General Synod the following amendments to the Bylaws of the General Synod and Special Rules of Order of the General Synod:

- Clarify the role of the General Synod Council and the Commission on History with the RCA Archives—BCO, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 5b (MGS 1998, R-6, p. 295).

- Provide for an observer or observers from the churches represented in the Formula of Agreement to attend Commission on Theology meetings—BCO, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 8a (MGS 1998, R-11, p. 310).

- Stipulate that the General Synod Council will no longer receive “progress reports” from commissions—BCO, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 1b (MGS 1998, R-15, p. 314).

- Reorganize and restructure the relationship of the racial/ethnic councils within the RCA church order—BCO, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 4, Section 4; Chapter 3, Part I, Article 6 Section 1; Chapter 3, Part I, Article 8, Section 9; Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 1 and 2 (MGS 1998, R-16, p. 317-318).

- Establish a Commission on Race and Ethnicity—BCO, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 7 (MGS 1998, R-17, p. 318-319).

R-9
To declare the above amendments approved by the 1998 General Synod in first reading to be incorporated into the 1999 edition of the Bylaws of the General Synod. (ADOPTED)

Proposed Changes to the Bylaws of the General Synod

GSC Meeting Frequency

At the meeting of the General Synod Council in October 1998 the council voted (GSC 98-140) to change the GSC meeting schedule in 1999, by canceling the previously scheduled June 11-16, 1999, meeting, and requested the Policy, Planning, and Administration Services committee to consider in October 1999 a proposal to revise the Bylaws of the General Synod, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3. General Synod Council, Section 5. Meetings, a. In reviewing this matter, staff for the committee noted that if this request was not addressed until October 1999, a proposed revision in the bylaws could not be presented to the General Synod for action until June 2000 and could not be incorporated into the Bylaws of the General Synod until after the General Synod meeting of 2001. Therefore, at the April 1999 meeting the GSC adopted the proposed recommendation that the GSC be required to meet twice annually, for approval by the General Synod. (GSC will be out of compliance with its bylaws only in 1999 if General Synod approves this change.)

R-10
To adopt in first reading the following amendments to the Bylaws of the General Synod in the Book of Church Order, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3. General Synod Council, Section 5. Meetings, a. as follows (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken out):
Sec. 5
a. The council shall hold three two stated meetings each year. (ADOPTED)

> Upon a motion from the floor, the synod:

VOTED: To refer the section of the General Synod Council/Board of Directors report entitled “Budget” and the section titled “Supervision” to the Advisory Committee on Financial Support.

(The section of the General Synod Council/Board of Directors report titled “Budget” and the section titled “Supervision” were referred to the Advisory Committee on Financial Support. See pp. 314-323.)

OTHER

1999 General Synod Theme

The theme for the 1999 General Synod is “God’s Spirit upon Us: Celebrating,” taken from Isaiah 61:1-4.

Classis and Regional Stated Clerks Consultation

The General Synod Executive Committee, 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 assessments budget, with the understanding that transportation expenses for this meeting are provided by the classes and regional synods.

The annual gathering of stated clerks is scheduled for June 9-10, 1999, at North American Baptist Seminary in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Clerks will present information and lead discussions on issues of judicial business and church order, specialized interim ministers, the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency, and General Synod 2000. Denominational staff will present information on insurance and long-term care, pension investments, classis assessments, legal ramifications of conflicts in classis, the clerks’ manual, and the RCA data system.

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 Susan Converse 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. Kenneth Bradsell, director of Policy, Planning, and Administration Services, to have authority to sign legal documents for the corporation of the General Synod, it is necessary to approve the following recommendation:
To appoint the Rev. Kenneth Bradsell assistant secretary of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America. (ADOPTED)


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1996</th>
<th>1997</th>
<th>1998</th>
<th>Increase or Decrease</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Churches</td>
<td>952</td>
<td>952</td>
<td>949</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Church Households</td>
<td>119,733</td>
<td>116,921</td>
<td>115,047</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Confessing Members</td>
<td>186,435</td>
<td>185,074</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Inactive Members</td>
<td>42,978</td>
<td>41,065</td>
<td>40,174</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Baptized Members</td>
<td>81,235</td>
<td>79,337</td>
<td>78,838</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Total Membership</td>
<td>310,648</td>
<td>305,476</td>
<td>302,264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Adherents</td>
<td>41,612</td>
<td>43,725</td>
<td>44,764</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Average Worship Attendance</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Received on Confession</td>
<td>8,315</td>
<td>8,445</td>
<td>7,876</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Received on Certificate</td>
<td>4,886</td>
<td>4,514</td>
<td>4,187</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Transferred</td>
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<td>3,886</td>
<td>3,541</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Deceased</td>
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<td>2,980</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Other Removals from Roll</td>
<td>6,238</td>
<td>5,653</td>
<td>5,627</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Infants Baptized</td>
<td>4,513</td>
<td>4,497</td>
<td>4,332</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Adults Baptized</td>
<td>1,118</td>
<td>1,301</td>
<td>1,193</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Sunday Church School</td>
<td>97,084</td>
<td>95,555</td>
<td>93,703</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>New Membership Class</td>
<td>11,864</td>
<td>11,902</td>
<td>11,008</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Other Educational Programs</td>
<td>92,975</td>
<td>96,759</td>
<td>98,524</td>
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</table>

19a RCA Assessments $9,100,798 $9,323,211 $9,627,952 $304,741
19b RCA Contributions $13,268,186 $13,404,833 $14,099,457 $694,624
19c Other Contributions $9,820,416 $10,546,972 $11,326,415 $779,443

20 Congregational Purposes $188,579,609 $197,242,829 $204,710,130 $7,467,301

TOTAL $220,769,009 $230,517,845 $239,763,954 $9,246,109

Organized
Valley Life Community, Boise, Idaho (3/98) Classis of Cascades
Community of Joy, Traverse City, Michigan (11/98) Classis of Northern Michigan
Cornerstone Community, Chowchilla, California (12/98) Classis of Central California

Disbanded/Released
Korean Peace, Mission Hills, California (1/98) Classis of California
Chuk Bok Reformed, Astoria, New York (3/98) Classis of Queens
Princetown Reformed, Duanesburg, New York (6/98) Classis of Schenectady
First Reformed, Muskegon, Michigan (11/98) Classis of Muskegon
First Reformed, Marion, New York (12/98) Classis of Rochester
Merged
Canarsie Reformed, Brooklyn, and Christ Community, Brooklyn, became
Canarsie Community Reformed, Brooklyn, New York (1/98) Classis of Brooklyn
Report of the Commission on Judicial Business

The 1998 General Synod received reports and recommendations from the Commission on Judicial Business regarding three appeals (MGS 1998, pp. 83-105). One was an appeal by the Classis of New York of an action by the Regional Synod of New York.

The case underlying the 1998 appeal involved a dispute between Bethany Memorial Reformed Church in New York City and the Collegiate Church Corporation, also in New York City, concerning a sale of church property by the Collegiate Church Corporation. The Rev. William Hanousek and elder Sylvia Simpfendorfer-Ishmael (on behalf of Bethany Memorial Reformed Church) filed a complaint with the Classis of New York, and subsequently appealed the decision of the classis to the Regional Synod of New York. On appeal, the regional synod reversed the decision of the classis and remanded the case to the classis with certain instructions. The classis appealed the decision of the regional synod to the 1998 General Synod. The Commission on Judicial Business recommended to the 1998 General Synod that it reverse the decision of the regional synod, and this recommendation was adopted (MGS 1998, R-3, p. 102).

In the meantime, in the summer of 1997 the Rev. William L. Hanousek and the Rev. Lynn M. Hanousek filed separate, new complaints with the regional synod. Each complaint challenged the validity of the earlier appeal by the Classis of New York to the 1998 General Synod concerning the same subject matter. On May 9, 1998, the regional synod, acting upon the advice of its Permanent Committee on Judicial Business, rejected the challenges in the new complaints and confirmed the validity of the Classis of New York's appeal to the General Synod.

During the 1998 General Synod meeting the General Synod received by fax a letter dated June 7, 1998, from the Rev. William J. Hanousek (hereinafter, "Rev. Hanousek"). The letter purported to be an appeal to the General Synod by Rev. Hanousek of the regional synod's May 9, 1998, decision. The letter was referred to the General Synod's Committee of Reference during the 1998 General Synod. The Committee of Reference subsequently informed the General Synod that the letter would be referred to the Commission on Judicial Business for its review and report back to the 1999 General Synod.

The Commission on Judicial Business met by conference call on Tuesday, July 28, 1998, to discuss Rev. Hanousek’s June 7, 1998, letter. At that time the Commission on Judicial Business concluded that 1) the June 7, 1998, letter did not contain sufficient detail to constitute an appeal and was, at most, a notice of intent to file an appeal, and 2) absent additional documentation, it was unable to form a recommendation to the 1999 General Synod regarding the June 7, 1998, letter. In August 13, 1998, letter the commission communicated its conclusion to Rev. Hanousek and advised him that, consistent with the appeal procedure outlined in Chapter 2, Part III, Article 2, Section 2 of the RCA Book of Church Order, he would have twenty (20) days from his receipt of the August 13, 1998, letter within which to forward to the commission any additional documentation related to the matter. Chapter 2, Part III, Article 2, Section 2 of the Book of Church Order provides as follows:

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.

On January 6, 1999, the Commission on Judicial Business again met by conference call. At that time the commission was advised by General Synod staff that no additional documentation or information of any kind had been received from Rev. Hanousek related to the matter. The commission therefore concluded that no new appeal had ever been filed by Rev. Hanousek.
The commission’s conclusion was communicated to Rev. Hanousek in a letter dated January 18, 1999. In response Rev. Hanousek asserted, among other things, that he had never received the August 13, 1998, letter. (All ten of the other addressees of the letter received their copy.) The commission therefore reconvened by conference call on Monday, March 8, 1999, and at that time reluctantly agreed to provide another notice to Rev. Hanousek, advising him of the irregularities in what he had filed to date, and giving him twenty (20) days from his receipt of the new notice within which to correct all such irregularities. On Thursday, March 11, 1999, the new notice was hand-delivered to Rev. Hanousek and sent to him by first class mail.

In response to the new notice dated March 11, 1999, Rev. Hanousek corresponded by letter dated March 31, 1999, to the commission. Accordingly, the commission concluded that the letter dated March 31, 1999, had been submitted within the new applicable twenty- (20-) day period. Rev. Hanousek’s letter dated March 31, 1999, included another copy of the June 7, 1998, fax. The text of Rev. Hanousek’s letter dated March 31, 1999, is as follows:


It is clear that the point of contention was a violation of the Book of Church Order; Chapter 2, Part II, Article 3, Section 5. The validity of this contention is a matter of record and can easily be verified by the Regional Synod of New York.

On Monday, April 12, 1999, the Commission on Judicial Business again met by conference call. At that time it considered the March 31, 1999, letter from Rev. Hanousek and concluded that Rev. Hanousek’s June 7, 1998, fax to General Synod remained insufficient to constitute a valid appeal. Although the March 31, 1999, letter asserts that Rev. Hanousek is appealing a decision by the Regional Synod of New York, the March 31, 1999, letter and June 7, 1998, fax fail to adequately identify the reasons for the appeal. A mere assertion that a provision of the Book of Church Order has been violated is not enough. Facts supporting the assertion must be provided. Rev. Hanousek has failed to provide such facts on appeal. Rather, he seemingly expects the Regional Synod of New York (against whose decision he is appealing) to provide those facts. Such an expectation is inconsistent with and contrary to the appeal procedures outlined in the Book of Church Order and quoted above.

Accordingly, the Commission on Judicial Business concluded again that no new appeal had ever been filed by Rev. Hanousek. Thereafter, the Commission on Judicial Business advised the clerk of General Synod (the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, general secretary) that, pursuant to Chapter 2, Part III, Article 2, Section 2 of the Book of Church Order, the purported appeal is considered to be dismissed and that he as the clerk of General Synod should notify the parties involved of the dismissal. On April 15, 1999, Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, general secretary, serving as clerk of General Synod, sent a letter to the parties to the purported appeal advising them that the purported appeal had been dismissed.

Adrienne Flipse Hausch, member of the Commission on Judicial Business from the Regional Synod of New York, recused herself and did not participate in the discussion or disposition of this matter.
REPORTS OF THE RACIAL/ETHNIC COUNCILS

Report of the African-American Council

"I am God, and also henceforth I am He; there is no one who can deliver from my hand; I work and who can hinder it?" (Isaiah 43:13)

The African-American Council (AAC) has had another successful year in the service of the Lord. The year started without an executive director, but through the grace of God and the hard work of the executive committee under the leadership of Dr. Oliver Patterson, the work of the council continued.

The annual Black Caucus meeting was a tremendous success. The theme for this thirtieth caucus was "The Church's Role in Community Transformation: Where Do We Go From Here?" Addressing this issue, as the Moses B. James Colloquium speaker, was the Rev. Dr. Calvin Butts, pastor of Abyssinian Baptist Church in New York City. Butts challenged participants to work together in a collaborative way with other churches and groups on community projects. He called for a united (umoja) voice to tackle the multiplicity of problems facing the black community. The Rev. Frederick Kruithof, General Synod president; the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, RCA general secretary; and the Rev. Stanley Perea, coordinator for urban ministry, graced the caucus with their presence. Each one challenged and encouraged participants in their efforts to enhance the work of the RCA through the African-American Council.

In October 1998 the new executive director, the Rev. Dr. Glen C. Missick, was hired. He brings a wealth of experience in the area of pastoral ministry and community outreach. Previously, Missick served as senior minister of Harlem's famed Church of the Master, affiliated with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The AAC looks forward to his work with the council and his help in making the transition into the twenty-first century. Missick is already developing relationships with other agencies within the denomination, as well as with other denominations such as the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the United Church of Christ, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church (Formula of Agreement churches), and the Uniting Church of Southern Africa. A productive future is anticipated for the African-American Council and the Reformed Church in America.

The new relationship between the AAC and the General Synod Council is still being worked out. Conversations are being held concerning this new structure (MGS 1998, R-18, p. 319). Of equal concern is the formation and implementation of the new Commission on Race and Ethnicity. This commission will continue the work done by the AAC and will also work with the AAC in its efforts to eradicate racism, prejudice, injustice, and other social ills from our world.

The AAC continues to work with the Commission on Christian Action on the goal of a "Decade Free of Racism" (MGS 1998, R-9, p. 131). In the near future, joint workshops and seminars around issues of racism and prejudice will be conducted. The AAC will continue to monitor the escalating tide of racist incidents that are sweeping across the U.S. (e.g., the senseless killing of James Byrd in Texas). The council will also continue to protest the many incidents of police brutality, such as the shooting of the West African immigrant, Amadou Diallo, in New York City. A study guide, Police/Community Dialogue, has been developed to help in this process. This guide is available free from the RCA Distribution Center.

The AAC remains deeply concerned about the continuing low enrollment of African-Americans in RCA colleges and seminaries. Conversations are currently underway with Hope College to seek ways of turning this trend around. In the fall of 1998 the AAC Eastern
Region sponsored a joint workshop with Hope College to explore a better working relationship in the recruitment of blacks and other minorities.

The AAC is also concerned about the shortage of pastors in African-American churches. Studies have shown African-American pastors to be highly skilled in the areas of church growth and evangelism as well as in urban ministry. The AAC executive director will be assisted in the effort to recruit more African-American pastors for these congregations.

The continuing decline of membership in African-American congregations is also a concern. Evangelism and church growth will be a priority, and a series of seminars and workshops for clergy and lay persons is being planned.

R-13
To request that the General Synod Council, in cooperation with the RCA seminaries, develop intentional training programs at these seminaries to help black and other ethnic students from other denominations make the transition to become RCA pastors; and further,

to pair students with seasoned RCA pastors who will mentor them in order to provide pastors for the growing number of African-American churches without pastors.

(R-13 was referred by the Committee of Reference to the Advisory Committee on Church Vocations. See pp. 265-266.)

R-14
To encourage all members of the RCA to speak boldly, in the spirit of Christian love, against acts of intolerance, racism, and police violence; and further,

to encourage commissions, synods, and classes to work with all deliberate speed in the implementation of past and present recommendations in addressing issues of prejudice and racial intolerance.

(R-14 was referred by the Committee of Reference to the Advisory Committee on Christian Action. See p. 115.)

R-15
To encourage Evangelism and Church Development Services, as well as the Urban Ministry Team, to consult with the African-American Council in an effort to intentionally recruit African-American pastors for RCA churches; and further,

to set aside funds from these agencies for this recruitment.

(R-15 was referred by the Committee of Reference to the Advisory Committee on Evangelism and Church Development. See p. 290.)
R-16
To encourage Congregational Services, in cooperation with the Urban Ministry Team, to add to the educational resources of the denomination, study guides, videos, websites, and published materials that reflect the cultural backgrounds of people living in urban areas; and further,

to call on regional synods and classes to work in cooperation with local churches and encourage them to use these resources.

(R-16 was referred by the Committee of Reference to the Advisory Committee on Christian Education and Discipleship. See p. 142.)

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Report of the Council for Hispanic Ministries

TRANSFORMATION VS. DEFORMATION

The Council for Hispanic Ministries is thankful to God and the RCA for the support and encouragement received since its formation on February 18, 1974. The work of the council has been productive and valuable to the advancement of Hispanic and multicultural ministries of the Reformed Church in America.

Last year the reporting format and structure of the councils were changed (MSG 1998, R-16, p. 317). This will be the council’s last report submitted directly to the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America. If the provisions of the Bylaws and Special Rules of Order of the General Synod are met (Book of Church Order, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 10), the racial/ethnic councils will be submitting their reports through the General Synod Council. The new relationship begins at the completion of the 1999 General Synod. The council gives thanks to God for those visionary men and women who throughout the history of the council have supported, prayed, advocated, understood, and in one accord united to make the Council for Hispanic Ministries what it is today.

The new structure is something that the Council for Hispanic Ministries expects will benefit the entire RCA in years to come. The Council for Hispanic Ministries anticipates improvement and transformation leading to more effectiveness and productivity as it is called to assist in visioning for the cities, evangelism, and other vital areas of church growth as an inclusive body. However, there are functions and duties that demand continuity so that the uniqueness of the council’s positive work is not lost in the transformation. Vital to the council’s continuity (and to that of all the racial/ethnic councils) is the ability to receive direction and guidance from its own roots, through the executive committee, pastors, and congregations.

The experiences gained throughout the council’s two-and-one-half decades of existence have provided the foundation for a progressive and fruitful ministry. It would be of great concern to lose those practices that have become the identity of the council today. Changes that would shift the basic purposes of the councils could lead to what can be called the deformation of the councils. Deformation comes about when the focus is too broad and specific accomplishments are no longer visible or measurable with normal systems mechanisms.
Deformation can be subtle and can happen through absorption or overburdening the leadership.

Council members are proud to be part of the RCA because there has been a place to articulate, plan, and implement critical programs and methods that have allowed for the continual ministry and influx of Hispanics into the denomination, inside and outside of the continental United States. The growth of Hispanics in our congregations continues at a steady pace, and numerous ecumenical and mission relationships outside of the United States are maintained due to the efforts of the Council for Hispanic Ministries. Transformation occurs when we can identify differences, acknowledge that there are differences, and together work toward a solution that is acceptable to all. In addition, transformation is a way of creating new consciousness, creativity, and the development of new linkages that widen relationships. It is the council’s prayer that when put into effect the new council structure will lead to transformation.

COUNCIL BENEFITS

Presently there are approximately forty-one Hispanics in ministry within the Reformed Church in America, serving in congregations as pastors, lay pastors, contract ministers, and specialized ministers. Approximately thirty-seven ministries, including congregations and missions, are being served by Hispanics. The council serves the entire Reformed Church in America in the following ways:

- The council is instrumental in processing and advancing the ministry of the Lord as a church and people of God.
- The council has knowledge and understanding of Hispanic trends.
- The council has helped create a climate of acceptance in the Reformed Church in America. Rejection, fear, and stereotyping have been replaced with acceptance and welcome, and with partnerships that bring people to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

PROJECTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- La Unión Femenil (Ladies Guild)
- Prison ministry in New Jersey
- New Hispanic churches in the RCA
- Student recruitment to RCA colleges and seminaries
- Initiation of new Hispanic ministry sites
- Resources for Hispanic pastors with limited fluency in English
- Youth ministry
- Exploration of mission work in the Caribbean, Spain, and Latin America and introduction of this work to the RCA
- Development of models for ministry
- Superintendence of Hispanic congregations
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

On several occasions we have been asked to describe what the executive secretary of the Council for Hispanic Ministries does. The following is a list of major duties:

- Work on assignments requested by judicatories of the RCA, such as GSC, regional synods, and classes.
- Serve on numerous RCA committees, such as Council of Field Secretaries, Program and Coordination Team, Urban Ministries Team, etc.
- Preach and teach in Hispanic and Anglo congregations.
- Provide written and verbal translations of resources.
- Recruit, screen, and interview new pastors for Hispanic RCA congregations.
- Work with steering committees at congregational and classis levels.
- Advise classes, regional synods, consistories, and other denominational bodies.
- Act as a crisis management mediator.
- Be a "pastor to pastor" advisor and mentor.
- Train and teach new pastors and steering committees.
- Advise regional synods and classes during process for Hispanic church starts.
- Work with congregations on stewardship.
- Write a quarterly news bulletin to Hispanic congregations.
- Visit pastors and congregations.
- Coordinate the council's annual meeting.
- Coordinate the council's executive committee quarterly meetings.
- Coordinate trips to Cuba.
- Maintain contact with ecumenical groups.
- Serve on ecumenical committees.
- Work with Mission Services on issues that pertain to South and Central America.
- Provide reports, studies, and summaries on issues that relate to conditions in the Latino world.
- Help interpret the needs of Hispanic ministries in local communities.
- Maintain relationships and network with other denominational leaders.
RACIAL/ETHNIC COUNCILS

R-17
To request that the General Synod Council, in cooperation with the four racial/ethnic council executive committees, develop a mechanism that will guarantee that the effectiveness of the councils will not be lost (deformed) or reduced due to excessive assignments or mandates that arise in the new council structure.

>(R-17 was referred by the Committee of Reference to the Advisory Committee on Church Order. See p. 228.)<

VISIT TO CUBA

During November 1998 the Council for Hispanic Ministries sent two pastors and three elders to assist the Christian Reformed Church in Cuba in evangelism work. It has become standard for Hispanic members of the Reformed Church in America to show support for and affirm the work of the Christian Reformed Church of Cuba. The work consists of two weeks of intensive evangelism, sometimes with limited transportation, such as walking or bicycle riding. However, the rewards are uplifting; many have come to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ through the preaching and teaching of the men and women who have been sent. The experience is rewarding to both the Cubans and the Hispanics from the U.S. The Cuban Reformed congregations have increased in membership each year during the visits. In return, the council’s delegation has learned of the struggle in a communist-dominated country that has limited resources. Last November expenses for the visit to Cuba were covered by a donation from Rehoboth Reformed Church in McBain, Michigan. The Council for Hispanic Ministries gives thanks for their support.

Several RCA congregations, through the Hermandad program (MSG 1994, R-14, p.94), have sent or will send their own groups to Cuba to participate in programs and learning experiences with the Christian Reformed Church of Cuba.

HURRICANE MITCH

Hurricane Mitch left in its wake scenes of nearly indescribable destruction across Central America. More than nine thousand people were killed during the storm. Three million were left homeless. Many still live in crowded temporary shelters. Effects were heavily felt in Honduras, Nicaragua, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and other areas. As reported by the Washington Office on Latin America, one assessment by the United Nations Development Program estimates damage in the Central American region at over $5.3 billion and reconstruction costs at well over double that amount.

Humanitarian concern is sufficient reason for the involvement of the U.S. and other countries in the wake of the disaster. There are also powerful political, economic, and strategic arguments for greater action. Highly unequal distribution of land and wealth in Central America has led to widespread poverty, exploitation of marginal lands, deforestation, and ecological destruction. These conditions worsened the impact of Mitch, wiping out communities established on hillsides and in other marginal areas.

The Council for Hispanic Ministries encourages congregations who are able to do so to volunteer through the RCA’s Office of Volunteer Groups and Disaster Reconstruction Services to help victims of Hurricane Mitch, who have been further condemned to live in dire poverty. These people have few alternatives. They can either continue the unsustainable agricultural practices that left them so vulnerable to flooding and erosion, or migrate to the already overcrowded cities of the region or the U.S.
Volunteer work groups will continue to aid the victims of Mitch through 2000. Many RCA Hispanic pastors and lay people know the language and culture of the region and can be instrumental in translation and in the creation of bonds of fellowship.

R-18
To encourage congregations to send work groups to Honduras and Nicaragua; and further,

to include RCA Hispanic pastors and tradespeople in the groups, in effect encouraging unity within the Christian community and making the work groups more effective.

(R-18 was referred by the Committee of Reference to the Advisory Committee on World Mission. See p. 349.)

MISSION AND VISION STATEMENT

We trust that the Reformed Church in America is at the beginning of a revival. A number of congregations are being revitalized and changed by the power of the Holy Spirit. When good things begin to happen, the Christian’s discipline is to keep alert. “Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). Paul prayed to God so the Christians in Ephesus would be given “a spirit of wisdom and revelation...so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you” (Eph. 1:17–18). One thing is clear: the church’s main focus is to bring people to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. The concerns and issues are many. Those who believe in spiritual warfare understand that prayer and fasting is an Old and New Testament practice. In both testaments, individuals and communities prayed and fasted. In Luke, chapter 5, the Pharisees questioned Jesus because they found his disciples were not fasting. Jesus’ response was that later there would be days when the disciples would fast. Our later days are here; we need to fast.

R-19
To proclaim a church-wide day of fasting and prayer (for those who are physically and medically able); and further,

to request the Office of Social Witness and Worship to prepare appropriate liturgies for use by congregations and other assemblies of the RCA for that day.

(R-19 was referred by the Committee of Reference to the Advisory Committee on Evangelism and Church Development. See p. 290.)

Report of the Native American Indian Ministries Council

The vision and purpose of the Native American Indian Ministries Council (NAIMC), as stated in its Constitution and Bylaws, is as follows:
The vision of the Native American Indian Ministries Council is to embrace and live in the spirit of our Lord, utilizing all our gifts for one another. The Native American Indian Ministries Council seeks to work with other cultures in North America and the world, giving testimony to God's grace and God's activity among us, and the making, teaching, and sustaining of disciples throughout the earth.

In acceptance of and in response to God's call and teaching through Jesus Christ, the Native American Indian Ministries Council proclaims the gospel of Christ and seeks to empower RCA Native American Indian ministries. The Native American Indian Ministries Council seeks to strengthen the discipleship, fellowship, leadership, and stewardship of Native American Indian congregations, ministries, and members of the Reformed Church in America. The Native American Indian Ministries Council seeks to create opportunities for RCA Native American Indian ministries to gather together; to design resources through RCA mission and program offices for Christian nurture and leadership development; to sponsor an annual leadership conference; to encourage faithful stewardship practices of finances, time, and talents with a view toward self-sufficiency of member congregations; and to pray for RCA ministries among Native American people. The council seeks to work ecumenically.

—Statement of Vision and Purpose, NAIMC Constitution and Bylaws

Throughout the last few years the NAIMC has been living in a period of transition, shifting from the former structure of the American Indian Council (AIC), which had primary purposes of advocacy and ordained leadership development, to a new and smaller structure whose primary focus is on mission, discipleship, and lay leadership development.

While the most recent years have been spent discerning the calling and direction of the council's continuing ministry, the next several years will be given to meeting the goals of the vision of the council as expressed in its Statement of Vision and Purpose. In its first meeting, held March 12-14, 1999, at Cook College and Theological School in Tempe, Arizona, the council devoted itself to the initial steps of working toward these goals in very deliberate and specific ways. As the journey toward the renewed effort to "strengthen the discipleship, fellowship, leadership, and stewardship" of RCA Native American Indian ministries and members begins, it is the council's privilege to report on the journey thus far.

STAFFING TRANSITION

The Rev. Reaves Nahwooks began serving the council as its interim executive secretary in October 1996. During his term of service the council accomplished the structural transition from the former AIC to the new council, the NAIMC. Following General Synod's 1998 approval of the new structure for NAIMC (MGS 1998, R-8, pp. 300-304), the tasks for which Nahwooks was contracted were completed, and his interim assignment with the council was concluded.

Two important tasks remained before the transition could be finalized: to convene the council and to conduct a staff search for a permanent executive secretary. It was determined that this search could best be conducted without someone concurrently filling the executive secretary's role. Effective November 1, 1998, the Rev. George Montanari was contracted to work with the council as interim associate for NAIMC, working out of the office of the director of Policy, Planning, and Administration Services and in close cooperation with the council in order to provide staff services for the council's remaining transitional needs. In its first meeting the council began to work on a revised position description for the executive secretary of NAIMC. It is anticipated that the staff search will begin shortly after the 1999 General Synod meeting.
GENERAL SYNOD REFERRALS

The 1998 General Synod referred several items to NAIMC for their review and action, if appropriate. Of these, NAIMC took action on two in particular.

Bylaws Revision

The 1998 General Synod voted:

To direct the racial/ethnic councils of the General Synod to revise their bylaws and other governing documents to indicate clearly that they are racial/ethnic councils of the General Synod Council of the Reformed Church in America; and further,

to present these revised bylaws to the General Synod Council, at its fall 1999 meeting for approval (MGS 1998, R-18, p. 319).

NAIMC approved the following editorial change in Article 1 of its bylaws concerning the name of the racial/ethnic council for Native American Indian Ministries, and will submit it to the General Synod Council for its approval (addition underlined):

The name of this organization shall be the Native American Indian Ministries Council (NAIMC) of the General Synod Council of the Reformed Church in America.

Moral Standards for Holders of Church Offices

The Commission on Theology paper, “Moral Standards for Holders of Church Offices,” was also referred to the NAIMC (MGS 1998, R-2, p. 469). The council voted to send a letter of response directly to the commission, expressing appreciation for its work on this topic and sharing suggestions to be included in the final draft of the paper.

NAIMC YOUTH CAMP

The camp for Native American Indian youth which has been sponsored by the former AIC, and now by NAIMC, continues to be a ministry with a strong positive impact among the teenagers of NAIMC member congregations. Last year Winnebago Reformed Church hosted the camp, with the theme “Don’t Buy the Lies!” Nineteen young people were challenged to rethink the messages and values of a secular society and how they can take a stand against them with their personal faith and relationship with Jesus Christ. The camp provides opportunities from time to time for cross-cultural ministry by members of RCA congregations and colleges. Comanche Reformed Church in Lawton, Oklahoma, has provided the initiative to host the 1999 camp, scheduled for July 7-12.

LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

In order to meet explicitly the goal of “strengthen[ing] the discipleship, fellowship, leadership, and stewardship” of RCA Native American Indian congregations, the council is constitutionally committed to sponsoring an annual leadership conference. As the council’s need to focus on transitional changes is diminishing, it is positioned to begin thinking more intentionally about how to plan and implement this leadership conference. The council engaged itself extensively and creatively in initial brainstorming about the needs of constituent ministries and in realistically assessing what the council can and cannot accomplish. Using Acts 2:37-47 as a model, along with its parallel commitments in the council’s Statement of Vision and Purpose, the council explored possible needs and themes within the context of worship. The content of this brainstorming effort is being shared with member congregations, with the hope that feedback will provide a clear sense of direction as the council endeavors to provide a meaningful and effective ministry of discipleship and lay leadership development.
CONCLUSION

NAIMC is emerging from a period of transition into a period of focused ministry. The council covets the prayers of the church for the steps that remain to be taken during this time of adjustment, and it offers itself as a partner with the wider church in the service of Christ our Lord.

Report of the Council for Pacific and Asian American Ministries

In 1999 the Council for Pacific and Asian American Ministries (CPAAM) celebrates twenty years of ministry. Before the opening of the decade of the '80s the Reformed Church in America had only four congregations with a predominance of Pacific and Asian Americans. Today RCA Pacific and Asian American congregations are scattered throughout North America, mainly clustered in large metropolitan areas. Twenty years ago the Reformed Church had a barely discernible constituency of Pacific and Asian Americans. Today 3 percent of its congregations are of Pacific and Asian heritage.

On any given Sunday, worship services in RCA Pacific and Asian American congregations are conducted in Chour-Thai, Chinese (Mandarin), English, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Lao, Taiwanese, Tamil, and Vietnamese. Many congregations conduct ministries in two or three languages. The challenges of multilingual ministries are compounded when one understands that this translates into multicultural and multigenerational issues.

As the Reformed Church lives out the Statement of Mission and Vision adopted by the 1997 General Synod, the challenges confronting CPAAM are also the challenges of the entire RCA.

PRIORITIES

In 1994-95 the CPAAM executive committee adopted five-year priorities for the council’s work. In 1999 a process was set in motion to evaluate the priorities in the light of the denomination’s 1997 mission and vision statement. Using the acronym RENEWAL, suggested by the general secretary in his report in 1998, the CPAAM executive committee will look at its work in this way:

- Revitalize congregations
- Establish new churches
- Nurture the gifts of the laity
- Engage the city
- Welcome all people
- Announce the good news
- Learn to call forth leaders

As it seeks to live out its work within the framework of the 1997 Statement of Mission and Vision, the council will continue to develop partnerships, both denominationally and ecumenically, locally and globally. Clearly the challenge of ministry for Pacific and Asian Americans will be one for the entire Reformed Church as well.
Evangelism

In fulfillment of their top priority, RCA Pacific and Asian American congregations have focused on reaching both newcomers (immigrants) and the unchurched. Through cell groups, marketplace evangelism, prayer groups, and Bible study fellowships, congregations and pastors have sought to announce the good news. As pastors and congregants have worked with individuals in community service, newcomers especially have been drawn into church fellowships.

Discipling Laity

CPAAM assists in discipling laity through consistory training. The council engaged the services of the Rev. Dr. Martin Wang, an RCA mission program associate on home assignment from Taiwan, to do consistory training for a Taiwanese/Chinese congregation.

The RCA Association of Korean Churches sponsored the annual gathering of Korean lay leaders. At the event in January 1999, lay leaders attended numerous workshops designed to meet the needs of Korean congregations.

CPAAM is facilitating the translation of the Book of Church Order (BCO) in Chinese. This has been a monumental challenge. Portions of the BCO were translated several years ago.

Youth

The second CPAAM-sponsored youth leader training event was held in January 1999. This time the venue was Bellflower, California. A Pacific and Asian American resource person worked with the participants and involved them in an experiential workshop.

Gatherings of youth were held during the past year, and were generally organized according to language groups. Spectrum '99 provided an opportunity for Pacific and Asian American youth to experience a multicultural event with youth from the three eastern synods.

Ministry with Women

In January eleven Korean lay women gathered at the Parish Resource Center in Queens, New York, to discuss issues dealing with household matters and coping with life in an American context. The Korean pastors' wives met for the first time in conjunction with the Annual Consultation of Pacific and Asian Americans, while the pastors met separately.

Cross-Cultural Interchanges

Pacific and Asian American ministers in Southern California attended a retreat in November 1998 with the Hispanic pastors of the classis. The Rev. Dr. Charles Van Engen resourced the group. This event was a time of enrichment and encouragement for all who participated.

Ministry with the Elderly

The Taiwanese seniors meet monthly for fellowship and program. As they lose their mobility they need reminders on health care, encouragement to stay active, and help to keep from getting depressed. In California one pastor reports that some seniors are having trouble passing their citizenship examinations. Senile dementia robs them of short-term memory, and they are not able to retain what they learn in preparation classes. This often leads to frustration for all persons involved.
New Church Development

CPAAM staff continues to work with Classis of California personnel to strengthen existing congregations and develop new ministries. The regular meetings of the Asian American Ministries Committee will be coordinated in order to allow staff to also meet with the classis evangelism and church growth committee.

The foundation is being laid for a new ministry for 1.5 and second generation young adults. (The 1.5 generation is a group of people who came to North America before age eleven and consequently grew up under the influence of North American culture.) The intent is to reach a multiracial young adult audience in the Long Island/Queens, New York, area. This ministry is to be a pilot for a program to reach members of the English-speaking 1.5 and second generation who are not comfortable in the immigrant church of their parents.

Persecution of Christians in India

In early 1999 Dr. Graham Steins, Christian missionary from Australia, and his two sons were killed in Orissa, an eastern state of India. In March, less than two months later, Hindus and Christians clashed and 157 of the 250 Christian homes in Orissa were burned down.

"The violence is part of a growing number of attacks on Christians in India," reports the New York Times (3/19/99). Church officials believe the problem worsened since the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party became the head of a national coalition government a year ago.

"Indian government officials said there have been 238 registered attacks on Christians in the last twenty years, sixty of them in Orissa. The number of attacks on Christians in India rose to eighty-six last year from seven the year before" (New York Times, 3/19/99).

R-20
To call on the members of the Reformed Church in America to pray for the Christians in India; and further,

to instruct the general secretary and the minister for social witness to write to the president of the United States and key members of Congress, and to instruct the Regional Synod of Canada executive secretary to write to the prime minister of Canada, urging them to communicate with the prime minister of India to work diligently toward stopping the violence against Christians in India.

►(R-20 was referred by the Committee of Reference to the Advisory Committee on Christian Action. See p. 115.) ◄

REFERRALS FROM PREVIOUS GENERAL SYNODS

Confessing the Uniqueness of Christ

The CPAAM executive committee encouraged RCA Pacific and Asian American congregations to study the paper "The Crucified One is Lord: Confessing the Uniqueness of Christ in a Pluralist Society" (MGS 1998, R-1, p. 464). It encouraged responses be sent to the Commission on Theology.
Moral Standards

The CPAAM executive committee encouraged RCA Pacific and Asian American congregations to study the paper “Moral Standards for Holders of Church Offices,” as recommended by the Advisory Committee on Theology (MGS 1998, R-2, p. 469). The CPAAM executive committee also encouraged congregations to send their responses to the Commission on Theology.

Racism

The CPAAM executive committee, with the assistance of ecumenical and community organizations, monitors incidents of violence against Asian Americans and acts of overt and institutional racism. It will cooperate fully with the Commission on Christian Action as the commission attempts to address the issues of race and racism (MGS 1998, R-17, p. 133).

Bylaws

The consultation of Pacific and Asian Americans in the RCA will act on changes to the bylaws. The changes will indicate that CPAAM is a “racial/ethnic council of the General Synod Council of the Reformed Church in America.” These revisions will be presented to the General Synod Council at its fall 1999 meeting for approval.

CONCLUSION

The executive committee of CPAAM is moving toward decision-making through consent, as suggested by the “worshipful works” model (Charles Olsen, Transforming Church Boards). In preparation for the new millennium it will need to discern the leading of God’s Spirit as it outlines new program priorities and initiatives.

CPAAM wants to bring about transformation of the Reformed Church in America as it seeks to live out its intention to be a fully-inclusive church, welcoming all people. The book of Revelation paints a picture of a great multitude standing before the throne and the Lamb, “from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” (Rev. 7:9). Let the Reformed Church in America be a reflection of that multitude here on earth.
The Report of the Commission on Christian Action


GENETIC ENGINEERING:
AN UPDATE BY THE COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN ACTION

PROLOGUE: TWO COLLEAGUES TEACHING EACH OTHER

In 1985 two members of the Reformed Church in America were asked by the Christian Action Commission to prepare a paper on genetic engineering for the commission to use as a resource. One of the two members was a professor of biology at Hope College, and the other was a professor of Christian ethics at Western Theological Seminary. The two men scarcely knew each other, but as they became acquainted, they found that there were other gaps in their knowledge as well. The seminary professor knew next to nothing about genetic engineering, and the biologist was unaware of how a professor of Christian ethics went about his job.

They agreed to start their project by being each other's students. For a few months their meetings consisted of lessons for the seminary professor on the basics of genetic engineering, and then the biologist received a course on the methods and conclusions of Christian ethics. When each had completed his course, they turned at last to the writing of their assigned paper for the Commission on Christian Action.

The two men came to see that their interactions with one another were an example of how the church might relate to developments in science and technology. First, study the subject on its own terms. Learn how people who work in the field think and what they have learned. You don't have to become an expert scientist, but you do have to be able to understand the language well enough to read and talk intelligently about the field. Second, learn about your method of thinking ethically. What principles and values are central to your thinking on any subject? How do you arrive at conclusions about what should be done?

This paper is the first kind of study: a lesson on genetic engineering. Such papers are important so that our moral thinking will be about reality. It is important to emphasize that genetic engineering and biotechnology are not things that will be developed "some day." They are with us now. Research results have spawned companies, and companies have developed products, some of which are in use even as you read this report. Reading this report is not enough. Once we understand reality, the church must engage in serious moral reflection.

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In 1988 the General Synod approved resolutions associated with a report from the Commission on Christian Action (MGS 1988, pp. 61-74). This followed a period of study of the statement on genetic engineering in a series of five symposia held at various places across the country in the spring of 1987. The paper on genetic engineering thus had the benefit of study by two General Synods (1986 and 1988) and a large number of other members of the Reformed Church. Updates of the 1988 paper are called for; time and research march on.
Congregations will have to work to keep up-to-date on the amazing advances in genetic engineering, and it will be hard work. But the issues are too important to require no less. Understanding the scientific accomplishments of geneticists is essential if we are to act justly, do mercy and walk humbly with God in the age of genetics.

Some Fruits of Plasmid Research

Work with plasmids has yielded interesting results in both basic research and applied biology. One basic research question that has occupied biologists' attention for many years is how different genes are turned off and on in different tissues. For example, every cell in one's body has the genes for making hemoglobin, the oxygen-carrying protein that makes blood red. But only in the cells that make the red blood cells are the hemoglobin genes turned on. By isolating a hemoglobin gene and putting it in a plasmid, scientists have found the "switch" and have learned something about how it works. From the study of many such genes and their switches, biologists now have developed a more coherent picture of how genes become active and inactive in different tissues.

THE VERY LEAST WE HAVE TO KNOW ABOUT GENETIC ENGINEERING (see MGS 1988, pp. 62-65)

The 1988 paper described the "very least" that responsible people needed to know in order to approach genetic engineering in an adequate way. The following information is meant as a guide for starting to learn. The least one has to know is more now than it was then. What is contained in the 1988 report is still essential, so read that first if a copy is available. Then learn some more of the very least one has to know; it is safe to say that, at the very least, an expansion of techniques and a focus of resources have provided far more power to manipulate and analyze genes than in 1988.

A. The Very Least in 1988

To understand the new developments, one still has to understand the basics of recombinant DNA from the paper of 1988. Here is that information on which to build.

Cells are the basic units of life. All living things are made up of cells, from bacteria and protozoa, which are single-celled, to humans and trees, which are composed of trillions of cells. Each cell is itself made up of chemical substances called molecules. Some molecules, like water or simple sugars, are rather small, composed of only a few atoms. But cells are also noteworthy for containing several kinds of very large molecules called macromolecules, which include proteins, starches, and DNA.

DNA is called an informational macromolecule because the arrangement of the molecule contains specific information used by cells. In the English language letters are placed in linear arrays to convey information. Take, for instance, the sentence:

This is a message.

Both the order and position of the letters in this message are important. If single letters are changed or a few letters deleted, the consequences are significant. For instance:

This is a message.

can become

This is a mess.

In a similar way, changing just one letter will make a difference—an "a" instead of an "e" yields
This is a massage.

DNA is a linear molecule. Four different subunits make up DNA, and like the letters of English, the order and position of these letters contain information. Stretches of the subunits, like a sentence, contain a particular message that tells a cell to make a specific molecule and how to make it. Such a stretch of DNA, specifying a single molecule, is called a gene.

Since DNA is linear, the molecule can be represented as a line:

For the purposes of this study, this is all that needs to be known of the structure of DNA. It is of course, far more complex. DNA is like a very long, thin line. The DNA in an adult human would fit in a teaspoon, but if stretched out it would reach to the moon.

In human cells, and in the cells of most plants and animals, DNA is wrapped in little packages called chromosomes. Since there is so much DNA in a cell, these chromosomes make handling of the molecule by the cell an easier task. The "molecule line" gets wound into chromosomes.

A chromosome

In bacteria, DNA is often only a single molecule, usually with the ends connected to form a circle.

Bacterial DNA

Sometimes, in addition to the main circle, bacteria contain extra, smaller circles of DNA. These circles are actually the DNA of little viruses that live in the bacteria. They are called plasmids.

Bacterial DNA with two plasmids

If bacteria containing plasmids are mixed with bacteria lacking plasmids, soon all the bacteria will be infected with plasmids. Scientists can even mix purified plasmids with bacteria to get infections. Bacteria "catch" the plasmids much as humans catch colds.
DNA is not the only molecule we need to know about to understand genetic engineering. The other molecules are called enzymes. There are many different enzymes, each with a specific job. Each kind of enzyme speeds up one of the very large number of chemical reactions occurring in cells. The reactions ordinarily go at such low rates as to be useless to cells, but the presence of the right enzyme will make a reaction proceed at a significant rate. For all practical purposes, the enzymes act as switches to turn on a reaction.

Since enzymes are so specific, biologists can isolate a particular enzyme and use it to run a particular reaction in the laboratory. One group of these enzymes, called *restriction enzymes*, directs the breaking up of DNA into smaller segments.

Restriction enzymes break: the DNA

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There are many of these restriction enzymes. Each one breaks DNA at a different place in the sequence of the subunits or “letters” of DNA information. Thus an accomplished molecular biologist can choose restriction enzymes to break DNA wherever he or she desires.

Another set of enzymes is also available to molecular biologists. These enzymes hook broken fragments back together.
In the DNA of each human cell are thousands of different genes. Molecular biologists can break open a sample of human cells and separate the DNA from the rest of the molecules in the cell. Then, by judicious use of restriction enzymes and a bit of trial and error, these biologists can cut a particular gene out from all the DNA and isolate it.

|-----------------------------| Isolated gene

An isolated plasmid can then be broken, and the open plasmid circle can be joined to the isolated gene. This is the act of "gene splicing."

\[\text{plasmid} \quad \text{isolated gene} \quad \text{newly formed plasmid with the isolated gene attached}\]

The newly formed DNA molecule, containing DNA from two sources, is called *recombinant DNA* because it results from recombining pieces of different DNA molecules.

Since the recombinant DNA still has all its old plasmid characters, the bacteria can be infected with these recombinant molecules.

Every time the bacteria divides, the recombinant plasmid will also double. By growing large numbers of such infected bacteria, genetic engineers can also grow many copies of the isolated gene. Under optimum conditions, bacteria will divide every thirty minutes. If a person starts with one recombinant plasmid, doubling every 30 minutes will produce \(2^{10} = 1,024\) copies in five hours. In twenty-four hours there will be \(2^{24} = 2^{20} \times 2^4 = 2^{24} \times 16 = 2^{28} = 280\) trillion copies.

The genes introduced into other cells not only are copies, but may function as well. Most genes direct the production of specific proteins, such as enzymes or hormones. The enzymes in turn direct most of the chemical reactions within cells. Some recombinant DNA genes direct the synthesis of their specific proteins even in their bacterial host cell. Thus bacteria can be designed which will produce a protein otherwise difficult to obtain. For example, the hormone insulin has been manufactured by bacteria containing the human insulin gene.

But what if we could transfer a functioning human insulin gene, not to bacteria, but into a diabetic human? Molecular biologists have succeeded in forming recombinant DNA molecules that grow and function in human cells that are being propagated in glassware. Because the DNA technology bypasses the usual means for transferring genes in humans and allows direct transfer from one cell type to another, the potential for this kind of "genetic therapy" is now being explored actively.

**B. Polymerase chain reaction**

Plasmids are still very much in use in 1999, but another technology, called "polymerase chain reaction" (or PCR) now is widely used for finding a gene and making many copies of it.

Before discussing this technique, it might be a good idea to think about why we would want many copies of a gene. Each individual gene is rare. A human has 60,000 to 100,000 different genes in every cell, and even a bacterium (\textit{E. coli}) may have 4,300 genes, so any given gene will be a small part of the total DNA isolated from a cell or tissue sample. The object of making many copies of a gene is to be able to study its structure and function as we would any other chemical. We can admire one isolated gene, but we can analyze a large number of the same gene.
Growing the gene by attaching it to a dividing plasmid is one way to increase the numbers available. PCR, on the other hand, is a cell-free method of duplicating a gene of choice. It uses an enzyme that normally helps duplicate DNA in a bacterium that lives in hot springs. At high temperatures the double-stranded molecules of purified DNA come apart into two separate strands. Then the two strands are slightly cooled, and each is duplicated using the bacterial enzyme, which is especially resistant to heat. Repeated cycles of separating and duplicating the strands double the amount of DNA each time so that after relatively few doublings, significant amounts of DNA are accumulated. One million copies could be obtained with only twenty rounds of duplication.

The important point is that this is all done in a test tube with no live organisms. You can buy the enzyme and other ingredients from suppliers, and special machines have been constructed that are programmed to raise and lower the temperature at just the right times. PCR is a very sensitive method that can even find and reproduce a specific piece of DNA from a single cell. It has readily become a popular method in research labs as well as in medical and crime labs and in the Human Genome Project described below.

**PCR and the Police**

DNA sequences are complex enough to be used as much as fingerprints are used to identify people. Just as a person may leave behind a fingerprint, that person might leave behind cells as well—a drop of blood, cells from the lip on the surface of a cigarette, some skin under a victim's fingernails. That DNA can be analyzed for certain patterns. The frequencies of these patterns in human populations are known, so if a suspect's DNA patterns match the patterns of the DNA at the crime scene, police investigators can say what the probability is that the cells found at the scene belong to the suspect. Or they might be able to say that the suspect's DNA simply does not match, perhaps eliminating him or her as a suspect. This kind of analysis requires more DNA than the tiny amounts normally found at the scene, and that's where PCR comes in to multiply the DNA to usable amounts.

**C. New “vectors” expand possibilities**

Something that carries the DNA of one cell into another cell is called a vector. Plasmids are vectors, but most of them are restricted to entering into just one cell type, usually a bacterium. When the 1988 report was written, the standard—almost only—method for getting isolated genes into cells was to use plasmids. Considerable research has focused on finding vectors that will carry genes into cells other than bacteria, and many new vectors have been found.

Vectors are known that will carry genes into yeast cells, various plant cells, and animal cells. Yeast geneticists have constructed an artificial chromosome that will transfer very large pieces of DNA from a donor species into yeast. Some mammalian viruses will carry genes into mammal cells and even integrate the new DNA into the chromosomes of the host. For instance, experimental therapies for cystic fibrosis include putting the normal cystic fibrosis gene into cells of a person with the disease by using the adenovirus as a vector.

In addition, a variety of mechanical means of getting DNA into cells have been developed. “Electroporation” uses electric currents to get the DNA in, and methods have also been developed to transfer DNA into very early mammal embryos simply by injecting the DNA with a very fine needle. If injected into early embryos, genes from other organisms sometimes become established in every cell of the animal that develops from the embryo.
Plants and animals that have genes from other organisms in their cells are said to be “transgenic,” and there are now many amazing transgenic organisms. Investigators have produced goats that have human genes in their cells and produce medically useful human molecules in their milk, such as a factor that breaks up blood clots. Although mostly in the development stage, the use of transgenic animals for “pharming,” the production of useful pharmaceuticals, is becoming more common.

### Three Transgenic Mice

Companies have sprung up to provide biologists with transgenic mice—mice that contain a gene from another species. These transgenic mice are used widely in research on a number of topics. Here are three examples of how they are being used today.

1. **Down’s syndrome.** Down’s syndrome in humans is caused when a person gets three copies of chromosome 21 instead of the usual two copies. In mice a similar effect occurs when the mice have three copies of chromosome 16. Investigators at the University of California have cloned a number of genes from chromosome 21 in humans and added them one by one to mice to see what genes on chromosome 21 are responsible for aspects of the disability.

2. **Antibodies** are proteins that play an important role in the immune system, helping in our resistance to disease. A biotech company in California has put the human gene for one class of antibodies into mice, and the scientists at the lab have been able to get high-quality human antibodies from the blood of the mice. They can get the mouse to make large quantities of specific antibodies, so the system will probably be of use for treating some human diseases.

3. **Many agents in the environment cause mutations**—permanent changes in genes. These mutations are often harmful, so much research on causes of mutation is going on. A gene which increases the frequency of tumors when mutated has been introduced into mice. Then exposing the mice to potential causes of cancer allows researchers to evaluate how powerful a compound is in causing mutations simply by counting the frequency of tumors.

### D. Big genetics

One significant development in genetic technology has been its bigness. Little work of this sort is done by lone scientists working on isolated projects.

1. **Gene databases**

New instrumentation now makes it fairly routine to determine the structure of any gene that is isolated and duplicated to fair quantities with plasmids or PCR. Hundreds of genes in many different species have been studied by scientists all over the world. Today when a new gene is isolated, one of the first things researchers do is determine its structure and then compare it to other genes already known by using large computer databases maintained with the support of many national governments.

For example, suppose a gene from weasels had just been isolated and its structure determined. Its function may be unknown. Is it a gene with information for synthesizing an enzyme or structural protein? If so, which one? At this point researchers get on the Internet and access one of the gene databases—GenBank, for example. They type in the structure of the weasel gene, and the computer compares it to every other gene in the database.
Seventy percent of its structure might be the same as a protein of known function—chicken lysozyme, for example, a protein that helps protect chicken eggs from bacterial infection. This kind of analysis tells us what kind of genes have this kind of structure and gives us clues for further research. Perhaps there is an application for this gene product. In any case, progress is notably speeded up by having the database.

2. Human Genome Project

In 1990 scientists in many countries began a project to determine the sequence of the subunits of the entire human genome—60,000 to 100,000 genes and 3.2 billion DNA subunits in linear order. In the United States this “Human Genome Project” was begun under supervision of the U.S. Department of Energy and the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The project has been an ambitious one. Not only will the human genome be completely sequenced. Several other organisms widely used by geneticists were targeted also, including the bacterium E. coli, the fruit fly Drosophila melanogaster, and a worm Caenorhabditis elegans. The structure of the worm and of E. coli are now known, and the human project is on schedule, in part because new techniques for studying gene structure have been developed as the Human Genome Project has proceeded.

The NIH project should cost about $3 billion. Inventors of new techniques for determining gene structure have now set out to accomplish the goal of the Human Genome Project for one-tenth the cost, while patenting gene sequences and getting people to subscribe to their database. NIH scientists too have been patenting genes and gene fragments as they are produced in sequencing the human genome. What was contemplated in the 1988 paper has come to pass: “At stake...is the control of both science itself and an immensely powerful and potentially profitable technology” (MGS 1988, p. 69). As one genetics text recently pointed out, “Results of the Human Genome Project will have repercussions on the practice of medicine for years to come. The project is revealing, on a weekly basis, the genetic underpinnings of many human conditions” (Lewis, 1999, p. 374).

E. The moral consequences of genetic knowledge

We stand on the verge, not only of revealing genetic underpinnings, but of making use of that knowledge to improve the health of people with such conditions. On the other hand, the availability of this new knowledge raises issues for us to confront. The Human Genome Project itself formed an Ethical, Legal, and Social Implications (ELSI) program to study and discuss the social impact of the Human Genome Project. This is in the spirit of the 1988 paper on genetic engineering, which included a section on “some cautions and the questions they raise.” Those questions from the 1988 paper included these issues:

1. Is safe containment of recombinant organisms assured?

2. Who should control basic research?

3. Relative merits of somatic and germ cell gene therapy.


5. Priorities and justice.

These five concerns still need to be taken seriously and given much careful thought, but there has been much exploration of these issues by ethicists and theologians since 1988. The arguments of 1988 need updating and revising, while at the same time there are new items that have come to the fore that need attention as well. For example, the ELSI program of the Human Genome Project identifies these consequences of the findings of that project.
1. Problems of increased knowledge about the genes of individual people. For example, do employers and insurance companies have a right to know if a person has genes that may affect his or her future health? One instance would be genes that increase the risk of certain cancers. Are there ways that information about genes is more personal and private than other information about our health?

2. Means of transferring research knowledge to clinical practice. One specific problem here would be the question of how to finance the transfer and application of research knowledge. Patents provide a way of protecting a company’s investment in a risky venture, making possible the testing and production of medicines that might otherwise never leave the research lab. On the other hand, the patenting by some research scientists and institutes of every new DNA sequence they produce in the course of sequencing the human genome on the chance that it might be useful someday seems misguided. This is especially so when the funds for the original discoveries come from research grants provided by government agencies. It is as if the public were investing in the research and then were asked to pay again when the investment bore fruit.

3. How to be sure people give informed consent when they are part of genetic experiments. Whenever we experiment with people, we need to remember that they are people and treat them with the utmost respect. This becomes doubly so when the subject of investigation is our genetic make-up. People may be vulnerable and frightened when they receive genetic information about themselves, and researchers must guard against taking advantage of this vulnerability, even when the most important of genetic information might result from experimentation.

4. How to increase public knowledge of the issues. This paper has already spoken on the importance of sound public understanding. The issue of who controls genetic knowledge will not go away as long as the general public has little knowledge. We urge the General Synod to encourage careful studies of these important questions at all levels of the Reformed church.

In the eleven years since the Reformed Church in America started looking at genetic engineering, these technologies have become more well developed. The old questions are more complicated, and more new questions have surfaced. The church needs to apply its wisdom to help guide humanity in the use of genetic engineering. To be credible in this task, the church also needs to learn at least the very least, perhaps a measure more, about genetic engineering.

A bibliography

This annotated bibliography provides a fairly diverse range of sources for learning about modern genetic engineering.

Magazines that regularly feature articles on genetic engineering

These are listed in the order of how technical they are. Many public libraries and most college libraries carry them.

*Science News*
*Discover*
*Scientific American*
*American Scientist*
*The New Scientist*
*Science*
*Nature*
Books with the average nonscientist in mind


This book explains the very least you have to know clearly and patiently.


A serious reader willing to work will gain much from this book by a professor emeritus of immunology at UCLA.


Professor Eenigenburg was a professor of Christian ethics and dean of the faculty at Western Theological Seminary. This book, which was in preparation at the time of his death, was published posthumously by his daughter, Susan E. Eenigenburg. Chapter 11 on genetic engineering is a fine treatment of the ethical issues, but read the whole book to get an understanding of the position Professor Eenigenburg is developing.


The National Academy of Science is working to enlarge and expand scientific literacy. One successful way they’ve done that is with this book. A gentle but accurate introduction to biotechnology.


Arthur Kornberg received a Nobel Prize for his work on the enzymes that help DNA reproduce. He has also been involved with the business world of biotechnology. This is an account of the entrepreneurs and businessmen as well as the scientists who together are converting a science into a technology. Some will find this book more optimistic than they are, but it’s a fascinating account. Read it and Rifkin at the same time.


These Chicago Tribune reporters present some information about what is being done and combine that with considerable speculation about what might be done in the future. This book is a little detailed, but the interest is in the details.


A look at the people who developed the polymerase chain reaction from an idea to a business.


If some of the people on this list are technology optimists, Rifkin is a technology pessimist and therefore important in any careful study of this issue. An interesting and challenging book.
Accessible textbooks


This book covers more than just genetic engineering—it is about all that goes under the name of biotechnology. It has great chapters on the nature and manipulation of DNA that should just about do it for the very best information you need to know. Not the least, but the best.


More technical than the others, and oriented to all of genetics, this is a good textbook (especially chapters 17 and 18).


This book uses good specific examples. It is a joy simply to read the text boxes to get a feel for what is happening in biotechnology. Chapters 17-20 are especially good.


This book contains an excellent general introduction to recombinant DNA technology as well as a lab manual. It is used as a textbook for courses at the Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory and in other colleges and high schools across the United States and Canada.

Informative sites on the World Wide Web

http://www.absolutedomain.com/links/sc/genetics.html

This website provides links to virtually all the gene databases in the world. There are general databases, and there are bases for specific organisms. You may not need to use one of these databases, but you will get an idea of how much information is available if you read this website.

http://www.ornl.gov/TechResources/Human_Genome/home.html

This is the Human Genome Project Information site. One can read all about the project and find out what the latest results might be. There is much to learn at the site. There's also a link to a more technical site to learn about research in progress pitched at the level of a scientist.

http://vector.cshl.org/dnafthb/

Cold Spring Harbor Laboratories is one of the foremost research and educational laboratories in the United States. Their book, *DNA Science*, is an excellent introduction to molecular biology and is listed in the bibliography above. Now they have constructed a multimedia primer on the basics of DNA and heredity called *DNA from the Beginning*. It is an excellent learning site, but the user needs fairly sophisticated Web software in order to take advantage of it. The site gives people who are good at using the Web a chance to become a DNA scientist.
A biology teacher at the United States Air Academy High School teaches molecular biology to his students. At this reference site he offers information that spans a host of topics and keeps up with new advances and new items from the press. It's a good site to visit every month or so.

This is a relatively specialized site, but it is of great interest as an example of where things are headed. This site lists foods derived by recombinant DNA methods from various plants. The list is from a U.S. Food and Drug Administration list out of its Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition.

R-21
To direct the RCA Distribution Center to circulate “Genetic Engineering: An Update by the Commission on Christian Action” to the church in a manner appropriate for study; and further,

In consultation with the Office of Social Witness, to make key resources of the bibliography available to RCA members and congregations. (ADOPTED)

R-22
To direct the Commission on Christian Action to follow this paper, “Genetic Engineering: An Update by the Commission on Christian Action,” with an analysis of the moral and ethical questions which genetic engineering raises, for report to the General Synod in 2001. (ADOPTED)

CLIMATE CHANGE UPDATE

In its 1993 report to the General Synod the Commission on Christian Action called the church’s attention to the issue of global warming and changes in climactic patterns likely to be caused by the increased atmospheric levels of heat-trapping gases in the atmosphere (MGS 1993, pp. 98-103). The report argued that the issue of climate change is one that calls for the church’s response. We have a biblical mandate to tend and keep creation. Moreover, since the effects of climate change will fall disproportionately on the poor and on future generations, the issue is a matter of justice. We cannot love God and love our neighbors as ourselves, and ignore the potentially disastrous consequences that human-induced climate change may have on future generations, on the poor, and on all of creation.

The 1993 report called on the church to advocate for policies that promote energy efficiency and conservation through such measures as higher energy efficiency standards and economic incentives, including imposing additional taxes (such as a carbon tax) on products that contribute to global warming. The synod also called on congregations to address the issue, to improve the energy efficiency of church buildings, and to consider other actions aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE FOR CLIMATE CHANGE

Since the 1993 report there has been growing scientific evidence that climate change caused by human activity is already occurring. The decade of the 1980s was the warmest decade of record and the 1990s are well on the way to surpassing the record warmth of the ’80s. The four warmest years on record were 1990, 1995, 1997, 1998. Global temperatures in 1998 were the warmest in the past 119 years, since reliable instrument records began. The previous record
was set in 1997. The year 1998 was also the twentieth consecutive year with an annual global mean surface temperature that exceeded the long-term average.\textsuperscript{1} The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a body of nearly 2,500 international scientists that has been researching climate change since 1988, reported in 1995 that “the observed warming trend is unlikely to be entirely natural in origin...the balance of evidence suggests that there is discernible human influence on global climate.”\textsuperscript{2} If greenhouse gas emissions are not reduced, the IPCC projects future temperature increases of about 3.5 degrees Celsius (six degrees Fahrenheit) by the end of the next century, a faster rate of climate change than any experienced during the last 10,000 years. The difference in temperature from the depths of the last ice age to now is five to nine degrees Fahrenheit.

For the past thirty years climatologists have predicted that global warming would occur most rapidly at the poles. Recent evidence suggests that such warming may have already begun. While global temperatures have, on average, warmed by one degree Fahrenheit over the last century, the Antarctic Peninsula has seen a jump of more than five degrees in the last fifty years. Huge sections of the ice shelf, including some pieces as large as the state of Delaware, have begun calving off its eastern shore. The southern half of the Greenland ice sheet, the second largest expanse of land-bound ice on earth, after Antarctica, has shrunk substantially in the last five years. If big ice sheets melt even partly, sea levels will rise around the world. Melting might also disrupt the ocean currents that modulate the earth’s climate by distributing heat around the globe.

![Atmospheric Concentrations of Carbon Dioxide, 1600-1997](image)

Although there is now substantial scientific consensus in support of IPCC conclusions, there are those who are working to undermine its case, seizing on remaining uncertainties in data or computer modeling to argue against the need to respond to the threat of climate change. The Global Climate Coalition, a leading oil industry public relations outlet and other organizations such as the National Coal Association, the American Petroleum Institute, and the Western Fuels Association have spent millions of dollars trying to downplay the threat of climate change and cast doubt on the scientific evidence.\textsuperscript{3} While there is a continuing need for further research and better computer modeling of the effects of increased greenhouse gas emissions, these uncertainties should not be used as an argument for delaying action. We do not know everything there is to know about potential climate change. We do know enough to act now. Prudence requires reducing greenhouse gas emissions without waiting for every last scientific uncertainty to be resolved. The vast scale of the environmental and social damage that would be caused by climate change, and the long time scale it will take to reverse the effects call for taking preventive action. It will be easier to achieve reductions now, and at less cost to society, than to wait until the problem has grown worse.
Meanwhile atmospheric levels of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases continue to rise. Atmospheric levels of carbon dioxide in 1860 were 280 parts per million (ppm); in 1993, 350 ppm; and in 1998, 363 ppm, the highest point in 160,000 years. Not only are atmospheric levels increasing, but the rate of emissions also continues to increase at about 1 percent per year. Even maintaining current levels of carbon dioxide emissions will raise concentrations to over 700 ppm by the year 2100. In 1992 the U.S. committed itself to reducing greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by the year 2000, and relied on volunteer efforts to do so. So far, such volunteer efforts have proven ineffective. A healthy economy, low fuel prices, the increasing popularity of larger, fuel-inefficient cars and sport utility vehicles, and our energy consumptive lifestyles have contributed to a 10.7 percent increase in emissions since 1990. The forecast is that emission levels will be at 13 percent above the 1990 level by the year 2000. The United States emits more carbon dioxide than any other nation, both in total and per capita. More than 98 percent of U.S. carbon dioxide emissions can be traced to the consumption of fossil fuels.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has conservatively estimated that the atmosphere can sustain carbon emissions of no more than two billion tons per year without serious disruption of the climate. Spreading that quota evenly among the ten billion people projected to share the planet by 2100 yields a per-person quota of a pound a day. The U.S., Japan, and other industrialized nations are emitting carbon at a pace twelve to twenty-seven times this figure—and the rates continue to climb. 2

Average Temperature at Earth’s Surface
1866-1998

Compiled by Worldwatch Institute
EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

The climactic consequences of increased levels of heat-trapping gases in the atmosphere are likely to include the following:

1. Weather patterns, particularly rainfall, are likely to change significantly and have a severe impact on water resources and water availability in many regions.

2. Droughts, storms, and floods are likely to be more frequent and more severe than in the past, especially in subtropical regions where many developing countries will be particularly severely affected.

3. The geographic distribution of vegetation types would be altered, leading to changes in habitat and further exacerbating the rate of species extinction (already occurring at the alarming rate of 75 to 100 species per day!).

4. Atmospheric warming would increase the temperature of the oceans, leading to an expansion in the volume of water and a rise in sea levels. Sea level rise would be exacerbated by melting polar ice. Already the sea level has risen ten to twenty-five centimeters in the last century. The IPCC estimates that it will rise another fifty centimeters by the end of the twenty-first century. Such a rise would have severe consequences for people and ecosystems in such areas as the Pacific and Caribbean islands, countries with populations and agriculture on river deltas (Bangladesh; Egypt; Louisiana, U.S.), and many coastal regions.

5. Insect- and rodent-borne diseases such as malaria, dengue, yellow fever, and encephalitis are likely to increase and spread into new areas.

WHAT CAN GOVERNMENTS DO?

In 1997 in Kyoto, Japan, the industrialized nations adopted the Kyoto Protocol, a treaty in which they agreed to make specific emissions reductions within eleven to fifteen years (2008 to 2012). The treaty calls for industrialized countries to reduce their emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions by an average of about 5 percent below 1990 levels. The United States' reduction would be about 7 percent. The U.S. administration has signed the protocol, but it awaits ratification by the Senate. Prior to the Kyoto conference the U.S. Senate passed a resolution stating it would not ratify any agreement that might harm the U.S. economy or did not include participation by developing nations. Although the treaty does not call for binding limits on emissions by developing nations, these nations are not exempt from the stipulations of the agreement. All signatory nations must inventory emissions and create pilot programs to limit them. Moreover simple justice requires that the industrialized nations, and the U.S. in particular, take the first steps in reducing emissions. In seeking an appropriate balance between consumption and the equitable use of global resources, we need to make a distinction between the "luxury emissions" of the rich and the "survival emissions" of the poor. "From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required" (Luke 12:48).

The treaty agreed to at Kyoto must be adopted by over half the industrialized nations before it takes effect. U.S. ratification is crucial. Late last summer leaders of several mainline denominations (including the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Reformed Church in America, the United Church of Christ, and the Church of the Brethren) signed letters to President Clinton and U.S. senators urging ratification of the Kyoto Protocol to the Climate Convention.
CLIMATE CHANGE AND CHRISTIAN WITNESS

The threats to creation represented by global warming are a cause for concern for everyone on the planet, but for Christians the issue is more than a matter of self preservation; it is a matter of faithfulness.

Global climate change is an issue of justice. The industrialized nations, representing less than 20 percent of the world’s population, are responsible for 75 to 80 percent of the annual greenhouse gas emissions. Yet those who live in poor and developing nations are the ones who will be most seriously effected by global warming. The North American suburbanite can afford to turn up the air conditioner and pay a little more for groceries. The peasant living in coastal Bangladesh would become an environmental refugee. Climate change is also an issue of intergenerational justice. The effects of global warming in our lifetimes may be minimal. It will not be so for our children and our children’s children. Current North American energy-rich and overly consumptive lifestyles are being subsidized by the poor and by future generations.

Christians understand the threat of global climate change in the context of covenant. God has established a covenant “with every living creature” (Genesis 9:10ff.) and with the earth itself (Genesis 9:13). Humankind has been given a special place in this covenant relation. We are not merely one species among many but a species to whom God has given a unique and important responsibility. We are placed in the garden of creation “to till it and to keep it.” God has given us dominion over creation, not to do with it as we please but, in the words of Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann, “for its profit, well-being, and enhancement...to see to it that the creation becomes fully the creation willed by God.”

This means, among other things, that our relationship with God, with our fellow human beings and with the rest of creation are all of a piece. A break in any one part of the covenant relationship affects the others. We cannot love God and hate our neighbor. Neither can we love God and our neighbors while we degrade creation.

Our response to the threat of global climate change is a matter of Christian witness. We confess that in Jesus Christ God entered creation in order to heal and restore the relationships broken by human sinfulness. The early Christians sang of Jesus Christ as the one in whom, through whom, and for whom all things were created and the one through whom God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven (Colossians 1:15-20). This confession of a “cosmic Christ” has important implications for the church’s ministry. The church is called to bear witness to the Christ who reconciles and restores all creation. “The church is not an elite body, separated from a doomed world,” writes New Testament scholar, J. Christiaan Beker, “but a community placed in the midst of the cosmic community of creation. Its task is not merely to win souls but to bear the burdens of a creation, to which it not only belongs but to which it must also bear witness.”

Dealing with the threat of climate change will require changes in technology, in public policy, and in our ways of thinking and living. We should not expect that it will be easy, and we should try to find ways in which the burdens of change are shared. But the longer we wait to deal with global warming, the more harm will occur and the greater will be the human, environmental, and economic costs for our children and grandchildren.


Simple Steps to Reduce Global Warming

1. Buy energy-efficient compact fluorescent bulbs for your most-used lights.  
   **Carbon dioxide reduction:** (by replacing one frequently used bulb) about 500 pounds a year.

2. Wrap your water heater in an insulating jacket.  
   **Carbon dioxide reduction:** up to 1,000 pounds a year.

3. Ask your utility company for a home energy audit to find out where your home is poorly insulated or energy-inefficient.  
   **Carbon dioxide reduction:** potentially, thousands of pounds a year.

4. Whenever possible, walk, bike, carpool, or use mass transit.  
   **Carbon dioxide reduction:** 20 pounds for every gallon of gasoline saved.

5. When you buy a car, choose one that gets good gas mileage.  
   **Carbon dioxide reduction:** about 2,500 pounds a year if your new car gets 10 mpg more than your old one.

6. If your car has an air conditioner, make sure its coolant is recycled whenever you have it serviced.  
   **Equivalent carbon dioxide reduction:** thousands of pounds.

7. If you need to replace your windows, install the best energy-saving models.  
   **Carbon dioxide reduction:** up to 10,000 pounds a year.

8. Plant trees next to your home and paint your home a light color if you live in a warm climate, or a dark color in a cold climate.  
   **Carbon dioxide reduction:** about 5,000 pounds a year.

9. As you replace home appliances, select the most energy-efficient models.  
   **Carbon dioxide reduction:** 3,000 pounds a year if you replace your old refrigerator with an efficient model.

10. Be informed about environmental issues. Keep track of candidates' voting records and write or call to express concerns.  
    **Carbon dioxide reduction:** billions of pounds if we vote to raise U.S. auto fuel efficiency.
The advisory committee recommended to amend R-23 as follows (deletions stricken out):

R-23
To urge members of the Reformed Church in America to write letters to their elected officials urging ratification of the Kyoto Protocol and supporting public policies that encourage energy efficiency and help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

Reason: The paper did not provide sufficient background information about the Kyoto Protocol.

R-24
To urge RCA members, congregations, and institutions to take steps to reduce fossil fuel consumption through energy conservation measures and changes in lifestyle. (ADOPTED)

The advisory committee recommended to amend R-25 as follows (additions underlined):

R-25
To direct the Office of Social Witness to make available additional resources about climate change, methods of reducing fossil fuel consumption, and legislative efforts aimed at curbing global warming, including the Kyoto Protocol. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

THIRD WORLD DEBT AND THE YEAR OF JUBILEE

Many of us are looking forward to December 31, 1999, with excitement and anticipation. Some churches are planning special worship services to thank God for God’s great acts in the millennium closing this year. Other churches are planning dinners and dances so that their members will have a safe and appropriate place to welcome in a new year in a way that acknowledges this milestone—the changing of a millennium. Though there are some concerns about this event, such as how our computers will act when they have to make a jump from ’99 to ’00—the Y2K problem—generally speaking, the celebration will be happy, and participants will look to the future with expectations for even better things to happen.

That is how it is for most in North America. But things are vastly different in other parts of the world. Millions of people will face this occasion as they face every day and every year: with poverty and hunger. For them, the future will look as bleak as the past. For them there will be no school for their children, no medical treatment for their diseases, no food on the supper plate, and no clean water to drink.

In particular these references are to the countries designated the HIPC countries—Heavily Indebted Poor Countries. These countries, arranged by geographical grouping, are:


LATIN AMERICA: Bolivia, Guyana, Honduras, and Nicaragua. These four nations owe $17 billion.
ASIA: Laos, Myanmar (Burma,) and Vietnam. The total debt of these three countries is $34 billion.

THE MIDDLE EAST: Yemen owes $6 billion.

This debt can be divided into three major categories. Multilateral debt is money owed to international financial institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, or regional development banks, such as the African Development Bank. Multilateral debt accounts for 45 percent of HIPC debt. Bilateral debt is money owed to individual governments. Forty-five percent of the debt is bilateral. Commercial debt is owed to banks and private lenders. Ten percent of HIPC debt is commercial debt. Happily, the United States has already pardoned about $2.7 billion in debt to HIPC countries. However, the U.S. is the largest single contributor to the World Bank and International Monetary Fund and holds a major share of the multilateral debt.¹

The Heavily Indebted Poor Countries owe a total of $6.8 billion to the U.S.

—United States Accounting Office

Compare this amount to:

• The cost of three B-2 Stealth Bombers, of which the U.S. has 21—$6.6 billion.

—Council for a Livable World Education Fund

• The amount spent to date on the savings and loan bailout—$165 billion.


Though we speak of these debts in terms of dollars owed, the real price of the debt is in incalculable human misery. As always happens, the burden of the debt falls most heavily on the poorest. The poor who are powerless to solve the problem of debt bear the brunt of the vast human cost imposed by debt beyond repayment.

It is because of this human cost that the church has taken note of this problem, and communities of faith are joining forces to bring relief, hope, and health to the suffering people of the world. In 1990 the Christian Action Commission wrote a paper describing the problem of Third World debt and the misery it was causing the world's poor (MGS 1990, pp. 72-77). That paper noted that while there may be some financial concerns for creditors, “too few have raised the question from the point of view of those in the Third World—the poor, the women and children—who are those often made to suffer in order that payment toward the debt might be made...Biblically and theologically the case for Christian concern is clear. Christian concern is not solely for the poor of the U.S. or Canada, but for the poor of the world—for these are our neighbors, too. Love does not recognize political boundaries.”²

Communities of faith and secular organizations tuned to the plight of the poor are calling for the cancellation of the debt of the HIPCs. The Christian Action Commission urges congregations of the Reformed Church in America to add their voices to the chorus of caring people asking that the burden be lifted from these nations that their people may breathe free and find the same hope for the future that our members enjoy.³
The debt owed by the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries between 1983-85 averaged $122 billion. Despite some debt relief efforts by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, the debt owed between 1993-95 had increased to an average of $221 billion.

—United General Accounting Office

In particular, churches are seeing the new millennium as a special opportunity to bring grace and relief to the world’s poor. A call has been issued to declare the year 2000 the year of Jubilee. The Jubilee is “the fiftieth year occurring at the end of seven Sabbatical cycles of seven years each, in which all land was restored to its ancestral owners and all Israelite slaves were freed. The Jubilee is described in Lev. 25:8-17, 23-55; 27:16-25; and Num. 36:4.” The Jubilee was a time of putting things right—of restoring relationships to their proper status; debts were canceled, slaves liberated, and land returned to its original owner. “These commandments are taken up in “the year of the Lord’s favour” (Isa. 61:1-2a) and described in Isa. 65:17-25 as ‘new heavens and a new earth.’... In the New Testament, Jesus extends the jubilee vision by proclaiming good news to the poor, release to the captives, sight to the blind, and liberation of the oppressed. He taught his disciples to pray for the forgiveness of debts (as we forgive our debtors). Pentecost was characterized by the voluntary sharing of possessions, so that ‘there was not a needy person among them’ (Acts 3:34, cf. Deut. 15:40).”

Many communions and communities of faith from other religions as well as some secular organizations are calling for the year 2000 to be declared the year of Jubilee for the HIPCs. There is no possibility that these countries can repay their debt in the foreseeable future. Jubilee 2000 will give them the opportunity to enter the next century and millennium free from the debt that strangles their poorest citizens.

Payments on the debt of the HIPCs chokes the countries. The social cost is enormous. Heavily indebted countries are crippled by higher rates of infant mortality, disease, illiteracy, and malnutrition than other countries in the developing world. Six out of seven of these countries in Africa pay more to service their debts (interest payments) than their total budget to defeat malnutrition and preventable disease. For example, in Tanzania 14 million people lack access to safe drinking water and are vulnerable to diseases such as typhoid, cholera, and dysentery. During 1993 and 1994 the Tanzanian government spent $155 million dollars (U.S.) on debt repayments—twice what it invested in providing safe drinking water. According to the World Bank, providing a comprehensive primary health system would require a tripling of current expenditures on health. At this time, $225 per person is being spent on health needs while $515 per person is being spent on debt payments. In that same country, 40 percent of people die before the age of thirty-five. In Zambia, $37 million (U.S.) was spent on public education, while debt payments totaled $1.3 billion. In countries such as Mozambique, Honduras, and Nicaragua, debt payments take more than health and education combined. “If governments invested in human development rather than debt repayments, an estimated three million children would live beyond their fifth birthday, and a million cases of malnutrition would be avoided.”

The cycle of debt continues to eat away at a country’s ability to help its poorest citizens. Debt weighs as a crushing load that just gets heavier and heavier with the passage of time. “Because foreign debt can only be repaid in hard currency (e.g., U.S. dollars or sterling), indebted countries are obliged to orient their economies toward the raising of these revenues from exports or new loans. This explains why debtor nations are forced to concentrate on cash crops...
such as coffee, cocoa, and carnations as opposed to staple foods, and why they are caught up in endless cycles of borrowing."

So who pays the most? Those least able to pay. Debt payment comes almost literally from the food on the tables of debtor nations' poorest families. And women and children in the poorest families suffer most. In Mozambique, infectious disease claims the life of one in four children before age five, yet the government spends four times as much servicing its debt as on health care that would save the majority of those children. One out of every twenty African mothers dies giving birth. Thirty percent of children in sub-Saharan Africa are undernourished, and malnutrition accounts for half of all deaths among preschool children.

Whose fault is the crisis? After all, if people run up unmanageable debt, don't they have only themselves to blame?

Parallels between personal indebtedness and international debt are not fair for a number of reasons. The people currently suffering most from the debt of their nations are the powerless who have no say in how their countries are managed. The great social injustice of the debt of these nations is that those who had nothing to do with the accumulation of the debt pay the highest price.

The international debt crisis came into focus in 1982 when Mexico made it known that it could not pay its foreign debt. This announcement caused grave concern in the international financial community, with fears that other countries would follow suit. The most obvious cause of the crisis was the quadrupling of the price of oil in 1973 by OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries). Surfeit funds made with the high oil prices were invested in commercial banks. These banks made loans to developing countries. Sometimes loan requests were not evaluated properly, and there was no monitoring of how the loans were being put to work. The blame falls to borrowers who spent money on programs such as armaments, large-scale developments, and private expenditures that benefited those in power or the elite of the nation. The poor received no benefit at all from the large-scale borrowing of their country. Creditors are also to blame for failure to adequately evaluate the ability of the borrower to repay the loan or the appropriateness of the projects for which funds were being borrowed.

Remember 1973? Remember waiting in long lines for gas for your car? Do you remember the ballooning inflation of those years? While North Americans were suffering an uncommon inconvenience, the foundation was being laid for a worsening of the circumstances of the world's poorest people.

In 1979 OPEC again jacked up the price of oil. The U.S. declared war on inflation and enacted extremely tight fiscal policies to rein in surging interest rates. This resulted in a domestic recession. The world slipped into a global recession pushed by the escalating cost of fuel combined with rising interest rates. This recession dried up the market for Third World exports. Huge borrowing on the part of the U.S. Treasury to finance the new skyrocketing deficits drove up interest rates worldwide. Funds from private investors in Third World debtor nations were transferred to banks in the developed nations, further worsening the condition of debtor nations. Interest rates on their debt rose dramatically.

When Mexico announced its default on foreign debt, the collapse of the international financial system seemed imminent. Banks responded by making new loans to debtor nations so they could pay the interest on their first loans, growing their debt. Creditors regard heavy indebtedness as a symptom of problems with loan repayment, making investment in that country risky. High-risk loans come with very high interest rates. The UNDP (United Nations Development Program) estimates that in the 1980s the interest rates for poor countries were four times higher than for rich countries due to their inferior credit ratings and the expectation of national currency depreciation.
Another cost of debt is the absence of infrastructure such as roads, schools, or health facilities that could both fight poverty and create the conditions for more economic growth. The poor of the land had nothing to do with the requests for loans, the projects for which the funds were used and for subsequent decisions to service the debt. In many cases, even if the blame is clear, those responsible for the bad decisions leading to today’s misery are no longer in power or have disappeared from the scene. All that remains is the tragedy of people facing a hopeless future.

Another reason personal debt cannot be compared to HIPC debt is that there is no recourse for these countries in dealing with the crisis. If North Americans get into debt, they can turn to the courts for relief. In dire cases, they can find relief by declaring bankruptcy. Unfortunately there is no vehicle for declaring bankruptcy for debtor nations. So without some radical intervention or change, the debt will continue to bleed dry the peoples of the world most in poverty and least able to repay. There is no hope of repaying the dollars, but payment will continue to be made with a harvest of pain and tears.

Forgiveness of this debt might seem like a radical proposal, but there is strong precedence clearly demonstrating the effectiveness of wiping out debt. Following the Second World War, Britain was given permission to cancel some payments it owed on its debts. In 1953 Germany was allowed to limit payments of its debt to only 3-5 percent of its export earnings. In the 1960s exemption from the normal payments of its debt was given Indonesia. In the 1980s creditor nations halved Poland’s debt. Following the Gulf War of 1991, the United States forgave $7 billion in military debts owed by Egypt.

It is not unreasonable to assume that, with relief from the crushing load of debt, the entire global economy will benefit from healthier economies in the formerly heavily indebted countries as their improved circumstances lead to more energetic economies and subsequent increased international trade. The prospects are for a beneficial outcome not only for the debtor nation, but for trading partners as well. Another significant advantage of releasing HIPCs from their debt is the potential for improvement to the environment. Poverty exacerbated by heavy debt leads to exploitation of a nation’s natural resources in unsustainable usage, which leads to the destruction of natural habitats and the destruction of arable land. Everyone pays the price as forest land is denuded, soil is depleted, and species are exterminated.

The Christian Action Commission is urging the Reformed Church in America and its local churches to join in the international call to proclaim the year 2000 as the year of Jubilee and forgive the debt of the HIPCs. The commission asks that RCA members align themselves with those suffering most in this crisis. The reality is that the voice of the poor of those lands is too faint to be heard. They need partners and allies who will tell of their plight and call for relief.

The reality is that these debtor nations cannot repay their loans. Giving them more time or searching for alternate solutions will not help and only prolongs the misery. Still another prohibitive cost to debtor nations is the battery of lawyers and representatives who must be supported as they travel and meet with creditors to renegotiate loan payments. Pardoning the debt is the only reasonable course of action.

More is needed than merely wiping the slate clean, however. Both creditors and people in the debtor countries are concerned that the debt relief could be improperly used, just as many of the original loans were. Conditions need to accompany the cancellation of debt. In a 1997 speech Archbishop Desmond Tutu, for example, cited four conditions as a model for debt relief: democratization, respect for human rights, military reduction, and a commitment to use the money realized from the debt relief for the needs of the common citizens of the country. New structures are needed which can implement ethically sound and mutually responsible development that puts human needs first and seeks to open the door to healthy living.
conditions, basic education, and fundamental medical care for those who do not have them now. And any solution needs to bear in mind preservation of the environment. Some organizations are calling for a link between debt relief and investment in human development. Proposals such as these will not simply eliminate the present problem but will work toward sustainable economies and a lessening of misery in the future. For this truly to be beneficial, it is imperative that improvements in the living conditions for the poor in debtor nations be worked out in conversation with representatives of the needy in those nations so that solutions are more than just mandates handed down by creditors. Bernardino Mandiate, the Methodist bishop of Mozambique, states that “investments of the developed countries in the Northern Hemisphere are not made to feed the people of the indebted countries, but to feed the industry in the North.” He suggests that the Mozambique parliament review any projects which require borrowing, asking whether or not it is needed. He insists that the people must supervise projects. Other models for funding development in Third World countries are CREDICOOP in Chile and SINAI in Nicaragua, which give loans to “micro-enterprises”—local projects proposed and run by people in their own cities, towns, and villages. Economic development will happen in the most beneficial way when lending is not viewed as an impersonal creditor/debtor relationship, but as a partnership for growth. It needs to be participatory; with knowledgeable people “putting their professional abilities at the service of the poorest.” Bishop Mandiate said investments in poor countries should enable people to develop themselves so that all can become players in the market system.

But for any of this to happen, the playing field must be leveled. Debt cancellation is the only fair way to lift the yoke from those who carry the crushing load. John Calvin writes of the Jubilee:

This was the most illustrious Sabbath since the state of the people, both as to their persons and their houses and property, was renewed; and although in this way God had regard to the public good, gave relief to the poor, so that their liberty should not be destroyed, and preserved also the order laid down by himself; still there is no question but that He thus added an additional stimulus to incite the Jews to honor the Sabbath. For it was a kind of imposing memorial of the sacred rest, to see slaves emancipated and become suddenly free; houses and lands returned to their former possessors who had sold them; and in fine all things assuming a new face.

The reformed tradition has always affirmed that faith leads Christians to stand beside the world’s neediest. Service in the kingdom of God means bringing relief to the suffering. “The reformed tradition has emphasized that the essential role of the church in society is not to enhance its own resources but to glorify God, witness to the Lordship of Christ, and transform this present social order according to the vision and values of Christ’s Kingdom.” The Christian Action Commission would like to add the RCA’s voice to those already calling for a year of Jubilee in the year of our Lord 2000, canceling the debt of the world’s most indebted nations, freeing them to live lives of dignity and to enjoy the fruit of their labor, and not have the very life blood of their communities drained in a hopeless cycle of unpayable debt.


2 Minutes of General Synod 1990, pp. 73, 75.

3 Among those calling for a year of Jubilee in A.D. 2000 are Catholic Relief Services, Church World Service, Episcopal Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Mennonite Central Committee, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), United Church of Christ, United Methodist Church, and U.S. Catholic Conference. Other groups include Africa Faith and Justice Network, World Vision, Bread for the World, and OXFAM-America.


8 World Council of Churches, op. cit., p. 2.


10 Catholic Relief Services, op. cit., Part I, p. 4.

11 The Episcopal Church, op. cit., p. 3.

12 The Episcopal Church, op. cit., p. 4.


14 Pablo Coloma, in a presentation to the Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility, New York, Feb. 9, 1999.


16 “The Church’s Peace Witness in the U.S. Corporate Economy,” approved for study by the 1985 General Synod, MGS 1985, pp. 56-64.

R-26
To endorse the Jubilee 2000/USA Campaign, part of the Jubilee 2000 coalition, which is calling for “a one-time cancellation by the year 2000 of the unpayable debt owed by the world’s poorest countries under a fair and transparent process.” (ADOPTED)

R-27
To direct the general secretary to write to the president of the United States, the prime minister of Canada, and other key leaders in the governments of the United States and Canada, asking them to cancel all debt owed to the United States and Canada whether directly or through the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund by heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC’s) and to urge those leaders to seek to persuade other nations to cancel the debt owed them. (ADOPTED)
The advisory committee recommended to amend R-28 as follows (additions underlined):

**R-28**
To encourage pastors, elders, and deacons to bring the crisis of Third World debt to the attention of their congregations; and further,

to encourage local churches to join Bread for the World’s Offering of Letters, asking national leaders to cancel the debt of HIPC’s; and further.

to instruct Reformed Church Mission Services staff to communicate this decision to partner churches around the world. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

Reasons:

1. The amendment encourages RCA partner churches by showing support

2. The amendment fosters an atmosphere in which Christians can serve as advocates within their own countries.

**R-29**
To direct the Office of Social Witness and the RCA Distribution Center to make the paper “Third World Debt and the Year of Jubilee” and additional resources on the debt crisis available to RCA congregations for study and discussion. (ADOPTED)

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

**REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF SOCIAL WITNESS**

The Office of Social Witness helps to equip and encourage congregations in their ministry in society. A congregation’s social witness ministry is an integral part of its proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. By standing with those who are poor and oppressed, in working for justice and reconciliation among peoples and races, and by striving to care more faithfully for the gifts of creation, the church witnesses to the Christ in whom all things hold together and through whom God was pleased to reconcile all things on earth and in heaven (Col. 1:15-20). The Office of Social Witness assists congregations in this wide-ranging ministry by providing resources for study and action, by organizing regional workshops and training events, and by offering opportunities for discussion and discernment concerning social and ethical issues that call for the church’s response.

Increasingly the office is called upon to assist deacons in their “ministry of mercy, service, and outreach” (Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 6, Section 1) and in their responsibility “to express the social concerns of the church” (Section 2). The office also represents the denomination in ecumenical gatherings, public statements, and forums on social issues. It responds to numerous requests for information and resources on a variety of ethical and social issues.
Caring for Creation

Through its Office of Social Witness the Reformed Church participates in the National Religious Partnership for the Environment, a coalition of four groups (Jewish, Roman Catholic, mainline Protestant, and evangelical) that work together in developing resources and programs for a faith-based response to environmental issues. Such ecumenical cooperation makes it possible to develop more resources and programs than would otherwise be possible. This year for example, the Eco-Justice Working Group of the National Council of Churches of Christ published a resource packet of study, worship, and action resources on consumption and the environment. This packet was sent to more than 70,000 Protestant congregations, including each congregation in the RCA. Reformed Church congregations also received information offering assistance in helping their church buildings become more energy efficient.

The 1998 General Synod encouraged each classis to name a “caring for creation coordinator” to serve as a resource and support person to aid congregations in their ministries of defending and restoring creation. To date, twenty people have been enlisted in this ministry. Coordinators work in cooperation with the regional synod diaconal ministry teams. Through the Office of Social Witness they receive resources and training to assist congregations in three areas of ministry: 1) learning [suggesting resources that will help churches learn about environmental issues and the biblical theology of creation]; 2) lifestyle [such as helping churches and families with ideas for reducing consumption, conserving energy, recycling, and reducing the use of toxins and pesticides]; and 3) legislation [serving as a conduit of information about important environmental issues and public policy issues]. Caring for creation coordinators have been instrumental in helping congregations organize special worship services, ecumenical events, workshops, letter-writing campaigns, educational opportunities, and service projects. Through the network of coordinators the office was also able to offer small grants for “creation care” projects in local congregations.

RCA caring for creation coordinators have participated in ecumenical training events and workshops in Montreat, North Carolina; Columbus, Ohio; and Chicago, Illinois. Additional workshops focusing on the issue of global climate change are scheduled for Michigan, Iowa, and Pennsylvania. The office also provided support for a conference on poverty and environmental stewardship, sponsored by the National Association of Evangelicals.

Justice for the Poor

Last year the Office of Social Witness began gathering information about RCA-related and congregationally-based ministries with the poor. Part of the impact of the 1996 welfare reform legislation (the Personal Responsibility and Work Act) has been the increased demands placed on church and volunteer ministries such as soup kitchens, food pantries, and shelters. In addition to meeting emergency needs, many RCA ministries are also working to provide continuing support, training, and counseling in helping people obtain work and become more self-sufficient. Another aspect of the welfare reform legislation was the so-called “charitable choice” option, a provision designed to expand cooperation between state welfare programs and faith-based organizations. Information about charitable choice has been distributed to each classis and through the RCA diaconal ministry teams.

The church is also in conversation with leaders in government and business, both to advocate for better welfare legislation and to explore avenues for better cooperation in addressing the problem of poverty. Several RCA members participated in the National Summit on the Churches and Welfare Reform, sponsored by Call to Renewal, in February. At the invitation of former U.S. Senator Paul Simon, the RCA’s minister for social witness participated in a gathering of a wide spectrum of religious leaders who met to discuss the role of the church and the role of the government in addressing poverty in America.
Witness in the Public Square

The Office of Social Witness facilitates RCA participation in events that enable church members to interact with legislators and government officials and to consider how the biblical calls for justice, peace, and the well-being of creation can impact public policy. Such events enable 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, this participation 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 synods and regions.

With the support provided through the Office of Social Witness, RCA members have been able to participate in the National Interfaith Legislative Briefing in Washington, D.C., the Christian Environmental Association’s annual briefing, the National Religious Leadership Conference on Public Policy, and the national convention of Evangelicals for Middle East Understanding, as well as state and local public policy meetings. The office also provides RCA members with information on public policy concerns through periodic “Action Alerts” and articles in the City Gate and the Church Herald.

Witness in the Corporate Economy

From time to time, through its participation in the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility, the Reformed Church in America files a shareholder resolution with a major corporation in which the RCA holds stock. Such shareholder resolutions often afford the occasion for church representatives and corporate management to come together to discuss significant ethical issues involved in participating in today’s global economy. As stated in a 1985 General Synod report, “The Church’s Peace Witness in the U.S. Corporate Economy”:

Through its economic involvement the church may offer a significant witness in and to its society...The reformed tradition has emphasized that the essential role of the church in society is not to enhance its own resources but to glorify God, witness to the lordship of Christ, and transform this present social order according to the vision and values of Christ’s kingdom (MGS 1985, p. 57).

In 1998 the RCA co-filed two resolutions to be presented at the 1999 shareholders’ meetings of companies in which the RCA holds shares.

The first, based on the 1993 General Synod statement on global warming, was a resolution filed with Texaco requesting that the company provide a report on its plans to reduce the emission of carbon dioxide. The RCA informed Texaco that the church is deeply concerned about potential global climate change caused by carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions and the effects of such climate change on many developing countries, which are especially vulnerable to declining agricultural productivity and rising sea levels.

The resolution called for a comprehensive report to shareholders on greenhouse gas emissions from the company’s operations and products. A group representing the filers of the resolution met with Texaco representatives on February 12, 1999, and the company agreed to provide a report on Texaco’s activities and position.

The second resolution, which followed from the 1997 General Synod instruction that the church should explore ways of reducing the environmental consequences of paper manufacture and use (MGS 1997, R-5, R-6, R-7, p. 93), requested the Georgia-Pacific paper company to provide a report on its plans to phase out the use of chlorine-based compounds from its pulp and paper production. Chlorine-based bleach chemicals used in some paper production processes produce dioxin and other persistent pollutants known to harm human health.
Georgia-Pacific filed a challenge to the resolution with the Securities and Exchange Commission, but after negotiations with the shareholders, the Securities and Exchange Commission challenge was withdrawn. A number of the company's initial assertions about the factual content of the resolution proved to be unfounded, and a new resolution was agreed to by both sides. A mutual agreement was reached between the company and the shareholders to continue talks on chlorine issues.

Additional General Synod Referrals

In response to a Commission on Christian Action report on the criminal justice system, the 1998 General Synod instructed the Office of Social Witness and the RCA Distribution Center/TRAVARCA to make available resources to assist congregations in implementing restorative justice ministries in their communities (MGS 1998, p. 115). The office has published a study guide on police-community dialogue. Other resources available through the RCA Distribution Center/TRAVARCA include Restore, a 50-minute video, and Close Encounters of the Criminal Justice Kind, a six-session study for senior high youth.

The 1998 General Synod also received a report from the Commission on Christian Action, "Bringing Racism to Light for a Decade Freed from Racism" (MGS 1998, pp. 119-134). The Synod voted to designate the decade 2000-2010 as the "Decade Freed from Racism in the RCA" (MGS 1998, R-9, p. 131) and called for congregations to become models in addressing racism and in breaking down racial and ethnic barriers (MGS 1998, R-14, p. 132). The Office of Social Witness was instructed to provide study resources (MGS 1998, R-12, p. 131), publish descriptions of model ministries, and conduct regional meetings and workshops (MGS 1998, R-16, p. 132). A study guide to accompany the Christian Action paper is in progress. Several additional resources are available from the Office of Social Witness and the RCA Distribution Center/TRAVARCA. The minister for social witness, representatives of the racial/ethnic councils, and the Commission on Christian Action have met to discuss preliminary plans for regional training workshops.

The General Synod also directed the Office of Social Witness to help the church address the following issues: the comprehensive treaty to ban land mines (MGS 1998, R-18, p. 137), human rights in Tibet (MGS 1998, R-19, p. 140), the U.S. embargo against Cuba (MGS 1998, R-21, R-22, R-23, pp. 144-45), and self determination for Puerto Rico (MGS 1998, R-24, p. 145). The office has addressed each of these issues through "Action Alerts," letters to public officials, or articles in the City Gate or the Church Herald.

Work in Progress

The 1998 General Synod gave several directives to the commission in response to the 1998 report "Bringing Racism to Light for a Decade Freed from Racism" (MGS 1998, pp. 119-134). Members of the commission in cooperation with the Office of the General Secretary and the Office of Ministry and Personnel Services reviewed the hiring practices of the Reformed Church in America and its progress toward greater racial and ethnic inclusion. The commission also met with representatives from the racial/ethnic councils to review a study guide (in process) to accompany the paper on racism; to discuss plans for regional dialogues on race; and to work on the process for getting other aspects of the "Decade Freed from Racism" underway.

With this meeting of the General Synod, Dr. Donald Cronkite is completing six years of service on the commission, the last several of which he also served as its moderator. He has been a gentle and effective leader and one to whom God has given "the tongue of a teacher" so that he knows "how to sustain the weary with a word." On behalf of the denomination, the members of the commission express deep appreciation for his leadership. He has guided and nurtured the rest of us in such a way that serving on the commission has not only been a worthy ministry but a great joy.
From the Report of the African-American Council (p.75)

R-14
To encourage all members of the RCA to speak boldly, in the spirit of Christian love, against acts of intolerance, racism, and police violence; and further,

to encourage commissions, synods, and classes to work with all deliberate speed in the implementation of past and present recommendations in addressing issues of prejudice and racial intolerance. (ADOPTED)

From the Report of the Council for Pacific and Asian American Ministries (p. 85)

R-20
To call on the members of the Reformed Church in America to pray for the Christians in India; and further,

to instruct the general secretary and the minister for social witness to write to the president of the United States and key members of Congress, and to instruct the Regional Synod of Canada executive secretary to write to the prime minister of Canada, urging them to communicate with the prime minister of India to work diligently toward stopping the violence against Christians in India. (ADOPTED)

Overtures

Distribute Materials Regarding Capital Punishment

1. The Classis of Delaware-Raritan overtures General Synod to 1) distribute to the consistories, congregations, and judicatories of the denomination the Reformed Church in America's most recent resolution and biblical study regarding capital punishment in its entirety for study and response (report of the Christian Action Commission, with addendum—MGS 1965, p. 211-214, 222-225; and MGS 1966, p. 220-222); and to 2) instruct the Christian Action Commission to review said resolution and accompanying biblical study to determine if it should be revised and reaffirmed for our present circumstances.
Reasons:

1. Recent trials and legislative initiatives have raised the issue of capital punishment, compelling God's people to respond pastorally and prophetically to it as the body of Christ.

2. The culture is becoming more vindictive with the increasing popularity and use of the death penalty. Some states repeatedly seek to streamline and expedite the death penalty process, increasing the likelihood of making permanent mistakes.

3. Even though the Reformed Church in America has been on record for thirty-four years as "opposing the retention of capital punishment as an instrument of justice" (MGS 1965, p. 222) many in our congregations have not been aware of this clear and historic resolution and the many biblical and pragmatic reasons to challenge the increasing use of capital punishment.

4. Since 1965 many Christian bodies have found it desirable to revisit the issue of capital punishment and clarify their positions in the face of growing public support for the death penalty.

   Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), 1976, 1985
   Christian Reformed Church in North America, 1981
   Church of the Brethren, 1975, 1979, 1987
   Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1991
   Mennonite Central Committee, 1982
   The Orthodox Church in America, 1989
   Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 1985
   United Methodist Church, 1980, 1984

5. Seeking a new consensus on this vital issue through shared theological reflection would be a faithful use of time and gifts.

➢ The advisory committee recommended:

   R-30
   To instruct the Office of Social Witness to distribute to the consistory, congregations, and judicatories of the denomination the Reformed Church in America's most recent resolution and biblical study regarding capital punishment in its entirety for study and response (report of the Christian Action Commission, with addendum—MGS 1965, pp. 211-214, 222-225; and MGS 1996, pp. 220-222) and further,

   To instruct the Commission on Christian Action to review said resolution and accompanying biblical study to determine if it should be revised and reaffirmed for present circumstances. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. The increased frequency of capital punishment in many states merits a response by the church.

2. Seeking a new consensus on this vital issue through shared theological reflection would be a faithful use of time and gifts.
2. The Classis of Chicago overtures General Synod to instruct the Commission on
Christian Action to prepare a statement, to be submitted to the 2000 General
Synod for approval, encouraging members of the Reformed Church in America
to support organ and tissue donation by taking the necessary personal and legal
measures to be qualified as individual donors.

Reasons:
1. Organ and tissue donation is a positive and practical expression of a Christian’s
commitment to the sacredness of life and to love others as Christ has loved us.

2. Nationwide there are 60,989 people waiting for an organ transplant as of August 1998.
A new person is added to this list every sixteen minutes. Each day ten people waiting
for a transplant die.

3. Anyone from birth to the age of sixty is eligible to be a donor, with the exception of
cancer patients and HIV positive individuals. Each donor may help twenty-five or more
people waiting for an organ or tissue donation.

The advisory committee recommended:

RCA Support Organ and Tissue Donation

R-31
To instruct the Commission on Christian Action to prepare a
statement, to be submitted to the 2000 General Synod for Approval,
encouraging members of the Reformed Church in America to
support organ and tissue donation by taking the necessary personal
and legal measures to be qualified as individual donors. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. Organ and tissue donation is a practical expression of Christian love.

2. There is an increasing need for organ transplants.
Report of Central College

INTRODUCTION

It has been an exciting year at Central College, and it is a pleasure to provide this report to the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America. In 1915 Central College and the RCA joined in a partnership to provide a quality liberal arts education in the Christian tradition to deserving young men and women in Pella, Iowa, and the surrounding area. Since that time Central has expanded its horizons and now serves students from some forty states and several foreign countries. Although the college has broadened its vision and outreach, it continues to cherish the relationship that was forged with the RCA so many years ago and looks forward to the opportunities of the years to come.

ENROLLMENT

Most private colleges are tuition-driven and dependent on stable student enrollment to maintain quality programs. This is certainly true for Central College and means that annual enrollment numbers cannot fluctuate much without having an effect on overall programming.

Over the last several years Central had experienced a decline in enrollment and was having some difficulty sustaining desired student numbers. From a high of 450 first-year students ten years ago, Central enrolled only 302 freshman in 1996-97 and 305 in 1997-98. Although the college could still operate from a position of strength, it became evident that ongoing enrollment decline and the accompanying potential for diminished returns would need to be stemmed.

To do so, the college established its first-ever marketing budget and targeted several areas in Iowa and surrounding states that traditionally are strong for student recruitment. Additionally, a new effort was made to identify particular strengths of the college and engage the entire campus community in the recruiting efforts. Those efforts were rewarded last fall with 417 first-year students registering for the first day of classes, resulting in nearly a forty percent increase from the previous year. This was accomplished without sacrificing the quality of the pool of students, as the incoming freshman profile indicated unusual strength in average ACT scores and grade point averages.

For the 1999-2000 school year, applications are keeping pace with last year's total, and every indicator suggests this class will surpass the number from a year ago. It is a particular joy to report that the number of RCA students on Central's campus continues to grow, with this year's applications showing nearly a 10 percent increase over a year ago.

COLLEGE SUPPORT

It is true that Central College is dependent on tuition income. Without the annual sacrificial support of hundreds of alumni, friends, corporations, and RCA congregations, however, Central could not begin to preserve the solid academic reputation it has earned.

Last year Central was the beneficiary of over $3.1 million in private support, which was the one-year record for private gifts to the college. As of this report, gifts to the college for this fiscal year are running nearly 25 percent ahead of last year's record tally. Several individual gifts deserve special mention:
Robert F. and Dorothy L. Van Vark of Pella and William Van Den Berg and Geraldine McGirt of Phoenix, Arizona, gave a parcel of land adjacent to the college. The land has been appraised at more than $287,000.

An anonymous estate gift in the amount of approximately $350,000 was given to the college to fund scholarships, with special consideration given to students who indicate a Christian affiliation and a history of community service.

Wilma Rempe, a 1928 graduate of Central, gave a gift in the amount of $38,000 to establish an endowed scholarship.

ACADEMIC PROGRAM

Central continues to be recognized by national publications that annually rank colleges for quality indicators such as academic excellence, affordability, percentage of faculty with terminal degrees, graduation rates, and library resources. For 1998-99 Central was again ranked in the top 150 “best buy” colleges nationwide by Money Magazine, and was listed in the top 165 National Liberal Arts Colleges by U.S. News & World Report.

Central’s exercise science department has started the long, exacting process of establishing an accredited athletic training program. If successful, Central would become one of the few colleges at the Division III level able to graduate students eligible to take the certification exam for athletic trainers. At present the only accredited athletic training program in the state of Iowa is at the University of Iowa.

There is some urgency in putting a certified athletic training program in place. The National Athletic Trainers Association (NATA), the professional organization that oversees the certification process, wants to make the academic requirements to become a certified athletic trainer consistent from school to school, much as they are for other health professions such as physical therapy and occupational therapy. By 2004 anyone planning to take the NATA examination must have graduated from an accredited program.

FACULTY

Central is fortunate to have an outstanding faculty comprised of talented and intellectually diverse persons who are collectively dedicated to helping students. Many of them are truly outstanding teachers, and several enjoy national reputations in their chosen fields. Listed below are just a few of their accomplishments for the year.

Dr. Don Racheter, professor of political science, was the recipient of the first annual Vernon Van Dyke Award from the Iowa Association of Political Scientists for 1998-99. The award, named for a long-time member of the faculty at the University of Iowa, goes to the political scientist who has demonstrated continued excellence in serving the political science community in Iowa and beyond. The award marks the third time Racheter has been named the first-time recipient of an award from the Iowa Association of Political Scientists.

Dr. Michael Harris, associate professor of English, was the recipient of a Fulbright Lecturing Grant to teach at the University of Dar es Salaam in the East African nation of Tanzania during the 1998-99 school year. Harris began the long, three-stage process to win the Fulbright grant nearly two years ago. A committee of American scholars first reviewed his application and recommended it be approved. Then it was sent to Tanzania, where administrators at the University and diplomats at the U.S. embassy concurred. Finally, the application returned to the U.S. for final approval by yet another Fulbright committee.
Dr. Paula Holcomb, professor of music, was the guest conductor for the 1998 New York State School Music Association All-State Wind Ensemble during the sixty-third Annual Winter Conference, December 1-2. Dr. Holcomb also recently taught at the University of Calgary Conducting Institute in Alberta, Canada, a diploma program for Canadian, American, and European public school and university students. She presented lectures and demonstrations, gave private conducting lessons, and offered critiques of conductors as they worked with various ensembles.

SPIRITUAL LIFE

Under the guidance of the Rev. Tom Trinidad, campus chaplain, Central's spiritual life continues to be an important part of educating the whole person. It is a pleasure to report that a large portion of students on campus continue to participate in opportunities of service, worship, and faith building. New to campus this year is a weekly chapel service that encourages students, faculty, and staff to come together as a community for worship and reflection.

A portion of the strategic plan that was initiated by president David Roe upon his arrival at Central is devoted to discovering how Central College educates the whole person in mind, in body, and in spirit. To begin this discovery process, several task forces were established this year.

The spiritual life task force was charged with finding a working definition for the part of the college mission statement that identifies Central as being a college in the Christian tradition. That is, it was to define "Christian Tradition" for Central College. In addition, it was to assess and make recommendations regarding how Central College provides for the spiritual life on campus and how Central provides for faith development in members of the community.

As of the writing of this report, the task force has delivered a working definition to the campus community for its reflection and input, and is currently considering the other two components of the charge from the president. When the task force has completed its work, recommendations will be delivered to the president and a wider audience for further refinement in this year's strategic plan cycle.

The John Templeton Foundation of Radnor, Pennsylvania, again named Central to the 1998-99 Honor Roll for Character-Building Colleges. The honor roll recognizes colleges and universities that emphasize character building as an integral part of the college experience. Central was one of only 135 four-year undergraduate institutions in forty-two states selected.

CAMPUS DEVELOPMENT

A general phrase that might describe Central’s campus development this year is "under construction." As it was reported a year ago, Central has embarked on several building projects to improve the physical plant. Listed below are updates of the current building projects underway.

The Ron Schipper Fitness Center is progressing nicely with an anticipated completion date of late summer. The fitness center is attached to the existing Kuyper Athletic facility and includes a 7,200-square-foot fitness room, a 2,000-square-foot multipurpose room, and a recruiting lounge. Plans for a 1,440-square-foot human performance lab and an enlarged 200-meter indoor track are also part of the project.

The Weller Center for Business and International Studies is scheduled to open for the fall semester. The $3.75 million facility will include multimedia and Internet-connected classrooms and offices for the departments of international education, modern languages, and economic, accounting, and business management.
Graham Hall, the oldest women's residence hall on campus, is being completely refurbished and will be available to the students next fall. Students participated in the design phase and are anxiously awaiting the opening. The old dining portion of the building is also being converted to a conference center and banquet hall, with plans to make it available to large groups and companies for seminars.

**COCURRICULUM**

Cocurricular life at Central continues with strength. Students participate in a full range of activities, including drama, forensics, intramural and competitive athletics, clubs, and music ensembles. Many cocurricular activities within the life of the college achieved particular distinction this year with the following being especially noteworthy:

Following the extreme devastation of Hurricane Mitch in Central America, members of the Central College Jazz Band, the Chamber Singers, and vocal and instrumental jazz ensembles organized a “Pitch for Mitch” benefit concert in Pella. Gabriel Espinosa, who directs Central’s jazz program, and is a native of Merida, Yucatan, Mexico, planted the seed for such a concert after witnessing the extent of the suffering on television news. What began as a rather small idea soon ballooned into a community-wide effort by Central students. Student clubs and organizations took on the task of selling tickets and seeking donations. Ads and articles were submitted to the local newspaper, and students were encouraged to educate their families and communities about “Pitch for Mitch” over the Thanksgiving break. This effort alone netted more than $1,000 in donations. Overall, the students were able to personally deliver over $10,000 to the humanitarian group Save the Children in Honduras and Nicaragua.

Second-year football coach Rich Kacmarynski led the Dutch to its first undefeated season (10-0) since 1995 after having ended last season at 8-2. The Dutch achieved a record twenty-third Iowa Conference title and a thirteenth NCAA Division III playoff berth. Central narrowly missed advancing in the playoffs, giving up a late score in a 28-21 home loss to Wisconsin-Eau Claire. Andrew Paulsen, senior defensive back from Plainfield, Iowa, was a three-time all-conference pick and was named to the Division III All-America first team. Kacmarynski was named the league and West Region coach of the year.

Following last year’s third place finish in NCAA Division III volleyball, Central’s team, lead by Coach Megan Clayberg, this year won the national title by defeating defending champion University of California-San Diego. The team concluded the regular season with a 37-2 record despite having to go through a schedule loaded with nationally-ranked opponents. Clayberg was named Division III coach of the year. Abbie Brown, a junior from Eldora, Iowa, was named the AVCA player of the year, Division III All-America first team, the Iowa conference player of the year, and was recently nominated for Honda women’s athlete of the year honors. She was joined on the Division III All-America team by Candace Wilson, a sophomore from Britt, Iowa.

**CONCLUSION**

The college is greatly encouraged by several important factors that seem to indicate a level of success in accomplishing its mission. Increasing enrollment totals, wider participation in financial and individual support, and general enthusiasm for its role as a leader in private higher education give the Central family much for which to be thankful. Perhaps the one thing it is most thankful for is the continuing prayers and ongoing support of the Reformed Church in America. It is a real privilege to journey with the church in preparing young men and women to be responsible leaders and citizens in the world.
Report of Hope College

Introduction

As Hope College comes to the end of its 137th year, the college looks back on generations of loyal service to the church and to our youth. In 1987, 1991, and again in 1998, Hope joined Western Theological Seminary in hosting the General Synod meeting. It is very natural for the General Synod to meet on this campus where so many members have close personal and family ties. We hope that General Synod will meet here once again before too many years have passed.

Admissions

Again this year the enrollment of the college increased and applications for the fall are at an all-time high. Although the college has set an upper limit on enrollment of 3,000, it is still several years away from reaching that limit. It is very gratifying that the college attracts the interest of so many outstanding students. The college is also pleased that the number of students from the Reformed Church has increased over recent years and continues to increase.

A Vision of Hope

In 1997 the college undertook an extensive consultative process in order to frame a vision of Hope College in the future. At the end of the process, the Board of Trustees approved the following statement:

A VISION OF HOPE
MAY 1, 1997

Hope College will be recognized nationally for its academic excellence as an undergraduate liberal arts college. Hope will be noted for its emphasis on active learning, whether through collaborative research, internships, off-campus study, cooperative learning or other modes. Hope will have critically examined and incorporated advances in pedagogy through information technology. Hope's academic program will provide the foundation and the intellectual excitement essential to a lifetime of learning.

Hope will be recognized nationally as a leading Christian college, ecumenical in character while rooted in the Reformed tradition. Hope will offer students outstanding opportunities for development in Christian faith through study, worship, and service.

The college will offer students effective support in meeting academic challenges as well as the challenges of personal and spiritual growth. The college's residential character will complement and enhance its academic program. Hope will be a community in which there will be effective care and concern for each individual and one in which the attitude of caring is shared by all members of the community.

The Hope experience will include encounter with the cultural diversity that is characteristic of our nation and world. Hope will increasingly reflect the presence and influence of students, faculty, and staff from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds. Hope will also provide ample opportunities for study in off-campus settings where racial and cultural diversity will be encountered.

Recognizing that service to others is essential to a full and rewarding life, Hope will provide varied opportunities for growth and development through service and will
challenge its graduates to seek opportunities for servant leadership while it prepares them for rewarding careers.

The faculty and staff of Hope College will be active lifelong learners, and the college will encourage and support their commitment to learning. Hope College will be a learning organization, committed to constantly examining and learning from its own institutional experience as well as from the best thinking of the academic and professional communities to which it belongs.

Hope College will have a strong financial base and will make effective provision for maintaining it. Hope will have a campus and campus facilities fully adequate to its academic and residential program. Hope will provide excellent value for its students.

Hope will have a relationship of mutual respect and support with its immediate community and will be known for its constructive contributions to the community, the state, the Reformed Church in America, the nation, and the world.

This vision statement formulates the principles that are guiding the college as it plans and works for the future.

**Education and Information Technology**

Over the last two decades Hope College has made substantial investments in information technology and has assembled a first-rate staff in computing and information technology. The college recently completed the wiring of all dormitory rooms for direct access to the campus mainframe computer, which carries with it direct and rapid access to the Internet. A vast array of information about the college is available through the college’s home page at http://www.hope.edu. E-mail has become the preferred medium of communication on campus. Syllabi for many courses are already on the college’s internal Internet system, and we find that many students use e-mail to stay in touch with their families.

This spring, for the first time, Hope experimented with a course offered online. Professor Ludwig offered his developmental psychology course online during May term. He has already established a national reputation as a leader in the educational use of multimedia. Through offering this course, Hope is not entering the field of distance education. Rather, it is trying to find out what the potential may be for future improvements in offerings to students through the Internet.

**A Change in Administration**

On June 30 of this year I will retire as president of Hope College. This transition was announced at the January 1998 meeting of the Hope College Board of Trustees. At that time the board authorized a search to identify the next president of Hope. The search committee was chaired by trustee Joel Bouwens and staffed by Dr. Elton Bruins and Karen Schakel. After an exhaustive search lasting nearly a year, the search committee recommended the appointment of Dr. James E. Bultman, currently president of Northwestern College.

Dr. Bultman accepted the appointment and will begin his service to Hope on July 1. Bultman and his wife, Martie, know the college well. They are graduates of Hope. Bultman served Hope College as a member of the faculty and dean of social sciences before departing in 1985 to become president of Northwestern College. There is no doubt that James Bultman will give highly effective leadership to Hope College as it enters the twenty-first century.
A Personal Note

As I come to the end of my time as president of Hope College, I would like to express appreciation to all my friends in the Reformed Church in America for their support and friendship over the last twelve years. Thank you for your care for Hope College. May the Lord strengthen and guide you in your future service to the kingdom.

John Jacobson, president

Report of Northwestern College

It is a pleasure to submit this, my fourteenth and final report as president of Northwestern College to the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America. It has been my special joy and privilege to serve the college and the denomination. Time goes so swiftly by. It especially flies when you're having fun!

When I came to Northwestern in 1985, I knew immediately that this was a very relational place. People were important. It is a tribute to my predecessors and the faithful Northwestern College constituency that this is such a genuinely hospitable place, a place of both conviction and civility. May it ever be so.

During the past year the college has engaged in a very thorough and invigorating strategic thinking effort. This involved all of the major constituencies of the college and was designed to bring the college to the threshold of the new millennium with great strength and expectation. The one hundred strategies identified to accomplish this clustered in three major areas:

1. To further enhance already strong programs in academic, spiritual, and residential life. The college anticipates making better what already is very good.

2. To increase the cultural, racial, and geographic diversity at Northwestern. Although admittedly difficult and expensive, the college is committed to better reflect the diversity of our country and the world. Like most colleges of our type and location, Northwestern has done better with international than American minority diversity.

3. To further develop the college’s physical plant. The centerpiece of this is the construction of a new library. Other efforts include bringing the art and theater departments back to campus, finding a new home for the communications department, and consolidating our maintenance facilities. Already underway is an approximately $2 million renovation designed to upgrade science facilities for the next decade, after which a new science building will likely be necessary.

During all of my years at Northwestern, I have been fortunate to serve with Ron De Jong, our director of admissions. Ron has been a pillar of strength for the college in this important position. Today the college enjoys its largest full-time enrollment ever at nearly 1,200 students. Northwestern remains a residential, coeducational, undergraduate institution, serving primarily traditional age college students—a niche the college serves well. In the last decade Northwestern has increased its enrollment by nearly 50 percent enabling both effective and efficient operation. It is likely that the college will plateau at this level for the
foreseeable future. Increasingly, Northwestern is attracting very capable students, as evidenced by the increase in average ACT scores in recent years from 22.25 to nearly 24.5, well above the national average of 21.5.

Perhaps the greatest change at Northwestern in the past decade has been the evolving stature of the academic program. This has taken place under the capable leadership of Dr. Robert Zwier, who recently announced his resignation from Northwestern to accept a similar post at Colorado Christian University in Denver. Zwier’s departure after nine years as a faculty member and eleven years as vice president for academic affairs will leave a considerable void at the college. This position will be filled from within on an interim basis, with a national search conducted during the next academic year. As architect of the academic program, Zwier has designed a challenging academic experience in which students must earn an education, not merely be given a diploma. Zwier has recruited and developed an outstanding faculty. Excellence in teaching is combined with scholarship, and faith is intentionally integrated with learning. Ninety percent of Northwestern’s faculty hold the terminal degree in their field—a tremendous achievement for an institution with as brief a four-year college history as Northwestern’s.

During the past year two Northwestern students have especially distinguished themselves in national competition. In music, Rose Van Mersbergen, student of professor Rodney Jiskoot, finished national runner-up in the Music Teachers National Association Collegiate Organ Competition. Rose is currently pursuing an advanced degree in organ performance at the University of Michigan. And Northwestern’s nationally reputable theater program has produced yet another outstanding artist. Dawn Wittke competed at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., in lighting design and finished runner-up to a graduate student from Syracuse University. Dawn’s mentor was theater professor Jeff Taylor.

Northwestern continues to have a very vibrant spiritual life program. This manifests itself not only in daily chapel and numerous voluntary spiritual groups on campus, but also and especially in the application of this faith in community, national, and international student ministry efforts involving over half the student body and many members of the faculty and staff. After serving the college faithfully for ten years, chaplain Matthew Floding has accepted an administrative/faculty position as director of formation for ministries at Western Theological Seminary. Floding’s ability to connect with all students and to be a chaplain for the entire campus community will be greatly missed. Barb Dewald, director of student ministries, is serving as interim chaplain for the spring semester. A search is currently underway for Floding’s successor.

Northwestern maintains one of the finest residence life programs in the country. Realistically, I would place it in the top five among our nation’s Christian liberal arts institutions. Paul Blezien and his staff have developed a very relational and wholesome student development program, designed to build up rather than tear down. Given considerable freedom within certain boundaries, students are expected to grow and mature while being held accountable for their behaviors. I do not go home at night worried about how our students will embarrass themselves or the college, but rather wonder how they will next make us proud of their achievements.

Wayne Kooiker has been the chief financial officer at Northwestern College since 1985. It is no coincidence that Northwestern’s exceptional financial improvement has occurred during this time. The college has finished each fiscal year with a surplus of revenues over expenditures. During this time period Northwestern has expended more than $25 million in new construction and property acquisitions. Despite this revolutionary development of the campus, the college has an indebtedness of only $2 million. Meanwhile, the endowment has increased from $2.5 million to $27 million. The college is currently working with a team of professionals in updating the campus master plan.
Under the able direction of vice president for development John Grel1er, now completing his seventh year, and his staff, the college has been able to raise considerable sums of money in support of programs, personnel, and physical plant projects. Truly God has blessed the college in ways beyond our fondest expectations. Generous donations and wise stewardship of resources have allowed the college to reward faithful employees at a level commensurate with the top third of Iowa’s private colleges and universities; fund academic, spiritual, and residential life programs that place Northwestern clearly in the top third of Iowa’s private institutions relative to overall stature; and remain in the lower third of Iowa’s private colleges and universities with respect to overall cost. To achieve this requires some considerable effort and commitment. The college’s goal continues to be one of affordable excellence.

It is my impression that Northwestern is poised to become one of the premier Christian liberal arts colleges in the country. I fully anticipate that the next decade will be the most exciting in Northwestern College’s history. I deeply regret that I will not be an intimate part of it.

My goal when I came to Northwestern fourteen years ago was to build on the obvious strengths of my predecessors and leave the institution a little better than I found it. History can be a judge of that. I do know that Martie and I have grown to love the college and the people of Northwestern. It has been our wonderful joy and privilege to be a small part of a team of people committed to the exceptional fulfillment of its noble mission. To God be all the glory!

James Bultman, president

Report of Reformed Church Women’s Ministries

A TRANSFORMING YEAR

As Reformed Church Women’s Ministries (RCWM) defines its direction for the future, its executive committee formulated the following statement which includes two proposals addressing the future of women’s ministries in the Reformed Church in America:

In response to the 1997 General Synod recommendation that RCWM engage in a comprehensive self-study of future directions, toward the goal of ministry that includes and serves the needs of all the women of the RCA (MGS 1997, R-4, p. 133), the RCWM Executive Committee, after two years of prayer, deliberation, and consultation, presents the following two proposals concerning the future of women’s ministries in the RCA:

1. To establish a Council for Women’s Ministries within the governing structure of the Reformed Church in America.

2. To develop a capital fund campaign in the range of $4,500,000 for the purposes of forming and funding the Council for Women’s Ministries and developing the program and mission for women’s ministries in the Reformed Church in America.

Working toward that end, RCWM leadership circulated these proposals for reaction and input from the Commission for Women, Triennial participants, the RCWM denominational board, RCA clergywomen, and women in professional ministries. The vast majority of women affirmed the need for an office, council, or agency that 1) continues to unite women for
spiritual growth, mission, and fellowship, 2) addresses women's issues in the church, and 3) trains women as church leaders and encourages church-wide utilization of women gifted for all forms of ministry.

RCWM, in letting go of its self-governed organization, is committed to an inclusive ministry with and for all women, both laity and clergy, working toward full partnership between the men and women of the RCA. This direction envisions denominational, regional, and local church leaders opening doors to shared leadership with women and working together to do mission and ministry. It recognizes that the majority of members in the RCA are women. The future of the RCA's churches is dependent on a new understanding of shared voice, power, decision-making, and celebration between men and women, and a truly united effort to share the gospel of Christ. We, as "resurrection women," are called by Christ to bring the good news to his disciples and beyond to the rest of the world.

A TRIENNIAL YEAR


HIGHLIGHTS OF TRIENNIAL

On August 1-4, 1998, over 1,200 women gathered at the Amway Grand Plaza Hotel in Grand Rapids, Michigan, for the thirteenth Triennial celebration of RCWM. The event featured performances by Cheri Keaggy and the Hour of Power Children's Choir and an address by noted author and speaker Maya Angelou. Worship included music led by Jody Cook and Kathy de Waard, drama by Brad Olson and Elizabeth Stapley, and preaching by the Revs. Bruce and Vicky Menning. The "Fools for Christ" clowns of Christ Memorial Church in Holland, Michigan, illustrated the daily theme using the building blocks from the event's logo. The annual summer missionary conference was held in conjunction with Triennial, allowing more missionaries to participate in the event. An offering of $42,000 was divided among three RCA mission projects: 1) Niagara Life Center in Welland, Ontario; 2) the Rainbow Project in Taipei, Taiwan; and 3) Kodai People's Development Group in Kodaikanal, South India. For the first time, participants could offer their afternoon time to do mission outreach in the Grand Rapids community.

RCWM expresses gratitude to the Triennial committee: Gloria Nollen, chairwoman; Ellen Brouwers, Kay Brown, Kathy de Waard, B. J. Haner, Molly Korver, Jacqueline Robinson, Sally Tapley, Diane Van Zetten, Sherry Vander Eyk, and Arlene Waldorf. RCWM also thanks the local arrangements committee: Sally Tapley, chairwoman; Barbara Boss, Nancy Claus, Nancy Matthews, Kathy McConnell, Lois Morehouse, Gayle Peddie, Beth Van Prooyen, and Sandy Vander Roest. RCWM extends a special word of thanks to stage manager, Kristi Naber, and registrar, Mary Hondorp.

RCWM regional conferences continue to grow in attendance. Some events bring together over eight hundred women. Crossroads, the gathering of the Synod of the Mid-Atlantics, meets every April. The Synod of Albany has an annual event in October. "Joy in the Son," the Synod of the Far West event, takes place in Tucson in April 1999. The Synod of the Heartland is planning Dimensions for October 14-16, 1999. The Synod of Mid-America's event is scheduled for June 2000. Interlude, from the Synod of the Great Lakes, will also take place in year 2000. Information about these conferences and other RCWM news and articles are now published quarterly in the Church Herald.
NEW CONSULTANT

In September RCWM welcomed Melinda Wilsey, member of New Life Community Church in Artesia, California, as consultant for the Synod of the Far West. This position was previously held by Glenda Perea, who moved to Chicago, Illinois, with her husband, the Rev. Stanley Perea, the new urban ministries director. RCWM extends its deep appreciation to Glenda for her leadership.

YEAR-END FINANCIAL REPORT

The 1998 financial report indicated that RCWM had a deficit of $28,413 for the year. Income was $186,572 and expenses were $214,985. Even though expenditures were less than in 1997, contributions—and particularly membership gifts—were substantially lower. RCWM is committed to eliminating dues over the next three years, but continues to need the support of both men and women in order to carry on its important ministries and mission efforts. Increased publications and communications stretched the budget this year, with items such as the Church Herald pages, four new ministry brochures, extra mailings, and the Bible study book and leader’s guide. RCWM pays the denomination 16 percent of its budget for basic service costs.

Scholarships were awarded to women seminary students and women students at RCA colleges. An additional $5,000 was raised through private donations and awarded for Triennial scholarships.

MISSION GIVING

China goal achieved! By the end of 1998, RCWM exceeded its three-year goal of raising $300,000 for the Christian church in China. The three-year total stands at $311,505. RCWM thanks and congratulates all the women who made this possible through their fund-raising projects, offerings, and personal donations. RCWM also thanks the RCWM consultants who promoted this project, gave speeches, and helped everyone meet the goal: Barbara Neevel, Carol Babinsky, Shirley Boertje, Ruth De Young, Alicia Hermance, Glenda Vetter, and Melinda Wilsey.

Over one hundred churches enrolled 843 children in the Children in Covenant program. Because of this program and the P.S. I Love You program, RCWM raised $10,987 for the Rottshafer Preschool in Brewton, Alabama.

Through the Footsteps hands-on mission program, twenty-three women from California, Illinois, Michigan, Iowa, and New York went to Rancho Santa Marta in Baja California, Mexico. RCWM continues to hold mission involvement and support as one of its highest priorities and is grateful for the ongoing gifts of time, love, energy, money, and other resources offered by the wonderful women of the RCA.

CONCLUSION

The next three years will be challenging for RCWM as the women continue to support existing programs and mission efforts and at the same time help the organization evolve into something new. This means, in some cases, frightening changes for women who have grown as leaders because of RCWM, the organization that offered them opportunities to exercise their voice and abilities. RCWM is now calling the greater church to recognize women and to provide for their development and integration into the leadership of the whole church. RCWM is calling all women to work in harmony and unity with one another and with all people. RCWM calls the men of the denomination to help women open doors that are closed.
to women and to stand with women against the prejudice, abuse, violence, and hoarded power that victimize women and children. RCWM invites others to join with women as they live out their ministries and missions, called by God to a lost and broken world.

Report of the General Synod Council's Congregational Services Committee

REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

"God save us from what the mind alone produces. Christian education is more about people's souls."

Thomas Groome, professor, Boston College
Lecture to Association of Presbyterian Educators, February 5, 1998

There is a revolution going on in North American society, no less than the ones that have been fought on the plains and the hills of the United States with guns and armies throughout its history; no less than the revolutions of liberation that have toppled governments around the world. There will be little bloodshed in our current revolution; what will be lost is not lives but the very society and culture we once knew but is no more.

Ours is a technological revolution; its battlefields are office chairs and school desks and the recliner in your living room. It happens every time you turn on a computer to access the Internet; every time you turn on a television to watch a movie; every time you shop for an updated appliance or drive your car or use the telephone or send your children off to school or write a check or say Y2K as if it were a normal, everyday part of the English language. Simply living today—participating in whatever you do in the world—has become a revolutionary act.

And unlike those revolutions of the past, even those fueled by the stated desire to return power to the masses, this revolution is truly the most democratic in history. For it is happening at personal computers and in basement workshops more often than in government or corporate boardrooms. It is happening with young people and seniors; at ivy league universities and community colleges alike; among both those traditionally empowered by society and those traditionally not. The revolution of the new millennium is truly a revolution of the people.

It is also a revolution in which the church must participate if it is to continue to meaningfully engage the world. It will do that, not by purchasing the latest technology for the church office or the sanctuary or the Sunday school classroom (although that may be a component of the church's strategy), but by recapturing the crucial dynamic of today's information age that the early church also practiced: building a common foundation, or set of shared values, on which the organization and everyone in it can build in a way that is always growing, learning, and creating. That dynamic becomes a model for church which Groome calls a for-life-for-all faith. Ministry becomes the work of the entire congregation, not just of a single person. And it focuses on creating disciples, not simply acquiring content: reaching out to people, welcoming them to a life of faith, forming them as disciples in a covenant community, and commissioning them to a love of God and neighbor in the world.
Christian education becomes the core of a Christian community building *for-life-for-all* faith for its participants. No longer will the culture *de facto* provide us the faith community with the stories, images, values, and traditions of the church and of the Bible. The faith community must intentionally guide and nurture those in its midst, so that they can live lives of a faith that is rooted in the truth of the gospel and the gospel community. It is education for life, providing those in the community with the necessary foundations to live, work, and minister in a constantly changing society, and to invite those not a part of the community to come experience its grace.

Amidst this need to understand and re-evaluate the role of education *for-life-for-all*, the Office of Christian Education continues to seek to provide leadership, resources, and challenge to local congregations in their own ministries of Christian education. Here are some of the ways and means by which that is happening.

**Children’s Ministry**

How do we recruit enough adults to staff the church nursery? Can you help us develop a child abuse prevention policy? What about spirituality for children?

No longer is the world of children’s ministry just Sunday school curriculum; an emphasis on *for-life-for-all* faith extends children’s ministry to the whole-life development of the spiritual lives of our children. That’s why the Office of Christian Education stands just a toll-free phone call away: to assist congregations with resources, suggestions, and a listening ear tailored to a congregation’s specific needs.

That doesn’t mean curriculum is unimportant to the local congregations and to the Office of Christian Education. LiFE (Living in Faith Everyday), the Bible-based curriculum for children in preschool through sixth grade that was jointly developed by the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC) and the Reformed Church in America, emphasizes *for-life-for-all* faith through faith nurture, faith knowledge, and faith modeling. On this faith journey together, both children and leaders grow through worship and praise, through the hearing of the biblical stories, and through times to wonder, reflect, question, create, interact, and talk about what the story means for their everyday lives.

Responding to feedback from users, LiFE editors made revisions for the fall, winter, and spring quarters of the two-year cycle. The revised material has been available quarter by quarter for year one since the fall of 1998. Year two revised materials will be available beginning in the fall of 1999.

A network of regional consultants, working under the direction of regional synod education staff and with support from the Office for Christian Education, provides direct support and training for RCA congregations using LiFE. In addition, *Here’s LiFE*, a video training workshop for LiFE leaders, was introduced in the fall of 1996 and is available for loan from TRAVARCA or purchase through the RCA Distribution Center. *LiFE Support*, a four-page newsletter for LiFE leaders, provides suggestions on topics such as seasonal ideas, storytelling, drama, using audiovisual equipment, and resources. A copy is included in all LiFE orders and it’s also posted on the RCA website, www.rca.org.

While LiFE is considered the key core children’s curriculum for RCA congregations, the education office continues to review and recommend other curricula that can appropriately meet the needs for faith development of children amid the highly diverse needs of ministry in the RCA. Bible Way, now teaching the biblical stories to children of its original users, continues to provide a solid, traditional curriculum grounded both in Scripture and Reformed creeds and confessions. Discussions regarding the possibility of revising Bible Way are underway.
Whole People of God, an ecumenical, lectionary-based curriculum, allows every age group in the congregation to study the same topic or biblical text on the same day. In addition, a Reformed Church in America denominational handbook helps connect themes from the Whole People of God with the celebrations, history, sacraments, traditions, mission outreach, and issues that make our denomination Reformed. The handbook is available for free each fall with the curriculum order.

One-Room Sunday School, a nongraded curriculum for children age three through eighth grade, addresses the need of smaller congregations for a broader, more inclusive program for children of various ages.

God Loves Me is a new curriculum for two- and three-year-olds. Published by CRC Publications in 1998, it focuses on fifty-two Bible stories. The education office is also in conversation with several denominations and publishing houses in the initial development of a lectionary-based curriculum (a replacement for Whole People of God) for the year 2001.

In addition to the core curricula, the RCA participates in the development and publication of the StoryTeller series, a five-day vacation Bible school program published by a partnership of several denominations. “The Fisherman’s Story: Jesus Calls Peter,” the newest in the StoryTeller series, is available for 1999.

Asia: Children Have Rights, Too! Kids’ Pages, a joint project of the RCA children’s ministry office, the RCA hunger office, and the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC), focuses on child labor, street children, and child exploitation. Published in 1999, this study helps children to learn more about the causes of hunger and to understand that we need to join hands with others to protect children’s rights.

Leader training designs and workshops for denominationally supported curricula are available to support planners, leaders, and teachers. The Office for Christian Education and the regional synods currently collaborate to provide a network of education consultants who are available to lead continuing education events, provide teacher training, and consult with churches regarding the development of effective children’s ministry programs. Ongoing support for all congregations is provided through a toll-free RCA Resource Helpline, (800) 968-7221, and through the Office for Children’s Ministry, (800) 968-3943.

Children and Worship

In addition to providing core curricula for the support of congregational ministries with young children, the Office for Christian Education remains deeply committed to the Children and Worship program. Children and Worship provides a unique and innovative worship experience for children ages four to seven in their own setting and at the same time prepares them for worship with the whole congregation.

A network of twenty-one regional Children and Worship trainers in the U.S. and Canada is available for presenting introductory sessions for congregations who want to learn more about the program or for conducting basic training events for congregations who want to become involved in the ministry. In addition, the trainers provide enrichment events or specialized events for congregations that are already involved in the Children and Worship ministry.

In December 1998 Phyllis Palsma and Willa Brown introduced the Children and Worship program to church leaders from around the world at a three-day *Padare* (a Shona word meaning "meeting place") that preceded the World Council of Churches Jubilee Assembly in Harare, Zimbabwe. Having created excitement and interest in the Children and Worship program among these leaders from around the world, the task now is to find ways to provide training for those who would like to begin the program in their churches.

Congregations interested in Children and Worship are encouraged to contact the RCA Office for Children's Ministry, (800) 968-3943, for information about localized training and personnel available to support the Children and Worship program.

**Youth Ministry**

Ministry to youth at the denominational level continues to be coordinated through the Denominational Youth Team, formed from representatives of each of the regional synods and of each of the racial/ethnic councils, as well as from the General Synod Council level. Ron Den Hartog serves the General Synod Council as Denominational Youth Team leader on a forty-day-per-year contract; he is also a member of the pastoral staff of Central Reformed Church in Sioux Center, Iowa.

Coordinating ministry with and for youth at the denominational level through the youth team acknowledges the unique, necessary, and indeed, primary contributions to youth ministry that are happening through staff and programming at the regional synod level and in the RCA's racial/ethnic councils. Regional synods, for instance, are the sponsors of all the major youth gatherings that take place across the Reformed Church: Spectrum for the three eastern synods; Genesis in the Regional Synods of the Great Lakes and Canada; Winter Happening in Mid-America; Rocky Mountain High in the Heartland; and several classis-based events in the Far West. Through interaction provided by the Youth Team, both creative and financial resources can be moved between participants and can enhance the quality of all the events.

Cooperative tables of ministry work, however, only when each participant or group at the table can bring its own unique contributions and its personal commitments to that table. The denomination has clearly said that it remains committed to providing for effective youth ministry across the church through unique leadership in a number of key ministry areas. For example, the Office of Youth Ministry also continues to sponsor Project Timothy, an annual ten-day summer mission immersion event for high school youth and adult sponsors. The Rev. Randy Wieland, minister of youth at Emmanuel Reformed Church in Paramount, California, and Denominational Youth Team member from the Regional Synod of the Far West, remains on contract with the RCA to coordinate the program. Last year more than forty youth gained powerful new insights into faith and discipleship through their participation in Project Timothy. The Rev. Jason Perry, a member of the Classis of Iliana and of Pembroke Community Reformed Church in Hopkins Park, Illinois, provided key insights into congregational needs in urban youth ministry through a thirty-five-day contract in 1998. Those key findings will enhance the possibilities of youth ministry across the denomination.

The specific responsibilities of individuals like Den Hartog, Perry, and Wieland are examples of a denominational strategy approved by General Synod in 1995 to use part-time contract staff to focus on certain key, strategic ministries to youth that are not adequately nurtured by other parts of the church. No less important is the identification and availability of a full range of learning materials and curricula for youth in both Christian education and youth group settings. Jane Schuyler, the RCA Resource Helpline manager, remains vitally in tune with current youth and youth-related resources and with the youth team, and can provide immediate consultation services or advice to congregations.
Finally, the RCA continues to provide opportunities for its youth leaders to attend a wide variety of resourcing events. The RCA benefits from their attendance with new and creative means by which youth ministry can be carried out on all levels, from a single gathering in a particular congregation to broadly ecumenical events.

**Family Ministry**

In the 1980s the Office of Christian Education, through the work of part-time contract staff, sought to maintain a vital presence in ministry to families across the RCA. In fact, this area of ministry was valued enough that in 1990 the General Synod approved a recommendation from the General Program Council instructing the council "to develop a plan, including a job description and means of funding, to provide full-time staff for the Office of Family Life, making family ministry a major program priority in the Reformed Church in America" (MGS 1990, R-16, p. 101).

The Office of Christian Education has not been able to carry out this action of the General Synod adequately or appropriately. Small steps toward the goal, such as the hiring in 1995 of the Rev. Tom Schwanda on an limited-basis contract, did produce some resources for congregations to use with families and provided some liaisons with other family ministry organizations. But those eighteen-to-twenty-days per year were simply not enough to sustain any real momentum in ministry to families, and that responsibility has been removed from Schwanda’s portfolio. That leaves the RCA without leadership denominationally in family ministry at a time when the need is still present and indeed has probably increased since the 1990 action of the General Synod. There are possibilities and energy for further work in this area, including possible strategic partnerships that could provide leadership for the RCA in family ministry. There is not, however, any identified income source that would put this ministry on sound footing. Until that is identified, the RCA will remain unable to adequately serve its congregations in an area of ministry where the need is increasing, not decreasing.

**Adult Education**

It is not that knowledge of faith is no longer relevant in today’s society; knowledge is simply no longer enough. That’s what makes the need so urgent for a multifaceted approach to the ministry of adult Christian education.

The RCA is indeed well served with resources for adult study of both the Scriptures and contemporary issues. A quick review of *RCA Resources for Ministry 1998-99*, catalogs one and two, reveals a variety of biblical study resources and adult study guides. Most of those were produced outside the RCA Office of Christian Education. Given the limited resources available for the office, a conscious decision has been made not to focus the efforts of the office on the creation and publication of new resources, but rather to work in partnerships with other denominations and Christian ministry organizations in first identifying helpful and sound resources and then making those resources available through the RCA Distribution Center.

But the question for adult education is not only how adults increase their knowledge of faith, but also how adults can be equipped to live out and model what they know. In 1997 the Office of Christian Education debuted at General Synod a new initiative in biblical engagement, tied to the theme of the synod. This was the stated goal of that effort:

> We desire to see the Reformed Church actively engaged with Scripture, in order to experience the transforming power of God’s Word. In the life of the General Synod and through its work, individuals, congregations, and the whole of the church will be invited to question and examine how this active engagement with Scripture can be realized in every area of their individual and collective lives (MGS 1997, p. 139).
The word “engagement” was purposefully chosen, to challenge Christians to move beyond simply acquiring more biblical knowledge to asking how Scripture engages their life, work, and ministry. The task group that planned this initiative passionately believed that such an “engagement” with Scripture could make all the difference in the world; the difference between stagnation and growth, between skepticism and faith. Toward that end it designed a full program aimed at providing both the inspiration and resources necessary for individuals and congregations to embark on a program of biblical engagement and dialogue. Turning Points: The Dangerous, Liberating, Holy, Transforming, Everyday Stories of People Engaging the Bible includes a broadcast quality video emphasizing the transforming power of Scripture that can come to individuals and congregations who seek it; and a complete resource book, with both articles and direct resource listings, that provides congregations and teachers with information necessary to match the ethos and need of a particular congregation with an appropriate resource.

Out of this initiative, about one hundred RCA congregations named 1998 the “Year of the Bible,” using a resource of that same name to provide its members a guided reading through the entire text of the Scriptures. The Office for Education supported those congregations with networking and periodic communications. That knowledge and practice have now been collected in a form that will be of great assistance to any congregation seeking its own active engagement with Scripture. This effort is a prime example of religious education for the new millennium: congregations helping congregations through the facilitation of the denomination.

Other key initiatives and resources for adults continue to focus primarily on training for leadership and spiritual growth. Branches on the Vine, a self-contained consistory training workshop, continues to be a widely accepted and used resource. The workshop combines the previously published books, Ministry of the Deacon, by Betty Voskuil, and Ministry of the Elder, by the Rev. Robert A. White, and the video, As One Who Serves, with a newly created workshop structure for training elders and deacons together. The package is available through the RCA Distribution Center. The Office of Christian Education has also entered into partnership with RCA camps and conference centers around the themes of spiritual formation and spiritual retreats, an initiative led by the Rev. Tom Schwanda, who provides leadership in spiritual formation for the RCA on a twenty-five-day-per-year contract. The office is exploring new means to encourage and foster additional training opportunities and experiences for lay leaders, in keeping with its commitment of for-life-for-all faith.

Leader Support for Education

A key to any effective educational program, whether at the local, regional, or denominational level, is a provision for first identifying those gifted for educational ministry and then providing training and leadership resources that allow those gifts to grow, blossom, and be appreciated in the church.

The Office of Christian Education and the regional synods have joined together in providing a network of regionally based, trained consultants available to all RCA congregations. Consultants can provide congregations with assistance on a number of levels, including teacher training, programming, educational workshops, and even redesigning the educational ministry. Consultants can most easily be contacted through the education ministry of the regional synods or by calling the Office of Christian Education, (800) 968-3943.

One key component in all ongoing educational initiatives from the Office of Christian Education is the Council for Christian Education. The council meets three times annually, paid for with a shared funding agreement between the denomination and regional synods, and operates under the umbrella of a document approved in 1995 outlining eight assumptions about the joint work of the denominational education office and regional synod education personnel. The Council for Christian Education continues to play a central role in the future
development of RCA educational philosophy and in the development or evaluation of educational resources. The council is the embodiment of a commitment 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.

Certification

The work of the Office of Christian Education has increasingly involved identifying means for the care and nurture of those persons providing leadership for Christian education in RCA congregations. The process of certification of Christian educators by the classis as associates in ministry has become one way by which the whole church has recognized the importance both of the ministry of Christian education and of those persons who are gifted and trained to provide leadership in this area. A “grandparent clause” in the certification process allowed many Christian educators certified under previous plans in the Reformed Church to become certified as associates in ministry under this new process and to take up their important role not only in churches but also in the classis. A revised certification handbook will continue to provide guidance for this important process.

While the Office of Christian Education rejoices in this new visibility for these associates in ministry, it also acknowledges that the certification process has raised new issues and concerns for all those involved, both those being certified and the classes doing the certification. The General Synod actions establishing the certification process (MGS 1992, pp. 369-78; MGS 1993, R-18 and R-19, p. 282; and MGS 1994, pp. 50-51) did not address important polity issues regarding associates in ministry. These issues include 1) the ongoing relationship of associates in ministry to the classis, 2) the ongoing relationship of an associate in ministry to the board of elders and consistory in the congregation in which he or she serves, and 3) the accountability of associates in ministry to the classis and/or the board of elders. In not addressing these issues the Reformed Church has created a situation in which Christian educators are being asked to meet appropriate requirements for certification; but once those requirements are met, they find little clarity or practical benefit from that work.

These questions surrounding certification of associates in ministry reflect a broader challenge for the church in these times: How do we acknowledge, honor, and involve in the life of the church those laypersons who have accepted a call from God to ministry lived out in places other than an ordained office of the church? Increasingly, leadership for ministry in RCA congregations is being provided by nonordained persons who are both skilled and called by God and who want to be actively involved not only in that local ministry but in visioning what the church can be for the future. Is there a place for those people in our polity? Are associates in ministry the right place?

In addition to these questions that have arisen out of the practice of the church, the 1997 General Synod, acting on an overture from the Classis of Orange, adopted the following recommendation:

To instruct Congregational Services to prepare criteria for Associates in Ministry to be certified in areas such as administration, visitation, church music, preaching, outreach/evangelism, and other areas of ministry that can be carried out by capable and trained laity under proper guidance and supervision; and further,

to report these criteria to the 1998 General Synod (MGS 1997, R-21, p. 353).

While the Office of Christian Education affirms the intent of the recommendation and those persons carrying out these crucial ministries in our congregations, it likewise acknowledges that the questions raised by the current efforts to certify Christian educators suggests the need
for some careful consideration of the broader polity questions prior to the formulation of any new criteria in other areas. To that end, the General Synod Council presents the following recommendation to the General Synod for its consideration and action:

➤ The advisory committee recommended to amend R-32 as follows (additions are underlined):

R-32
To instruct the Commission on Church Order, in consultation with the General Synod Council's Congregational Services Committee and with CERCA (Christian Educators, Reformed Church in America), to study the definition, role, and accountability of associates in ministry within Reformed Church polity and to propose changes to the Book of Church Order consistent with its findings, for report to the 2000 General Synod. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

Reason: This additional consultation was called for in the overtures from the Classes of North Grand Rapids and Canadian Prairies; adding it here brings the overtures and R-32 into agreement.

More and more, leadership for ministry in local congregations will be provided by skilled, nonordained persons called by God and empowered by the Holy Spirit. It is imperative that the church find ways to ensure their competence and then take advantage of their gifts as it seeks its collective future. The Office of Christian Education will continue to advocate for these persons and their involvement in the life of the whole church.

Funding

The Office of Christian Education is most appreciative for the generosity of RCA congregations, both individually and through their classes, in providing crucial funding for the work of the office. The majority of staff and office costs of the work is covered by assessments. In 1999 about $2.85 of the General Synod Council assessment is designated for Congregational Services, which includes the Office of Christian Education. This fundamental support forms the foundation for all that it does.

But assessments form only part of the funding picture. A significant portion of funds for staff costs, as well as the funds for all programming, resource development, training, and joint educational planning, must come from other sources. Income from denominational investments provides some of that revenue; so do fees for some of the programs the office sponsors. Finally, a number of churches generously support the ministry of Christian education. In 1997 Congregational Services received about $60,000 in voluntary contributions from congregations and individuals. While thanks have been expressed directly for this generosity, the Office of Christian Education wishes publicly to thank again those churches and individuals who sponsor the work of education in the RCA. Without them, many essential initiatives could not be undertaken. Thank you.

That's not to say that funding is, or even historically has been, flush for RCA ministries in Christian education and discipleship. The staff continues to face acute challenges on how Congregational Services will fund its work, even as direct General Synod mandates remain unaccomplished or underaccomplished. In recent years General Synod has asked the Office of Christian Education to focus more attention on family ministry, ministry with older adults, and programs for equipping the laity, to name three. Yet while ideas abound, the funding for implementation remains problematic. The General Synod Council's Congregational Services Committee continues to creatively examine new ways by which the Reformed Church can affirm and fund its ministries in Christian education in a fair and long-term manner.
General Synod Referrals

In recent years a number of General Synod recommendations have encouraged Congregational Services to continue to strengthen its commitment to provide leadership and resources for equipping the laity in ministry, in light of the RCA's Statement of Mission and Vision. The General Synod Council has affirmed that direction in the development of its own goals statements for the work of staff. The Office of Christian Education continues to seriously focus its attention on identifying unique means and resources by which it can enable the congregational empowerment of ministry by persons not ordained to an office of the church.

Specifically, the 1997 General Synod, acting on the report of the general secretary, adopted the following recommendation:

To instruct Congregational Services, in consultation with regional synods and classes, to develop and begin implementing a specific plan for continuing to raise the visibility of the ministry of the laity at all levels of the church, including a means for gathering and communicating to local congregations key resources or processes that can identify and evoke the gifts of laity; and further,

to instruct Congregational Services to include in this plan a proposal and models for congregationally and geographically based celebrations of the gifts of the laity, to be held in the year 2000; and further,

to instruct Congregational Services to include this plan in its report to the 1998 General Synod (MGS 1997, R-9, p. 145).

The plan approved by the General Synod Council to hold a mission convocation in 2000 compelled the Office of Christian Education to be a participant in that event, based on its commitment to the concept of Mission Is One. To hold additional events in that same time period seems neither prudent from the standpoint of cooperation or stewardship. In order not to lose the intent and focus of the recommendation, however, the General Synod Council took an action designating the program year 2001-2002 as Year for Education. The Office of Christian Education will incorporate an emphasis on laity into a major church-wide effort of celebration and challenge.

The 1998 General Synod voted:

To instruct this General Synod to refrain from deliberative debate and policy decisions specifically relating to homosexuality, as these matters have already been thoroughly addressed by the previous synods, and to urge this same action upon the 1999 and 2000 General Synods; and further,

To request all commissions, agencies, assemblies, and institutions related to the General Synod to refrain from taking any action that would be in obvious contradiction of our stated positions, as expressed especially in 1978, 1979, 1990, and 1994; and further,

To instruct the General Synod Council, through its Congregational Services Committee, to help enable congregations and classes to enter a process of intentional discernment over the next two years concerning the pastoral challenges raised by the existence of persons of homosexual orientation within our churches and within the communities in which we are called to minister, utilizing the study guide and other resources, in order to fulfill the actions called for on this matter by the 1994 General Synod (MGS 1998, R-1, p. 511).
That action is consistent with previous actions of the General Synod, including the following action taken by the 1995 General Synod \textit{\textit{(MGS 1995, R-5, p. 388)}}:

To instruct the Congregational Services Unit though its Office of Christian 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.

A study guide, \textit{Homosexuality: Seeking the Guidance of the Church}, based on the prospectus of the commission and including a full appendix of foundational papers on the issue of homosexuality approved by the General Synod, was completed early in 1997 and is currently available through the RCA Distribution Center. In addition, the Office of Christian Education has sought to communicate with all RCA congregations and individuals who have ordered the study guide, to ascertain methods and models by which dialogue and discernment are happening in the church around this issue. While the Office of Christian Education understands that those actions do not adequately fulfill the 1998 General Synod request, it also recognizes that the continued volatility of this issue in society and the church suggests a careful approach to further study, consistent with the actions of the Reformed Church at past General Synods. The office welcomes the continued suggestions of congregations and classes on how it can best aid the church in fruitful and charitable dialogue around this issue.

The 1998 General Synod voted:

To instruct the Office of Christian Education and Faith Development to produce the Report of the Task Force for Calling Forth Leaders to Serve as Missionary Pastors in the Twenty-First Century in booklet form and distribute it to all RCA congregations, camps and conference centers, and campus ministries \textit{\textit{(MGS 1998, R-1, p. 195)}}.

To instruct the Office of Christian Education and Youth Ministry to gather responses from RCA congregations to the report of the task force, including means by which congregations have implemented an intentional effort to identify young people whom God is calling into ministry, and subsequently to affirm that calling by encouraging them to enter into ministry; and further,

\begin{itemize}
  \item to instruct the Office of Christian Education and Youth Ministry to provide the results of its findings to all RCA congregations, camps and conference centers, and campus ministries in order to further promote intentional efforts to identify those young people whom God is calling into ministry with the subsequent affirmations described above \textit{\textit{(MGS 1998, R-2, p. 196)}}.
\end{itemize}

The paper approved by the 1998 synod was mailed to each congregation and was accompanied by an evaluation/response form by which congregations could communicate back to the office. Throughout 1999 the Office of Christian Education will be following up with congregations on how the paper was used and on innovative actions being used in congregations. A follow-up report will be presented to the General Synod Council with further results and actions; those results and actions will be distributed according to the instructions in the second recommendation.

The 1998 General Synod voted:

To instruct the General Synod Council through its Office of Congregational Services to explore ways to include the significant contributions of women throughout the history of the RCA in resources developed for Christian education for all age groups; and further,
to urge New Brunswick Theological Seminary and Western Theological Seminary, when planning their survey of RCA history courses, to include the important contributions made by women; and further,

to urge all classes to include questions pertaining to the history of women in leadership in the RCA in the examinations of students under care (MGS 1998, R-10, p. 351).

The Office of Christian Education continues to work with Reformed Church Women’s Ministries and other relevant organizations to fulfill this ongoing task. It will also seek a more active relationship with the Commission for Women.

Cooperative Efforts

“Mission Is One,” the slogan reads. Only it is not merely a slogan nor are its words merely lip service. The Office of Christian Education, as part of Congregational Services, is committed to continued joint efforts with other units, agencies, and institutions under the RCA’s Statement of Mission and Vision. In particular, it will continue to explore with Evangelism and Church Development Services how that body’s statement, “Faithful Witnesses,” can become a wholistic vision for both units as they seek to enable the church to make disciples able to witness to Jesus Christ in the world.

REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF DIACONAL MINISTRIES

The diaconal ministries program continues to equip deacons to become leaders in ministries of mercy, service, and outreach. Deacons are reclaiming the biblical role of the servant as modeled by Jesus Christ who was among us “as one who serves” (Luke 22:27b). They are recapturing the vision which John Calvin cast for them when he set aside four offices to help lead God’s people in ministry. Deacons are taking their place alongside elders, ministers of Word and sacrament, and professors of theology. They are increasingly being selected more for ministry than for management, more because of their gifts in mercy, service, and outreach.

The Grand Rapids Deacons’ Coordinating Center in Michigan is flourishing with a firmly planted board, director, and agenda. It continues to seek ways to undergird the work and ministry of deacons in North and South Grand Rapids Classes. Holland Classis is exploring the possibility of a similar assembly of deacons.

An interchange between Reformed Church in America deacons and deacons from the National Presbyterian Church of Chiapas has added a rich component to the diaconal ministries program. Representatives from five regional synods accompanied the Rev. Roger De Young, supervisor of RCA mission programs in Mexico and Venezuela, and Betty Voskuil, RCA coordinator for diaconal ministries, to Chiapas from February 22 to March 1, 1999. The trip was organized by the Rev. Vernon and Carla Sterk, RCA missionaries to Chiapas. The RCA diaconal pilgrims traveled across the state of Chiapas, engaging deacons in five presbyteries in dialogue and an exchange of ideas and experiences. Much was learned, including the fact that deacons in Chiapas do a lot more preaching and leading of worship than RCA deacons. Chiapan deacons care for widows, orphans, the imprisoned, and those who are sick. They explained that stewardship concerns included material wealth as well as care for creation. Since most people give their “first fruits” to God, they are usually able to meet congregational needs except in dire circumstances.

The deacon exchange was completed with a return visit of Chiapan deacons, who attended the annual diaconal gathering on April 23-25, 1999, at the Gull Lake Bible Conference Center in Hickory Corners, Michigan. Deacons look forward to future exchanges such as this one to add breadth and depth to their understanding of what it means to be a deacon. Several training sessions have been held in different classes and regional synods.
Report of the Task Force on Consistories

"When one becomes an elder or deacon, the first question should be, 'Are you willing to grow in Christ? Then, out of that commitment, can you discern where God is calling your congregation in mission and ministry?'" (MGS 1997, p. 50).

With those questions, RCA general secretary Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, quoting a regional synod staff member, put before the 1997 General Synod an issue he had identified in conversations with classes across the denomination: the need for flexibility in how the RCA structures its consistories, in order to foster a consistory's ability to provide leadership in mission and ministry. In response to a proposal from the general secretary, the 1997 General Synod adopted the following recommendation:

To instruct the moderator of the General Synod Council, in consultation with the general secretary, to appoint an ad hoc committee of no more than eight persons, including representatives of the Commission on Theology and the Commission on Church Order, and other ministers, elders, and deacons, to study those sections of the Book of Church Order (BCO) dealing with the election, tasks, and responsibilities of consistories in light of the Reformed understanding of the role of elders and deacons and the consistory's calling to give spiritual leadership in the ministry and mission of congregations, for report to the 1999 General Synod (MGS 1997, R-6, p. 406).

Due to the large number of task forces formed by the 1997 General Synod, and both the human and financial costs of carrying out all the assignments, the committee called for by the General Synod was named but not formally constituted in the year leading up to the 1998 General Synod. At that meeting, the Rev. Dr. Charles Van Engen, synod president, again raised the issue of consistories and their ability to provide leadership in living out the RCA's new Statement of Mission and Vision. "Given our wide diversity of contexts and styles around the RCA," Van Engen told the synod in his president's address, "how can we help one another to a new understanding from a missional standpoint of the ministry of our consistories? We need a group of knowledgeable, visionary, and pastoral people to think about this for a couple of years and to pray, listen, think, strategize, and write about it to help us all" (MGS 1998, p. 39).

In response to a proposal from the president, and cognizant of the task force already created by the 1997 Synod, the 1998 General Synod adopted the following recommendation:

To instruct the General Synod Council to refer to the ad hoc committee to review the Book of Church Order (for the purpose of suggesting possible revisions "that will allow greater flexibility in the method of consistory selection and will emphasize the
consistory's calling to give spiritual leadership in the ministry and mission of congregations" —MGS 1997, P-3, p. 50) the responsibility to also consider how the Reformed Church in America can develop a new understanding of the purpose, makeup, and work of its consistories so that consistories may begin to see themselves and to function as agents of mission and ministry in their contexts, for an initial report to the 1999 General Synod and a final report to the General Synod of 2000; and further.

to instruct the General Synod Council to assure that the membership of the ad hoc committee includes at least one long-term cross-cultural missionary, two ministers of Word and sacrament, three elders, and three deacons, with the group to include at least four women (MGS 1998, R-3, pp. 511-512).

The General Synod Council (GSC) retained those persons appointed to the original task force who remained willing to serve, then added additional persons in order to fulfill the requirements of the 1998 synod recommendation. GSC appointed the following persons to the task force: the Rev. Wesley Kiel, Carol Myers, Russell Paarlberg, the Rev. Dr. Paul Fries, Douglas Anderson, Mary Linge, Brad Lambert, Mary Clark, and Helen Mulder Wierenga. Following his appointment, Douglas Anderson withdrew from the committee. The Rev. Amy Jo Van Es Hawley was appointed in his place. The Revs. Roger De Young and Jeff Japinga were appointed to staff the task force.

The task force met twice prior to the 1999 General Synod: January 21-22, 1999, and March 16-17, 1999. Both meetings were held at the RCA regional office at the Lutheran Center in Chicago, Illinois. The Rev. Wesley Kiel was named by the task force as its chairperson.

The work of the task force in its first year centered around the identification of context, issues, and possible directions related to its two synod mandates. The task force quickly identified that the task of identifying possible changes to the Book of Church Order was different and separate from identifying possible models for selection, training, and empowerment of consistories for mission and ministry. The task force also wrestled with the understandings of church from which its mandate arose, what those understandings implied for the work of elders and deacons, and how those understandings matched up with the Reformed view of the leadership of elders, deacons, and ministers of Word and sacrament. In addition, the task force spent significant time identifying the means by which it could listen to the church at large in order to identify those consistories already functioning well "as agents of mission and ministry in their contexts," as named in the General Synod action, so that it might allow those congregations and consistories to be instructive to the whole church. Finally, the task force tried to identify those resources in the Reformed Church that were already available and effective in defining roles and responsibilities for consistories, including but not limited to the excellent diaconal program and its accompanying resources.

The 1998 General Synod asked the task force only for an interim report to the 1999 synod, with a final report to the 2000 synod. In keeping with that action, the task force has no recommendations to make to this General Synod. It will continue its work with the following priorities:

Prior to its next meeting, scheduled for fall 1999, the task force will initiate direct contact with individual consistories in order to gather firsthand information and models on effective and faithful means by which consistories are functioning well "as agents of mission and ministry in their contexts." Those "contact congregations" will be identified through a number of means, including recommendations from stated clerks of classes, from denominational and regional staff, and from pastors and lay leaders of congregations. The task force will intentionally seek a wide diversity of congregations, taking into account issues of size of congregation (large/middle-size/small), demographics (urban/rural/suburban; white-collar/blue-collar; East/Midwest/West); and ethnic background.
(focusing on the different traditions out of which many RCA racial/ethnic congregations operate). These contacts will come both by mail and by telephone. The information will be used to form the foundation of the task force's report to the 2000 General Synod.

The task force will continue to challenge and educate itself concerning theological understandings of church and ministry that can inform its work. Specifically, it has asked the Rev. Paul Fries to prepare a paper on the office of elder, to complement studies already available on the office of deacon and to examine how the offices might work in a spirit of complementarity in leading congregations. The task force will review that paper, which has a working title of “Faithful Consistory: Office and Mission” at its fall 1999 meeting.

The task force will seek additional demographic and research data on local church leadership issues from two of its partner churches in the Formula of Agreement—the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America—which maintain permanent research offices.

The task force will identify possible changes in or amendments to the Book of Church Order, based on its findings in the areas identified in this report. The task force at this time is unable to say with certainty whether or not any changes in the BCO are necessary for consistories to function well “as agents of mission and ministry in their contexts.”

In all its work, the task force has been mindful of the context for its work: “to equip congregations for ministry” (RCA Statement of Mission and Vision). It is committed to doing so in a way that reflects the theological integrity of the RCA and the committed desire of the General Synod to empower and enable consistories, as reflected in the reports both of the general secretary in 1997 and the president of General Synod in 1998.

**From the Report of the African-American Council**

**R-16** (p. 76) was referred to the Advisory Committee on Christian Education and Discipleship.

**R-16**

To encourage Congregational Services, in cooperation with the Urban Ministry Team, to add to the educational resources of the denomination, study guides, videos, websites, and published materials that reflect the cultural backgrounds of people living in urban areas; and further,

> to call on regional synods and classes to work in cooperation with local churches and encourage them to use these resources.

(ADOPTED)

**From the Report of the President**

**P-2** (p. 38) was referred to the Advisory Committee on Christian Education and Discipleship.

The advisory committee recommended:

**R-33**

To instruct the General Synod Council, through its Congregational Services Committee and staff team, to explore the feasibility of and need for establishing a world outreach training team for the Children and Worship ministry, taking into consideration the funding requirements for this venture; and further,
to encourage the Congregational Services Committee and staff, in concert with the Mission Services Committee and staff team, to carry out this assignment in partnership with churches in other parts of the world and other appropriate resources; and further,

to instruct the Congregational Services Committee to report to the General Synod Council on this matter by April 2000. (ADOPTED)

P-8 (p. 42) was referred to the Advisory Committee on Christian Education and Discipleship.

The committee recommended no action on P-8.

Reasons:

1. The instructions and requests of the 1998 General Synod (MGS 1998, R-1, p. 511) have not been fully carried out; specifically, there has not been sufficient time to carry out the spirit of part three of the 1998 action of the General Synod's instruction: to instruct the General Synod Council, through its Congregational Services Committee, to help enable congregations and classes to enter a process of intentional discernment over the next two years concerning the pastoral challenges raised by the existence of persons of homosexual orientation within our churches and within the communities in which we are called to minister, utilizing the study guide and other resources, in order to fulfill the actions called for on this matter by the 1994 General Synod.

2. Some regions and classes of the church have already held such times of study.

3. Resources are already available for use in churches.

No action was taken on P-8.

Overture

Study Role of Associates in Ministry

1. The Classis of Canadian Prairies and the Classis of North Grand Rapids overture the General Synod to instruct the Commission on Church Order, in consultation with the General Synod Council's Congregational Services Committee and CERCA (Christian Educators, Reformed Church in America), to study the definition and role of Associates in Ministry within Reformed Church polity and to propose changes to the Book of Church Order consistent with its findings, for report to the General Synod 2000.

Reasons:

1. While providing an orderly and consistent practice for the certification of Associates in Ministry, the General Synod action establishing the plan for certifying Associates in Ministry (MGS 1993, R-18 and R-19, p. 282; and MGS 1994, pp. 50-51) did not address important polity issues including:
a. The ongoing role and function of Associates in Ministry in the classis following certification, including rights and responsibilities connected to voting privileges.

b. The ongoing relationship of the Associate in Ministry to the board of elders and to the consistory of the congregations in which he or she serves, including membership status and accountability.

c. The accountability of an Associate in Ministry to the classis and/or the board of elders of the congregation in which he/she serves in matters of discipline.

d. The need for consistent instructions to the classes, consistories, and candidates within the Book of Church Order.

2. In approving the provisions and requirements for Associates in Ministry under the supervision of the classis, and in lodging ongoing pastoral care and supervision of Associates in Ministry with classis, the church also has an obligation to define the role, responsibility, and place in the governing structure of the church for Associates in Ministry.

3. The process for certification of Associates in Ministry also includes provisions for the certification of Minister of Christian Education, a term and function also unaddressed by the Book of Church Order.

➢ The advisory committee recommended:

R-34
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The substance of the overture was dealt with in R-32, p. 136.
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 met twice: on October 9, 1998, at Northwestern College in Orange City, Iowa, and on March 19, 1999, at New Brunswick Theological Seminary in New Brunswick, New Jersey.

HISTORICAL DIRECTORY 2000

At its October 1997 meeting the commission approved the publication in the year 2000 of a Historical Directory of the Reformed Church in America (1628-2000). This directory will include names of all RCA ordained ministers, career missionaries and staff, and congregations from the birth of the denomination in 1628 through January 1, 2000. This directory edition will serve as a landmark or baseline, to which future electronically published editions will be added as supplements.

The proposed 2000 General Synod operational budget includes $7,500 to be allocated to the production cost of the directory. It is anticipated that the remaining cost of publication for this directory will be recovered from sales.

NEW PUBLICATIONS IN 1999

The commission is active in publishing the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America under the general editorship of the Rev. Donald Bruggink. Thirty volumes have appeared since the inception of the series in 1968.

The commission is pleased to announce the publication of two new volumes to be added to the series this year. They are Family Quarrels and Patterns and Portraits.

FUTURE PUBLICATIONS

The commission approved future publication of the following: 1) the work and contributions of women in the RCA, 2) the Book of Church Order of the RCA, 3) turning points in nineteenth-century Dutch Reformed immigrant churches, 4) the sermons of Howard G. Hageman, 5) the Digest and Index of General Synod Legislation on CD-ROM, 6) Travels of an American Girl, the diary of a young RCA girl touring the mission field, and 7) the history of the American mission in India. Publication dates for these volumes are still to be determined.

The commission wants to take notice of the publication of Santa and Pete (Simon and Schuster) by one of its members, Christopher Moore. The volume takes note of Reformed Church roots in relation to the broader community in light of the RCA Statement of Mission and Vision.

The commission continues to review manuscripts for possible future publication in the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America. The commission encourages persons who are contemplating RCA research projects to contact the commission and ascertain how the commission may offer assistance.
REPORT OF THE RCA ARCHIVES AND OFFICE OF HISTORICAL SERVICES

Introduction

The archival task in the Reformed Church in America is to preserve the essential documentation of the life and ministry of the church. This documentation usually takes the form of written records (handwritten, typewritten, and computer generated), but may also include audio, video, pictorial, and oral testimonies. The goal is to document the “five Ws” of history: What happened? When did it happen? Who did it? Where did it happen? Why did it happen?

The usual manner in which such documentation is generated is through the preservation of regular correspondence about the daily life and work of the church—the regular reports, letters, minutes, agenda documents, and other such material. These are impartial witnesses to the work and ministry, designed to provide the information needed as the work progresses.

Responsibilities

The Office of Historical Services is responsible for the ministry of memory and the corresponding management of the Reformed Church in America Archives. The Reformed Church Archives has been located in the Gardner A. Sage Library at New Brunswick Theological Seminary for more than 120 years and is a staff function of the General Synod Council. The office provides many historical services to staff, agencies, and congregations throughout the denomination. Services offered include:

1. Collecting, arranging, preserving, and making available the records of the denomination, which includes:
   a. Appraising and transporting records from congregations and denominational offices.
   b. Arranging, describing, and making available the records which are open to public research use.
   c. Working with and assisting a wide range of research workers who are engaged in historical study of either the RCA or our mission areas.
   d. Assisting staff in regard to the preservation of their records.

2. Updating, researching, and publishing the Historical Directory of the Reformed Church in America.

3. Updating, researching, and publishing the Digest and Index of General Synod Legislation.

4. Providing historical background studies for staff, agencies, and congregations as needed.

5. Managing the RCA Historical Society and publishing Historical Highlights and the RCA Historical Society Occasional Paper series.

6. Providing assistance and workshops for congregations in writing congregational histories, celebrating anniversaries, and preserving congregational records.
7. Providing assistance to New Brunswick Seminary by serving on the committees for the Albert A. Smith Fellowship and the Standing Seminar on RCA History.

Reference Assistance

Much of the work of the office is dictated by requests for assistance and reference needs which come into the office on a daily basis. During the past year, the archivist was involved in researching over three hundred requests, which included 176 requests for historical background assistance on the life and ministry of the RCA and 130 requests for genealogical information. The nature of this reference work ranges from the preparation of substantial research papers for denominational staff and agencies to biographical information on RCA ministers. In addition, seventy-one individuals visited the archives to engage in research on fifty-nine days during the past year. The reference use of the archives in 1998 was at its highest since the program was established in 1978.

Publications

The archivist has also continued work on the update to the *Digest and Index of General Synod Minutes*. The Commission on History has an anticipated publication date in 2000 for a volume covering the period from 1978 through 1999. The archivist also collects data and edits the *Historical Directory of the Reformed Church in America*, which is also scheduled for publication in the year 2000.

The Office of Historical Services engages in publishing a variety of historical and resource materials. Historical resources are made available in print, on disk, via e-mail, and through the RCA’s website. Resources will become increasingly available in machine-readable formats.

Preservation of Records

The primary task of the office remains the preservation of important documentation of the RCA. A regional center in Canada at Camp Shalom has been established and training is provided by the RCA archivist. This center will be responsible for records of the Reformed Church in Canada and is established under the authority of the denominational archives.

The archivist has also been working extensively with three congregations as they seek to preserve and use their documentary heritage through the establishment of a congregational archives center. This year archival work started at Bronxville Reformed Church in Bronxville, New York, Collegiate Church in New York City, and Old Bergen Church in Jersey City, New Jersey. The archivist assists and advises these congregations as they begin to care properly for their important records and to use actively their rich heritage in their current ministries.

Another major undertaking this year is the establishment of the Gerald and Jeanne De Jong Internship in the Reformed Church in America Archives. This internship is a cooperative effort between the RCA Archives, Northwestern College, and New Brunswick Theological Seminary. A student will work for the spring semester in the denomination’s archives each year, take a reading course in RCA history with the president of New Brunswick Seminary, and audit a course in archival administration at the School of Communication, Information, and Library Studies at Rutgers University. The first intern, Erica McLaughlin, was appointed in October and worked in the archives from January to May 1999. The archives will be seeking contributions from individuals to underwrite the expenses of the internship.
Denominational Records

Records continue to be appraised and transferred to the archives on a regular basis. Among the records received during the last year were:

**Boards, Agencies, and Missions**

Arabian Mission. Copy of *Camera Studies in Iraq*, a printed photograph album, copyright by A. Kerim and Hasso Bros.

New Brunswick Theological Seminary. Records include agenda documents, reports, and a self-study report of the board of trustees from 1991 to 1997.


True Reformed Dutch Church. Collection of pamphlets, correspondence, and other papers regarding the split of the True Reformed Dutch Church from the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church in 1822.

**General Synod**

Index to the *Printed Minutes of General Synod from 1794 to 1826*, by Rev. Thomas M. Strong, New York: 1831

Office of the General Secretary. Chronological files of Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, covering the period from June 1994 through December 1995; and the Celebration of Full Communion service of worship, Rockefeller Chapel, University of Chicago, Sunday, October 4, 1998.

**General Synod Council**

Council for Pacific and Asian Ministries. Records of the secretary from 1978 to 1995 include minutes and agenda documents for the executive committee from 1989 to 1994; joint council meetings from 1978 to 1994; chronological files from 1989 to 1995; files on disbanded churches; and subject files on the work of the office and the RCA.

Financial Services. Closed loan files from the RCA fund executive’s office include closed loan files for the Board of Domestic Missions, Board of North American Missions, Trustees of the General Program Council, General Synod Council, the Extension Foundation, and the Building and Extension Fund.

Minister for Education and Faith Development. Records cover the period from 1983 to 1995 and relate to administrative council meetings, alcohol and substance abuse, Christian education, deacons in the RCA, educational consultants, ministries in Christian education of the National Council of Churches, and Presbyterian and Reformed Educational Ministries meetings, correspondence, and publications.

Mission Services. Subject files of the director of Mission Services, Richard Vander Voet, for the year 1994. Records include correspondence with RCA staff and missionaries relating to the administration of Mission Services.
Coordinator for RCA Volunteer Services. Records for mission programs in Appalachia and the Caribbean from 1989 to 1994. Records include application files for volunteers and sites, correspondence and subject files regarding Adult Voluntary Services, denominational staff relations, and educational institutions regarding recruitment, placement, and volunteer projects.

Records of the coordinator for mission, stewardship and the supervisor of RCA mission programs in the Middle East include travel plans for furloughing missionaries, classis mission festivals, correspondence with Mission Services staff and mission event planning.

Communication and Production Services. Display copies of mission resource packets for the General Program Council and the General Synod Council relating to the mission programs of the RCA include missionary and staff acquaintance sheets, maps, articles, and other resources useful to a congregation for the support of RCA missions.

TRAVARCA. Discontinued slide/tape presentations from the library include: An Appalachian Quilt: Ministries of the RCA; Rising to the Challenge: The Reformed Church in Mission in Aotearoa, New Zealand; America’s Indian Ministries in the RCA; New Life and Mission in Taiwan; Seeking the Ninety-nine in Japan: Student Ministries; Seeking the Ninety-nine in Japan: Pastoral Ministries; Beautiful Island: A Story of Christian Witness in Taiwan; Sam Zwemer Remembers (from O That Ishmael Might Live Before Thee); God's Children in Chiapas.

Regional Synod Records

Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantic. Minutes of the synod foundation from 1987 to 1991. The Synod Foundation was incorporated in 1987 for the purpose of aiding and assisting in the ministry and mission of the synod and to receive and hold the real estate and investment properties of the synod. Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantic from January 1991 to January 1993.

Classical Records

Florida Classis. Records of the stated clerk from 1980 to 1994 include church planning and development within the classis and the Regional Synod of Mid-America, minutes of meetings, blueprints of new church buildings, legal and administrative papers relating to church starts, and correspondence regarding church start pastors.

Minnesota Classis. Minutes of the classis from 1951 to 1995.

Orange Classis. Minutes of the Women’s Missionary Union from 1907 to 1934.

Passaic Valley Classis, Reformed Church Home Unit (formerly the Bethany Home Unit of Passaic Classis). Records from 1953 to 1998 include minutes of the unit meetings, lists of congregational representatives and societies, journals of disbursements and receipts, annual financial reports, and check registers.


Local Church Records

Pompton Plains, New Jersey, First Reformed Church. The congregation was organized in 1736. Records include miscellaneous pamphlets, books, photographs, and member directories.


Willow Grove, Pennsylvania, Willow Grove Reformed Church. The congregation was organized in 1806. Records include minutes of the consistory from 1985 to 1987.

Gifts

A Case Study in Organizational Change: The Reformed Church in America, 1962-1972, by Laurie Mol. Thesis presented to the graduate program of the School of Social Work at the State University of New York at Stony Brook (January 1973).

Donald Bosch. Copies of articles relating to the Reformed Church's mission to Arabia by Samuel Zwemer; copies of articles about James Cantine; and information regarding Thomas Valpy French.

Necrology

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date of Death</th>
<th>Age</th>
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<tr>
<td>John Moerman</td>
<td>March 28, 1998</td>
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<tr>
<td>Richard Groenhout, Jr.</td>
<td>April 10, 1998</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Blane</td>
<td>May 1, 1998</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theodore Oegema</td>
<td>May 4, 1998</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neva Vogelaar</td>
<td>May 18, 1998</td>
<td>67</td>
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<tr>
<td>James Boogerd</td>
<td>May 20, 1998</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Francis Pitcock</td>
<td>May 22, 1998</td>
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<td>Leroy Frank Evans, Sr.</td>
<td>May 30, 1998</td>
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<td>J. Robert Steegstra</td>
<td>May 31, 1998</td>
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<td>Sarah Ann Winter Zwemer</td>
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<td>June 22, 1998</td>
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<td>Carlo Lazzaro</td>
<td>July 10, 1998</td>
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<tr>
<td>Donald Dale Baker</td>
<td>August 4, 1998</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
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</table>
John Moerman was born at Schipluiden, in the Netherlands, on July 1, 1922. He studied at Hope College from 1953 to 1955. His theological education was completed at Western Theological Seminary in 1958.

John was licensed by the Classis of Lake Erie in 1958 and ordained by the Classis of Zeeland the same year. He began his ministry at First Reformed Church in Galt, Ontario, which he served from 1958 to 1961. He then served the following congregations: Emmanuel Community in Edmonton, Alberta, from 1961 to 1970; Monarch Reformed in Monarch, Alberta, from 1970 to 1976; Grace Community in Surrey, British Columbia, from 1978 to 1986; and (again) Emmanuel Community in Edmonton, Alberta, from 1986 until his retirement in 1988.

John died on March 28, 1998, of a massive heart attack as he worked on his farm. He was seventy-five years old.

Richard Groenhout, Jr.

Richard Groenhout, Jr., was born at Grand Rapids, Michigan, on April 27, 1938. He studied at Northwestern College and graduated in 1966. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1969.

Richard was licensed by the Classis of South Grand Rapids in 1969 and ordained by the Classis of California the same year. He started his ministry as assistant pastor in Artesia, California, in 1969. In 1970 he went to serve First Reformed Church in Hospers, Iowa, as pastor. He also served as missionary pastor to Tulare Community Church in Tulare, California, from 1973 to 1974 and as pastor of Matlock Reformed Church in Matlock, Iowa, from 1974 to 1977. He demitted the ministry in 1977 due to multiple sclerosis.

Richard died on April 10, 1998, at Grand Rapids, Michigan. He was fifty-nine years old.
James Blane

James Blane was born at Blantyre, Scotland, on May 16, 1920. He studied at Hope College and graduated in 1951. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1954.

James was licensed by the Classis of Bergen in 1954 and ordained by the Classis of Newark the same year. He began his ministry at First Reformed Church in East Orange, New Jersey, which he served from 1954 to 1956. He then pastored Flatbush Reformed Church in Saugerties, New York, from 1956 to 1961 and Reformed Church of South Bound Brook, New Jersey, from 1961 to 1971. He demitted the pastoral ministry in 1972. Until his death he conducted services at the Somerset County Jail in Somerville, New Jersey.

James died on May 1, 1998, in Somerville, New Jersey. He was seventy-seven years old.

Theodore R. Oegema

Theodore R. Oegema was born at Grand Rapids, Michigan, on September 2, 1918. He studied at Hope College and graduated in 1941. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1944. He also received a master's degree in religious education from the University of Michigan in 1946.

Ted was licensed by the Classis of Grand Rapids in 1944 and ordained by the Classis of Kalamazoo the same year. He began his ministry as pastor of Twin Lakes Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan, which he served from 1944 to 1949. He entered teaching as an instructor at Northwestern Junior College in 1949 and served until 1952. He taught at Christian schools in Muskegon, Michigan, from 1958 to 1975. He served as a representative for World Vision from 1975 until his retirement.

Ted died on May 4, 1998, at Muskegon, Michigan. He was eighty-nine years old.

Neva Vogelaar

Neva Vogelaar was born at Oskaloosa, Iowa, on February 1, 1931, and was a graduate of Central College.

Neva served with her husband, Harold, as a missionary in the Middle East from 1963 to 1988, serving in pastoral and educational ministries. Since 1990 the Vogelaars worked in an interfaith, cross-cultural ministry in Chicago, Illinois, in partnership with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Neva died on May 18, 1998, after suffering from Alzheimer's disease. She was sixty-seven years old.

James Sidney Boogerd

James Sidney Boogerd was born at Rock Valley, Iowa, on October 21, 1923. He began his undergraduate studies at Northwestern Junior College and completed them at Central College, from which he graduated in 1949. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1952.

James was licensed by the Classis of West Sioux in 1952 and ordained by the Classis of Germania the same year. He began his ministry at First Reformed in Monroe, South Dakota, which he served from 1952 to 1955; He then served the following congregations: Matlock Reformed in Matlock, Iowa, from 1955 to 1957; Grace Reformed in Corsica, South Dakota,

James died on May 20, 1998, at Sheldon, Iowa. He was seventy-five years old.

**Robert Francis Pitcock**

Robert Francis Pitcock was born on July 27, 1916, at Cincinnati, Ohio. He studied at the University of Cincinnati, from which he graduated in 1949. His theological education was received at the University of Chicago Divinity School, from which he graduated in 1951. He was licensed and ordained by the Baptist Church in 1951 and served First Baptist Church in Cordova, Illinois, from 1950 to 1958, and East End Baptist Church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, from 1958 to 1963. He transferred to the United Church of Christ and served St. Andrew's United Church of Christ in Bridgeville, Pennsylvania, from 1963 to 1967, and then Christ Congregational Church in Woodhaven, New York, from 1967 to 1988. While at that church he also served Forest Park Reformed Church in Woodhaven, New York, from 1971 until his retirement in 1988.

Bob died on May 22, 1998, at Queens, New York. He was eighty-one years old.

**Leroy Frank Evans, Sr.**

Leroy Frank Evans, Sr. was born at Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, on December 18, 1934. He studied at Baltimore College and took his theological training at Manhattan Bible Institute and the American Bible College. He was ordained by the National Baptist Church in 1973.

Leroy began his ministry as an assistant pastor at Brown Street Baptist Church in Brooklyn, New York, which he served from 1973 to 1975. He then served Mott Haven Church in the Bronx, New York, from 1975 to 1990.

Leroy died on May 30, 1998, at Mount Vernon, New York. He was sixty-three years old.

**J. Robert Steegstra**

J. Robert Steegstra was born at Grand Rapids, Michigan, on December 14, 1916. He began his undergraduate education at Grand Rapids Junior College and graduated from Calvin College in 1938. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1941.

He was licensed by the Classis of Grand Rapids in 1941 and ordained by the Classis of Kalamazoo the same year. His first pastorate was at Hopkins Community Reformed Church of Hopkins, Michigan, which he served from 1941 to 1946. He then served the following congregations: Bethel Reformed in Harvey, Illinois, from 1946 to 1955; Covenant Community in Muskegon Heights, Michigan, from 1955 to 1964; Faith Reformed in Pompano Beach, Florida, from 1964 to 1969; Standale Reformed in Grand Rapids, Michigan, from 1969 to 1976; and Bethany Reformed in Grand Rapids from 1977 until his retirement in 1984.

He died on May 31, 1998, at Grand Rapids, Michigan. He was eighty-one years old.

**Sara Anna Winter Zwemer**

Sara Anna Winter Zwemer was born at Manito, Illinois, on August 11, 1895. She received her undergraduate education at Hope College, from which she graduated in 1916. She studied at the Kennedy School of Missions during 1921 and 1922 and received a master of arts degree from the University of Chicago in 1942.
Sara left in 1923 with her husband, Theodore Zweimer, to serve in Punganur, India. Shortly after starting language study, her husband succumbed to an attack of typhoid fever, and her son was born two months later. Sara continued to serve at Kodakpanal Union Mission School and at Chittoor as headmistress of Sherman Christian Girls High School. She retired from mission service in 1961.

Sara died on June 19, 1998, at Pilgrim Place in Claremont, California. She was 102 years old.

**Anthony G. Van Zante**

Anthony G. Van Zante was born at Pella, Iowa, on May 22, 1903. He studied at Central College and graduated in 1925. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1929.

Tony was licensed by the Classis of Pella in 1929 and ordained by the Classis of Kalamazoo the same year. His first pastorate was at Trinity Reformed in Kalamazoo, Michigan, which he served from 1929 to 1942. He then served the following congregations: Hope Reformed in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, from 1942 to 1950; Third Reformed in Grand Rapids, Michigan, from 1950 to 1954; Hope Reformed in Spencer, Iowa, from 1954 to 1957; Bethel Reformed in Kalamazoo, Michigan, from 1957 to 1964; and Glen Lake Community in Cedar, Michigan, from 1964 to until his retirement in 1968. He served as minister of calling at Bayshore Gardens Community Church in Bradenton, Florida, from 1968 to 1990.

Tony died on June 22, 1998, at Shelbyville, Michigan. He was ninety-five years old.

**Carlo Lazzaro**

Carlo Lazzaro was born at Krebs, Oklahoma, on June 30, 1915. He studied at Wheaton College, from which he graduated in 1939. He undertook graduate studies and received a master of arts degree from Boston University in 1940. His theological education was received at Westminster Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1943.

Carlo was licensed and ordained by the Reformed Presbytery of Philadelphia in 1943. He pastored Bethany Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Passaic, New Jersey, from 1945 to 1947. He then served the following pastorates in the Reformed Church in America: Fultonville Reformed in Fultonville, New York, from 1948 to 1955; Nassau Reformed in Nassau, New York, from 1955 to 1986; and Linlithgo Reformed in Livingston, New York, from 1986 to 1995. During his ministry he also served as stated supply at Reformed Dutch Church in Schodack Landing, New York, from 1976 to 1983 and as a contract pastor from 1983 to 1984.

Carlo died on July 10, 1998, at Newton, New Jersey. He was eighty-three years old.

**Donald Dale Baker**

Donald Dale Baker was born at Luverne, Minnesota, on June 13, 1936. He studied at Northwestern Junior College from 1958 to 1959 and completed his undergraduate education at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1962. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1965.

Don was licensed by the Classis of Minnesota in 1965 and ordained by the Classis of Chicago the same year. He served the following pastorates: Newton Zion Reformed in Erie, Illinois, from 1965 to 1969; First Reformed in Platte, South Dakota, from 1969 to 1975; Chandler Reformed in Chandler, Minnesota, from 1975 to 1984; and Faith Community in Alexandria, Minnesota, from 1984 until his sudden death.

Don died on August 4, 1998, at Alexandria, Minnesota. He was sixty-two years old.
William John Haak

William John Haak was born at Sodus, New York, on November 5, 1919. He studied at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1947. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1950.

William was licensed by the Classis of Rochester in 1950 and ordained by the Classis of Grand Rapids the same year. His first pastorate was at First Reformed Church in Grant, Michigan, which he served from 1950 to 1954. He then served the following congregations: First Reformed in Sanborn, Iowa, from 1954 to 1966; Unity Reformed in Kentwood, Michigan, from 1966 to 1973; and Archer Reformed in Archer, Iowa, from 1973 until his retirement in 1982.

William died on August 24, 1998. He was eighty years old.

Willis Noomen Zenk

Willis Zenk was born on May 3, 1916, at Linton, North Dakota. He studied at Rutgers College, from which he graduated in 1939. He began his theological education at New Brunswick Theological Seminary that year and completed it at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1942. He undertook additional graduate study and received master's degrees from Tulsa University in 1955 and Washington State University in 1963.

Willis was licensed by the Classis of Illinois in 1942 and ordained by the Classis of Poughkeepsie the same year. He served the Reformed Church in Hyde Park, New York, from 1942 to 1944, and then served in missionary work among Native Americans with the Home Mission Council of North America from 1944 to 1954. After leaving mission work, Willis worked as a teacher in public schools from 1954 to 1976.

Willis died on September 24, 1998, at Kennewick, Washington. He was eighty-two years old.

Austin Atwood

Austin Atwood was born at Sparta, Wisconsin, on November 6, 1922. He studied at Seattle Pacific College, from which he graduated in 1949. He received his theological education at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1952.

Austin was licensed by the Classis of Cascades in 1952 and ordained by the Classis of Pleasant Prairie the same year. He pastored the following congregations: First Reformed in Bristow, Iowa, from 1952 to 1958; Hawarden Community in Hawarden, Iowa, from 1958 to 1962; and East Valley in Yakima, Washington, from 1963 to 1967. He also served as a chaplain in the United States Navy from 1962 to 1963.

Austin died on October 7, 1998, at Oak Harbor, Washington. He was seventy-six years old.

Johanna Gertrude De Vries

Johanna Gertrude De Vries was born at Hickman, Nebraska, on March 29, 1907. She studied at Central College and received her degree as a registered nurse from Presbyterian Hospital in Chicago, Illinois. She was the sister of Benjamin De Vries, also a missionary.

Johanna began her nursing career at Pine Mountain, Kentucky, then served as an instructor at the Presbyterian Hospital in Chicago before going to India as a missionary for the Reformed Church. She served as a career medical missionary in India from 1937 to 1951.

Johanna died on October 30, 1998, at Pella, Iowa. She was ninety-one years old.
Wendell Chino

Wendell Chino was born at Mescalero, New Mexico, on December 27, 1923. He studied at Central College, Cook Christian Training School, and Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1951.

Wendell was ordained by the Classis of New York in 1951 and then served as the missionary pastor of the Mescalero Church in Mescalero, New Mexico, until 1969. He left the pastoral ministry in 1972 to serve the Native American community in politics and was the president of the Mescalero Apache tribe for more than thirty years.

Wendell died on November 4, 1998, at Santa Monica, California. He was seventy-four years old.

William H. Coons

William H. Coons was born at Germantown, New York, on January 27, 1917. He studied at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1941. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1944.

William was licensed by the Classis of Hudson in 1944 and ordained by the Classis of Rensselaer the same year. He pastored the following congregations: First Reformed in Ghent, New York, from 1944 to 1946; New Concord Reformed in East Chatham, New York, from 1944 to 1946; Second Reformed in Coxsackie, New York, from 1946 to 1951; Niskayuna Reformed in Schenectady, New York, from 1951 to 1965; Hawthorne Reformed in Hawthorne, New York, from 1965 to 1977; and Cranesville Reformed in Amsterdam, New York, from 1977 until his retirement in 1979. He also served as the president of the Synod of Albany from 1955 to 1956.

William died on November 4, 1998, at Altamont, New York. He was eighty-one years old.

Gideon Wolbrink

Gideon Wolbrink was born at Stickney, South Dakota, on July 26, 1916. He began his studies at Southern Normal School in South Dakota in 1936, continued at Northwestern Junior College in 1939, and then completed his work at Central College, from which he graduated in 1949. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1949.

Gideon was licensed and ordained by the Classis of Dakota in 1949. He pastored the following congregations: First Reformed in Litchville and North Marion Reformed in Marion, North Dakota, from 1949 to 1957; Newton Zion Reformed in Erie, Illinois, from 1957 to 1963; and Wellsburg Reformed in Wellsburg, Iowa, from 1963 until his retirement in 1979.

Gideon died on November 24, 1998, at Wellsburg, Iowa. He was eighty-two years old.

Benjamin De Vries

Benjamin De Vries was born at Hickman, Nebraska, on May 2, 1900. He studied at Central College, from which he graduated in 1932. Central awarded him an honorary doctorate in 1966.
Benjamin began his mission work at Annville, Kentucky, in 1926. He then entered the mission field in India in 1928 and served until 1967. He was the brother of Gertrude De Vries, who also served in India.

Benjamin died on December 10, 1998, at Pella, Iowa. He was ninety-eight years old.

**Ralph Menning**

Ralph Menning was born at Westfield, North Dakota, on March 19, 1916. He studied at Central College, from which he graduated in 1938. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1941.

Ralph was licensed and ordained by the Classis of Pella in 1941. He pastored the following congregations: First Reformed in Sully, Iowa, from 1941 to 1943; Mayfair Community in Bellflower, California, from 1943 to 1948; First Reformed in Denver, Colorado, from 1948 to 1953; Central Park Reformed in Holland, Michigan, from 1953 to 1958; First Reformed in Midland Park, New Jersey, from 1958 to 1962; First Reformed in Grandville, Michigan, from 1962 to 1968; First Reformed in Fremont, Michigan, from 1968 to 1975; and Bussing Reformed in McKee, Kentucky, from 1975 to 1981.

Ralph died on December 11, 1998, at Pella, Iowa. He was eighty-two years old.

**Paul Tanis**

Paul Tanis was born at Holland, Michigan, on December 6, 1927. He studied at Central College, from which he graduated in 1950. His theological education was received at Western Theo logical Seminary, from which he graduated in 1953.

Paul was licensed and ordained by the Classis of Pella in 1953 and served as a missionary in Japan from 1953 to 1958. He then pastored the following congregations: Church of the Saviour in Rochester, Minnesota, from 1959 to 1963; Peace Reformed in Oak Harbor, Washington, from 1963 to 1969; Stout Reformed in Stout, Iowa, from 1969 to 1976; and Bethel Reformed in Sheldon, Iowa, from 1976 to 1984.

Paul died on December 13, 1998, at Pella, Iowa. He was seventy-one years old.

**Madeline Holmes**

Madeline A. Holmes was born at Grand Rapids, Michigan, on May 22, 1904. She received her undergraduate education at Maryville College, from which she graduated in 1924. She was awarded a master of arts degree from the University of Michigan. She also studied at Northwestern University in 1935 and again at the University of Michigan from 1945 to 1948.

Madeline began her career as a schoolteacher in Grand Rapids, Michigan. She became an RCA missionary in 1952 and served in Kuwait and Bahrain until her retirement in 1968.

Madeline died on December 22, 1998, at Holland, Michigan. She was ninety-four years old.

**M. Earl Van Leeuwen**

M. Earl Van Leeuwen was born at Holland, Michigan, on January 7, 1915. He studied at Bloomfield College, from which he graduated in 1938. He received his theological education at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1941.
Earl was licensed by the Classis of New Brunswick in 1941 and ordained by the Classis of Greene the same year. He pastored the following congregations: First Reformed in Athens, New York, from 1941 to 1944; Allwood Community in Clifton, New Jersey, from 1944 to 1956; Canajoharie Reformed in Canajoharie, New York, from 1956 to 1972; Second Reformed in Claverack, New York, from 1972 to 1980; and Livingston Memorial in Germantown, New York, from 1980 to 1995.

Earl died on December 25, 1998, at Linlithgo, New York. He was eighty-three years old.

**Willard G. Wullschleger**

Willard G. Wullschleger was born at Albany, New York, on October 5, 1904. He studied at Rutgers University, from which he graduated in 1926. His theological education was completed at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1929.

Willard was licensed and ordained by the Classis of Albany in 1929. His first pastorate was at the New Prospect Church and Graham’s Presbyterian Church, both in Pine Bush, New York, which he served from 1929 to 1939. He then served Clinton Avenue Reformed Church in Bergenfield, New Jersey, from 1939 until his retirement in 1969.

Willard died on January 2, 1999, at Jamesburg, New Jersey. He was ninety-four years old.

**Bruce Blythe Goodwin**

Bruce Blythe Goodwin was born at Cleveland, Ohio, on July 19, 1940. He studied at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1964. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1967.

Bruce was licensed by the Classis of Lake Erie in 1967 and ordained by the Classis of Schoharie the same year. He pastored the following congregations: First Reformed in Berne, New York, and Beaverdam Reformed in West Berne, New York, from 1967 to 1976; Lakeview Community in Rochester, New York, from 1976 to 1984; and Rea Avenue Reformed in Hawthorne, New Jersey, from 1984 until his death in 1999.

Bruce died on January 21, 1999, at Hawthorne, New Jersey. He was fifty-eight years old.

**Mary Geegh**

Mary Emma Geegh was born at Lancaster, Pennsylvania, on December 21, 1897. She received her undergraduate education at Hope College, from which she graduated in 1920.

Mary entered RCA mission service in India in 1924 and served there until her retirement in 1962. There she founded the Mother Geegh Nursery School, a haven for small children left on the streets while their parents were away.

Mary died on January 30, 1999, at Holland, Michigan. She was 101 years old.

**Bertram DeHeus Atwood**

Bertram DeHeus Atwood was born at Albany, New York, on June 7, 1913. He studied at Rutgers College, from which he graduated in 1934. He then studied at New College in Edinburgh, Scotland, and received his theological education at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1937. He continued his studies at Turingen, Germany, in 1938. He also received an honorary doctor of divinity degree from Alma College.
Bertram was licensed and ordained by the Classis of Albany in 1937. He began his ministry as associate pastor at First Church in Albany, New York, from 1938 to 1940. He then served the Church of the Covenant in Paterson, New Jersey, from 1940 to 1943, and First Reformed Church in Schenectady, New York, from 1943 to 1953. Bertram was dismissed to the Presbyterian Church in 1953. During his ministry he also served as an adjunct professor of homiletics at Princeton Theological Seminary.

Bertram died at Fort Myers, Florida, on February 7, 1999. He was eighty-four years old.

**Ruth Muyskens Van Engen**

Ruth Muyskens Van Engen was born at Alton, Iowa, on October 10, 1915. She began her undergraduate education at Northwestern Junior College and completed it at Central College, from which she graduated in 1940. She served as a pioneer missionary in Chiapas, Mexico, with her husband, Garold, from 1943 to 1978.

Ruth died on Ash Wednesday, February 17, 1999, at Orange City, Iowa. She was eighty-three years old.

**Harvey Staal**

Harvey Staal was born on January 17, 1922, at Grand Rapids, Michigan. He studied at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1943. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1946. He received a master of arts degree from the University of Michigan in 1946. He continued graduate study during his missionary career and received a Ph.D. from the University of Utah in 1968.

Harvey was licensed by the Classis of Grand Rapids in 1946 and ordained by the Classis of Rochester the same year. He served a pastorate at the Ontario Center Church in Webster, New York, from 1946 to 1949. Harvey then left to serve as a missionary in the Middle East, where he served until his retirement in 1987.

Harvey died on February 21, 1999, at Hudsonville, Michigan. He was seventy-seven years old.

**D. Ivan Dykstra**

D. Ivan Dykstra was born at Platte, South Dakota, on March 15, 1915. He studied at Northwestern Junior College from 1931 to 1933 and then completed his undergraduate education at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1935. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1938. He began his graduate study at Yale University in 1938 and received a Ph.D. in 1945.

D. Ivan was licensed by the Classis of East Sioux in 1938 and ordained by the Classis of Ulster in 1941. His first pastorate was at Clove Cottekill Church in Marbletown, New York, which he served from 1941 to 1943. He then served First Reformed Church in North Paterson, New Jersey (now Rae Avenue Reformed Church in Hawthorne, New Jersey), from 1943 to 1947. He continued his ministry at Hope College, where he taught from 1947 until his retirement in 1980.

D. Ivan died on February 28, 1999, at Wooster, Ohio. He was eighty-three years old.
Harry Lambert Brower

Harry Lambert Brower was born at Zeeland, Michigan, on January 6, 1906. He studied at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1928. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1931.

Harry was licensed by the Classis of Holland in 1931 and ordained by the Classis of Kalamazoo the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Nardin Park Reformed in Detroit, Michigan, from 1931 to 1935; Calvary Reformed in Grand Rapids, Michigan, from 1935 to 1941; Ebenezer Reformed in Morrison, Illinois, from 1941 to 1955; First Reformed in Sioux Center, Iowa, from 1955 to 1966; and Grace Reformed in Wyoming, Michigan, from 1966 until his retirement in 1972. He also served for two years as interim pastor at Palm Springs Community Church in Lake Worth, Florida, following his retirement.

Harry died on March 10, 1999, at Wyoming, Michigan. He was ninety-three years old.

William Rosenberg

William Rosenberg was born at Oregon, Illinois, on March 11, 1917. He studied at Central College, from which he graduated in 1939. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1942.

William was licensed by the Classis of Pleasant Prairie in 1942 and ordained by the Classis of Germany the same year. He pastored the following congregations: First Reformed in Everly, Iowa, from 1942 to 1946; First Reformed in Prairie City, Iowa, from 1946 to 1952; First Reformed in Waupun, Wisconsin, from 1952 to 1964; Community Reformed in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, from 1964 to 1969; and Orchard Hill Reformed in Cedar Falls, Iowa, from 1969 until his retirement in 1981.

William died on March 14, 1999, at Waterloo, Iowa. He was eighty-two years old.

Norman Edwin Thomas

Norman Edwin Thomas was born at Brooklyn, New York, on September 24, 1919. He studied at Rutgers College, from which he graduated in 1942. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1944. Norman was awarded an honorary doctor of divinity degree by Central College in 1962 and undertook additional graduate studies at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, from which he was awarded a master's degree in 1966.

Norman was licensed by the Classis of South Long Island in 1944 and ordained by the Classis of Montgomery the same year. He pastored the following congregations: St. John's Reformed in St. Johnsville, New York, from 1944 to 1947; Bellevue Reformed in Schenectady, New York, from 1947 to 1957; and First Church in Albany, New York, from 1957 to 1969. Norman served as a chaplain for the United States Army from 1951 to 1952 and as president of the General Synod from 1961 to 1962. He left the pastoral ministry to serve as dean of New Brunswick Theological Seminary from 1969 to 1973 and then as provost from 1973 to 1979. He returned to the pastoral ministry and served at Colonial Reformed Church in Bayside, New York, from 1979 until his retirement in 1985. Norman served on many committees of General Synod and was active in RCA ecumenical involvements.

Norman died on March 17, 1999, at Woodstock, Connecticut. He was seventy-nine years old.
Franklin John Hinkamp

Franklin John Hinkamp was born at Alto, Wisconsin, on December 12, 1903. He studied at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1926. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1919. Franklin was awarded an honorary doctorate by Hope College in 1970.

Franklin was licensed by the classis of Wisconsin in 1929 and ordained by the Classis of Montgomery in the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Florida Reformed in Minaville, New York, from 1929 to 1932; Niskayuna Reformed in Schenectady, New York, from 1932 to 1945; and the Reformed Church in Poughkeepsie, New York, from 1945 to 1970. He also served as the stated supply at First Reformed in New Hyde Park, New York, from 1970 to 1973 and as minister for promotion of residences for the elderly for the Synod of New York from 1970 to 1973. Franklin also served as president of the Synod of Albany in 1945 and of the Synod of New York in 1962, and as a senior pastor for the Board of Pensions in 1977.

Franklin died on April 9, 1999, at Holland, Michigan. He was ninety-five years old.

Emil Varga

Emil Varga was born at New Brunswick, New Jersey, on August 31, 1913. He studied at Rutgers University, from which he graduated in 1937. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1940.

Emil was licensed by the Classis of New Brunswick in 1940 and ordained by the Classis of Schenectady the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Princetown in Duanesburg, New York, from 1940 to 1944; and First Reformed in South River, New Jersey, from 1944 to 1980.

Emil died on April 14, 1999, at New Brunswick, New Jersey. He was eighty-five years old.

Report of the Editorial Council of the Church Herald

The Church Herald continues its mission to serve members of the Reformed Church in America. Currently entering about 89 percent of the denomination's households, in many ways the magazine represents the denomination and all of its diversity to members of the RCA. The magazine's pages allow for information and discussion on a wide range of matters, including denominational programs, spirituality, and living as Christians in a complex world.

MAGAZINE CONTENT

In 1998 the Church Herald continued its practice of offering a variety of articles on a range of topics. In addition to covering major denominational events such as Spring Sabbath and General Synod, the magazine has included pieces that highlight denominational issues such as classis exams, articles on the worldwide church (such as religious persecution), and features on personal spirituality and family life. The Church Herald has continued its popular columns—"Signs of the Kingdom," by Louis Lotz; "A Question of Faith," by Gregg Mast;
"Roots of Renewal," by Wesly Granberg-Michaelson; and "Cross Section," by Phyllis Palsma and Roger Nelson—and continued other popular features like the Advent devotional and pages dedicated to the news of the regional synods.

Through letters to the editor and the opinion column called "Platform," members of the RCA also used the pages of the *Church Herald* as a forum to discuss a number of issues such as homosexuality, creationism, and the infallibility of Scripture. In response to General Synod's action in 1998 (MGS 1998, R-1, p. 511), the magazine will refrain from publishing any further articles or letters on the topic of homosexuality for two years.

A General Synod referral on racism (MGS 1998, R-14, p. 132) requests that twice a year the *Church Herald* report anecdotal accounts of congregations that are "being freed from racism." We are happy to print such stories when they become available and will actively solicit them in 1999.

In response to two other General Synod referrals, the *Church Herald* published excerpts from the Commission on Theology’s paper, “The Crucified One is Lord” (MGS 1998, R-1, p. 464), in our January 1999 issue, and mentioned the commission’s paper, “Moral Standards for Holders of Church Offices” (MGS 1998, R-2, p. 469), in connection with articles on pastoral abuse in the January 1999 issue.

**PERSONNEL**

The *Church Herald* has enjoyed another year of relative stability in terms of staffing. Tom Scholten, the magazine’s editorial assistant for four years, took a new position in January 1998. Kristi Naber joined the staff in that position in February. Late in 1998 administrative assistant Sheryl Meulenberg resigned in order to take another position within the denomination, and in January 1999 Brenda Addie joined the staff as administrative assistant. The Editorial Council thanks Meulenberg and Scholten for their years of dedicated service.

In December 1998 managing editor Terry De Young attended the World Council of Churches meeting in Harare, Zimbabwe, and shared news of that meeting with RCA readers in the February 1999 issue. Pam Huyser, who has served the *Church Herald* for seven years—the last several as subscription manager—took on the added responsibility of maintaining the congregational name and address database for the denomination.

**FINANCES**

Increased advertising revenue and strong investments, as well as the good fortune of level postage and paper prices, have allowed the *Church Herald* staff to continue to produce a fine magazine without increasing assessment costs. Despite taking a cut in assessment revenue in 1998, the *Church Herald* ended the year $74,000 in the black. The surplus was used to fund other denominational programs.

**THE FUTURE**

In 1999 the *Church Herald* increased the cost of classified advertising and began featuring these ads on the RCA’s website. This is just one small way that technology has influenced the future of the magazine. In 1999 the magazine will undertake a readership survey in order to better understand its readers and their expectations. The results of this survey will have implications for what the *Church Herald* will publish in the year 2000 and beyond.
Report of the Perspectives Board of Editors

The Perspectives Board of Editors appreciates this opportunity to report to the 1999 General Synod and would like to thank the denomination for its support in the past year. The journal is at a critical stage in its life.

Perspectives has a dedicated and growing base of support. Its board members and writers are deeply committed, and all of them volunteer their time. In the course of a year that amounts to thousands of hours. It may well be that no other organization in the denomination has as high a level of volunteer commitment in terms of hours given. Further, the journal is expanding its base of institutional support to include the Christian Reformed Church and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The latter especially has been showing a great deal of interest. Perspectives is laying the groundwork for a conversation around Reformed identity, which is a constant theme and concern in the RCA.

But even with growing interest, Perspectives' institutional base of support is only $18,350 (RCA, $6,000; Western Theological Seminary, $5,000; New Brunswick Theological Seminary, $1,650; Northwestern College, $1,200; Central College, $1,500; Hope College, $1,500; and Calvin College, $1,500). This, together with $25,000 in subscriptions, covers only the basic costs of layout, printing, mailing, and board meetings. The periodical does not have the funds to improve the format, solicit new subscribers, or hire an office manager. Thus, each year Perspectives survives but is weaker.

Perspectives needs to increase its revenues by $20,000 a year in order to be viable. The board has an advancement plan to do that incrementally. That plan includes increasing existing institutional support, securing new institutional support, raising advertising revenue, expanding subscriptions, and hiring an office manager to support the magazine in all these endeavors.

Report of the Office of Communication and Production Services

In 1998 General Synod Council dissolved the Stewardship and Communication Services unit of the GSC. Stewardship responsibilities were transferred to the RCA Foundation. The GSC consolidated the RCA Distribution Center, the TRA VARCA video lending library, RCA Productions, and the RCA's communication staff into a single, self-sustaining production and distribution operation called Communication and Production Services (CAPS).

Communication and Production Services strives to be responsive to the diverse needs of RCA congregations, classes, regional synods, and General Synod Council (GSC) committees and staff. CAPS has three main objectives:

1. To effectively equip RCA congregations, classes, and regional synods for ministry in their own contexts by providing high-quality resources that reflect Reformed theology.

2. To develop and maintain a communication network that connects RCA members, congregations, classes, regional synods, and GSC committees and staff, in order to enhance mutual understanding and promote cooperation and involvement in common ministry.
in the *Formula of Agreement*. The guidelines will be in accord with the practices of each of the four churches. The purpose of such principles and guidelines is to provide a clear understanding of the process for implementing the exchange of a pastor from a Lutheran church to serve in a Reformed church and vice versa. Serving on this ad hoc committee for the RCA are the Rev. Allan Janssen, the Rev. Howard Moths, Ellen Mers of Ministry and Personnel Services, and the Rev. Douglas Fromm, associate for ecumenical relations. Charlotte Peet of the RCA insurance office and Barbara Diekman of the RCA pensions office have met with the ad hoc committee and will continue to serve in a consultative capacity. The committee will meet again in September of 1999.

**UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST AND RCA DIALOGUE**

**Final Report**

In 1996 the General Synod, out of discussions pertaining to the *Formula of Agreement*, voted (Yes-112, No-110) to initiate a 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" *(MGS 1996, p. 214)*.

The UCC responded favorably to the request, and a series of dialogue meetings was held over the next two and a half years between representatives from each denomination. What follows is the final report of the dialogue. (For additional background material, refer to *MGS 1997*, pp. 173-176 and *MGS 1998*, pp. 245-246).

CCU receives the report from the RCA/UCC dialogue with gratitude for the sincere, open, and honest manner in which the series of discussions took place. Further, CCU honors the work of all the participants in the dialogue and is pleased to present this final report to the General Synod for its assimilation. The commission believes the dialogue may serve as a model for future ecumenical engagement on matters of significant divergence within the body of Christ.

**Final Report of the Dialogue Between the Reformed Church in America and the United Church of Christ on the Membership and Ministry of Lesbian and Gay Persons in the Church**

*April 1996 to January 1999*

**Introduction**

Recognizing that the United Church of Christ and the Reformed Church in America differ in significant ways in their understanding of the nature of the appropriate participation of gay and lesbian Christians in the life and ministry of the church, and that this difference could be an obstacle to the full communion between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and three Reformed churches—the Reformed Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and the United Church of Christ—the 1996 General Synod of the RCA voted to initiate a dialogue with the UCC focusing on the different positions held by the two churches and the desire that the UCC move toward a "more biblically faithful understanding of human sexuality and...a repeal of all its policies condoning homosexual behavior," *(MGS 1996, p. 214)*. Following the General Synod, the Executive Council of the UCC voted to accept the invitation of the RCA to enter into dialogue in order to "demonstrate the integrity of the biblical and theological discernment that has informed and undergirded the UCC General Synod’s position" *(EC, 1996)*.
The following persons were named by their churches to participate in the dialogue:

**Reformed Church in America:**

The Rev. Heino Blaauw, pastor of Forestview Community Church in Grimsby, Ontario, and member of the Commission on Christian Unity.


The Rev. Douglas Groen, chaplain, South Texas Veterans Health Care System in San Antonio, Texas; chaplain (colonel), U.S. Army, retired; and pastor of Chapel in the Cove in Spring Branch, Texas.

The Rev. Dr. I. John Hesselink, professor of systematic theology emeritus at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan, and past president of the General Synod.

The Rev. Dr. Eugene Pearson, pastor of Lake Hills Community Church in Laguna Hills, California.

The Rev. Douglas Fromm, associate for ecumenical relations, and pastor of Upper Ridgewood Community Church in Ridgewood, New Jersey.

**United Church of Christ**

The Rev. Dr. Frank Dietz, pastor of Christ United Church of Christ in Cypress, Texas, and former chair of the UCC Council for Ecumenism.

Dr. Edith Guffey, secretary of the United Church of Christ.


The Rev. John H. Thomas, assistant to the president of the UCC for ecumenical concerns.

*Brink resigned from the dialogue in 1997 due to increased pastoral responsibilities in her parish.

The dialogue met four times to explore the question of how two churches, both from the Reformed tradition, each honoring and reading the same Scripture, could come to such different conclusions. In the course of the sessions the participants engaged in significant biblical and theological reflection, shared stories of the discernment of the two churches on this issue, and experienced a rich, though challenging, encounter. Sessions included formal presentations on hermeneutics, pastoral care concerns, biblical study, and frequent sharing of stories. The sessions were marked by frank, open, and candid exchanges, and by respect for the integrity of each participant. Personal stories and testimony provided the means for deepening relationships across the divisions of differing perspectives. The basic positions of the two churches were upheld with each church feeling free to challenge and critique the partner church.

The reports that follow were prepared by the representatives of each church. They do not represent a consensus, nor do they reflect a conversion of one church to the point of view of the other. Each, however, is deeply informed by the process of dialogue both as a formal
theological exchange and as a profoundly personal encounter. Significant disagreement continues to exist. Yet the promise of full communion is confirmed in this dialogue as churches seek to bear witness to a unity that can embrace differences and 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.

Report of the Reformed Church in America Participants

Introduction

It is not an overstatement to say that in this time of human history, the topic of sex seems to be most prominent. Whether the topic is addressed in terms of sexual behavior, sexual morality, sexual orientation of persons, sexual violence, concern with role modeling for children and youth, a culture seemingly saturated with blatant and subliminal sexual messages, or the biblical and traditional witnesses of the church with regard to human sexuality, the topic is before us in a host of venues.

While all of these themes and subthemes are the source of intense debate, the issue of homosexuality is most intense within culture and the church—especially concerning the presence of gay and lesbian persons in the life and ministry of the church.

In 1974 the issue was first raised at the General Synod of the RCA. Through the Commission on Christian Action, the whole church was enlisted in an endeavor to understand homosexuality. Being aware of the need for expression of pastoral care toward those who are rejected because of their homosexual identity, the General Synod was urged to encourage churches to continue the study of homosexuality as it relates to the life and work of the church.

The General Synod also affirmed the biblical teaching against the practice of homosexuality. It rejected the language of the commission that the church provide the compassionate acceptance of such persons within the life and mission of the church (*MGS* 1974, pp. 221-222).

For the next twenty years the issue was before the church in a variety of ways, ranging from actions calling for discipline, biblical and theological appraisals, and denial of ordination to practicing gay and lesbian persons, to programs for helping homosexuals and creating a climate of acceptance.

In 1994 the Commission of Theology, as instructed by the General Synod of 1992, presented a report entitled “The Church and Homosexuality.” It was recommended to the General Synod that RCA congregations, classes, and regional synods enter into a season of discovery and discernment guided by study, prayer, listening, and discussion, aimed at relating to homosexual persons in ways which are more faithful to Christ, and that resources and materials be provided to enable congregations, classes, and regional synods to carry out this season of discernment and discovery (*MGS* 1994, p. 375).

After a period of intense debate, the General Synod adopted a substitute recommendation. The text resulted from an all-night session of persons representing divergent views on the issue of homosexual persons in the life and ministry of the Reformed Church in America.

In an emotionally charged moment the General Synod adopted the following statement:

The General Synod of the Reformed Church in America recognizes and confesses that the Reformed Church in America has failed to live up to its own statements regarding homosexuality in 1978 (*MGS* 1978, pp. 229-40), 1979 (*MGS* 1979, pp. 128-35), and 1990 (*MGS* 1990, R-11, p. 461). Few in the Reformed Church in America have
creatively and lovingly spoken with persons with a homosexual orientation about the truths of Scripture and the hope of the gospel. Many have participated in or tolerated forms of speech and behavior which humiliate or degrade such persons. Many of the churches within the Reformed Church in America have not provided an environment where persons have felt the acceptance and freedom to struggle with hard issues involving sexual orientation. Many Reformed Church in America members have shown no interest in listening to their heartfelt cries as they struggle for self-acceptance and dignity. For all these wrongs, this General Synod expresses its humble and heartfelt repentance, and its desire to reflect the love of Christ to homosexual persons. In all that this General Synod does, it seeks to obey the whole of Scripture, demonstrating in its own life the same obedience it asks from others. It calls itself and the whole church to a greater faithfulness to Christ in relationships with persons of homosexual orientation. To this end, the General Synod calls the church to a process of repentance, prayer, learning and growth in ministry (MGS 1994, pp. 375-376).

It was further voted by the General Synod that a study guide, a process of reflection, and a collection of models for ministry be developed to assist the church to understand its own statements on the church and homosexuality. The process of reflection would be used to increase the church’s sensitivity and awareness of ways in which persons of homosexual orientation have wrongly suffered in our churches and society. The models to be used demonstrate ways of implementing ministry to persons of homosexual orientation in harmony with the church’s stated theological positions (MGS 1994, p. 376).

The issue of homosexual persons in the life and ministry of the church was again brought before the General Synod of the RCA in 1996. Concern was raised via overtures from several classes about the United Church of Christ, a partner in the dialogue for full communion with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The overtures focused on the UCC for its policies condoning homosexual behavior and its need to move toward a more biblically faithful understanding of human sexuality (MGS 1996, p. 207).

In response to the overtures, the General Synod stated its opposition to the policies adopted by the United Church of Christ that condone homosexual behavior and offered to enter into dialogue with the UCC 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. The recommendation passed by two votes out of 222 voting delegates (MGS 1996, p. 214).

The first round of the dialogue was held on April 17, 1997, and concluded with a fourth round on January 13, 1999.

How has this dialogue affected us as persons?

Both RCA and UCC participants found themselves being pushed into their own heads and hearts in their attempts to be understood and understanding. In general, all participants in the dialogue learned the truth spoken by the theologian Howard Thurman that “understanding requires great artistry. This is why conversation, and good talk and dialogue are of such immense value.”

In spite of the obvious difference between the two churches, which was the reason for coming together for dialogue, RCA participants learned that even such uncomfortable—and at times “testy” confrontations—can be occasions in which one experiences the gracious presence of God. In spite of apparent disconnects in some areas of conversation, there was an abiding affirmation of our common commitment to Jesus Christ as the basis for our unity.
For the RCA delegation as a whole, it was insightful to be confronted by an articulate lesbian pastor. One cannot be hostile to a person with whom you may disagree sharply when dealing with that person face to face. Hearing firsthand the views of a gay/lesbian Christian was new and proved to be an enlightening experience. It is one thing to talk about a person of this sexual orientation; it is quite different to talk with that person. Dialogue/discussion/conversation does not take place in a vacuum and needs to be sensitive to those persons who are gay or lesbian and to those who have family members who are gay and lesbian. We found that it is incumbent upon us to use appropriate forms of speech and behavior so as not to humiliate or degrade persons with whom we share a common baptism.

For some RCA participants it was the first known and acknowledged opportunity to be with an openly gay person. To be conversant, laugh and cry, worship and pray, read and discern Scripture, and to share meals, life stories, hopes, dreams, fears, and anxieties was to experience the discussion of homosexuality in a much different context. For some the issue still remains that of homosexual orientation as well as homosexual practice. For others, the issue is only focused on the practice, even including faithful monogamous relationships. As one of our RCA participants said, “I can and do accept and love you as a person of the church, but I cannot accept or condone the homosexual relationship in which you live.” Another stated that “homosexual orientation is not in accord with God’s original created order; it is not God’s expression of human sexuality.”

What have we learned about our own church’s approach to Scripture?

In the first round of dialogue the question was framed: How is it that two churches of the Reformed tradition, honoring and reading the same Scripture, can come to such different conclusions? By the end of the first round it was agreed by all participants that the Bible has been and continues to be the foundational guidance for our churches on the issue of homosexuality, though we come with differing hermeneutical and interpretive principles. Both sides agreed that both churches seek to take Scripture seriously. There is, however, a clear difference in the hermeneutical approach of the two churches.

Central to the differences in the two church’s approach to, and use of Scripture, is in the relative weight given to the role of experience. This use of experience in the hermeneutical process allows one to challenge, reinterpret, or even to set aside certain texts as culturally conditioned or irrelevant. As one of the UCC’s participants said, “There are just some texts we need to leave behind.” The role of experience as an entrance into biblical reflection is the crux of the difference in approach to the exegetical (historical task) and hermeneutical (contemporary task) process of each church. As the RCA participants listened to the UCC, it appeared that in the UCC one begins with the experience of the situation, addressing Scripture more in its totality and less by lifting up particular, individual texts, whereas the RCA begins with Scripture and applies it to the reality of the situation, citing specific texts. The key issue finally is whether we begin with revelation and interpret the human situation in that light or begin with the situation and go to revelation.

During the course of the dialogue, UCC participants raised a question for the RCA. They asked, “How do you come to new understandings of Scripture?” Cited were the issues of slavery and the role of women in the life and ministry of the church. In both cases there was earlier justification based on Scripture which condoned slavery and excluded women from authority roles in the church. How, then, were these justifications nullified and previously held positions completely reversed? Presently the RCA condemns slavery and permits women to hold ordained offices in the church. However, in these cases, the seeds for both the abolition of slavery and the opening of church offices to women are found in the Bible itself. Diverse perspectives exist within the canonical witness itself regarding the roles of women and the institution of slavery. In both cases, however, the New Testament makes explicit statements that call into question earlier assumptions about hierarchy and patriarchy.
The issue of slavery and the role of women in positions of authority in the church are not exact parallels to the question of homosexuality. Diverse perspectives do not exist in the canonical witness with regard to the question of homosexuality, and the texts that speak to this issue are consistent in condemning the practice.

What have we learned about our own church’s response to and experience with gay and lesbian Christians?

The UCC position is formed and shaped in part by the presence of persons with gay and lesbian orientation participating in the process of discernment of biblical witness, whereas the voices of these persons are absent in RCA assemblies. This is an important difference between the two churches. The RCA lives with the reality that life stories are seldom heard from gay or lesbian persons. No living human documents were able to be presented from the RCA to share firsthand experiences on the subject of homosexual persons in the life of the church. At times this left an appearance of an abstract approach to the issue.

The UCC’s discernment of Scripture on this issue is shaped to a significant degree by the testimony of gay and lesbian persons among the baptized. In contrast, the RCA discernment is shaped by the conviction of heterosexual persons who believe that homosexual behavior is not God’s intended expression of sexuality. This conviction is shaped by biblical interpretation without benefit of the experience of gay and lesbian persons being introduced.

Being in this dialogue has led us to ask, “How do we change a climate in our church that has had the effect of silencing and keeping invisible the persons in our midst who deal with gay or lesbian orientations, and limiting support to their parents, siblings, and friends?” Our denomination has produced a resource, available through the RCA Distribution Center, that could facilitate healthy discussion on this issue. Called Homosexuality: Seeking Guidance, this five-session study is helpful in understanding what the RCA has said as a church and includes previous RCA statements about the subject. The study should be given greater attention in the church and disseminated throughout its local congregations for use.

Further, the dialogue has surfaced the need for more biblical understanding of human sexuality, its purposes and expressions. We need to understand sinful expressions of heterosexuality more clearly. When this is understood with a repentant heart, then more of a climate to help those dealing with a homosexual orientation will be created. The RCA needs to mature in this. We could also use more and better teaching on gender and on healthy sexuality within the marriage covenant.

In all this we recognize the need for sensitivity in language and behavior when discussing the issue of homosexuality and the church. We must remember that these persons in the church are baptized members of the body of Christ. The church, as the body of Christ, needs to reflect the love of Christ for these persons in its words and actions.

Conclusion

The question stands before us: Has anything been accomplished by the dialogue? In response we must say that both churches remained true to their positions. While we can say that the dialogue was generally friendly and rarely acrimonious, we wonder if that will bring much satisfaction to either church. We can say that each church may gain a clearer and better understanding as to how the other has come to the position it holds with regard to the life and ministry of gay and lesbian persons in the church.
With a desire to live 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, we offer the following affirmations and admonitions to the United Church of Christ.

Affirmations

We affirm the willingness with which the UCC has engaged us in this ongoing theological dialogue, to risk, to confront, and to reveal their church's journey. In so doing, we affirm their openness, the sharing of feelings, and candid feedback in the process of clarifying their position, reacting to our mandate and in critiquing our presentations. Of importance was their ability to speak the truth in love during times of difference, facilitating an authenticity in the dialogue and its continuance. As RCA dialogue members we have sensed and experienced the fervent manner in which the UCC team has approached the Scriptures, even though their hermeneutic differs from ours. Furthermore, we affirm the passion of the UCC dialogue members on issues of justice. Especially apparent is their loving concern for the marginalized in society. We have been enriched by the dialogue and our worship together, in which we claimed the collegiality developed from our personal relationships. The constructive dialogue amid the diversity of our positions is a perpetual witness to our commitment to the one body of Christ, our common baptism, and our love for Jesus Christ.

Admonitions

We realize that the UCC has already taken an official position on the issue of gay-lesbian relationships, but we would still ask the UCC to be open to the leading of the Spirit and the Word in reconsidering its stance in view of:

1. The fact that many biblical scholars cannot agree with the process by which the UCC reached its conclusion. There are other hermeneutical approaches to Scripture, and we urge the UCC to consider other biblical and theological scholars within its own communion who take a different view and to engage in dialogue with them.

2. The fact that a sizeable number of UCC congregations are not on record as being "open and affirming" in regard to this issue. We would encourage the UCC to continue its search to discern God's will in regard to this issue, together with the significant number of its members who are not in accord with the official position of the church. Therefore we urge the UCC to be more sensitive to the concerns and convictions of those within the UCC who do not affirm the official position of the church.

3. The fact that the UCC official stance threatens to divide the worldwide church of Jesus Christ. To look at the RCA as being unenlightened and judgmental on this question overlooks the fact that the RCA position is that of the vast majority of denominations in North America and that the UCC position is regarded as a scandal by many overseas churches. This, we feel, calls for serious self-examination.

We admonish the UCC to repeal its official positions that sanction homosexual practice. While we recognize that relatively few (less than 10 percent) UCC local churches have adopted the status of "open and affirming," nevertheless denominational statements are important within the Reformed understanding of the church. The Reformation churches are confessional in nature. Our collective statements therefore become the basis of our union, and we covenant together to live them out. This is what makes it necessary for the official UCC position to be changed. Our motive for this call is not only a desire to be faithful to what we understand is the biblical teaching; it is also the motive of love and concern for the UCC and its future.
A concluding word

In closing we express appreciation to the RCA for giving us the opportunity to serve as participants in this most important dialogue with another church of our Reformed tradition. We also express our appreciation to the participants from the United Church of Christ for their willingness to engage in this dialogue with us.

The experience confirms for us the conviction that dialogue over continuing differences in faith, life, and witness becomes the way churches can live more faithfully into full communion characterized by an ongoing process of mutual affirmation and admonition.

Report of the United Church of Christ Participants

Introduction

The United Church of Christ participants in the dialogue with the Reformed Church in America began their involvement in the dialogue in the context of judgments made by the General Synod of the RCA regarding the UCC’s biblical fidelity. The explicit purpose of the dialogue, from the perspective of the RCA, was to “encourage 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.” Thus, we began our dialogue recognizing the need to respond to the judgment that we fail to respect Scripture, give it authority, or read Scripture with discernment. In the face of this uncomfortable and offensive assumption, the members of the dialogue team are grateful to have encountered RCA colleagues ready to engage us rather than dismiss us, willing to wrestle with some very difficult questions, prepared to listen to our stories of hospitality and pastoral availability to gay and lesbian persons and their families, and able to be honest about differences both through passionate speech and thoughtful listening. In spite of enduring and significant disagreement, we have come to appreciate and respect the integrity of our dialogue partners. Above all, we are grateful that increasingly the issue among the representatives of our two churches was not “does the UCC read the Bible?” but “how do we hear God’s Word and will through Scripture in the midst of our present life circumstance?”

What have we learned about ourselves?

This dialogue has given rise to important personal reflection among our team even as we have attempted to represent the ethos, experience, and conviction of the United Church of Christ. One member, who grew up in a conservative African-American church, found herself asking for the first time why, given her background, she has never had strong negative reactions to gay and lesbian persons, and discovered at least part of the answer in a formative friendship during her teenage years with a gay man in her congregation, as well as the awareness of what it can mean to be marginalized and excluded as an African-American woman. A pastor in Texas found himself reaching deeply into the wellsprings that have informed us as the United Church of Christ. These wellsprings, part of both our present and hoped-for reality, include a passion for justice, shalom, and deep hospitality. A pastor from Connecticut found herself reflecting on the difference between being part of a church that historically has been a church of establishment and privilege, and being part of a church with a living remembrance of the immigrant experience. She has become more aware of the significance of the challenge to communion when some are of the establishment and some are truly new to the land. A biblical scholar and teacher discovered in a deeper way the importance of “nonfellowship-breaking” relationships and of the need to remain open to those with whom we differ strongly.

The presence and participation of a UCC pastor on our team who is a lesbian was very significant for our participants. She reminded us that our dialogue was about persons, not merely issues and ideas. She bore witness to the fact that our dialogue was with those inside
the body of Christ—members and ministers—not simply about those outside the church. She demonstrated that God’s call to ordained ministry is not confined to one sexual orientation. Finally, she helped us see the pain experienced by many who are excluded by the church or by their own families, who must hide their sexual orientation from others, or who face physical and emotional abuse from those encouraged in their prejudice by some forms of biblical interpretation or theological understandings. Yet even as the other members of our team felt gifted by her participation, we were aware of the costly commitment such participation must require. We hope that members of the Reformed Church in America will come to recognize that the language of their General Synod resolution does not merely call into question the United Church of Christ’s biblical fidelity; it also calls into question the integrity and vocation of faithful UCC persons and ministers and, we believe, the integrity and vocation of faithful persons and ministers within the Reformed Church in America.

What have we learned about our approach to Scripture?

For the United Church of Christ the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are authoritative. While there is no single approach to Scripture in the UCC, and while there is not a single doctrine of Scripture, those involved in the dialogue have come to understand that the authority of Scripture is authentic in that it includes both content and process over a thousand years of Hebrew and Christian history. The biblical writers’ approach to their Scripture did not absolutize it, as if God were locked into voices from the past. For them, Scripture could challenge Scripture in the ongoing process of interpretation, recognizing that God’s Spirit works by leading the communities of faith to fresh understandings (e.g., in terms of stoning, diet, death, slavery, and women).

Yet the major themes of God’s love story with Israel and the church in Scripture resound for them and for us: creation, sin or human rebellion, liberation/salvation, healing/holiness/blessing, truth, justice, peace. A selective proof-text method, which does not begin with the Bible but with views already held, may miss the large forest of Scripture by focusing on a textual tree or two. Further, to superimpose a single doctrine of Scripture on the Bible means making the Bible fit our doctrine and refusing to let the Bible be what it is, with all the rough edges of human experience and God’s engagement of that experience over a thousand years of writing.

In the context of this understanding, we might describe the basic UCC interpretive process as one that pursues an “interpretive circle” which begins with where people are in their faith and life in the present and then engages the voices from Scripture and church traditions in the past to let them inspire, guide, and challenge us again in the present. Thus, with this and other issues we tend to begin by hearing the experience of people. In this instance, specifically, we listen, learn from, and seek to value and appreciate the lives of lesbian and gay persons who are already full members and participants in the church as the body of Christ. On the basis of this experience, we then listen to the voices of Scripture as they inspire, guide, and challenge our life together for the purpose of building up the community. We do not use a few (six or seven) biblical texts to exclude or condemn gay and lesbian persons as sinners, believing that to so use such texts from the past is to deny the way in which God is working now to lead us into more and more dignity and freedom, justice, and peace for all people. Rather, we attempt to search the Scriptures in their fullness, allowing our interpretations to build up persons in faithful relationships with God, one another, and God’s creation; build communities of love, justice, and peace both within the church and within God’s beloved world; and build communities of stewardship that care for the earth, its peoples, its resources, and its place in God’s universe. Finally, we seek to allow the Scriptures in their wholeness to guide us into the responsible use of God’s gift of our sexuality to demonstrate God’s tender love and gracious care for all God’s beloved children.
What have we learned about our own church’s experience with its lesbian and gay members?

There is a certain irony in the fact that a dialogue originally intending to challenge our United Church of Christ convictions and commitments actually led each of the UCC dialogue team members to a deeper appreciation for the richness and integrity of our journey with gay and lesbian members over recent decades. The invitation to tell our story became an opportunity to discover in new ways the significance of this experience and to connect it to other points in our history when openness to others who have been at the margin—women, persons of color, persons with disabilities—has led us to discover ways in which the Bible calls us to receive and offer hospitality. One learning we take from this dialogue is the need to gather together a historical and theological account of this story, both for ourselves and for our ecumenical partners.

We found it difficult to find ways to articulate the fact that, while there is a growing and deepening receptiveness throughout our church to the conviction of the General Synod, in every congregation, association, and conference of the United Church of Christ there are those who continue to struggle with these issues, who remain uneasy and unsure, including those who would support the position represented by the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America. That difficulty is due in part to a sense that some among our dialogue partners interpret the presence of dissent to suggest that our position represents only the view of a small elite or that our church may one day change its mind. Without denying that our journey has been marked—and continues to be marked—by struggle, we tend to see these diverse views as a wrestling with the Spirit who makes us aware that God is alive and well and caring about what we are becoming. Our current discernment, biblically and theologically, is not an “end,” but a milestone along the way of discovering that God is not through with us, even now, even with this issue. Yet we would say firmly that there is no going back for the United Church of Christ. As our lesbian sister puts it, “while there are some in the UCC who wish that I and my lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender sisters and brothers were not at the table, there is nonetheless a growing sense of welcome to our table and a growing sense that we can trust the ‘ties that bind,’ since those God-given ties are stronger than the differences which may divide.” Here our UCC polity helps us. We come together expecting differences; we come together giving up expectations of uniformity. Our policy allows for this difference, enabling some to lead while granting others the freedom to respond to that leadership in their own discernment process.

Finally, as we have remembered our story and reflected on it in the context of the biblical story, we have been reminded of a striking reality in the gospel accounts of Jesus: The primary people with whom Jesus had trouble was the religious establishment, which excluded those who did not fit into its theological systems. Jesus’ words of judgment fell primarily on those who would not express the inclusiveness of God’s reign. Thus the interpretive circle which began with the story of our journey together with gay and lesbian persons in the United Church of Christ, and which continued as we engaged the voices of Scripture, now returns us again to the present where we hear the Scriptures’ challenge to consider again the ways in which we may be continuing to restrict God’s grace and limit God’s love.

A word to the Reformed Church in America: affirmations and admonitions

We affirm the seriousness in which the RCA has entered into full communion, particularly the commitment to ongoing theological dialogue, to consultation and shared decision-making, and to the vulnerability involved in the process of mutual affirmation and admonition. We affirm the individuals who have represented the RCA for their willingness to struggle with difficult issues, to hear new and challenging perspectives without immediately dismissing them. We have sensed a real attempt on the part of our dialogue partners to understand our church’s journey in spite of its sharp contrast to their own. Above all, we have cherished the development of personal relationships, the opportunity for worship, the times of joyful table
fellowship, and the reminder in the midst of mutual prayer that we are saved not by our theologies, but by the grace of God which can embrace many theologies as long as those theologies do not negate God’s grace itself or violate God’s “good news of great joy for all the people” (Luke 2:10).

We admonish and encourage the Reformed Church in America to seek out, welcome, and listen to the faith and stories of gay and lesbian persons who are, or have been, members of the RCA. In our dialogue we have experienced the ways in which the voice of these persons has been silenced by official positions and discipline. In many settings of the RCA, gay and lesbian persons have been rendered invisible by the fear of ecclesiastical sanction and the language of rejection. Frequently in the dialogue we heard gay and lesbian persons described as “other”; they are not seen as part of “us.” Part of the price of this silence is that few members of the RCA have the opportunity for personal, healing relationships with gay and lesbian Christians in the context of the church. As a result, gays and lesbians are often seen through the lens of stereotype and prejudice, as was the case at points in our dialogue.

Unable to experience the reality of many gay and lesbian persons living in faithful covenant relationships that reflect and share the sacred love of God, such stereotype and prejudice tends to caricature homosexuals on the basis of instances of abuse, promiscuity, or exploitation—generalizations we would never draw of heterosexual persons on the basis of similar instances of abuse, exploitation, or promiscuity. An additional price is that pastoral care to gays, lesbians, and their families is, in our view, compromised. Is it possible for gay and lesbian persons or their families to fully trust the pastoral care of a church that officially condemns the expression of their sexuality and bars them from the leadership of the church?

Finally, this silencing of gay and lesbian persons often allows the more virulent voices of prejudice and hate in our society to go unchecked by a word from the church. The dialogue team from the United Church of Christ hopes that the RCA will seriously explore the ways in which it might uplift, welcome, and encourage gay and lesbian persons to express their hopes and fears, bearing witness to the richness and reality of their faith in many congregations, classes, and the General Synod.

Our second admonishment is to explore an understanding of biblical authority that does justice to both the content and the process which the biblical writings themselves demonstrate. The biblical writers themselves do not isolate texts from the past, making them prescriptive for life in the present. They listen to the voices in their Scripture which can engage them in dialogue and which can help them to discern God’s will in the ongoing interpretive work of God’s Holy Spirit. To fail to see the nature of this process among biblical writers themselves is to be unfaithful to the Scripture. The Bible needs no defenders. It only needs faithful interpreters to be aware of all that is there, in terms both of the glory and tragedy of human life, the faithfulness and faithlessness of human beings, the theologies that build persons and communities of faith, hope and love and theologies that harm both persons and communities. Most of all it needs persons who know that God’s grace is greater than all our destructive sin and who want to lift the blindness that excludes any of God’s beloved children from God’s human family, a family that God has fully embraced in Jesus Christ.

This dialogue began with a challenge to the United Church of Christ “to repeal . . . its policies condoning homosexual behavior.” At the conclusion of our dialogue, we respectfully invite the Reformed Church in America to reconsider its official position on gay and lesbian persons, not for the sake of agreeing with us, but for the sake of gay and lesbian members in your own church. They need to know that their church welcomes and cherishes them. They need to know that their church trusts them to walk a journey of faith with them. They need and deserve to be invited to live openly and joyfully as lesbian and gay persons and as joyful and faithful members of the RCA. Their families need to hear a voice of love and acceptance from the church so that parents no longer need to counsel a son or daughter of the RCA to find a spiritual home in another faith communion.
A concluding word

Because of the judgmental tone of the Reformed Church in America's invitation to dialogue, we entered into this dialogue with some suspicion about how open our partners would be to a full and honest conversation. We are grateful to have encountered brothers and sisters in faith who listened with care and who took us and our church seriously. Yes, there were painful, awkward, and disturbing exchanges. But we also grew to appreciate and enjoy each other. The issues between us are not resolved any more than the questions before us in this dialogue are fully and finally resolved in either of our two churches. Nevertheless, the dialogue did help us clarify our own understandings, learn to appreciate our own experience more fully, and challenge us to find ways to articulate our commitments and convictions in ways that can be understood by those who share with us the same Bible and who have been nurtured in the same Reformed tradition. For this we are deeply grateful. We trust this experience will become a model for how churches can face difference even while nurturing the communion that God has given us.

A Joint Statement of the United Church of Christ and the Reformed Church in America Dialogue Participants

This dialogue, although difficult and at times painful, was an enriching experience for each of the participants. In the context of a shared faith, and in an atmosphere of respect and growing friendship, we learned much about each other's traditions and churches, gained insights from each other's biblical and theological perspectives, and came to a deeper understanding of both the hopes and the challenges confronting each of our churches as we face the twenty-first century. We also learned something of the meaning of full communion and of the dialogue process itself which we would like to share with our churches.

First, we note that the votes on the Formula of Agreement in 1997, establishing full communion between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and three Reformed churches that were themselves already in communion with one another, took place during the course of our dialogue. While the commitment to dialogue on this potentially church-dividing issue may have facilitated the vote on full communion for some in our churches, we believe it is significant that resolution of differences on this issue was not required for our two churches to enter together into full communion with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Rather, the experience of the participants confirms the conviction that dialogue over continuing differences in faith, life, and witness becomes the way of living in full communion, a life characterized by an ongoing process of mutual affirmation and admonition.

Second, we believe the presence of participants or observers from other full communion partners would have enhanced our dialogue. On an issue that broadly affects the whole Christian community, the differences between our two churches would be more helpfully seen in the context of wider ecumenical discernment on the issue of homosexuality. Furthermore, we question the appropriateness of engaging in dialogue without including those churches to whom we have an ecumenical commitment. In the future, we encourage dialogues to include others with whom we are in full communion.

Finally, while acknowledging the importance of the question of the membership and ministry of lesbian and gay Christians in the life of the church, we also urge our churches to seek ways of living together in full communion through dialogue and common witness on other critical matters of mutual importance. We note in particular the call of the twenty-third General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches to "give special attention to the analysis and understanding of economic processes, their consequences for people's lives, and the threats to creation... to work towards the formulation of a confession... which would express justice in the whole household of God... and to act in solidarity with the victims of injustice as they struggle to overcome unjust economic powers and destructive ecological activities."
In the Reformed tradition we confess that “we belong—body and soul, in life and in death—not to ourselves but to our faithful Savior Jesus Christ.” Knowing that in our dialogue we have not always been faithful to our confession, we close with this prayer, using the words of the “Declaration of Debrecen” adopted by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in 1997:

We confess our theological and moral failures, our complicity in adding to the world’s burdens, our inadequate witness to God’s purposes. We ask forgiveness from God and from each other for these transgressions, and also for the injuries we have done to one another.

May this spirit of humility, and this reliance on God’s grace, be the way of walking together in full communion for our two churches.

CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH AND RCA RELATIONS

CCU received correspondence from the Interchurch Relations Office of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC) indicating the CRC’s positive response to a request from the RCA regarding union churches. The request from the RCA originated from action taken by General Synod in 1996 when the synod voted “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” (MGS 1996, R-9, p. 221). CCU addressed a letter to the general secretary of the CRC requesting such action.

At its synod in 1998 the CRC voted to make provision for the formation of union congregations “with one or more particular congregations of churches in ecclesiastical fellowship with the approval of classis.” The CRC Synod of 1999 must ratify the previous year’s action before it becomes official. It is anticipated that ratification will take place. It was noted, from an article in the February 1, 1999, issue of the CRC’s publication, the Banner, that an RCA/CRC union congregation has already been formed in Holland, Michigan. The new ministry will not be officially adopted by the CRC until ratification occurs.

EVANGELICAL COVENANT CHURCH

CCU continues to encourage the development of ecumenical relations with the Evangelical Covenant Church. For the past three years the RCA and the Evangelical Covenant Church have exchanged delegates at the annual meeting of each denomination. The two denominations have also conducted staff-to-staff gatherings coordinated through the office of the general secretary.

UNITING REFORMED CHURCH IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

CCU received a report from the Southern Africa/RCA Partnership Project Team that met December 21, 1998. CCU maintains an interest in this relationship as it pertains to the formation of a general policy statement on “ecumenical partnerships” which CCU, along with RCA Mission Services, is in the process of formulating.

One specific item that CCU is interested in, as a result of the RCA’s long-standing relationship with the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA), is the Belhar Confession, one of the standards of unity of the URCSA. CCU took action at its most recent meeting to authorize the commission’s secretary to request a study guide for the Belhar Confession from the president of the URCSA. This action was in response to a request to CCU by the Southern Africa/RCA Partnership Project Team.
The Eighth Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC), marking the counsel’s fiftieth anniversary, was held December 3-14 in Harare, Zimbabwe. The major substantive work of the assembly was to deliberate and vote on the WCC’s Central Committee plan for the future, “Toward a Common Understanding and Vision,” to which the RCA provided input during its draft stage. Two major items that the assembly agreed upon were to create a Christian forum under the auspices of the WCC with the purpose of bringing together as many Christian churches and organizations as will attend. The forum is tentatively set for Pentecost 2001. The assembly also endorsed the Central Committee’s intention—in an attempt to be more inclusive of Orthodox churches—to explore different ways of doing its business other than reaching decisions by a simple majority.

The RCA, one of the founding churches of the WCC in 1948, sent four delegates to this Eighth Assembly. They were the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, RCA general secretary; the Rev. Pacia Ferrell Vanvass, pastor in New York; Carol Wagner, layperson from Illinois; and Debra Ann Braaksma, supervisor of RCA mission programs in Africa.

In addition to the delegates, the RCA was privileged to have the Rev. Phyllis Palma and Willa Brown attend the assembly. Palma and Brown led a padare (marketplace workshop) at the assembly, sharing the RCA’s Children in Worship program. The workshop was translated into several languages for attendees from the worldwide community. Each church was invited to share a significant program with the world church at the assembly. The RCA was one of those selected.

In addition to delegates and workshop leaders, the RCA was represented by seven official visitors at the assembly. They were: the Rev. John Paarlberg, minister for social witness and worship; Loreen Damhof, a member of the Commission on Christian Unity; Karin Granberg-Michaelson, Ecumenical Decade for Solidarity with Women; N. Jan Wagner, layperson and spouse of delegate Carol Wagner; the Rev. Fritz Kruithof, president of General Synod, and his wife Sharon; and Rowland Van Es, student at Western Theological Seminary and participant in the seminary students program at the assembly.

CCU heard an inspiring, first-hand report from commission member Loreen Damhof who attended the assembly. CCU will request an oral presentation from one or more of the members of the RCA delegation to Harare during this session of General Synod.

The National Council of Churches (NCC) is preparing for its Jubilee celebration in Cleveland, Ohio, November 8-12, 1999, with the theme, “Unity in Christ: Gift and Calling.” At the 1998 assembly meeting in Chicago, held this past November, the NCC approved a new policy statement, “Disabilities, the Body of Christ, and the Wholeness of Society.” The policy says, “All human beings, including those among us with disabilities, are entitled to rights in church and society.” The policy is based on four theological principles: All people are created in the image of God; All people are called by God; All people have special gifts; and All people are invited to participate in God’s ministry.

In response to an overture from last year’s general synod, the CCU moderator has sent correspondence to the general secretary of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) to seek clarification on what “membership in WARC means beyond mere recognition of Reformed heritage and Presbyterian church order.” The letter also asks the general secretary of WARC “to state under which circumstances members of WARC might lose their membership” (MGS 1998, R-10, p. 257).
CCU has sent correspondence to the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) asking that its governing board "re-examine the membership policy of NAE which restricts membership to (church) bodies which do not belong to the NCC and WCC." CCU's letter also expressed "the interest of the RCA in joining the NAE as a member denomination." In the past the RCA, through the general secretary's office, has made inquiry to the NAE about becoming a member. CCU's action, taken on behalf of General Synod, is the first time the RCA has issued an official request to the board of NAE (MGS 1998, R-2, p. 250). It should be noted that the RCA does have a presence in NAE through the Regional Synod of Mid-America, which formally belongs to NAE.

UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA

RCA General Secretary Wesley Granberg-Michaelson wrote a letter to the Executive of General Counsel of the United Church of Canada (UCOC) as directed by last year's General Synod (MGS 1998, R-6, p. 254). The letter expressed the RCA's concern with statements made by the Rev. William Phipps, moderator of the UCOC, to a public newspaper in Canada in which the moderator denied essential truths of Christian doctrine. The recommendation from synod came in response to an overture from the Classis of Canadian Prairies (MGS 1998, pp. 253-254).

ROMAN CATHOLIC–REFORMED CONSULTATION: ROUND VI

The sacraments of baptism and Eucharist, as well as the sacrament or rite of marriage, have become for American Christians more and more times of intense ecumenical encounter. This can be attributed to the closer, more positive relations between the churches in North America and also to the rise in intermarriages and spiritual journeys of individuals from one church to another. These realities provide times of ecumenical openness as well as tension and indecision. What can we say together about baptism, Eucharist, and marriage that will be of pastoral help to our congregations? Where do we differ in our understandings of these sacraments? What do our differing and similar practices for celebrating them signify? What do they tell us about our sense of identity as Christians? As Catholics? As Reformed? What elements of pastoral practice can we learn from each other? What can we do together or on our own in preparing our people for and in celebrating the sacraments to further the quest for Christian unity?

Round Six of the Reformed–Roman Catholic Consultation will begin with gathering together the insights and guidance that may be found in existing ecumenical resources such as the work of the International Roman Catholic–Reformed dialogue; the foundational ecumenical document, "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry"; the Groupe Des Dombres' "For the Conversion of the Churches" (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1993); the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity's "Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism" (Vatican City, March 25, 1993); and other ecumenical dialogues such as "Facing Unity" and "The Church and Justification" (Lutheran–Roman Catholic). Important as well will be looking at creative approaches that have already emerged from local ecumenical situations.

Drawing on these, a resource will be developed for use in congregations that may include such elements as a compilation of the understanding and practice of the sacraments in our respective churches, and what we can say together about them. This may entail a brief history of the development of practices and understandings and an examination of liturgical books over time. The resource will seek to draw out the ecumenical opportunities and possibilities offered by the fact that these family-oriented events, in our time and place, increasingly involve ecumenical congregations. What might be done in a given church, for example, to provide a blessing for members of the other tradition during communion? Or a service in one church to celebrate a baptism that has taken place in another?
The dialogue will explore the pastoral tension in feeling that we have to choose between honoring ecclesial identity and obeying ecclesiastical convictions (preserving the tradition in its integrity at the cost, sometimes, of driving away the people we serve) and meeting the pastoral needs of our people (at the cost, sometimes, of losing our distinctive traditions or ignoring canonical requirements). How can we hold both values together?

How can we create liturgical moments that will at once celebrate the unity we have and communicate the urgency to seek full unity? How can we teach our people to understand that in profound ways we are in communion with other churches, even though it is not full communion (e.g., with regard to the reception of the Eucharist). How can the day-to-day sacramental practice of a given parish or congregation become for its own people an ecumenical witness? How do we ritualize the ecumenical commitments of our communities?

Members of the RCA dialogue team are the Rev. Dr. Gregg Mast and the Rev. Dr. Carol Bechtel. The Rev. Douglas Fromm, associate for ecumenical relations, serves as RCA staff to the dialogue.

➢ The advisory committee recommended:

R-37
That the Commission on Christian Unity report to the 2000 General Synod regarding Overture 13 from the Regional Synod of Canada to the 1997 General Synod (MGS 1997, R-17, p. 228). (ADOPTED)

Reason: The Commission on Christian Unity did not complete its study as required by the 1997 General Synod.

Overture

RCA Sever All Ties with the United Church of Christ

1. The Classis of Florida overtures the 193rd General Synod to instruct the general secretary of the Reformed Church in America: 1) to communicate to the General Council of the United Church of Christ (UCC) that the Reformed Church in America, with tears, severs all ecumenical ties until the UCC repents of its affirmation of practicing homosexual and bisexual lifestyles as appropriate for Christians; 2) to communicate the prayers of the Reformed Church in America that the UCC will repent so that they may be reunited in the gospel ministry; and 3) to explain to ecumenical agencies that we no longer consider the UCC a sister Christian communion walking in fidelity to the gospel.

Reasons:

1. The Reformed Church in America has deep historical roots and fond memories of shared ministry in the true gospel with the United Church of Christ since before the American Revolution.
2. The UCC has been drifting farther away from that gospel, most unmistakably visible in the continuing unrepentant affirmation of the practicing homosexual and bisexual lifestyles.

3. A representative committee of RCA church leaders implored the leadership of the UCC to return to the faithfulness of Scripture in these regards, but the UCC has instead boldly continued in this path, indeed issuing a pastoral letter to all its congregations reaffirming this position as an appropriate Christian position.

4. To retain ecumenical ties implies a shared agreement in essential Christianity which has sadly been shown to no longer exist with the General Council of the UCC.

5. It is hoped that the seriousness of this step will bring the UCC to repentance, and that hereby the Holy Spirit will warn other sister churches of the serious ramifications of drifting into this error.

➢ The advisory committee recommended:

**R-38**

To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. Despite differences with the United Church of Christ (UCC), the RCA recognizes the UCC as a Christian communion.

2. The Reformed Church should avoid the precedent of severing ecumenical ties with other Christian denominations over differences regarding interpretation of Scripture on social and ethical matters.

3. The RCA’s participation in ecumenical agencies enables fellowship with a wide variety of Christian denominations with whom the Reformed Church has significant differences. This participation has value in the Reformed tradition, as reflected in Section III A3 of “An Ecumenical Mandate for the Reformed Church in America” (MGS 1996, p. 194).

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**Investigate the United Church of Christ and Unitarianism**

2. The Regional Synod of Mid-America overtures the 1999 General Synod to refer to an appropriate body the responsibility to investigate the accommodation of the United Church of Christ (UCC) to the Unitarianism subscribed to by some of its member congregations; and further,

**to review the implications of that investigation for the RCA’s continued full communion status with the UCC, and report these matters to the RCA General Synod of 2000.**

Reasons:

1. The UCC has accommodated itself to Unitarianism. The Rev. John H. Thomas, assistant to UCC president the Rev. Paul J. Sherry and corresponding on his behalf, stated in a January 6, 1999, letter to the Rev. Paul F. DeVries (retired, Classis of Chicago): “There are seventeen congregations (out of over 6,000 total UCC local churches) that are either federated with or dually aligned with congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association.”
2. Even if the UCC regards these congregations as "the legacy of the distant past rather than a prominent feature of the contemporary character of the UCC" (as stated in Thomas's letter cited above), Unitarianism is too dangerous for us to ignore. The RCA should only be committed to ecumenical relations with bodies that believe in the Trinity.

3. The regional synod brings this matter to the General Synod because efforts by RCA members within the boundaries of the Regional Synod of Mid-America to correspond with the RCA ecumenical relations officer about this matter have received no response.

➢ The advisory committee recommended:

R-39
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. The UCC constitution respects the theological differences among its member churches. The RCA is not in a position to investigate the life of the UCC's individual congregations.

2. The UCC is a confessional church that believes in the ecumenical creeds and the evangelical confessions of the Reformation. Among its standards are the Cambridge Platform/Westminster Confession, the Savoy Declaration, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Augsburg Confession, and Luther's Small Catechism.

3. In the preamble to its constitution, the UCC claims as its own the faith of the historic church expressed in the ancient creeds (the Apostle's and Nicene) and reclaimed in the basic insights of the Protestant reformers.

4. More than sufficient correspondence has been exchanged with regard to this matter by the ecumenical officer of the RCA, past president of the General Synod, and the moderator of the Commission on Christian Unity.

➢ A motion was made later to reconsider Overture 1. Synod:

VOTED: Not to reconsider Overture 1. A division of the house resulted in 118 votes to reconsider and 127 votes not to reconsider.
Report of the Commission on Christian Worship

The Commission on Christian Worship met in two stated sessions on October 4-6, 1998, and February 1-2, 1999, at the offices of the Reformed Church in America in Chicago, Illinois.

LITURGICAL WORK

Introduction

More than a generation ago Reinhold Niebuhr observed:

"the trouble with American Protestantism is that its protest against the various forms and disciplines of worship led to their destruction. It may be possible to have a brief period of religious spontaneity in which the absence of such disciplines does not matter. The evangelism of the American frontier may have been such a period. But this spontaneity does not last forever. When it is gone a church without adequate conduits of traditional liturgy and theological learning and tradition is without the waters of life."


The Reformed Church in America has long recognized the importance of theology and liturgy in the life of the church. Its constitution includes not only the Book of Church Order but the doctrinal standards and the Liturgy. Theology, polity, and liturgy constitute our life together as a denomination.

The Commission on Christian Worship is responsible for advising the church of changes needed in the Liturgy. In fulfilling that charge, the commission reviews and revises various orders, being attentive to concerns that have been raised and also working toward the goal of having a Liturgy that is consistent. The principles that guide the development of all liturgical revision are 1) faithfulness to Reformed theology, 2) vivid, biblical imagery, 3) clear, concise language, 4) breadth of imagery for God and inclusive language for people, 5) congregational participation, 6) historical sensitivity, 7) attention to the aural nature of liturgy, and 8) sensitivity to emerging ecumenical convergence.

"Proposed Order for the Ordination and Installation of Deacons and Elders"

The Commission on Christian Worship has been working on the orders for ordination and installation to the offices of the church. The 1998 General Synod approved the orders for ordination and installation of ministers of Word and sacrament for study and provisional use.

This year the proposed "Order for the Ordination and Installation of Deacons and Elders" is before the synod. The revisions in this liturgy ground all Christians' ministry in baptism, use language that names the moral responsibility of officeholders, and accent the unity of the offices in the church. This proposed order for ordination and installation of deacons and elders, drawing from both Scripture and the historic expression of the offices in our tradition, seeks to express a fuller understanding of both offices.
PROPOSED ORDER FOR THE ORDINATION AND INSTALLATION OF DEACONS AND ELDERS

The ecclesiastical duties of elders and deacons are set forth in the Book of Church Order (Part I, Article 1, Sections 8 and 10). These shall be made known to the congregation prior to election to office, and these officeholders shall acquaint themselves therewith.

The Book of Church Order (Part 1, Article 2, Section 11) directs that the names of elders- and deacons-elect shall be published in the church on three successive Sundays preceding their installation in order that the board of elders may consider legitimate objections.

Elders and deacons may be reelected, but shall not be reordained. When reelected, the following order shall be considered as an installation.

After the sermon and the prayer for blessing on the Word, the presiding minister shall begin:

PRESENTATION

Beloved in the Lord,
we have come to ordain and install elders and deacons in Christ’s holy church.
Christ alone is the source of all Christian ministry, through the ages calling men and women to serve.

By the Holy Spirit all who believe and are baptized receive a ministry to witness to Jesus as Savior and Lord, and to love and serve those with whom they live and work. We are ambassadors for Christ, who reconciles and makes whole. We are the salt of the earth; we are the light of the world.

Following Christ’s resurrection and ascension, God has given the church apostles, prophets, and teachers, deeds of power, gifts of healing, forms of assistance and leadership.

We stand within a tradition in which God calls and empowers deacons, elders, ministers of Word and sacrament, and professors of theology to fulfill an ordained ministry that enables the whole mission of the church.

The elder vice president of consistory invites the candidates forward, saying:

This congregation has elected the following people to the offices of deacon and elder: NN/s using full names of all candidates to be ordained and installed to the Office of Deacon; NN/s to be ordained and installed to the Office of Elder; NN/s
to be installed as deacon;
and NN/s ________________________________________
to be installed as elder.

The candidates shall remain standing as the presiding officer continues:

Deacons and elders are called to serve as Christ served.
We look to them to be people of
spiritual commitment, exemplary life,
compassionate spirit, and sound judgment.3

Deacons are set apart
for a ministry of
mercy, service, and outreach.4
They gather gifts and offerings,
care for them faithfully,
and distribute them with wisdom and compassion
to persons in need and
to causes that advance God’s kingdom on earth.5
Deacons visit and comfort the distressed,
provide for whatever necessities may arise, and
assist the congregation at services of worship.6

Elders are set apart
for a ministry of watchful and responsible care
for the welfare and order of the church.7
They have oversight of all members,
the deacons, and one another,
equipping everyone to live in harmony with God’s Word.8
They ensure the Word of God
is rightly proclaimed and taught, and
the sacraments purely administered.9
Elders assist the minister/s with their good counsel and
serve all Christians
with advice, consolation, and encouragement.10

Elders and deacons, together with the minister/s,
form the consistory,11
to lead God’s people in proclaiming
good news to the poor,
righteousness to the nations, and
peace among all.12
The consistory provides for the welfare of the church,
stewardship of property and finance,13 and
the spiritual benefit and growth of all Christ’s people.

The three offices of deacon, elder, and minister of Word and sacrament
continue the full ministry of Christ in our day.14
Everything in the church will be done decently and in order15
when faithful persons are called to office16 and
responsibly fulfill their charge.17

The presiding minister addresses the deacons- and elders-elect:
Brothers and sisters, before almighty God, and in the presence of this congregation, answer sincerely these questions:

Do you confess together with us and the church throughout the ages your faith in one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

Yes, truly, with all my heart.

The presiding minister shall invite the congregation to stand:

Let us all stand with these brothers and sisters, confessing our faith in the words of the Apostles’ Creed.

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

The congregation is seated, the candidates remain standing, and the presiding minister addresses the candidates:

Do you believe in your heart that you are called by Christ’s church, and therefore by God, to this office?

Yes, truly, with all my heart.

Do you believe the books of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God and the perfect doctrine of salvation, rejecting all contrary beliefs?

Yes, truly, with all my heart.

Will you be diligent in your study of Holy Scripture and in your use of the means of grace? Will you pray for God’s people and lead them by your own example in faithful service and holy living?

I will, and I ask God to help me.
Will you accept the order and governance of the Reformed Church in America, submitting to ecclesiastical discipline should you become delinquent in either life or doctrine? 22

I will, and I ask God to help me.

Will you be loyal to the witness and work of the Reformed Church in America, using all your abilities to further its Christian mission here and throughout the world? 23

I will, and I ask God to help me.

The presiding minister shall address the candidates for the office of deacon:

As deacons, will you faithfully, diligently, and cheerfully manifest Christ’s love and care, gather and distribute the offerings of God’s people, visit and comfort the distressed, minister to the poor and needy, and further God’s reign of justice and peace? 24

I will, and I ask God to help me.

The presiding minister shall address the candidates for the office of elder:

As elders, will you faithfully, diligently, and cheerfully study God’s Word, oversee the household of faith, encourage spiritual growth, maintain loving discipline, and provide for the proclamation of the gospel and the celebration of the sacraments? 25

I will, and I ask God to help me.

ORDINATION

Those who are to be ordained shall kneel individually before the presiding minister for the laying on of hands. All present who have been ordained to the office may join in the laying on of hands. When all have come forward and are in place, the presiding officer shall continue:

Let us pray.

God of grace,
pour out your Holy Spirit upon N and fill her/him with grace and power for this ministry of deacon/elder in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

When all ordinands have received the laying on of hands, the presiding minister continues:
In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, 
the only head of the church, 
I declare that NN/nn are ordained to the Office of Deacon and NN/nn are ordained to the Office of Elder.

RESPONSE TO ORDINATION

Elders and deacons of the great consistory extend the right hand of fellowship to the new elders and deacons before returning to their places. The presiding minister continues:

Elders and deacons, 
be faithful in performing your duties,
magnify the One who has called you to these high and holy offices, 
be zealous for the church of Christ, 
hospitable, prudent, upright, 
devout, and self-controlled. 
Love goodness, 
holding always to the mystery of the faith.

Members of N Church, 
please rise to affirm your covenant 
with the elders and deacons 
whom God has given us.

Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ, 
do you receive in the name of the Lord, 
these deacons and elders 
as duly elected and installed servants of Christ?

We do.

Do you promise to respect them 
for the sake of the offices 
for which they have been chosen and ordained?

We do.

Do you promise to encourage and pray for them, 
to labor together in obedience to the gospel 
for the unity, purity, and peace of the church, 
the welfare of the whole world, and 
the honor of our Lord Jesus Christ?

We do.

Beloved people of God, 
receive these deacons and elders as Christ’s own servants. 
Support them in love, 
that their work may bear fruit.

In the name and by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, 
I declare that these brothers and sisters 
are lawfully installed 
deacons and elders in this congregation.

Thanks be to God.
PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION WITH THE LORD’S PRAYER

Almighty and ever-loving God,
you taught us to pray
for ourselves and for others,
and to give thanks for all of life.

May every grace of ministry rest on these elders and deacons.
Keep them strong and faithful,
that your church may prosper in peace.
Grant them wisdom, courage, discretion, and benevolence,
that they may fulfill their charge
to the glory of Jesus Christ.

Bestow your grace on this people
that they may support these deacons and elders
with prayer, cooperation, and encouragement.
to guard them from growing weary in doing what is right.

Inspire your whole church
with your Spirit of power, unity, and peace.
Grant that all who trust you
may live together in love.
Lead all nations in the way of justice.
Direct those who govern;
may they be fair, maintain order,
support those in need, and defend the oppressed,
that the world may know true peace.

Give grace to all who proclaim the gospel
through Word and sacrament and deeds of mercy,
that by teaching and example
others may come to live for you.

Comfort and deliver, O Lord,
all who are in trouble...
sorrow...poverty...sickness...grief....
Heal them in body, mind, spirit, or circumstance,
working in them, by your grace,
wonders beyond their dreams and hopes,
through Jesus Christ our Savior,
who taught us to pray...

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.

The peace of Christ be with you.
And also with you.

The congregation may exchange the Peace using the same greeting or through other appropriate words and actions. The service continues with the offering, a hymn, and the benediction.

1 This order follows the same pattern as the "Order for Ordination and Installation of Ministers of Word and Sacrament," grounding all Christian ministry and office in baptism.
2 1 Corinthians 12:28.
3 Book of Church Order, Preamble; Chapter 1, Part I, Article 1. Section 10; 1 Timothy 3:2-13.
4 Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 1, Section 10.
5 Liturgy, 1968, 1908, 1882.
6 Liturgy, 1968.
7 Book of Church Order, Preamble; Chapter 1, Part I, Article 1, Section 8; Liturgy, 1968, 1908.
8 Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 1, Section 8; Liturgy, 1968, 1908, 1882.
9 Belgic Confession, Article 30; Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 1, Section 8; Liturgy, 1968, 1908, 1882.
10 Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 1, Section 8; Liturgy, 1968, 1908, 1882.
11 Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 1, Section 2; Liturgy, 1968.
12 Our Song of Hope, VI. 16.
13 Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 9; Liturgy, 1968.
15 1 Corinthians 14:40.
16 Belgic Confession, Article 30.
18 These questions parallel the questions asked of those being ordained to the Office of Minister of Word and Sacrament, underscoring both the seriousness of office in the Reformed tradition and the parity among offices.
21 These questions are particularly appropriate given elders' responsibility to discern when the Word is rightly preached. Both elders and deacons are called to be examples of faithful Christian living within the congregation.
22 Liturgy, 1968.
28 Titus 1:8.
29 1 Timothy 3:9; Liturgy, 1908, 1882.
33 Liturgy, 1908.
34 Liturgy, 1882.
To approve and distribute to RCA classes and congregations the “Proposed Order for the Ordination and Installation of Deacons and Elders” for a one-year period of study and provisional use, with responses submitted to the Commission on Christian Worship by January 1, 2000. (ADOPTED)

“Proposed Order for Profession of Faith”

The Commission on Christian Worship also brings a proposed “Order for Profession of Faith” before this synod. This order has developed out of discussions regarding how Christians in the Reformed tradition receive into a fully confessing role in the life of the church those who have been baptized as infants, those who wish to renew their profession, and those who have never been baptized.

The 1991 “Confirmation of Baptismal Vows: An Alternate Order” sought to address some of these issues in light of the welcoming of baptized children at the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. That order was replaced by the 1993 “Order for Remembering Baptism and Professing Faith,” avoiding “confirmation” language in favor of professing faith in ways more consonant with Reformed theology. That liturgy has not moved beyond provisional use, however.

The proposed “Order for Profession of Faith” results from the work of the commission to provide an enduring order for profession of faith that is anchored in and builds upon the RCA’s order for the sacrament of baptism. The reception of confessing members into a congregation is often a complex occasion that includes persons seeking adult baptism, making initial profession of faith, reaffirming faith, and transferring from another Christian church—along with the call to baptize the children of these various confessors. The commission has attempted to craft a carefully integrated order that accomplishes all of these purposes without cumbersome repetition.

PROPOSED ORDER FOR PROFESSION OF FAITH

In the Reformed Church in America, the board of elders receives people into the life and work of the congregation (Book of Church Order, Part I, Article 5, Section 2.a). Reception of confessing members is based on a candidate’s profession of faith, a reaffirmation of such a profession, or the presentation of a satisfactory certificate from another Christian congregation (BCO, Part I, Article 5, Section 2.b).

This order is for those receiving baptism and/or making initial profession of faith, those reaffirming faith, and those transferring membership from another congregation. Part I of this order may be used by the elders in the exercise of their authority. Part II is for use in celebration with the congregation.

PART I: BEFORE THE ELDERS

At the meeting of the elders, the presiding minister of Word and sacrament or the presiding elder shall present each person by name. After the presentation, the order proceeds:

Scripture promises “if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and
believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. The Scripture says, “No one who believes in him will be put to shame.””

Romans 10:9-11

Let us pray.

O Lord, source of all light and life, illumine us with your wisdom that what we do at this time may be pleasing in your sight; that your church may be strengthened and increased; and that your name be glorified among your people in both the church and the world; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

FAITH SHARING

The elders shall engage a conversation with the people, inquiring concerning their acceptance of the Christian faith and the sincerity of their desire to live as confessing members of the congregation. If personal credos (written faith statements) have been prepared, they shall be presented at this time.

THE QUESTIONS

The minister or presiding elder continues:

Dearly beloved in the Lord, in baptism, we are grafted into Christ, received into the household of faith, and made inheritors of the covenant of which baptism is the sign and seal. In grace and mercy, God, by the Holy Spirit, has implanted faith through Word and sacrament. You have come now before God and the church to profess your faith in Christ.

Do you believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord?

I do.

Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the only rule for faith and life?

I do.

Do you, relying on the grace of God, promise to confess Christ publicly before others, to serve Christ daily, and to walk in Jesus’ way?

I do.
Do you promise to exhibit the joy of new life in Christ;  
to share fully in the life of the church;  
to be faithful in worship and service; and  
to offer your prayers and gifts? 

I do.

Do you promise to accept the spiritual guidance of the church;  
to walk in a spirit of Christian love with this congregation;  
and to seek those things that make for unity, purity, and peace?

I do.

BLESSING

Be assured that as you declare your faith,  
God will be faithful  
to strengthen you, and  
to renew you by the Holy Spirit,  
that you may grow in grace and knowledge and  
may keep this covenant faithfully all your days.

The meeting shall conclude with the following or another suitable prayer offered by the presiding minister or one of the elders, with all joining in the Lord’s Prayer.

Let us pray.

Almighty God, we praise you  
that by the death and resurrection of your Son, Jesus Christ,  
you have overcome sin and brought us to yourself;  
and that by the sealing of your Holy Spirit  
you have bound us to Christ and his service.
We thank you for the baptismal covenant you make with all your servants.
As your grace has drawn NN/s (names of candidates) to you,  
continue to strengthen and sustain them.
By your Holy Spirit, daily increase in them your gifts: 
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
the spirit of counsel and might,  
the spirit of knowledge and the reverence of the Lord,  
the spirit of joy in your presence,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
who has taught us to pray, saying:

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial,  
and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,  
now and for ever. Amen.
The elders will reach their decision and may establish the date for the public reception of the new confessing members.

PART II: BEFORE THE CONGREGATION

The public celebration of baptism and profession of faith shall take place during worship on the Lord’s Day after the Word of God has been proclaimed.

PREPARATION AND PRESENTATION

The minister addresses the congregation from the font:

Hear the words of our Lord Jesus Christ:

All authority in heaven and on 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.
And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

Matthew 28:18-20

Hear also these words from Holy Scripture:

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.

Ephesians 4:4-6 and/or Galatians 3:27-28; Romans 6:3-4; John 1:12-13, Acts 2:39

Baptism is the sign and seal of God’s promises to this covenant people. In baptism God promises by grace alone:

to forgive our sins,
to adopt us into the Body of Christ, the Church,
to send the Holy Spirit daily to renew and cleanse us, and to resurrect us to eternal life.

This promise is made visible in the water of baptism.

Water may be poured into the font at this time.

Water cleanses, purifies, refreshes, sustains;
Jesus Christ is living water.
Through baptism Christ calls us to new obedience:
   to love and trust God completely,
   to forsake the evil of the world,
   and to live a new and holy life.
Yet, when we fall into sin,
we must not despair of God's mercy,
nor continue in sin,
for baptism is the sign and seal
of God's eternal covenant of grace with us.

An elder shall present the candidates for baptism and/or profession of faith, using the following statements as appropriate; candidates shall come forward as their names are read.

The elders of (name of congregation) have welcomed these persons who appeared before them and made profession of their Christian faith.

NN/s (using full names) ________ come before us
to make public this profession of faith
and to receive the sacrament of baptism;

NN/s (using full names) ________ are baptized members of the body of Christ.
In making public this profession of faith
they affirm the meaning of their baptism.

We ask them now to declare their faith before God and Christ's church,
that we may rejoice together and
welcome them as brothers and sisters in Christ.11

The minister addresses the candidates:12

Beloved of God,
I ask you before God and Christ's church
to reject evil,
to profess your faith in Christ Jesus, and
to confess the faith of the church.

Do you renounce sin and the power of evil
in your life and in the world?

I renounce them.

Who is your Lord and Savior?

Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior.

Will you be a faithful member of this congregation,
and, through worship and service,
seek to advance God's purposes
here and throughout the world?13

God being my helper, I will.

If children of those being received are also to be baptized, the parents are asked:

Will you promise
to instruct these children
in the truth of God's word,
in the way of salvation through Jesus Christ;
to pray for them,
to teach them to pray; and
to train them in Christ's way
by your example,
through worship, and
in the nurture of the church?

God being my helper, I will.

The congregation shall rise; the minister or elder addresses the members of the congregation:

Do you promise to love, encourage, and support these brothers and sisters
by teaching the gospel of God's love,
by being an example of Christian faith and character, and
by giving the strong support of God's family
in fellowship, prayer, and service?

We do.

The minister or elder addresses the candidates:

Do you promise
to accept the spiritual guidance of the church,
to walk in a spirit of Christian love with this congregation,
and to seek those things that make for unity, purity, and peace?14

I do.

The congregation and the candidates shall join in confessing the faith in the words of the Apostles' Creed.15 The questions may be omitted.

Do you believe in God the Father?

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God?

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.
Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

The congregation may be seated; the minister continues. If baptism is not to be celebrated, proceed to the blessing and welcome.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.16

We give you thanks,
O holy and gracious God,
for the gift of water.

In the beginning of creation your Spirit moved over the waters.
In the waters of the flood you destroyed evil.
You led the children of Israel through the sea into the freedom of the promised land.
In the river Jordan, John baptized our Lord and your Spirit anointed him.
By his death and resurrection Jesus Christ, the Living Water, frees us from sin and death and opens the way to life everlasting.

We thank you, O God, for the gift of baptism.
In this water you confirm to us that we are buried with Christ in his death, raised to share in his resurrection, and are being renewed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Pour out on us your Holy Spirit, so that those here baptized may be washed clean and receive new life.

To you be all honor and glory, dominion and power, now and forever, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE BAPTISMAL COVENANT

If children are to receive baptism, the minister may ask the parents of each child:

What is the name of this child?

The parents shall give the Christian name; the minister may hold infants or small children, addressing each:
N________ (use Christian names, omit surname),
for you Jesus came into the world;
for you he died and conquered death;
all this he did for you, little one,
thought you know nothing of it as yet.
We love because God first loved us.

The baptismal covenant shall be repeated for each person receiving baptism. Using
Christian names, omitting surname, the minister shall immerse, pour, or sprinkle water
visibly and generously on each, saying:

N________ (use Christian names, omit surname), I baptize you
in the name of the Father,
and of the Son,

The minister may mark the sign of the cross on the forehead, saying to each:

N________ (use Christian names, omit surname), child of the covenant,
in baptism, you are sealed by the Holy Spirit and
marked as Christ's own forever. Amen.

When all have been baptized, the minister may make the following declaration:

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ,
the only King and Head of the Church,
these children of God are now
received into the visible membership of the holy catholic church,
engaged to confess the faith of Christ,
and to be God's faithful servant's until life's end.

BLESSING AND WELCOME

The minister may continue by laying hands on the heads of those professing faith,
offering the prayer of blessing. The elders may join in the laying on of hands.

Defend, O Lord, this your servant N________ (use Christian names, omit surname)
with your heavenly grace,
that he/she may continue yours forever,
and daily increase in your Spirit more and more,
until he/she comes to your eternal kingdom;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.17

The minister invites the congregation to stand:

By the Holy Spirit all who believe and are baptized receive a ministry
to witness to Jesus as Savior and Lord,
and to love and serve those with whom they live and work.
We are ambassadors for Christ,
who reconciles and makes whole.
We are the salt of the earth;
we are the light of the world.18

Welcome our brothers and sisters in Christ.
Joyfully we receive you.
Join with us as we give witness in the world to the good news,
for we are all one in Christ Jesus.
Alleluia.

*The following blessing may be said or sung by the congregation while the elders greet
the new confessing members:*

"The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you,
and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance on you,
and give you peace." Amen.

*Numbers 6:24-26*

9 The Lord’s Prayer was included in the order for meeting before the elders, *Liturgy*, 1987, 1968.
10 This order is grounded in the “Sacrament of Baptism,” which was adopted in 1994. The
preparation, baptismal covenant, and blessing and welcome portions of that order are
included in this order.
12 The questions from the “Sacrament of Baptism,” 1994, and “Remembering Baptism and
Professing Faith,” provisional order, 1993, are used here.
13 “Remembering Baptism and Professing Faith,” provisional order, 1993; see also *Liturgy*,
1908, 1882.
14 *Liturgy*, 1987, 1968; see also 1908, 1882.
15 The Apostles’ Creed is included in the *Liturgy*, 1987, 1968; in a different question and
answer format in the *Liturgy*, 1908, 1882; and in “Remembering Baptism and Professing
This text for the Sursum Corda is from Praying Together, the English Language Liturgical Commission, 1988; the same text is used in the “Sacrament of Baptism,” 1994.


From the “ Provisional Order for the Ordination of a Minister of Word and Sacrament,” 1998.

R-41
To approve and distribute to RCA classes and congregations the “Proposed Order for Profession of Faith” for a one-year period of study and provisional use, with responses submitted to the Commission on Christian Worship by January 1, 2000. (ADOPTED)

Work in Process

The commission continues to receive and review responses to the “Order for the Ordination of a Minister of Word and Sacrament” and the “Order for Reception into the Classis and Installation of a Minister of Word and Sacrament,” which were approved for provisional use by the General Synod of 1998. Responses will be received by the commission until January 1, 2000. The commission is also working on revised orders for the organization of a new church and the commissioning of church workers.

Continuing the practice begun in 1995, the commission has been responsible for planning and implementing the General Synod worship services. Members of the commission, the preachers for daily worship, Dr. John Witvliet, and the Rev. John Paarlberg formed the worship planning team for the 1999 General Synod. It remains the tradition that the General Synod president appoints the preacher(s) for daily worship.

The Commission on Christian Worship expresses its deep appreciation to the Rev. Amy Van Gunst, who is completing her second term of service. She has brought many gifts not only to the commission, but also the work of the hymnal supplement committee and General Synod worship planning teams.

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

REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF WORSHIP

The Office of Worship assists congregations with worship resources and worship education, provides staff support for the Commission on Worship, and represents the denomination on the Consultation on Common Texts and similar ecumenical gatherings. For the past several years the office, together with the Commission on Worship, has had primary responsibility for planning the worship services for the General Synod. Last year the office also participated in planning the October 4 worship for the celebration of full communion (Formula of Agreement) and in drafting the Guidelines and Worship Resources for the Celebration of Full Communion.
Worship Resources and Education

Three liturgical orders—“Order of Worship for the Lord’s Day” (including “Order for the Celebration of the Lord’s Supper,” “Order for the Sacrament of Baptism,” and “Order for Healing”)—are posted on the RCA website and can be downloaded for use. Revisions of two additional orders, “Order for Profession of Faith” and “Order for the Ordination and Installation of Deacons and Elders,” are being recommended for provisional approval at this synod. If these additional orders are approved, all five will be published in booklet form and distributed to congregations. A revised Spanish translation of these orders, as well as Korean and Chinese translations, are also in process.

The educational video and study guide, Liturgy and Life: A Reformed Understanding of Worship, is a resource for new member education, consistory and worship committee training, and adult study groups. The Office of Worship and members of the Commission on Worship are also available to lead workshops on worship using the video and other resources.

Hymnal Supplement: Sing! A New Creation

The 1996 General Synod instructed the Commission on 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” (MGS 1996, R-5, p. 232). Soon thereafter the Office of Worship began discussions with representatives from the Christian Reformed Church about cooperating in the publication of a hymnal supplement. A committee was formed and held its first meeting in December 1997.

RCA members of the committee are Barbara Boertje, minister of music at First Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan; the Rev. James Brumm, area minister in the Regional Synod of New York; Alfred Fedak, director of music at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Albany, New York; the Rev. Amy Van Gunst, member of the Commission on Worship, Grand Rapids, Michigan; and the Rev. John Paarlberg, minister for social witness and worship. CRC representatives are Emily Brink, music and liturgy editor for CRC Publications; Bert Polman, professor of music at Redeemer College in Ancaster, Ontario; Charsie Sawyer, music faculty member at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan; Annetta Vander Lugt, music coordinator at Neland Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids; and John Witvliet, director of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship in Grand Rapids.

The committee will have met eight times and reviewed more than fifty recently published hymnals and supplements as well as many individual songs submitted by people from the United States, Canada, England, Australia, and New Zealand. More than eight hundred hymns, songs, and choruses have been reviewed. To provide focus for the review, the committee decided to concentrate on songs published in the last fifty years in four basic categories:

- Modern hymns: those with stanzas and more traditional structure.
- Global hymns: songs from several countries and cultures.
- Praise and worship choruses: usually shorter songs and responses.
- Psalms and canticles (which includes songs in all three of the above types).

The committee also met with various consultants, including two nationally known experts on global music: Michael Hawn (African and Asian music), from the faculty of Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas; and Jorge Lockwood (Hispanic music), director of music at Westend Presbyterian Church in New York City. The committee also organized regional hymnals to provide RCA and CRC members the opportunity to sing some of the songs under consideration and to offer their suggestions.
Christian Worship 207

finished hymnal will be a supplement of approximately 250 songs. Interspersed throughout the hymnal will be a variety of worship resources—including prayers, litanies, and responsive readings.

Soon after the committee began meeting it became convinced that a leader's edition (with additional musical helps, descants, instrumental parts, and additional worship resources) would be very helpful. However, the cost of producing such an edition appeared prohibitive. Late last year word was received of an anonymous gift to cover almost the entire cost of the development of a leader's edition as well as recordings to help introduce the supplement to churches.

In January 1999 members of the CRC Board of Publications and representatives from the RCA met and approved the committee's recommendation for a title: Sing! A New Creation. The committee is projecting a publication date for both the supplement and the leader's edition in 2000 or 2001.

Discipling New Christians: A Return to the Basics

Increasingly the church in North America finds itself in a missionary situation. The dominant culture no longer identifies (if it ever did) with the Christian faith. More and more, “seekers” who come into contact with a congregation come with little or no background in the stories, values, and traditions of the Bible and the church. Many congregations find themselves in a situation similar to that of the church in the early centuries of the Christian era: mission outposts in a secular culture. In such a context the church must become much more intentional in guiding and nurturing seekers as they prepare for baptism and discipleship.

The method for nurturing new Christians in the early church was quite simple: “They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). As they did these basic things, “day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). The primary resource for nurturing people in the Christian faith is the church being what it is called to be: a community that devotes itself to Scripture, worship, prayer, and ministry in daily life.

Several churches have begun to adapt this practice of the early church as a means of discipling new converts to the Christian faith. The catechumenate (a “catechumen” is someone preparing for baptism) is an intentional and graceful means of accompanying adult inquirers on their spiritual journey toward baptism and discipleship. It is not simply another program whereby a congregation adds to its lists of members. It is a way of welcoming, nurturing, and supporting those who are new to the Christian faith. And it is a ministry of the whole congregation; it is the congregation's essential ministry.

This ministry includes a one-on-one mentoring process, meeting in a small group, and several opportunities to involve the entire congregation in prayer for the catechumens and their sponsors. The process includes regular worship, reflection on biblical passages, modeling a life of prayer, and engagement in some form of ministry. The catechumenal process leads to baptism and admission to the Lord's Table. However, newly baptized adults continue to receive support from their sponsors and church leaders who help them explore ways of living out their faith. The process can also be adapted for previously baptized adults who are making reaffirmation of their faith and for baptized children and young people who are making their first public profession of faith.

During the past few years the Office of Worship, in cooperation with the Commission on Worship, the Office for Education and Faith Development, and the Office of Evangelism, have begun exploring ways to introduce and adapt the catechumenal process for use in the Reformed Church. Denominational staff, representatives of the Commission on Worship,
pastors, and lay people have participated in training events sponsored by the North American Association of the Catechumenate and by some of the denominations who are developing this ministry for use in their churches. The Commission on Worship has reviewed some of the liturgical rites used in the catechumenal process. The Offices of Worship and Congregational Services plan to send additional RCA representatives to training events and workshops. Exploring the possibility of regional RCA workshops for interested congregations and possible cooperation with the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is also being explored.
Report of the Commission on Church Order

Since the 1998 meeting of General Synod, the Commission on Church Order (CCO) met September 25, 1998, and March 6, 1999, at the RCA's regional office in Chicago, Illinois, to consider referrals from General Synod and other matters related to church order.

MINISTERS TRANSFERRING FROM ONE CLASSIS TO ANOTHER

The commission reviewed a communication dated September 6, 1998, from the stated clerk of Greater Palisades Classis concerning the formalities incident to the transfer of a minister from one classis to another. The commission determined that a procedure should be in place to regularize such transfers. A clear statement of the minister's status will allow for the orderly transfer of ministers. This entails changes in the Book of Church Order (BCO) as well as the formularies. Therefore, the commission proposes the following:

R-42
To adopt the following revision to the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 13, by inserting a new Section 9 (and renumbering the current Sections 9-15 as Sections 10-16), and also by adding new Formulary 9, (and renumbering current Formularies 9-13 as numbers 10-14) for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined):

Sec. 9. A minister who moves from the bounds of one classis into another shall request a Certificate of Dismission from the classis where membership is held. The Certificate of Dismission shall be presented prior to the approval of the minister for reception into the new classis. That classis shall notify the sending classis when a minister is received.

Formulary 9

To the Classis of :

This is to attest that the Rev. is a member in good and regular standing of the Classis of , and is now requesting dismission to the Classis of , to whose Christian fellowship and care he/she is hereby affectionately commended. When received by the Classis of , the Rev. 's relation to this classis shall cease.

Last served as delegate to regional synod (year)
Last served as delegate to General Synod (year)

, Stated Clerk

(Classis of )

(date)

(ADOPTED)
REVISIONS TO DISCIPLINARY AND JUDICIAL PROCEDURES

The CCO received a communication which raised two issues: 1) Whether an assembly (as opposed to a judicatory) may administer the discipline of admonition and rebuke, and 2) specifying the grounds for a complaint.

The BCO currently provides, at Chapter 2, Part I, Article 1, Section 2 that discipline may take the form of *inter alia*, admonition, or rebuke, "...as the gravity of the offense in the opinion of the judicatory may warrant." It further provides that "admonition and rebuke are pastoral in nature and are exercised by an assembly in the ordinary course of its proceedings." Therefore, it appears that admonition and rebuke may be administered by an assembly. However, the argument could be made, based on the first sentence of Section 2, that only a judicatory may determine the gravity of an offense, and therefore only a judicatory may administer discipline. The following recommendation makes it clear that either an assembly or a judicatory may admonish or rebuke, but that further discipline is the province of a judicatory.

R-43
To adopt the following revision to the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 2, Part I, Article 1, Section 2, for recommendation to the classes for approval (deletions are stricken out; additions are underlined):

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 of charges to a judicatory. A judicatory may, in the judicial process, impose admonition or rebuke as a form of discipline.

➢ The Advisory Committee on Church Order recommended to substitute the following for R-43 (deletions are stricken out):

R-43 (substitute)

To adopt the following revision to the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 2, Part I, Article 1, Section 2, for recommendation to the classes for approval (deletions are stricken out):

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 of charges to a judicatory.
Reasons:

1. A consistory is also an assembly which includes deacons.

2. This substitute motion simplifies the section.

3. Other forms of gentle discipline are still available.

A motion to amend the substitute R-43 by adding the words “Discipline requires the presentation of an accusation to a judicatory” was not adopted.

The synod:

VOTED: To refer substitute R-43 to the Commission on Church Order for report to the 2000 General Synod.

The second question raised by the communication concerned the grounds for a complaint. The commission is concerned that the grounds for a complaint not be limited, since it is impossible to anticipate all actions which give rise to a legitimate complaint. However, assistance is found in BCO Chapter 2, Part III, Article 1, Section 2, which describes the grounds for appeal. Therefore, the commission proposes the following:

R-44
To adopt the following revision to the Book of Church Order, Chapter 2, Part II, Article 1, by inserting a new Section 2 (and renumbering the current Sections 2-4 as Sections 3-5), for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined):

Sec. 2. Grounds for complaint include any action or decision that is inimical to the church, whether the alleged error of the assembly or officer is procedural or substantive, and specifically would include, but are not limited to, irregularity in the proceedings; refusal of reasonable indulgence to any person or entity involved in or affected by the decision or action; manifestation of bias or prejudice in the decision or action; and manifest injustice.

The synod:

VOTED: To amend R-44 by substituting the word “harful” for “inimical” in line two.

VOTED: To adopt R-44 as amended.

SUPERVISION OF STUDENTS OF THEOLOGY

The 1997 report of the Task Force on Standards for the Preparation of the Professional Ministry in the Reformed Church in America (MGS 1997, p. 330 ff.) set forth criteria for the measurement of competence for ministry. The standards include character, call, gifts, appropriate comprehension of history, theology, biblical understanding and interpretation, capacity for leadership, and commitment to the church. The task force established by the 1997 General Synod to implement that report had hoped to revise the Book of Church Order (Chapter 1, Part II, Article 8, Section 6) to reflect the criteria in the 1997 report. The Commission on Church Order was given the task of reviewing proposed changes and presenting them to this General Synod.
The new set of criteria is intended to acknowledge the peculiar responsibilities of the classes. Current criteria generally follow an academic model. While such is appropriate and indeed highly to be desired for candidates for ministry in a Reformed church, they are more properly addressed by those set aside by the church for the academic preparation of candidates, those in the fourth office, professors of theology. The classes, on the other hand, while having a proper role of judging a candidate's competence within the academic disciplines, are much more attuned to such ecclesial concerns as call, commitment, competence, and understanding not only the intellectual but spiritual demands of the office, and as such the church order gives to the classes responsibility for ascertaining those properly to be licensed for ordination to the ministry of Word and sacrament by the church.

It is to be noted that the procedure currently outlined in section 6 assumes that candidates will enroll in a seminary for three (or four) years in anticipation of graduation, and subsequently, ordination. For many classes, this state of affairs no longer exists. Many candidates take many years to complete their seminary education. Thus, the requirement that the classes examine each year may be unnecessary, provided that they take appropriate time throughout a candidate's seminary education to ascertain appropriate progress in regard to the various criteria set forth in the proposed changes.

R-45
To adopt the following revision to the Book of Church Order, Chapter I, Part II, Article 8, by deleting current Section 6, adding Sections 6, 7, and 8, and renumbering current Section 7 as Section 9, for recommendation to the classes for approval (deletions are stricken, additions underlined):

Sec. 6. The candidate shall be examined by the class at the conclusion of each year of seminary training. The class may also require a candidate to appear at the conclusion of any period of internship. The candidate's class may request a class in the vicinity of the seminary or field of internship to act in its behalf at the conclusion of the year/s between the first and the last.

a. Prior to the final year of study the class shall satisfy itself concerning the candidate's competence in the following areas, placing the examination in each subject in the session in which the candidate is best qualified to be examined in it, as determined from a copy of the candidate's academic record furnished by the seminary: (1) Hebrew; (2) Greek; (3) biblical introduction and exegesis; (4) church history; (5) church government; (6) views of the ministry and its duties; (7) competence in conducting public worship; (8) sermon preparation and delivery; (9) Christian educational theory for and practice with children, youth and adults; and (10) personal piety and fitness for the ministry.

b. When the candidate is examined for licensure and ordination at the conclusion of seminary training, the class shall satisfy itself concerning the candidate's competence in: (1) theology; (2) the nature and administration of the sacrament; (3) knowledge and adherence to the Standards and the Government and Disciplinary Procedures of the Reformed Church in America; (4) the history and program of Reformed Church world mission.
c. The classis shall give the candidate a provisional license to preach under the supervision of the General Synod through its agent after each year of study, providing it is satisfied with the student’s attainment. The provisional license granted prior to the final year shall also give the candidate the right to receive the promise of a call.

Sec. 6. As the candidate pursues theological education, the classis shall satisfy itself that the candidate exhibits (1) appropriate character and call to the ministry of Word and sacrament; (2) comprehension of Scripture and of the history, theology, and church order of the Reformed Church in America; (3) requisite skills in interpretation and proclamation of Scripture, including sufficient Greek and Hebrew to understand nuances of the biblical text; (4) competence for ministry; (5) commitment to the unity of the church, the ministry of all Christians, and the proclamation of the gospel.

Sec. 7. When the candidate has been granted a Certificate of Fitness for Ministry, and upon conditions set forth in 1.11.11.4, the classis shall examine the candidate for censure and ordination. The classis shall satisfy itself that the candidate is competent in: (1) theology; (2) the nature and administration of the sacraments; (3) knowledge of and adherence to the Constitution (the Standards, the Government and Disciplinary Procedures, and the Liturgy) of the Reformed Church in America; and (4) the history and program of Reformed Church mission.

Sec. 8. Provided the classis is satisfied with the candidate’s progress toward ordination, it shall grant to the candidate each year a provisional license to preach under the supervision of the General Synod through its agent. The provisional license granted prior to the final year of the candidate’s program shall also give the candidate the right to receive the promise of a call. (ADOPTED)

COPASTORS

The 1998 General Synod referred to this commission an overture from the Synod of the Mid-Atlantics requesting that the General Synod undertake a study of the issue of copastors, hoping to avoid confusion occasioned by the presence of copastors and the lack of clarity concerning same in the BCO (MGS 1998, R-23, p. 326).

The increase in the number of so-called “copastors” requires that the commission spend more time than it has had in the current year studying the matter. The commission intends to report any proposed amendments to the General Synod of 2000.

COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF THE CHURCH ORDER

The 1998 General Synod voted to undertake a comprehensive review of its church order and instructed the moderator of the General Synod Council to appoint a task force to begin that process (MGS 1998, R-7, p. 298). This commission understands its mandate as the synod’s instrument for reflecting on the church order and as such offered itself to the General Synod Council as a means by which the synod can discharge the task set forth in the synod’s action. The General Synod Council assigned the synod’s mandate to this commission, and we anticipate the appointment of additional persons to work with us at the task. The commission shall begin work in the fall of 1999 and will present a progress report to the General Synod of 2000.
PROCESS FOR DISSENT

Upon recommendation of the Commission on Theology, the 1998 General Synod requested that this commission "formulate a more general process of dissent for inclusion in the Book of Church Order" (MGS 1998, R-4, p. 474).

The commission has begun a study of this matter, but confesses that it is extraordinarily difficult to design a general process of dissent. The occasion for the General Synod's request is an ongoing discussion of the so-called "conscience clauses" introduced into the church order to allow officers of the church who, for conscience sake, cannot participate in the ordination of women to church office (the pertinent sections of the BCO are Chapter 1, Part I, Article 5, Section 2h; Chapter 1, Part II, Article 2, Section 7; and Chapter 1, Part II, Article 13, Section 14). In this instance, the conscience clauses allow an officer of the church to refrain from participation in a discreet act or process that leads to that act, ordination. At the same time, of course, the clauses state clearly that no church officer can engage in an activity that impedes the ordination of a woman to office simply by reason of gender.

Were the church order to include a general process of dissent, the question presents itself: what is gained? If the answer is that the officer need not participate in particular rites of the church, as with ordination, the establishment of a general clause analogous to those now in the order would appear to result in deleterious consequences. A Reformed church could scarcely countenance, one assumes, a minister or elder who refuses to participate in infant baptism by reason of conscience.

However, the difficulty in devising a process of dissent for inclusion in the church order does not mean that this commission devalues dissent as such. Reformed order is such that the very plurality of the offices and the purity within and among offices encourages vigorous and sometimes contentious debate in the belief that the Spirit leads the church through the offices of the church gathered in assemblies. Indeed, your commission finds a number of avenues open to those who strongly oppose actions taken by the various assemblies of the church. Members of assemblies have, for example, the redress to complaint and appeal as outlined in the Disciplinary Procedures.

Complaints, however, must show that a body has in some fundamental way violated church order. Nonetheless, other avenues are open to members of the Reformed church to engage the church in dialogue and discussion. Members of the Reformed church have not hesitated to use the church presses, as well as a variety of other media, to further sometimes spirited discussion. We value such open debate.

The occasion for the General Synod's referral to the commission in this matter, however, requires comment on the content of the conscience clauses in themselves. While they are generally invoked by officers who desire to recuse themselves from participation in the ordination of a woman, the scope of the clauses is indeed much broader. One version of the clause (BCO, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 5, Section 2h) states that a board of elders shall not "permit any member to obstruct by unconstitutional means the election, ordination, or installation of women to church offices." That statement, with its parallels, clearly means, for example, that a member may not argue against the ordination of a woman simply because she is a woman, and such action on the member's part would make that member vulnerable to ecclesiastical discipline. Likewise, a member of a classis may voice the opinion that the ordination of women is contrary to Scripture, but if that argument is used in any way that it will prevent or hinder the ordination of a woman, he or she too is in violation of the church order. Similarly, it is clear that inclusion of clauses within a local congregation's bylaws that hinder the ordination of women to church offices is clearly out of order.
While the conscience clauses allow persons to hold the view that women's ordination is against the dictate of Scripture, some presume that the existence of the clause means that women's ordination remains an open question in the Reformed Church. Clearly that is not so. The church can, through appropriate means, close the offices to women should it do so in a constitutional manner. But at present the status is plain: the church has decided that women are to be admitted to all the offices of the church. The conscience clauses allow those who disagree for the sake of conscience a place to be on an issue that offends their understanding of Scripture in this matter.

A far more serious matter arises with a Reformed church member or officer who invokes the conscience clause to refuse to participate with a woman who has already been ordained to office. This has come to expression, for example, when some invoke the clause to refuse to be ordained when an woman officer participates in the act of ordination. Such use of the clause is not permitted by the Book of Church Order and would violate both the principle of the nature of the church's authority (BCO, p. 2) and of the parity of ministry (BCO, p. 4) as outlined in the Preamble.

We view this as a grave matter because such uses of the conscience clause refuse to acknowledge women as ministers, elders, deacons, and professors, and so not only violate the Book of Church Order, but call into question vows and declarations made upon ordination. As such, Reformed church members attack the very notion of ordination itself and indeed the nature of the offices of the church, and so stand against the way of being of a Reformed church as expressed in the Standards, the Liturgy, and the Government of the Reformed Church.

COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS IN UNION CHURCHES

The commission reviewed communications from the stated clerk of Holland Classis and the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes requesting clarification of the BCO language regarding complaints and appeals in union churches. The terminology found in Chapter 1, Part I, Article 7, Section 2 contains terms which do not jibe with the disciplinary procedures found in Chapter 2 of the BCO. For example, subsection "s" refers to "the commissioner, prosecutor, or prosecuting committee." Similarly, subsection "u" refers to the "administrative acts of a consistory." None of these terms finds definition in Chapter 2 of the BCO. The commission determined that clarity would be improved by the following:

R-46
To adopt the following revision to the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 7, Section 2 by inserting new subsections "r" and "s", deleting current subsections "r" and "u", and renumbering the current subsections "s" and "t" as subsections "t" and "u", for recommendation to the classes for approval (deletions are stricken out; additions are underlined):

r: Appeals or complaints against the actions of the consistory (session) shall be made to one assembly or judicatory only (presbytery or classis) at the choice of the members, and all subsequent appeals or complaints shall be in the courts of the members' original choice, and decisions so finally made shall be binding on the consistory (session) and on the members.

r: Complaints against the actions of the consistory (session) may be taken under constitutional provisions of only one denomination, according to the choice of the complainant, and once being complained to one judicatory, no other denomination shall accept jurisdiction in the same matter.
Appeals from the judicial actions of the board of elders (session) shall be made to one judicatory only (classis or presbytery) at the choice of the member(s) filing the appeal; and all subsequent appeals shall be in the courts of the denomination where the original appeal was filed, and decisions so finally made shall be binding on the board of elders (session) and on the members.

Complaints against the administrative acts of the consistory (session) may be taken under the constitutional provisions of only one denomination, according to the choice of the complainant, and once being complained to one assembly (judicatory), no other denomination shall accept jurisdiction in the same matter.

Upon the recommendation of the advisory committee, the synod:

VOTED: To amend R-46 by deleting the word “session” wherever it appears in the new subsections and inserting “or its equivalent” and by deleting the word “presbytery” in the new subsections and inserting “or its equivalent.”

VOTED: To adopt R-46 as amended.

MEMBERSHIP ON REGIONAL SYNOD JUDICIAL BUSINESS COMMITTEES

The Regional Synod of the Great Lakes submitted an overture to the 1997 General Synod (MGS 1997, R-22, p. 295) to revise the BCO, Chapter 1, Part III, Article 6, Section 4. The 1997 synod instructed the CCO to incorporate the substance of the overture in proposed revisions to the BCO to the 1998 General Synod. The CCO proposed the deletion of BCO Chapter 1, Part III, Article 6, Section 4 in its entirety. The Advisory Committee on Church Order recommended that the 1998 General Synod not adopt the CCO’s recommendation, citing the need for each regional synod to have a standing judicial business committee.

However, the overture also addressed the composition and function of the regional synod judicial business committee. The CCO, in its report to the 1998 General Synod, noted that regional synods should be allowed flexibility in determining the membership of their committees. For example, there is no provision in the BCO which mandates the composition of classis judicial business committees. Therefore, the CCO proposes the following:

R-47
To adopt the following revision to the Book of Church Order Chapter 1, Part III, Article 6, Section 4 for recommendation to the classes for approval (deletion is stricken out):

Sec. 4. The regional synod shall constitute, by election or otherwise, a permanent committee on judicial business. The clerk of the synod shall refer to this committee all appeals and complaints, with all papers and documents pertaining thereto, before these matters are presented to the synod. The permanent committee on judicial business shall consist of three ministers and two elders, who need not be delegates to the synod. The term of one member of the committee shall expire annually and a successor shall be chosen at the regular meeting of the synod for a term of five years. A vacancy occurring from the death,
In 1998 the Classis of Schenectady overtured the General Synod to request the commission to clarify, regulate, and further define the position of interim minister in the *Book of Church Order* (MGS 1998, R-17, p. 378). General Synod referred this request to the commission for report to the 1999 General Synod. The commission has examined the issues raised in the overture, recognizing that it is the responsibility of classes to supervise all ministers under contract serving churches within their bounds. Such supervision includes approving contracts (*BCO*, 1.11.7, Sec. 8). The commission is continuing this review and will make further report and recommendation to the 2000 General Synod.

In the course of its regular review of the *Book of Church Order*, the commission noted several instances where amendment would improve clarity and consistency among provisions in the book.

The 1998 General Synod ratified the vote of the classes to amend the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 13, to not require the installation of every minister, allowing classes to determine when such installation is appropriate. The 1998 commission report identified problems which emerge when classes install ministers under contract (“While technically the classis installs the minister to the ‘ministry’ and not to the ‘church,’ it is unclear to the participants just what has happened. What effect does this installation have on the ministry? What happens when the ministry ends? Is a dissolution required? Dissolution would appear to serve no purpose, and yet the installation implies a pastoral relation that requires dissolution” *MGS 1998*, p. 241). To increase consistency and clarity the commission presents this revision:

**R-48**

To adopt the following revision to the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 4 for recommendation to the classes for approval (addition is underlined; deletion is stricken out):

Sec. 4. A consistory may contract with one or more assistant ministers to serve with its minister(s) serving under a call. The contract(s) shall follow the guidelines established by the classis. The assistant minister may be installed by the classis as a minister under contract, but shall not be ipso facto a member of the church or the consistory. (ADOPTED)

There are careful provisions for churches entering into contract with both ministers and students. However, such safeguards are not named for licensed candidates. Sometimes such candidacy continues for a period of time which may include some contract employment in a church. Classes should maintain the same oversight for contracts between licensed candidates as they do for ministers and students.

**R-49**

To adopt the following revision of the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 8 for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined):
Sec. 8. A church shall not enter into a contract with a minister, a licensed candidate, or a student except by approval of the classis. Between sessions of classis the approval may be given by the president and the clerk of the classis. (ADOPTED)

The 1998 General Synod voted “to request the Commission on Church Order to propose changes to the Book of Church Order which will allow classes to request dispensations on behalf of ministerial candidates who have been or will be granted the M.Div. degree from an ATS accredited seminary, but who are not able to meet the full requirements of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry” (MGS 1998, p. 374). Because the removal of this article on dispensations was a matter before the classes for vote, the commission deemed it premature to prepare the requested change. Following the declarative act of this synod to affirm the amendment removing dispensations from the church order, this commission is prepared to review favorably the request of the 1998 General Synod and propose changes to the 2000 General Synod.

From the Report of the General Synod Council’s Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee

REVIEW OF GENERAL SYNOD COMMISSIONS

One of the responsibilities of the General Synod Council (GSC) is “to review all General Synod commissions at least once during each five-year period and to recommend to General Synod a continuation of, a reconstitution of, or a discontinuation of such commissions, with the understanding that necessity for continuation shall not be assumed” (BCO, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 6b). The first review under this section was conducted in 1984-85 for report to the General Synod in June 1985. The second review was conducted in 1989-90 for report to the General Synod in 1990.

At its April 1990 meeting, the General Synod Executive Committee (GSEC) voted to review at least two commissions each year, beginning in 1992, rather than review all commissions at one time every five years. A 1991-95 schedule for review of commissions was then approved at the January 1991 GSEC meeting.

The GSC, at its March 1995 meeting, voted to continue reviewing at least two commissions each year, beginning in 1997. The following 1996-2000 schedule for review of commissions was then approved:

1996—No review of commissions
1997—Commission on Judicial Business
Commission on Church Order
Commission on Nominations
1998—Commission on Christian Worship
Commission on Theology
1999—Commission on History
Commission on Christian Unity
2000—Commission on Christian Action
Commission for Women
For the review of the Commission on History and the Commission on Christian Unity, the General Synod Council appointed the Rev. Dr. Charles Van Engen, the Rev. Allen Pruis, and Donald DeVries.

Following a review of its task, the committee proceeded as follows: 1) each commission was sent a questionnaire on what it viewed as its major accomplishments over the previous five years, the value of its work for the life of the denomination, its plans for the future, etc.; 2) the moderator of each commission was interviewed by the committee during the 1998 meeting of the General Synod in Holland, Michigan.

The GSC received the final report of its committee in April 1999 and makes the following recommendations for each commission. It should be noted that, in addition to specific recommendations, there are brief descriptions of the functions of each commission and sometimes a comment or suggestion.

**Commission on History**

The Commission on History undertakes its task in accordance with its responsibilities as delineated in the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 5. The role of the commission has changed significantly since the formation of the General Synod Council and the assignment of responsibility for supervision of the RCA Archives to the GSC. In the review of the commission’s work it was noted that the General Synod of 1998 had just approved on first reading a change in the responsibilities for this commission (*MGS 1998*, R-6, p. 295) by removing from its mandate its role as the advisory board for the RCA Archives. This key change in the responsibilities of the commission will become effective following the second reading of the proposed change in the *Book of Church Order* at the General Synod of 1999.

The commission continues to serve as an advocate and advisor to the archivist and to the GSC’s Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee on the collection and protection of the official and corporate records and documents of the General Synod, its related boards, agencies, and institutions, regional synods, classes, and congregations. The commission also serves as an advisor to the editor of the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America, a series of books published regularly in cooperation with William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company of Grand Rapids, Michigan. The review committee also noted the importance of the work carried out through the office of the archivist and offers its thanks and commendation to Russell Gasero for his dedication and service to the ministries and mission of the RCA.

In light of the significant changes in the role of the Commission on History since the formation of the GSC that has resulted in the full transfer of responsibility for the RCA Archives and its staff to that board, the committee believes that the GSC should begin a more thorough analysis of the responsibilities assigned to the commission and advise a future General Synod on its continuation.

➢ The advisory committee recommended to amend R-50 as follows (deletions are stricken out):

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R-50
To continue the Commission on History for one additional year (2000), and to direct the General Synod Council to undertake a thorough review of the commission’s responsibilities and report to the General Synod of 2000 on how best to carry out the church’s responsibility for protecting and maintaining its historic record in the future. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)
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Reasons:

1. The wording is redundant.

2. The wording limits the review process.<

Commission on Christian Unity

The Commission on Christian Unity undertakes its task in accordance with its responsibilities as delineated in the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 3. The primary work of the commission is in response to referrals from the General Synod and as the initiator and supervisor of the RCA's membership and participation in various ecumenical bodies. The Commission on Christian Unity has been one of the most active General Synod commissions in the past several years. Its work has focused on but not been limited to: 1) providing guidance on the dialogue process and the recommendations to the General Synod (1997) to support the Formula of Agreement; 2) engaging in dialogue with consistories and other assemblies across the RCA on this and other critical ecumenical issues; and 3) assisting in the formulation of an ecumenical partnership agreement with the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa.

The commission has been deeply engaged in several other issues in the life and mission of the RCA, including the ongoing dialogue with the United Church of Christ. The committee shares the concern of the commissioners that the work assigned to this commission recently has made it difficult for it to carry out all of its assigned responsibilities within the constraints of time and budget allocated to it. The committee extends its appreciation to the commission for its work in the past several years and affirms the continuation of the Commission on Christian Unity.

R-51
To affirm the continuation of the Commission on Christian Unity as specified in the *Bylaws of the General Synod*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 3. (ADOPTED)

Report to General Synod Regarding Articles of Incorporation Project

The classis is responsible for exercising "a general superintendence over its enrolled ministers and over the interest and concerns of the churches within its bounds" for enforcing the requirements of the *Government of the Reformed Church in America* and for exercising "original and appellate supervisory power over the acts, proceedings, and decisions of the boards of elders and consistories, both in temporal matters and in those relating to Christian discipline" (*Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 2, Sections 1 and 2). On several occasions in recent years a classis, when seeking to carry out these responsibilities, has encountered challenges to its authority to do so. Typically, the challenge has been raised by a dominant group in a local church which seeks either to withdraw the church from the fellowship of the RCA or to conduct the affairs of its church in a manner inconsistent with the *Constitution* of the Reformed Church in America. Typically such groups have asserted that while the RCA may consider the *Book of Church Order* binding upon all local churches, this particular church has never agreed to be bound by the *Book of Church Order*, and
therefore is not subject to the supervision and authority of the classis. Great time and expense is then spent (at times in litigation) determining whether the local church has, either expressly in writing or implied through its conduct over time, subjected itself to the supervision and authority of the classis.

How can such an argument have any merit? How can a local church in the RCA be a part of the RCA for years and at the same time claim that it is not subject to the supervision and authority of its classis, notwithstanding the express (and apparently unequivocal) provisions of the Book of Church Order? The answer lies in the fact that the RCA is subject to federal, state, local, or provincial (in the case of Canada) laws. Under the laws of a few of those jurisdictions great deference is given to the determination of the denomination (as reflected in documents such as the RCA’s Book of Church Order) regarding the relationship between it and its local churches. Most jurisdictions, however, give no such deference, and instead determine the relationship between a local church and its denomination using “neutral principles of law.” Under a “neutral principles of law” analysis, courts look at a variety of evidentiary sources, of which the Book of Church Order is only one. Courts also look at documentation such as a local church’s organizational documents (e.g., charter, articles of incorporation, bylaws), property deeds, and behavior. Consequently, by merely claiming that it is not subject to the supervision and authority of its classis a local church creates an issue that must be resolved before the classis can in fact exercise its supervision and authority over the church. A resolution of the issue typically (at least in those jurisdictions that use neutral principles of law) involves a review of many documents and facts in addition to the RCA’s Book of Church Order.

Fortunately, in those cases in which the classis has contested the local church’s assertion that it is not subject to the supervision and authority, the classis has prevailed. Typically, however, the process has been lengthy, costly, and divisive. Hoping to avoid such issues in the future, the General Synod Council concluded several years ago that each local church in the RCA should include in its charter articles of incorporation or a similar organizational document—a clear statement expressly confirming that the local church is a member church in the RCA and subject to the supervision and authority of its classis. Specifically, at its April 1994 meeting the General Synod Council (GSC) voted “[to] include the following language in the corporate charter of every incorporated RCA church:

The ___________ is a member church of the Reformed Church in America; this corporation shall be governed in accordance with the Reformed Church in America Book of Church Order” (GSC 94-123).

Later the GSC voted to appoint an ad hoc committee to develop a plan for RCA congregations to document their relationship to the RCA, directed certain staff to work with the ad hoc committee in the implementation of the plan, and requested the RCA stated clerks (working with the ad hoc committee and RCA staff) to implement the plan.

At a very early stage in its work the ad hoc committee agreed that the success of its work would depend heavily upon the support and cooperation of the stated clerks. Consequently, to assist the stated clerks (and thereby limit the amount of work required of them), correspondence and supporting materials were developed for their use. The ad hoc committee also agreed at an early stage that its work should be focused initially on a few classes as “pilot projects.” This was reported to GSC at its October 1995 meeting (GSC 95-178).

At the suggestion of the classis stated clerks, the committee also refined the language originally proposed by the General Synod Council. The refinements were made to: 1) include language that would prevent a church from eliminating the recommended language from its organizational documents at some later date without first obtaining its classis’ approval, and
2) describe more completely the governing documents to which each local church in the RCA is subject. The language ultimately agreed upon by the ad hoc committee (and forwarded to the classis stated clerks for implementation by the churches) reads as follows:

This [church/corporation/organization] is a member church in the Reformed Church in America; is and at all times shall be subject to and governed in accordance with the Constitution of the Reformed Church in America; and agrees that the provisions of this [section/paragraph] shall not be amended or modified in any manner without the prior written consent of the classis of which this church is a member.

Ad hoc committee members met with the RCA’s stated clerks at their annual meetings in 1995, 1996, and 1998. Following the 1995 meeting several classes agreed to serve as “pilot projects.” Their work was done from the fall of 1995 through the spring of 1996. Based upon information learned from the pilot projects, as well as suggestions made by the stated clerks at their June 1996 annual meeting, a few minor revisions were made to the materials previously prepared by the ad hoc committee for use by the stated clerks. In July of 1996 the revised materials were sent to all stated clerks with a request that they be forwarded to all churches. Since that time the ad hoc committee has continued to make itself available, through its RCA support staff, to classes and local churches. It has responded to numerous inquiries regarding local churches’ existing articles of incorporation, suggested revisions to them, provided assistance (when requested) with drafting revisions to articles of incorporation, and continued to explain the importance of this project—especially to those churches and classes that have questioned the motives underlying the project.

During this same period the committee also recognized that steps should be taken to ensure that any church added to the RCA (either by the development of a new church or the “adoption” of an established church) include in its articles of incorporation the suggested language. Accordingly, several members of the committee jointly drafted a model form of articles of incorporation to be used by new churches, and have made the form available to the GSC’s coordinator for new church development.

From the fall of 1997 through the spring of 1998 status reports were requested from each stated clerk to determine what progress has been made toward the goal of having every local church include in its organizational document the language suggested by the GSC. As of March 1998 the status reports disclosed the following:

Total number of classes: 46

Total number of classes that submitted a status report: 25 (54 percent)

Total number of churches in the RCA: 954

Total number of churches that have provided any information to their classis stated clerk: 231 (24 percent)

Total number of churches whose articles of incorporation include the provision recommended by the GSC (as determined by the stated clerks): 119 (12½ percent)

The ad hoc committee is aware of some instances in which a stated clerk considers a church’s articles of incorporation to be acceptable even though they do not include all of the language suggested by the GSC. Consequently, the actual number of churches with articles of incorporation that include the suggested language in its entirety is probably somewhat lower than the number reported above.
Believing that the work on this project should continue (both as to existing churches and churches that are newly developed), that progress on this project should continue to be monitored by RCA staff, and that appropriate staff should continue to be available to advise and assist classes and local churches as their work on this project continues, the ad hoc committee made a number of recommendations to the GSC, all of which were approved. Included among them was a recommendation that the RCA's *Book of Church Order* be amended to provide that no new church be organized or received by a classis unless its organizational document includes the language suggested by the GSC and stated clerks. This recommendation, having been adopted by the GSC, is now made by the GSC to General Synod.

R-52
To adopt the following revisions to the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 2, “The Classis—Responsibilities of the Classis,” and Chapter 1, Part II, Article 2, “The Classis—Superintendence of the Churches,” for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken out):

*Chapter 1, Part II, Article 2, Section 3.*

The classis shall form, dissolve and disband churches, and shall form or dissolve combinations of two or more churches. When forming a church or combination of churches, the classis shall determine that the organizational document of the church includes a provision substantially in the form of Formulary X.

*Chapter 1, Part II, Article 2, Section 5.*

The classis shall have the authority to receive under its jurisdiction as a local church, any congregation signifying such desire. When receiving a church, the classis shall determine that the organizational document of the church includes a provision substantially in the form of Formulary X.

*Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 11.*

The classis, in forming new churches, shall appoint a committee to meet with those persons who desire to be organized into a church. The committee shall satisfy itself that the requirements of Part II, Article 2, Section 3 have been met and shall act as a board of elders in receiving members on confession, reaffirmation, or certificate. Notice of the time and place of the proposed organization, and of the election of elders and deacons, shall be published for three Sundays in the church or usual place of worship. The ordination of elders and deacons shall follow the regular procedure. The first elders and deacons of a newly organized church shall determine by lot, at the first meeting of the consistory following upon their installation, who of their number shall serve for one year, who for two years, and who, if it should be necessary, for three or more years.
Chapter I, Part II, Article 7, Section 22.

The classis, in exercising its authority to receive a congregation as a local church of the Reformed Church in America, shall first satisfy itself that:

a. such congregation truly desires to organize and function as a local church in accordance with and in all respects subject to, the provisions of the Government of the Reformed Church in America;

b. such congregation has satisfied all prerequisites required by the denomination, if any, with which it has been affiliated, for withdrawing from the jurisdiction of that denomination;

c. such congregation could function more effectively as a local church of the Reformed Church in America, and would be welcomed as such by the other churches of the classis; and

d. such congregation has adopted an organizational document that meets the requirements of Part II, Article 2, Section 5.

Formulary X. Provision to Include in Church Organizational Document.

Notwithstanding anything to the contrary contained in this [insert description of organizational document], this [corporation/organization] is a member church in the Reformed Church in America; is (and at all times shall be) subject to and governed by the Constitution of the Reformed Church in America; and agrees that the provisions of this [article/chapter/paragraph] shall not be amended or modified in any manner without the prior written consent of the classis of which this [corporation/organization] is a member.

➢ The advisory committee recommended to substitute the following for R-52:

*R-52 (substitute)
To adopt the following revisions to the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, “The Classis—Superintendence of the Churches,” and also to add a new Formulary to be placed after current Formulary 10 (renumbering as appropriate) for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined):

Chapter I, Part II, Article 7, Section 11.

The classis, in forming new churches, shall appoint a committee to meet with those persons who desire to be organized into a church. The classis, through this committee, shall determine that the organizational document of the church includes a provision substantially in the form of Formulary (15). The committee shall act as a board of elders in receiving members on confession, reaffirmation, or certificate. Notice of the time and place of the proposed organization, and of the election of elders and deacons, shall be
Reasons:

1. The *Book of Church Order (BCO)*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 2, "The Classis—Responsibilities of Classis" gives a list of general responsibilities of classis, but does not, in this section, give specific instructions on how to carry out these responsibilities. Therefore, specific instructions should not be added to this article of the *BCO*.

2. By changing the wording of the remaining two sections, the intent of the original recommendation is accomplished without disturbing the current *BCO* format. The intent of the original recommendation has remained.

3. The substitute recommendation corrects some editorial errors in the original.
Report of the Task Force on the Responsibilities and Purposes of Regional Synods and Classes

The 1996 General Synod voted:

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 purposes and responsibilities of regional synods and classes; and further;

to direct this task force to take into account the following:

1. The historical evolution of responsibilities of regional synods and classes with 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 (MGS 1996, R-4, p. 427).

In its 1998 report to General Synod, the task force clarified the need to include a review of the responsibilities and purposes of the General Synod Council as it works in relationship with regional synods, classes, and consistories (MGS 1998, p. 198). The report described assumptions with which the task force worked (MGS 1998, p. 198), the work of a subcommittee (MGS 1998, pp. 199-200), a preliminary model for staff allocation, and questions and responses about the model (MGS 1998, pp. 200-203).

The 1998 General Synod voted:

To develop fully a model for allocating the RCA staff and resources referring but not limited to the above report of the Task Force on the Responsibilities and Purposes of Regional Synods and Classes, under the guidance of the general secretary working in
cooperation with the director of Policy, Planning and Administration Services, the
executives of the regional synods, the members of the task force and the officers of
the General Synod; and further,

to carry out the organizational design in a manner that includes broad consultation across
the Reformed Church in America with representatives of the RCA’s classes, classis
officers and stated clerks; and further,

to continue the Task Force on the Responsibilities and Purposes of Regional Synods and
Classes for up to two additional years; and further,

to instruct the task force to present to the 1999 General Synod recommendations for an
organizational plan with implementation steps and a timeline for deployment of RCA
staff to support the ministries of classes and congregations as outlined in the above
reports of the Task Force on the Responsibilities and Purposes of Regional Synods and
Classes; and further,

to instruct the task force to report its work to the 1999 and 2000 General Synods (MGS

The 1998 report to General Synod named the persons appointed to the task force by the 1996-
97 moderator of the General Synod Council, the Rev. Dr. I. John Hesselink, and transitions
in membership since those appointments (MGS 1998, p. 197).

Since the 1998 General Synod the task force has met three times (September 23-24, 1998, at
the Cenacle Retreat House in Chicago, Illinois; and January 4-5, 1999, and March 10-11,
1999, at the Reformed Church office in Chicago, Illinois). The task force has clarified that
the Rev. Kenneth Bradsell is a member of the task force and that the Rev. Wesley Granberg-
Michaelson is the staff resource person for the task force. In the fall of 1998 Lisa Teague and
the Rev. Anthony Vis resigned from the task force. The General Synod Council moderator,
the Rev. Dr. Charles Van Engen, appointed the Rev. Phyllis Palsma to chair the task force.
Because the task force is well into its work, no appointments were made to fill the vacancies
from resignations.

In reviewing its work and mandates, the task force realized the need to more thoroughly
conduct a review of the purposes and responsibilities of regional synods and classes, as well
as to find out what local congregations need from classes, regional synods, and General Synod
to carry out their mission and ministries.

Plans to research the question of local congregational need are in development and should be
underway by the 1999 meeting of General Synod. The task force has gleaned significant
information from the RCA Book of Church Order and the bylaws of the forty-six RCA classes
and eight regional synods as well as from programmatic and missional information shared by
the classes and synods. This information has been collated and summarized and will be used
as the task force continues its work. The task force notes that the classes and regional synods
perform significant mission and ministry, living out the purpose statement of the Reformed
Church in America as written in the Preamble to the Constitution of the Reformed Church in
America.

Before any recommendations can be made, the task force needs to complete its research. Any
plans or models for allocating the RCA staff and resources will be made in light of the need
to strengthen and support the mission and ministries of congregations in regional synods and
classes and in consideration of the current governmental structure of the RCA.
From the Report of the Council for Hispanic Ministries (p. 79)

R-17
To request that the General Synod Council, in cooperation with the four racial/ethnic council executive committees, develop a mechanism that will guarantee that the effectiveness of the councils will not be lost (deformed) or reduced due to excessive assignments or mandates that arise in the new council structure. (ADOPTED)

From the Report of the General Synod Council/General Synod Board of Directors

At the advisory committee's request, synod considered R-6 before R-4 and R-5. The advisory committee recommended an amendment to R-6 as follows (additions are underlined):

R-6
Pending the approval of the required changes to the Book of Church Order, that the church not meet in General Synod in 2001 so that the church may move from the Mission Convocation 2000 into a year devoted to learning, prayer, and the implementation of mission locally and globally; and further,

that 90 percent of the resulting direct assessment cost savings in 2001 be returned to the classes and that the Reformed Church in America tithe the remaining savings in 2001 to educational ministries; and further,

to request Central College to postpone its invitation to host General Synod to 2002.

The synod:

VOTED: To adopt the amendment to R-6.

VOTED: To not adopt R-6 as amended.<

R-4
To adopt the following revisions to the Book of Church Order (BCO), Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 4, Section 1, and Part IV, Article 5, Sections 1 and 2, for recommendation to the classes for approval (deletions are stricken out):

Article 4, Section 1. The General Synod shall meet annually at such time and place as shall have been determined at its previous session. All meetings of the General Synod shall begin and end with prayer.

Article 5, Section 1. A president shall be elected from among the delegates to preside at the next session of the General Synod, and to undertake such other duties as may be assigned by the synod. It shall be the duty of the president to state and explain the business to be transacted, to enforce the rules of order, and, in general, to maintain the decorum and dignity belonging to the church of Jesus Christ.
The president shall be a member of the General Synod until the close of the next annual session.

Article 5, Section 2. After the president has been elected, the synod shall elect a vice president from among the delegates. The vice president shall be a member of the General Synod until the close of the next annual session of the synod. (NOT ADOPTED)

R-5
To adopt in first reading the following amendment to the Bylaws of the General Synod, Chapter 3, Part 1, Article 3, General Synod Council, Section 3, Term of Office, for recommendation to the 2000 General Synod for approval (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken out):

Section 3. Term of Office

The term of office for the elected members shall be three years. They shall be subject to re-election for one additional term. They shall be ineligible for two years after they have served two consecutive terms. General Synod officers shall serve as members of the council for one additional year until the conclusion of the next meeting of the General Synod following the expiration of their term as an officer of the General Synod General Synod term of office. (NOT ADOPTED)

R-7
To accept the invitation of Central College to host the 2001 meeting of General Synod. (ADOPTED)

➢ The advisory committee recommended a new motion for item 1 of the proposed amendments to the Book of Church Order (see p. 67).

R-53
To declare the amendments under item 1 (p. 67) to have been approved by the classes for incorporation into the Book of Church Order with the exception of BCO Chapter 1, Part II, Article 10, Section 1, with the understanding that the declarative act will be made for section 1 when an alternative amendment is approved or defeated. (ADOPTED)

➢ The advisory committee recommended:

R-54
To instruct the Commission on Church Order to propose a new section of the Book of Church Order that will allow classes to petition for an alternate course of study for master of divinity candidates who find it difficult to meet the full requirements for the certificate of fitness for ministry, for consideration by the General Synod of 2000. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. The old article on dispensations (Chapter 1, Part II, Article 10) had two sections: one for master of divinity degree candidates at theological seminaries, and another for persons not enrolled in a master of divinity program.
2. The new alternate route of Chapter 1, Part II, Article 9, Section 3 speaks only of candidates for the ministry who have not received the degree of master of divinity.

3. The 1998 General Synod (MGS 1998, p. 374) requested the Commission on Church Order to propose changes to the Book of Church Order which will allow classes to request dispensations on behalf of ministerial candidates who have been or will be granted the master of divinity degree.

4. Since the commission has not yet drafted an alternate route for master of divinity candidates, it would be unwise and unfair to drop the current provision for dispensations.

From the Report of the President

➢ P-1 from the president's report (p. 37) was referred to the Advisory Committee on Church Order. The advisory committee recommended:

R-55
To instruct the General Synod Council, through its coordinating committee and its Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee, to explore ways to incorporate “worshipful work” and other discernment models into the schedule, agenda, and meeting process of the General Synod Council, its committees, and its task forces. (ADOPTED)

Reason: This recommendation enhances spiritual focus and dimension to the meeting process.

Overtures

Classis Bring Charges Against Another Classis

1. The Classis of Florida petitions the General Synod to instruct the Commission on Church Order to design a structure by which a classis may bring charges against another classis to the General Synod when it perceives gross violations of the doctrinal or ethical stands of the denomination being tolerated within that classis and a refusal to take action to bring churches and ministers into conformity with the standards of the RCA.

Reasons:

1. The current polity limits the discipline of ministers of Word and sacrament to the classis of which the minister is a member.
2. The policy came out of a historical context in which it was impossible for classes to receive adequate information concerning an individual in another region. In our current situation, the Church Herald presents evidence to the whole church concerning ministers of Word and sacrament, presenting views inappropriate for office bearers seen by classes other than their own.

3. Classis of Florida, in the course of the last year, asked a sister classis to investigate and possibly discipline a minister. When that classis communicated back its response, the Classis of Florida was still left with unanswered concerns and without clearly prescribed recourse. A different classis offered itself as a "classis of sanctuary" for a former RCA minister deposed for perceived doctrinal infidelity. Covenantal community is not functioning in instances in which one’s standing in ministry relies not on doctrinal and ethical fidelity but on geographical location.

4. The covenantal character of the RCA is essential to offering a united witness to the world.

➢ The advisory committee recommended:

R-56
To deny overture 1. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. Classes are accountable to a regional synod.
2. Classes can communicate with a regional synod about a matter.
3. Within a classis any member or member church consistory can raise a complaint to the regional synod about its classis.
4. This is not according to Reformed Church polity.
5. This is an invitation to chaos.

Change Word for “Assessment”

2. The Classis of Orange overtures the General Synod to instruct the Commission on Church Order to change the word “assessment” to “denominational ministry” wherever appropriate.

Reasons:

1. The shift in wording replaces extremely negative and less descriptive wording with wording that is more positive, explanatory, and theological.
2. The overture helps change the framework of perception.

➢ The advisory committee recommended:

R-57
To deny overture 2. (ADOPTED)
Reasons:

1. The change is not practical.

2. The word “assessment” has the advantage that it is clear.

3. Any other word(s) used will take on the same connotation.

Criteria for Ministerial Candidate Qualifications

3. The Classis of Rochester overtures the General Synod to instruct the Commission on Church Order, in its proposed amendments to the Book of Church Order for implementation of the “Standards for the Preparation of Ministers of Word and Sacrament,” to amend the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 9, Section 1; and Chapter 1, Part II, Article 9, Section 2a, to provide specific criteria to be used by the RCA seminaries and TEA (or its successor, the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency) for determining a candidate's qualification for awarding a Certificate of Fitness for Ministry; and further, that the General Synod reaffirm Part IV, item C of the Standards, which states: “It is the sole responsibility of a classis to examine, license, and ordain ministers of Word and sacrament.”

Reasons:

1. The Theological Education Agency’s certification committee has, in its interpretation of its duties, established criteria for the awarding of a Certificate of Fitness for Ministry that assume authority never intended by the General Synod and which impinge upon the authority of the classis.

   a. TEA has assumed a responsibility to judge the validity of a candidate’s “external call.” The determination and validation of the “call to ministry” has always been and should remain the responsibility of the classis.

   b. TEA has interpreted the statement of the BCO, Chapter I, Part II, Article 9, Section 2a, that the awarding of a Certificate for Fitness for Ministry is an “entitlement to an examination for licensure and ordination,” to mean that the classis cannot examine a candidate without TEA’s approval. This would make TEA’s certification committee, rather than the classis, the sole arbiter of fitness. The General Synod did not intend the word “entitlement” to be defined as “requirement,” thereby prohibiting the classis from exercising its authority.

   c. Such misunderstandings ought not to be transferred to the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency.

2. The Theological Education Agency’s certification committee has assumed a responsibility to establish what it believes to be the necessary set of skills and talents that every minister of Word and sacrament in the RCA needs to possess. This is in direct contradiction with the statement of the Standards, Part II, “Standards for Personal Qualities and Professional Competencies,” which states: “the fact that specific strengths and weaknesses, experience and education, gifts and callings will vary from individual to individual is to be accepted and celebrated. This assures the church that there will be educated ministers with special gifts and callings to serve the diversity of emerging ministry settings.”
3. A clear statement of lines of responsibility and authority is needed in order to insure that under the new Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency the classis is able to retain and fulfill its responsibilities to the church.

The advisory committee recommended:

R-58
To deny overture 3. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. It would be difficult to determine the specific criteria that the overture requests.

2. It is a long-standing procedure that the General Synod has established agencies to do this.

3. The determining qualifications for the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry by agencies does not violate the responsibilities of classis to examine, license, and ordain candidates.
REPORTS ON CHURCH VOCATIONS

Report of New Brunswick Theological Seminary

Mark my teaching, O my people,
listen to the words I am to speak.
I will tell you a story with a meaning,
I will expound the riddle of things past,
things that we have heard and know,
and our [parents] have repeated to us,
From their children we will not hide
the praises of the LORD and his might
nor the wonderful acts he has performed;
then they shall repeat them to the next generation.

(Psalm 78:1-4, NEB)

For the 213th consecutive year, New Brunswick Theological Seminary, in response to God’s call through the psalmist, is helping the Reformed Church in America to experience God’s grace in the next generation by graduating a class of people prepared to “expound the riddle.” We rejoice in our past and trust in God’s promise for the future.

To prepare for the future, the seminary, in consultation with the church, has thought carefully about its mission and purpose. In 1997 the General Synod approved the new Statement of Mission and Vision that resulted from that process. Now that we have been living with that statement for a while, we are finding that it does indeed express what New Brunswick Seminary is to be and do.

For this year’s report the seminary would like to share with the church some of the ways in which the mission is being lived out. Many aspects of life at the seminary illustrate the mission. These eight are selected to focus attention on the ways in which seminary life actually flows from the definitive statement of how we intend to serve the church.

New Brunswick Theological Seminary is a teaching institution of the Reformed Church in America called by God to be a servant of the whole church of Jesus Christ. The seminary’s mission is to continue the ministry of Jesus in our time and place by enabling persons to translate their calling and gifts into faithful Christian ministry.

1. A TEACHING INSTITUTION OF THE REFORMED CHURCH IN AMÉRICA

For some years now the seminary has had a regular spring program known as the Standing Seminar in Reformed Church History. This has been a program of lectures, mostly by Reformed Church folk, that has looked in-depth at a particular era or theme in the history of the Reformed Church. Beginning this year there is a subtle but significant change. The name is now the Standing Seminar on the Reformed Church. It is not that RCA history is tiring, nor is it that past seminars have covered all the history there is. It is rather that the program is being amplified and made multifaceted.

In the past, the seminary student body was primarily RCA students. It was never 100 percent, but in most years 90 percent of the student body came from and entered ministry in the Reformed Church. In that context the students at the seminary learned the lore, history, and social character of the Reformed Church simply by being in school. All the faculty members were RCA. The members of the Board of Superintendents were all RCA. And the guest lecturers were often drawn from the famous preachers and denominational staff of the RCA.
All of those factors are different at New Brunswick Seminary today. It is not that there are fewer RCA students. The number of RCA students is what it always has been—forty to sixty. What has changed is the context. There are now over two hundred students from about twenty-five denominations in the student body. So it is no longer true that a student acquires a sense of denominational ethos simply by attending the school. For our RCA students, as well as for the Presbyterians, African Methodist Episcopal, United Methodists, and Baptists, learning one’s own denomination requires an intentional effort.

The change in the standing seminar is one part of that intentional effort for RCA students. The seminary has altered the program so that in addition to the lectures, an opportunity is provided for dialogue and engagement with the speakers. A special effort is made to make RCA students aware that this is an opportunity to gain an in-depth experience of the RCA. The program began this year with the visit of the General Synod president, the Rev. Frederick Kruijthof, to the campus. It concluded with the presentation of the Albert A. Smith Lecture by this year’s Smith Fellow, the Rev. Susan Huizinga Crane, who researched the Chamberlain missionary family. The plans for future years include a broadening of the subjects addressed and the people participating, all leading to the establishment of a Center of Reformed Church Studies at New Brunswick. This is just one way in which the seminary continues to embrace its mission to be a teaching institution of the Reformed Church in America.

2. CALLED BY GOD

Much of the work done by God’s people goes unnoticed. This is not because the work is unworthy. It is because there is so much of it that effort must be made to highlight the particulars. This sort of highlighting has taken place in recent decades as the world at large has begun to pay more attention to the history of women and of racial/ethnic minority groups. While there have been some who claim that it is only “political correctness” at work, Reformed theology knows that it is the work of the Spirit. One of the high doctrines of Reformed theology is election—the doctrine that God alone chooses those who are God’s people. The world does not decide who and what is important. The work of Christians is to catch the subtle drift of the Spirit and recognize those whom God has called as witness to God’s grace.

The Rev. Renee House, dean of the seminary, and the Rev. John Coakley, L. Russell Feakes Memorial Professor of Church History, have recently completed editorial work for Patterns and Portraits: Women in the History of the Reformed Church in America. This is a collection of essays largely drawn from presentations offered at the seminary’s Standing Seminar on the Reformed Church in 1995 and 1996. While some of the women featured in this work have been widely known, the stories of others have been told less frequently. In this publication, scheduled to be formally introduced and available for purchase at this synod, the seminary shares an illustration of a world in which people are called by God.

3. TO BE A SERVANT

Paul’s message on Mars Hill (Acts 17:16-34) is a model for the church in every age. Paul did not try to make the crowd think in terms he understood; he spoke to them in terms they understood. Beginning with the altar to the unknown god, he wove the gospel message into a fabric they could use. Some made fun of him, but as Acts 17:32 reports, “Others said, ‘We will hear you again about this.’” Paul made the gospel available to all, providing a model for all generations to come.

Each age needs the gospel woven into its fabric. In our day the fabric of our lives is planning. In the past forty years our society has moved from “organizational development” to “total quality management,” with many variations and intermediate stops. To articulate the gospel in that atmosphere, the seminary is required to be clear about its plans. And so New Brunswick
Seminary has been engaged in a strategic planning process. The “Core Institutional Values” portion of the Strategic Plan was presented as part of last year’s report to synod. New this year is the beginning of implementation. The seminary has a new website (www.nbts.edu), on which one can search for graduates, apply for admission, e-mail faculty and staff, and much more. As part of the grant received from the Lilly Foundation for technology in the classroom, all of New Brunswick’s students now have an e-mail account at the seminary through which they can communicate with fellow students and engage in class discussion groups.

Spending time and money on planning and technology is not conforming to the world or marring the spirit of the age. It is following the lead of Paul, to preach the gospel in ways people can grasp, and to be a servant.

4. OF THE WHOLE CHURCH

New Brunswick Seminary has always served the whole church of Jesus Christ, including that portion of the church known as the Reformed Church in America. The first graduating class was that of 1786. By the class of 1789, in the person of the Rev. Samuel Smith, the seminary was graduating people who served in other denominations—in the case of Smith, the Presbyterian. In this century every graduating class from New Brunswick Seminary has had members who went on to serve in denominations other than the Reformed Church. And Reformed Church people have had a continuing presence and impact in the ecumenical movement. Most recently, the Rev. Pacia Vamvas, class of 1995, was among the delegates of the Reformed Church to the Harare Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Zimbabwe.

The seminary is continuing and expanding that tradition of service to the whole church of Jesus Christ. New Brunswick’s first class of students in the D.Min. in Urban Ministry program represents six denominations. Twenty-two students are currently enrolled in the M.Div. program. In the past fifteen years the seminary has provided theological education to over sixty denominations, working in several nations as well as the United States and Canada.

This service to the whole church is now being broadened through the efforts of associate professor of metro-urban ministry, the Rev. Dr. Warren Dennis. For nearly a decade, practitioners and scholars of urban theological education and ministry have pursued creation of a national association that would consider their concerns. In 1997 Dennis organized a gathering of these scholars in Santa Fe, New Mexico, followed by a second consultation in July 1998. In November 1998 an organization meeting was held, and Dr. Dennis was elected vice chair of the Association for Urban Theological Education and Ministry (AUTEM). The new association will provide resources for the teaching and the practice of urban ministry, beginning with a national consultation planned for this summer.

The AUTEM program will provide broad services in the United States. The seminary is also contributing on the international level. As noted in the report last year, senior student Anna Melissa James, one of five delegates from the RCA to the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, is now serving on the executive committee of that world body. In all these ways, New Brunswick Seminary from 1789 to the present has been—and continues to be—actively involved in the continuing theological education of the whole church.

5. CONTINUE THE MINISTRY OF JESUS

The ministry of Jesus is continued by his disciples in many ways. Discipleship has always followed the models of the apostles to some degree, yet the church has realized that “new occasions teach new duties.” It is the special task of theological seminaries to be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit on the nature of those new duties so that the church can be educated to respond to them. The primary way in which seminaries shape that task is by the selection of faculty to teach their students.
New Brunswick Seminary is grateful to God and honored to announce the appointment of four professors to the full-time faculty since the seminary’s last report to General Synod.

The Rev. Dr. Hak Joon Lee has been appointed assistant professor of Christian ethics and community. This appointment fills the faculty position from which Professor Hugh Koops retired. Lee is a graduate of Chung-Nam National University, Yonsei University, and Temple University; and he earned M.A., M.Div., and Ph.D. degrees from Princeton Theological Seminary. Lee is minister of Word and sacrament in the Korean Presbyterian Church in America.

The Rev. Dr. Mark Kraai has been appointed associate professor of practical theology and director of supervised ministry. This appointment fills the faculty position from which Professor Robert Hoeksem retired. Kraai is a graduate of Northwestern College. He received his theological education in the bi-level, multi-site program of New Brunswick and Western seminaries and the D.Min. degree from Princeton Theological Seminary. Kraai is minister of Word and sacrament in the Reformed Church in America.

The Rev. Dr. Beth LaNeel Tanner has been appointed assistant professor of Hebrew Bible. This appointment fills the faculty position vacated by Professor Richard Weis. Tanner is a graduate of Purdue University and Eden Theological Seminary, earning the Ph.D. degree at Princeton Theological Seminary. She is minister of Word and sacrament in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

The Rev. Dr. Virginia Wiles has been appointed associate professor of New Testament. This appointment fills the faculty position vacated by Professor E. Elizabeth Johnson. Wiles is a graduate of Eden Theological Seminary and earned her Ph.D. degree at the University of Chicago.

In addition to these new people, the seminary deanship is changing hands. The Rev. Renee S. House, who has been dean of the seminary since 1996, has been accepted by Princeton Theological Seminary to study for her doctoral degree and has been granted a two-year leave of absence by the board of trustees. House will remain part-time at New Brunswick in her role as librarian, but has determined to relinquish both the dean’s position and her teaching responsibilities. The seminary is delighted to announce that the Rev. Dr. Paul Fries, who served as dean from 1985 to 1991, has been selected to be dean of the seminary, beginning July 1, 1999.

In all these changes, the seminary holds discipleship as the guiding vision, looking for the ways God is calling it in the present time to continue the ministry of Jesus.

6. ENABLING PERSONS

Every project has a host of enablers making the work possible. Last year New Brunswick Theological Seminary reported that L. Russell Feakes Memorial Professor of Church History, the Rev. Dr. John Coakley, had received a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. That grant enabled Coakley to have a sabbatical year in which he did research on the subject of medieval women mystics and their male collaborators. During the year following, Coakley has made great strides toward getting the book ready for publication. But just as important has been the way in which the grant and the sabbatical have influenced the life of both the faculty and Coakley’s classes. His research has given him new insight into the influence of the past on the church of today. That insight comes out in myriad ways, enabling life at the seminary to move in directions that would not have been possible without Coakley’s research.
In similar fashion, Rady Roldan-Figuerora and Gabriel Salguero, New Brunswick middler students, have been awarded scholarships by the Hispanic Theological Initiative. The Hispanic Theological Initiative, a program funded by the Pew Charitable Trust, is designed to focus the realities and concerns of Latina and Latino theological scholars in service to the church and the community. In addition to scholarship, the program provides journal subscriptions in Hispanic theology and several conferences and networking opportunities for its awardees. No more than twenty of these awards are made each year, and New Brunswick is deeply honored to have two awardees among its students.

In both of these examples, the seminary has been the receiver. The receipt, however, has been in light of the parable of the good Samaritan, “Go and do likewise” (Luke 10:37). As the seminary communicates this value to students and all with whom they come in contact, the seminary follows the example of Jesus in enabling persons.

7. TRANSLATE THEIR CALLING AND GIFTS

For most seminarians, translation is something that occurs in Hebrew and Greek courses. While that translation is important and much talked about among students, the fundamental translation taking place in seminary is in the practice of ministry. A bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church said recently, “If you aren’t different when you leave church from what you were when you came to church, what did you come to church for?” The same can be said of seminary education. Its purpose is not the confirmation of the previous ministry of students. The purpose of theological education is to enable change in the lives and work of students that results in broader and more effective ministry.

In the fall of 1998 the seminary sponsored a conference on dance and the church, “Troubled Partners: Religion and Dance in America.” The day-long conference included a panel discussion and a liturgical dance workshop. The panel discussion, which centered on the relationship of religion and dance in the United States, included the Rev. Dr. Richard Sturm, associate professor of Christianity and the arts at the seminary; the Rev. Dr. Alison J. Beach, church historian; Jack Anderson, dance critic for the New York Times; and the Rev. Dr. Paul R. Fries, New Brunswick Theological Seminary professor of foundational and constructive theology. The liturgical dance workshop was led by Kara Esposito and the Omega Dance Company, resident at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City. As part of the workshop, all the participants were invited to join in the dance. For some, it was the first time they had ever participated in anything with the name dance. For all, it was a beginning experience in translating a theological awareness into an expression of faith.

Middler student Jeanne Marie Boland is an example of a person whose theological education has nurtured her theological expression through dance. She is the author of Through Her Body, a dance theater piece written for Advent and performed in New York City by the East Village’s Connelly Theater. In speaking of the production, Boland says, “Despite her fear and bewilderment, Mary said yes to God. By letting go of her ideas about what is possible, Mary opened the door for God to come into the world in a wholly new way. The human that is possible for Mary gave way to the miraculous that is possible for God, and Christ was born.”

Finally, senior student Jacqueline Rotteveel has published an article in the Journal of Religion, Disability, and Health in which she reflects theologically on some of the intractable problems of human life. What does one do with chronic depression, a psychosis that disrupts life, or severe emotional trauma? How does faith in Christ fit with long-term continuing pain? The article is titled, “When God Isn’t Santa Claus” and is a significant contribution to these age-old issues.

These experiences are but examples, of which there are many more. In many and various ways, the seminary experience of theological education enables all students to grow and to translate their calling and gifts.
8. FAITHFUL CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

New Brunswick Theological Seminary understands faithful Christian ministry to be a lifelong commitment “to preach and teach the good news of salvation in Christ, to build up and equip the church for mission in the world, to free the enslaved, to relieve the oppressed, to comfort the afflicted, and to walk humbly with God.” All Christians are called to this ministry, but the Reformed Church in America asks ministers of Word and sacrament and General Synod professors of theology to publicly affirm their willingness so to minister. In order to keep faith with his promises, and in light of the fact that his actions occasioned an action of the General Synod in 1998 “concerning the pastoral challenges of persons of homosexual orientation within our churches and within the communities in which we are called to minister,” President Norman J. Kansfield has met with several RCA classes, at their request, for conversation regarding the church’s responsibility for ministering among homosexual persons.

The synods of 1994 and 1998 have requested that the church be enabled to have this conversation. It is not an easy conversation for the seminary to have. But faithful Christian ministry is not easy ministry. Common commitment to faithful ministry calls Christians to have this conversation, together, in order that they may be sure they have thoroughly and carefully understood the Scriptures. The seminary is summoned to the conversation to assure that the church, in its vocation to “minister to the total life of all people” is not overlooking the needs of anyone. God loved the world, the whole creation. As Christ’s disciples, New Brunswick Theological Seminary also must love God’s whole creation to be engaged in faithful Christian ministry.

IN CONCLUSION

New Brunswick Theological Seminary enters its 214th year with a clear vision of its place in the economy of God. In the work it is called to, the whole seminary community—students, faculty, trustees, and friends—are grateful to God and to the Reformed Church in America for the opportunities to be in ministry. With thanks for the past the seminary looks forward to the continued support of the Reformed Church in America for this mission with the whole church of Jesus Christ to the whole world so loved by God.

DISPENSATION FOR ED VAN KAMPEN

The Board of Trustees of New Brunswick Theological Seminary received a petition from the Classis of Albany for a dispensation from the biblical languages for Ed Van Kampen.

During the 1997-98 academic year Ed Van Kampen enrolled for Greek I. He worked extremely hard in the course but was unable to accomplish even a basic mastery of the language. It was the judgment of his professor that Ed, at the age of fifty-eight, would not profit from further study of the biblical languages. The other members of the faculty agreed with this judgment. Ed is aware of and makes good use of English language resources in his preparation for leading Bible studies and preaching in his supervised ministry placement. Therefore, the Board of Trustees of New Brunswick Theological Seminary, upon recommendation of the faculty, presents the following recommendation:

R-59
To grant Ed Van Kampen a dispensation from the biblical languages requirement of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry. (ADOPTED)
GENERAL SYNOD/JUNE 1999

SUBSTITUTE A PERIOD OF MINISTRY FOR NATHAN BROWNELL

The Book of Church Order requires that a candidate for the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry be under the supervision of a classis for a period of at least twenty-seven months between the time a petition for the certificate is submitted to the General Synod and the time it is finally acted upon by the synod. However, the BCO allows that "in instances where completion of theological training takes place prior to the required period of twenty-seven months, the classis may petition the General Synod to substitute a period of ministry supervised by the General Synod through the board of trustees of an RCA seminary...for all or part of its twenty-seven month requirement" (BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 8, Section 3).

The Classis of New Brunswick petitions General Synod through New Brunswick Theological Seminary to substitute a period of ministry for part of the twenty-seven month requirement for Nathan Brownell.

Reasons:

1. Nathan received the M.Div. degree from Western Theological Seminary in 1997. While a student at Western, Nathan was not a member of the RCA and did not complete supervised ministry in an RCA setting. However, through his studies at Western Nathan became thoroughly acquainted with Reformed theology and the Reformed Church in America. By the end of his M.Div. studies Nathan was interested in pursuing ministry opportunities in the RCA.

2. Nathan began studying for the Master of Arts in Theological Studies at New Brunswick Seminary in the fall of 1997, gaining further exposure to Reformed theology and the RCA.

3. In February 1998 Nathan came under the care of the Classis of New Brunswick, which petitioned General Synod for a Certificate of Fitness for Ministry on his behalf on March 15, 1998. At that time, the faculty of New Brunswick Theological Seminary agreed to act as the agent for the General Synod in overseeing Nathan's preparation for ministry and progress toward receiving the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry in the RCA. By the time General Synod acts on this petition, fifteen months of the twenty-seven month requirement will have been fulfilled.

4. Nathan has substantial experience in ministry. In 1993 he served for one year at the Shinohara Church (Assemblies of God) in Yokohama, Japan, using his fluency in Japanese to lead Bible studies, teach English, and run a coffee house drop-in center. Since beginning his studies at New Brunswick in the fall of 1997, Nathan has completed a five-month supervised ministry placement at Middlebush (New Jersey) Reformed Church. Presently, under the supervision of New Brunswick's faculty, Nathan serves as a full-time pastoral intern at the Japanese American United Church (RCA) in Manhattan, where he has been since September, 1998. By the time that General Synod acts on this petition, Nathan will have completed fifteen months of supervised ministry in RCA congregations, ten months on a full-time basis. In addition, he is engaged in an extended unit of Clinical Pastoral Education at Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center in New York City.

R-60
To approve the request of the Classis of New Brunswick that Nathan Brownell be allowed to substitute fifteen months of supervised ministry experience in the RCA and an extended unit of Clinical Pastoral Education for the remaining twelve months of the twenty-seven months required for the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry. (ADOPTED)
Report of Western Theological Seminary

This is a privileged time for Western Theological Seminary. Its enrollment is climbing; its financial resources are growing; its faculty and students are energetic, gifted, and committed; and its ties to the congregations of the Reformed Church in America are strong and becoming stronger. In the grace of God and through the faithful work of many over the last several years, Western stands at this moment filled with gratitude and wonder.

Yet this is not an easy moment, for the blessings with which the seminary has been showered are only tools for the work that lies ahead. That work, “preparing Christians called by God to lead the church in mission,” as Western’s mission statement expresses it, is poised on the brink of a new era. The seminary has, in fact, in a number of ways taken the first steps into that new era, and the challenges are daunting. A changing culture as well as changing models and understandings of the church present questions from without to which it must respond. And from within, growth itself presents difficult questions and painful changes as well as opportunities.

It is a time for looking ahead. As the following report will enumerate, the excitement and challenge of change is apparent in nearly all aspects of the seminary’s life as a community of faith and learning. Western is taking steps to see those changes as clearly as possible and to discern how best to address them.

It is also a time for action. There are no guarantees that the roads it has chosen are the best ones, but the journey goes on. Plans and programs may be effective and long-lived or faulty and soon discarded, but the need to shape the task into plans and programs does not diminish and does not wait for certainty.

In these days of promise, which are also days of challenge and uncertainty, the seminary walks deliberately and prayerfully forward, assured by the words of the psalmist:

Our steps are made firm by the Lord,
when he delights in our way;
Though we stumble, we shall not fall headlong,
for the Lord holds us by the hand (Psalm 37:23-24).

ENROLLMENT

In the last four years Western’s master of divinity enrollment has increased by more than 60 percent, with 164 students currently enrolled in classes. This year the seminary is enjoying the largest full-time equivalent enrollment in its history.

This large student body, while most welcome, puts strains on the seminary in a number of ways. The first is class size. Western was forced to refurbish its largest classroom last fall (Room 101) in order to accommodate classes with as many as fifty-two students. That solution is less than adequate, however, because some classes are simply too large with fifty students. Next year, expecting another large entering class, Western will offer more than one section of a number of classes in order to keep each section to a manageable number for discussion. However, that solution, too, is less than ideal, as it puts more demands on faculty and may reduce the range of available electives.

Increasing enrollments also pose challenges to the school’s facilities. Western’s student housing, built only five years ago, now has a long waiting list. The number of commuting students is increasing as well, and the seminary is addressing their needs for study and relaxation space with plans for a new student lounge. The purchase of two houses adjacent to the seminary on College Avenue will also provide options to relieve overcrowding in the current building for the near future.
MISSION 2000

It is important not simply to react to change, but to anticipate it and to set a clear direction that is in accord with Western's mission. In order to accomplish this, and to stay five to ten years ahead of the seminary's anticipated needs, the board of trustees has set in motion a strategic planning process called Mission 2000. The process began with a faculty-board brainstorming session in the fall, and it will continue through the work of a strategic planning committee, made up of members of the faculty, board, and administration. The process is expected to take one to two years to complete.

FACULTY

New Professors

Western Seminary appointed three new members to the faculty in 1998-99. Dr. Leanne Van Dyk began in the fall as associate professor of Reformed theology, and in January the Rev. Dr. Matthew Floding took up the position of director of formation. The seminary has already begun to feel the impact of these committed and very gifted teachers, their fresh energy, their expertise, and their love for and commitment to their students and the church at large. In addition, the Rev. Dr. Robert Van Voorst has been appointed as associate professor of New Testament. He will begin teaching in the fall of 1999.

Appointment of George Brown to Christian Education Chair

In the fall of 1995, as part of the Campaign for Western capital funds drive, Gerrard and Edie Haworth graciously agreed to endow a faculty position at Western Theological Seminary. Considering their longstanding interest and personal involvement in education, the Gerrard F. and Edie Haworth Chair in Christian Education was established. This spring the board of trustees appointed the Rev. Dr. George Brown, professor of Christian education and associate dean, to this chair. Brown also directs the master of divinity program and the doctor of ministry program and has been serving as interim director of the CONnECTS continuing education program.

Retirement of Donald J. Bruggink

The Rev. Dr. Donald J. Bruggink was born in Kalamazoo, Michigan, and grew up in Cedar Grove, Wisconsin. He graduated from Central College in 1951 (B.A.), Western Theological Seminary in 1954 (B.D.), and the University of Edinburgh in 1956 (Ph.D.). After returning to the United States, he served as pastor of Fordham Manor Reformed Church in Bronx, New York, for five years, from 1957 to 1962.

In 1962 he began his service to Western, first teaching systematic theology but soon moving into church history and historical theology. He retires this spring (1999) as James A. H. Cornell Professor of Historical Theology, having taught thirty-seven classes of seminarians.

As a teacher, Bruggink emphasized how the development of theology affected the life of the church throughout history, in order that students might understand the variety, as well as the essential unity, of the church. He took care to build students' awareness of the history being made by events in the contemporary church. He also communicated his love for and commitment to the urban church and to the furtherance of justice, as well as his lifelong passion for worship. He initiated and has for more than thirty years led a travel program that has taken generations of seminarians—and not a few RCA laypeople—to Rome, Greece, and the Near East. These seminars focus on the history of the church and, particularly in recent years, on an understanding of today's ecumenical issues.
Bruggink has offered his knowledge of both worship and history in invaluable service to the Reformed Church in America. He served as a member of the Commission on Liturgy from 1966 to 1969, during which time the commission published *Liturgy and Psalms*, the first major revision of the church’s liturgy since 1906. From 1980 to 1986 he was a member of the Worship Commission, which in 1985 published the hymnal *Rejoice in the Lord*. Bruggink’s contribution to the hymnal can be seen particularly in the inclusion of a form for Sunday worship, complete with orders for baptism and the Lord’s Supper, for the first time since Calvin. With James R. Esther he edited those liturgical forms for publication in a separate volume entitled *Worship the Lord*.

Bruggink has also served two terms on the Commission on History (1966-70 and 1972-78). During this time the commission published the first book in the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America. Bruggink has served as general editor of this series, which now numbers thirty-two volumes, since its inception in 1968. The Historical Series is the longest-lived, largest series of publications ever produced by any American denomination.

Bruggink’s service has extended far beyond the RCA, however, particularly in the area of church architecture. His expertise on worship theology as it is expressed in church architecture has enhanced the new and renewed buildings of many congregations. He has also earned recognition and the opportunity for service in the wider architectural community. He was awarded, in 1984, the second-ever Conover Award in recognition of contributions made to religion, art, and architecture. Among his publications, his two watershed books on church architecture, written with architect Carl Droppers, stand out. They are *Christ and Architecture: Building Presbyterian/Reformed Churches* and *When Faith Takes Form: Contemporary Churches of Architectural Integrity in America*.

He has also represented the Reformed Church in America on the Faith and Order Commission of the National Council of Churches. There he has served in several leadership capacities, including current membership on a subcommittee on mission and salvation in a pluralistic world.

R-61
To adopt the following resolution:
Be it resolved that the one hundred ninety-third regular session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting at Augustana College in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, on the fifteenth day of June, 1999, offers thanks to God for years of competent and faithful service to Western Theological Seminary and to the Reformed Church in America by the Rev. Dr. Donald J. Bruggink, whose dedication to teaching and scholarship, whose devotion to the life of worship in the Reformed Church in America, and whose commitment to the integrity of form and faith in church architecture have left enduring marks upon students, colleagues, and congregations; and

be it further resolved that the one hundred ninety-third regular session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, on behalf of the Reformed Church in America, expresses to Don and Erma Bruggink its gratitude, admiration, and affection and offers its prayers for years of health, love, and joy in continuing service to Christ and his church. (ADOPTED)

R-62
To declare the Rev. Dr. Donald J. Bruggink professor emeritus of the General Synod. (ADOPTED)
PLACEMENT OF WOMEN GRADUATES

In the spring of 1998, at the request of the board of trustees, associate dean George Brown conducted a survey of Western's master of divinity (M.Div.) graduates from 1990 to 1998. The purpose of the survey was to determine whether male and female graduates were having comparable experiences in finding appropriate starting positions in ministry. The results confirmed anecdotal evidence that although many women have found placements upon graduation, they have had a harder time than their male counterparts finding full-time, adequately compensated placements. Among female respondents to the survey, less than half received calls to full-time positions, and approximately half received starting salaries below classis minimums. Among male graduates, more than three-fourths received calls to full-time positions and 90 percent reported starting salaries at or above classis minimums.

In response to the survey, the seminary has taken a number of steps to better serve its women candidates for ministry. But while Western can and will make every effort to support its women candidates more effectively, this matter is not a seminary issue alone. The support, encouragement, call, and just compensation of gifted women called to pastoral ministry is also the task of the churches. Therefore Western Seminary strongly urges the congregations of the Reformed Church in America to find ways to more effectively call to service and justly compensate women who have been equipped and anointed by God for service in the Christian ministry.

INTERCULTURAL IMMERSION

For the first time the seminary was able to offer its intercultural immersion experiences during an intensive January term between the two semesters. In January 1999 one group traveled to Washington, D.C., for a spiritual formation retreat led by the Church of the Savior. Another group went to Chiapas, Mexico, where they were led in their studies by the Rev. Dr. Vernon and Carla Sterk, RCA missionaries and adjunct professors at Western. The Rev. Dr. Timothy Brown and Ray Vander Laan also led a group to Israel as part of a course on preaching.

CONNeCTS

During the 1998-99 academic year Western welcomed to campus a number of outstanding guest lecturers and workshop leaders for the continuing education of Christians, both clergy and lay. Continuing education events included the Ridder Leadership Lecture, given this year by Max De Pree; the Bast Festival of Preaching, with the Rev. Eugene Peterson; and the Martin Luther King Memorial Lecture, given by the Rev. Charles Gilchrist Adams. In addition, workshops were offered on the topics of death and dying in the Christian community, ministry in daily life, worship leadership during Lent, Prepare/Enrich training, teenage sexuality, and Christian education. In addition, the Rev. Marchiene Rienstra, adjunct professor, offered two seven-week evening classes, one on spiritual autobiography and one on contemplative prayer.

The Rev. Dr. George Brown, professor of Christian education and associate dean, has served as director of the CONNeCTS program. However, in order to enlarge the scope of the offerings and to fulfill the vision of Western as a resource for continuing education for the whole church, the seminary is conducting a search for a full-time director for this program. It is hoped that the position will be filled by the beginning of the 1999-2000 academic year.

FINANCES

Western's financial strength grew during the past year. A number of circumstances contributed to the growth. First, a rising stock market substantially increased the endowment fund.
Second, rising enrollment generated more tuition income. Third, increased giving from churches and individuals made a significant contribution to the seminary’s overall financial health and also demonstrated the support of the church for theological training at Western.

As other sections of this report indicate, Western is embarked on a period of study and planning that will allow these funds to be used wisely to provide expanded and more effective service to the church in the future.

REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS

The Master of Divinity (M.Div.) Program Committee processed two requests for dispensations. The first request was from the Classis of Columbia-Greene for a dispensation from the biblical languages requirements of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry under Chapter 1, Part II, Article 10, Section 1 of the RCA Book of Church Order for Daniel K. Herrick on the basis of certified weaknesses that make learning new languages extremely difficult. At its winter 1999 meeting the Western Theological Seminary Board of Trustees approved the following recommendation to the General Synod:

R-63
To grant a dispensation from the biblical languages requirement of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry to Daniel K. Herrick on the basis of certified learning disabilities. (ADOPTED)

Because the biblical languages are a requirement of the M.Div. degree at Western Seminary, Dan will receive a Diploma of the Seminary rather than an M.Div. degree.

The second request was from the Classis of Ontario for a dispensation under Chapter 1, Part II, Article 10, Section 2 of the RCA Book of Church Order for Allan Nyp of Brantford, Ontario. Allan is fifty-four years old and lacks a college degree. Given family and financial constraints, Allan is unable to attend college or seminary in order to fulfill the educational requirements for ordination to the ministry of Word and sacrament in the RCA. Allan has extensive pastoral experience, including two years as the stated supply of a Reformed church. Confirmation of his giftedness is reflected in part by the fact that the initiative for the dispensation comes from the classis rather than from the candidate. Members of the M.Div. committee interviewed Allan on January 27, 1999. On the basis of that interview, they recommended that Allan be accepted into the dispensation process. The faculty approved the following recommendation:

To recommend that the Western Theological Seminary Board of Trustees accept Allan Nyp into the dispensation process prescribed under Section 2; and

that Allan complete four TEA intensive courses (RCA polity, standards, history, and worship), a basic course in pastoral care and counseling, a unit of CPE (or have a mature pastor designated by Western Seminary review six verbatim of significant pastoral encounters), and readings in Old Testament introduction and church history under the direction of Western faculty; and

that, when this preparation has been completed, the Western Seminary Board of Trustees examine Allan in these areas through the Western Seminary faculty to determine whether to recommend to General Synod the granting of the dispensation.

REQUEST FOR FUTURE DISPENSATION

Over the past year, the classes of the RCA have been voting on a change to the Book of Church Order having to do with (among many other things) dispensations for students who are not enrolled in a master of divinity program (Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part II, Article
10, Section 2). The change will eliminate these dispensations as they currently operate from the Book of Church Order and replace them with a new "alternative route" process. At present Western Seminary is supervising one candidate for a "Section 2" dispensation. The candidate has not yet completed the program of study required for the dispensation, however, and therefore the dispensation request is not yet ready for the synod's action. Western Seminary is assuming that the synod will receive and act upon a dispensation request for this candidate in the future, even though the Book of Church Order may no longer make provision for such dispensations, since the classis and the candidate have acted in good faith by making application for a dispensation under the process that the Book of Church Order now has in place. If the synod believes that some other approach is preferable to this one, the seminary would appreciate receiving that guidance from the synod.

Report of the Theological Education Agency (TEA)

The Theological Education Agency (TEA) was established by the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America in 1984 and began its service to the RCA in 1985. This year represents fifteen years of existence of the TEA ministry, the initial six years under the direction of the Rev. Dr. Kenneth Van Wyk and the remaining years under the direction of the Rev. Dr. Cornelis G. Kors.

If the Book of Church Order (BCO) changes are approved at the General Synod of 1999, TEA will be amalgamated into the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency (MFCA). Although TEA will no longer exist in its present form, the functions of TEA will continue under the direction of the Certification Committee of the MFCA. Candidates will receive oversight from MFCA personnel, and the added responsibilities will be handled by assigning regional support staff. The plan is ultimately to hire a full-time associate director.

The TEA Board of Trustees expresses its heartfelt appreciation to all those who have served TEA over the past fifteen years. It gives special commendation to the Rev. Harold Korver, who served as moderator of the board for the first twelve years of its existence. It is for this reason that the TEA Board of Trustees makes the following recommendation:

R-64
To adopt the following resolution:

WHEREAS the Rev. Harold Korver has given his entire life in service to the Reformed Church in America, the Board of Trustees of the Theological Education Agency (TEA) recognizes the extra effort he has given to calling individuals into pastoral leadership through his service as moderator of the TEA Board of Trustees.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-third regular session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, on behalf of the Reformed Church in America, declares its thanks to God for the faithful life and ministry of Harold Korver, especially in his extraordinary service to the Theological Education Agency. (ADOPTED)
The TEA board also wishes to recognize the instrumental groundwork that was done by the first director of TEA, the Rev. Dr. Kenneth Van Wyk. Van Wyk helped build the structure of the agency and implemented the Certification Committee as it functioned in a manner equivalent to the faculty of a seminary regarding issues of certification. He charted many unknown waters and provided the church of Jesus Christ the continued perspective of the laity in ministry. The RCA is richer because of his fine effort. It is for this reason that the TEA Board of Trustees makes the following recommendation:

R-65
To adopt the following resolution:

WHEREAS the Rev. Kenneth Van Wyk has given his entire life in service to the Reformed Church in America, the Board of Trustees of the Theological Education Agency (TEA) recognizes the supreme effort he has given in creating an alternative to RCA seminaries in the form of the Theological Education Agency and the emphasis on employing all individuals in the ministry of Jesus Christ.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-third regular session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, on behalf of the Reformed Church in America, declares its thanks to God for the faithful life and ministry of Kenneth Van Wyk, especially in his dedicated service to the Theological Education Agency and his role in its inception. (ADOPTED)

The TEA Board of Trustees also wishes to recognize the only other director that TEA has had during its existence, the Rev. Dr. Cornelis G. Kors.

R-66
To adopt the following resolution:

WHEREAS the Rev. Dr. Cornelis (Cor) G. Kors has served the Theological Education Agency (TEA) since the summer of 1991 to the present, and has helped prepare hundreds of individuals for ordained leadership in the RCA, the TEA Board of Trustees recognizes Cornelis Kors' contribution and desires to recognize his faithful service to Christ and his church.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-third regular session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, on behalf of the Reformed Church in America, declares its thanks to God for the faithful service of Cornelis G. Kors to the Theological Education Agency and the calling forth of leaders for the future. (ADOPTED)

The TEA Board of Trustees, upon the recommendation of the TEA Certification Committee, awarded the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry this past year to the following individuals:

Russell Muilenburg
Michael Mulder
Daniel Van Gorp
Fred Wilgenburg

Classis of East Sioux
Classis of Holland
Classis of Minnesota

Trinity Evangelical Divinity School
Fuller/Western Seminary
Fuller Theological Seminary
North American Baptist Seminary
In the latter part of June 1999 the Certification Committee will be making recommendations to the TEA Board of Trustees for the Certificate of Fitness for the following candidates:

Brian Andrews  
Classis of California  
Fuller Theological Seminary

Ann Weathers-Calender  
Classis of Rockland-Westchester  
Union Seminary New York

Eric Cook  
Classis of Illiana  
Reformed Theological Seminary

Robert Drier  
Classis of Minnesota  
Bethel Seminary

Jon R. Henderson  
Classis of Red River  
Oral Roberts Divinity School

Janice Hesselink  
Classis of Albany  
St. Bernards Institute, Colgate Rochester Divinity School

Barbara Morgan  
Classis of Albany  
St. Bernards Institute, Colgate Rochester Divinity School

Keith Poppen  
Classis of Central California  
Princeton Theological Seminary

Kevin Van Wyk  
Classis of Pleasant Prairie  
Fuller Theological Seminary

Robert Wondergem  
Classis of South Grand Rapids  
Denver Seminary

PROGRAM

Interestingly enough, TEA reported to the General Synod of 1990 that twenty seminaries were represented, with seventy-five candidates in the program. In 1999 twenty seminaries are represented, with seventy-seven candidates officially enrolled in the Certificate of Fitness process. The major difference between 1990 and 1999 is that in 1990 twenty-eight candidates attended Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, and in 1999 sixteen candidates attend Fuller. In early 1998 that number was as low as eight. The following gives the specific details:

1. Bethel Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota  
2. Denver Seminary, Denver, Colorado  
3. Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California  
4. Fuller Extension Program  
5. International School of Theology, San Bernardino, California  
6. New York Theological Seminary, New York City  
7. North American Baptist Seminary, Sioux Falls, South Dakota  
8. Perkins School of Theology, Dallas, Texas  
9. Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, New Jersey  
10. Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando, Florida  
11. Regent College, Vancouver, British Columbia  
13. Talbot Theological Seminary, La Mirada, California  
14. Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois
15. Trinity Western University, Langley, British Columbia  
16. Tyndale Theological Seminary, Toronto, Ontario  
17. Union Theological Seminary, New York City  
18. University of Dubuque Theological Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa  
19. Westminster Theological Seminary, Escondido, California  
20. Yale Divinity School, New Haven, Connecticut  
21. Seminary graduates and others completing the 27-month requirement  
Total TEA Enrollment  

SEMINARY SELECTION POLICY CREATED AND RESCINDED

At its October 1998 meeting the TEA Board of Trustees approved a policy that would deny candidates entrance into the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry process if they chose to attend a seminary that would not allow women into the master of divinity degree program. When the policy was published in the monthly newsletter RCA Formations, there was a significant reaction—both negative and positive—on the part of the church.

Many letters and phone calls were received, both in support and in opposition to the policy, and the board members were eager to do what they considered to be right in this matter. It was agreed almost immediately at the March 1999 meeting that what the board had intended to accomplish did not take place with the creation of the policy. It was for that reason that the members present at the meeting unanimously decided to rescind the policy and actively seek ways in which all candidates can be exposed to, and allowed to, interact with female candidates.

As part of the deliberations during the meeting, the board stated that it regrets that it did not communicate the original intent of the policy. The intent was to explore and expand the position of women in ministry according to the official RCA position. Instead of addressing the growth of individuals, the board focused on seminaries. This policy gave the impression that the TEA board was not in support of the conscience clause and perhaps even beginning a movement to eliminate it, when in essence its intent was to adhere to it. What the board hoped to do was to help students. Instead it focused on seminaries, which the board says was a mistake and was insensitive to the context of current debates in the denomination. TEA considers itself to be an evangelical, Reformed, Scripture-based agency of the RCA whose purpose is to equip future leaders for service. TEA does not wish to place an issue before the church that will detract from its main purpose. It will continue to pursue its goals to prepare candidates for ministry in a manner that is faithful and true to the Lord and the Scripture in which he is revealed.

The board continues to seek ways in which the original intent of this policy can be fulfilled. Some of the thoughts expressed include providing teaching ministry opportunities where women are serving in ordained leadership roles and reworking the offering of summer intensives so that they include issues such as women in ministry.

An example of a possible course could be “Mission of the RCA,” a course that undertakes an in-depth study of the practical issues facing the Reformed Church in America in the next decade. Major themes could include women in leadership, multicultural ministry in a
pluralistic world, church growth and planting, new generations in an age of technology, refocusing ministries; ministry in a post-Christian world; ethics in ministry; and sexuality and ministry.

The TEA Board of Trustees will be asking the MFCA to consider offering such a course by the year 2000. Included in the board’s considerations was the possibility of redesigning the offerings so that this would not become an additional course for candidates to take during the summer months when they are needed in their ministries. The possibility of distance learning for some of the existing courses will be investigated.

TEACHING MINISTRY SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

The TEA Board of Trustees established an endowment fund in 1998 for teaching ministry scholarships. The interest earned from this fund will be designated for candidates both at non-RCA seminaries and at RCA teaching ministry sites. The board determined that $8,000 will be awarded in 1999.

The TEA Board of Trustees awarded three scholarships to ministries in order to assist in the funding of TEA candidates at their sites in 1999. The three are the Classis of Minnesota; Emmanuel Reformed Church in Paramount, California; and Lincoln Avenue Community Church in Pomona, California. A fourth scholarship has not been assigned but will be available to a late applicant for 1999.

The board also declared Chino Valley Reformed Church in Chino, California, and Morningside Reformed Church in Sioux City, Iowa, as official teaching ministry sites for TEA candidates. TEA director Kors is being asked by the board to create resources for teaching ministries. A seminar on the teaching ministry is being considered for the not-too-distant future.

CLINICAL PASTORAL EDUCATION REQUIREMENT

The TEA Board of Trustees decided to affirm Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) as part of the ministerial formation process by requiring at least one unit of CPE of all candidates and asking the MFCA Board of Trustees to do the same. The board was responding to the report of the Task Force on Standards for the Preparation for the Professional Ministry in the Reformed Church in America, which was approved at the General Synod of 1997 (MGS 1997 R-19, p. 352). The board’s action regarding CPE was seen as a means of implementing the recommendations from that report, which will subsequently be carried out by a denomination-wide policy.

SUMMER INTENSIVES

In 1998 TEA had another successful year of summer intensive courses, and it publicly thanks the instructors of the courses. “RCA Polity” was taught by the Rev. Dr. Robert Hoeksema; “RCA Standards” was taught by the Rev. Dr. I. John Hesselink; “RCA History” was taught by the Rev. Dr. Dennis Voskuil; and “RCA Worship” was taught by the Rev. Dr. Timothy Brown.

In 1999 the following intensives are planned: “RCA Polity” will be taught by the Rev. Dr. Wesley Kiel; “RCA Standards” will be taught by the Rev. Dr. Paul Pries; and “RCA History” will be taught by the Rev. Dr. John Coakley. These three courses will be offered at Northwestern College in Orange City, Iowa, June 16 to July 2. “RCA Worship” will be taught by the Rev. Dr. Greg Mast, July 19-23, at New Brunswick Theological Seminary.
DISPENSATION

The TEA Certification Committee and the TEA Board of Trustees present a request for dispensation from the Hebrew language requirement on behalf of Jon R. Henderson. Initially the Classis of Red River requested this dispensation. Henderson has transferred to the Classis of East Sioux, so the dispensation now originates there. The dispensation request is made under the provision of the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 10, Section 1.

Several factors were cited for the request:

1. Henderson does not live near a seminary that would enable him to complete the Hebrew language requirement.

2. Henderson has completed the Greek language course requirement and has done some self-directed study in Hebrew in order to work better with Old Testament texts.

3. A severe financial strain would be placed on Henderson and his family if he were forced to somehow take the Hebrew language. Henderson is already having to take on extra employment by teaching at the local junior college in order to begin paying off student loans.

4. Henderson serves Archer Reformed Church in Archer, Iowa, full-time, and his consistory has identified the need for him to place his time and energy into the ministry. His service over the initial time there has shown significant revival and growth in the life of the church.

5. Henderson needs to give time to his family, as they have had to adjust to a new culture. He and his wife have four children in grades ranging from second grade to high school.

R-67
To grant Jon R. Henderson a dispensation from the Hebrew language requirement of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry. (ADOPTED)

Report of the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency (MFCA)

The Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency (MFCA) was established by the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America in 1998 (MGS 1998, R-11, pp. 359-367). In the development of the MFCA it was recognized that an existing agency, the Theological Education Agency (TEA), was similar in purpose, function, and mission to MFCA. During the year 1998-99 the classes of the Reformed Church in America have voted on the Book of Church Order (BCO) changes that will replace TEA with the MFCA in the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry process. The ratification of the BCO changes not only entitle the MFCA to operate in the RCA, but the changes will also introduce new components to the process with elements such as the Alternate Route, Candidate Care Committees, and the annual standardized examination.
The MFCA board of trustees met twice in its first year. Both times the group met in Chicago—November 10-11, 1998, and January 27-28, 1999. The next meeting is scheduled for July 19-20, 1999, at New Brunswick Theological Seminary in New Brunswick, New Jersey. Most of the members of the MFCA board of trustees were nominated and elected at the meeting of the General Synod held in Holland, Michigan. Two members were appointed at the meeting of the General Synod Council (GSC) held at Morningside Reformed Church in Sioux City, Iowa, in October 1998.

RATIONALE AND FORMATION OF THE MFCA

General Synod exercises oversight of ministerial formation through the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency. General Synod elected nine people to serve as the board of trustees, including four laypersons, three parish pastors, one specialized minister, and one General Synod professor of theology. The director of Ministry and Personnel Services, the general secretary of the RCA, the presidents of New Brunswick Theological Seminary and Western Theological Seminary, and the director of the MFCA are ex-officio members, without vote.

The MFCA’s responsibilities include: 1) providing a uniform framework by which the classes will care for and nurture candidates in preparation for the ministry of Word and sacrament; 2) coordinating the roles of congregations, classes, and seminaries in the overall process of ministerial calling and formation; 3) reviewing and monitoring the implementation of General Synod’s standards for ministerial formation; 4) awarding the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry for candidates at non-RCA seminaries, upon recommendation of the Certification Committee; and 5) guiding and assisting candidates attending non-RCA seminaries.

The MFCA originated from a concern for new ways of ministerial formation in order to respond to new dynamics within the denomination—the needs of minorities in ministry, the need for a “home” for theological education, the need to define the standards for ministerial formation, and the need to implement programs to achieve those standards. A task force was formed to explore the shape such a new approach should take. That effort came to fruition by the approval of the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency by General Synod in June 1998.

At least some of the motivation for establishing such an agency came with the vacuum that resulted with the cessation of the Board of Theological Education in 1993. A need has been identified for a coordinated approach and program for the denomination’s theological education.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

At its inaugural meeting the board of trustees was called together by Rev. Alvin Poppen, then director of Ministry and Personnel Services of GSC. One of the first items of business was to nominate and elect officers. The MFCA board of trustees is made up of the following individuals:

The Rev. David Schutt, moderator 2002
The Rev. Alan Baker, vice moderator 2000
The Rev. Barbara Nauta, clerk 2001
The Rev. Dr. George Brown 2001
Martie Bultman 2002
The Rev. Case Koolhaas 2001
Dr. Brad Lewis 2002
Christina The 2000
Carol Wagner 2000
CHURCH VOCATIONS

Ex-officio
The Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson
The Rev. Dr. Norman Kansfield
The Rev. Dr. Cornelis Kors
The Rev. Dr. Vernon L. Hoffs
The Rev. Dr. Dennis Voskuil

MFCA DIRECTOR

The board of trustees has also considered the role of the director and any staff as crucial to the operation of the agency. The formulation of the director’s job description was determined to be a priority, and its formulation occupied the energy and time of the members. The job description listed in Appendix i was approved at the second board meeting.

APPOINTMENT OF DIRECTOR

In its Constitution and Bylaws the MFCA is mandated: “The Agency shall employ a director. The director of the agency shall be appointed by the board of trustees, in consultation with the general secretary, with approval of the General Synod.”

The board of trustees reviewed the qualifications of the Rev. Dr. Cornelis G. Kors and the recommendation from the TEA board of trustees that Kors be named the MFCA director. The board made its own recommendation, in consultation with the general secretary, to the General Synod. The board is recommending that Kors be offered a four-year, renewable appointment starting July 1, 1999.

R-68
To appoint the Rev. Dr. Cornelis G. Kors to a four-year, renewable term as director of the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency of the Reformed Church in America. (ADOPTED)

PROGRAM

Alternate Route

The Alternate Route is being introduced as a substitute and improvement on the former dispensation process. Given the highly individualized nature of the Alternate Route, the MFCA will create a manual that will provide classes with guidelines for the process, with sample programs. It is recommended that the classis obtain a copy of the manual prior to beginning the process. Those classes with questions may consult with the MFCA director in order to develop a program that will take into consideration the needs of the candidate, the opportunities within the classis, and the standards of the denomination.

The Alternate Route will allow the originating classis to have a more active part in working out the details of the process. In the past the classis could only make its case as it submitted a request on behalf of a candidate. The new process allows the classis to develop and suggest the means for accepting the Alternate Route. The classis will be in dialogue with the MFCA as the details of the program are worked out. All recommended programs will be dealt with by the MFCA in an individualized manner, and each candidate will be given a chance to achieve “equal footing” by means of the standardized annual examination. It is hoped that this process will lead to a change in the perception that the RCA has created a “second-class” category of ordained ministers who have been given a dispensation.
Candidate Care Committees

The MFCA will see the formation of Candidate Care Committees at the classis level as a key part of its coordinating and facilitative role in the denomination. The committee for each candidate will be worked out in the following manner:

Each candidate will recommend to the classis the names of individuals suitable for his or her Candidate Care Committee. Members of the committee must be approved by the classis, which will then be responsible for the operation of the committee. The Candidate Care Committee will normally consist of four individuals: 1) a representative from the classis, 2) a representative from the candidate’s teaching church/supervised ministry, 3) a representative from the seminary the candidate attends, and 4) another person (not a relative) of the candidate’s choice. At least one person on the committee shall be an ordained pastor. If the candidate is preparing for ministry in a location far removed from the home classis, arrangements may be made with individuals who are accessible to the candidate, and a regular reporting strategy with the classis will be determined. The Candidate Care Committee will meet with the candidate on a regular basis. Creative means such as conference calls or e-mail are encouraged for maintaining communication if face-to-face meetings are difficult.

Communication

The MFCA will make clear communication one of its priorities. Manuals will be created for all procedures involving the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry, Candidate Care Committees, the Alternate Route, and Teaching Ministries. Meetings and seminars for the purpose of educating classes in their work with candidates for ministry will also be offered by the MFCA. A meeting such as the one held by the stated clerks prior to General Synod each year is being considered for this purpose.

Standardized Annual Examination

The MFCA standardized written examination will be employed as part of the process of determining fitness for ministry by the RCA seminaries and Certification Committee. The classis will continue to have full responsibility for ordination examinations.

The General Synod professors of theology will meet at least annually for the purpose of creating and evaluating the examination. The prepared examination will be reviewed by the MFCA board of trustees and produced and distributed by the MFCA office. Testing locations will include New Brunswick Theological Seminary, Western Theological Seminary, Fuller Theological Seminary, and various RCA churches representing regions where candidates reside. The written answers will be evaluated by the General Synod professors of theology, who will determine whether minimum competencies have been achieved. If deficiencies are identified in some, but not all, of the tested areas, the candidates will be asked to retake those sections not passed.

The examination will be taken by a variety of candidates. The examination will be created in such a manner that they will evaluate the competency of all candidates. New Brunswick and Western Seminary students, non-RCA seminary students, and the individuals pursuing the Alternate Route will all be given equal opportunity to represent themselves by means of the examination. The goal of the examination will not be to establish grades and honor distinctions. The MFCA board of trustees will review the examination created by the General Synod professors of theology before it is administered. A review of the examination and the process will also occur after the examination is completed.
A primary goal of the new process is to be sensitive to ethnic and language nuances. Where the resources exist or can be developed, persons will be allowed to meet requirements in their language of origin. Since fellowship and the sharing of information at regional church gatherings occur in English, a sufficient level of English competency is expected for the sake of communication and collegiality.

The standardized examination is taken by all those seeking to earn the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry. The option will exist for the examination to be taken in the person’s language of origin. In addition, the examination will be designed to allow theological reflection on the basis of individualized academic learning and life/ministry experience.

FUNDING

In 1999 the MFCA budget will consist of the original TEA budget in a modified form and temporary funding from the General Synod Council (GSC), including additional receipts from the Quick Fund. The MFCA will not be made responsible for its own fund raising and will be seeking guidance and direction from the denomination as it formulates its funding for future years.

One thing is certain: the MFCA faces a daunting future in that it has been given expensive new mandates with no funding mechanism to implement them. The budget problems of the MFCA could be solved by simply asking for 50 to 75 cents from every RCA member on an annual basis. It seems that this is a small cost and a wise investment if it results in well-equipped ordained leaders and a coordinated approach to theological education in the future. The paper submitted under “Appendix ii” explains the dilemma and the options available.

Appendix i

Position: Director of Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency (MFCA)

SUMMARY OF POSITION

The director of the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency (MFCA) shall administer the services of the agency and be an advocate for its work before the church. This person shall oversee the coordination of efforts by congregations, classes, seminaries, and the Certification Committee in the overall process of ministerial calling and formation; assist the seminaries and the Certification Committee in their work with candidates for the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry; and oversee the implementation of the General Synod’s standards for ministerial formation.

NATURE AND SCOPE

The director is responsible for the effective functioning of the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency (MFCA). In this role, the director provides staff support and leadership for the agency and carries out its directives.

The scope of the director’s responsibilities is defined by the three central purposes of the agency. The director is responsible for: 1) coordinating and facilitating the roles of congregations, classes, and seminaries in the overall process of ministerial formation; 2) ensuring the effective operation of the unified and cooperative framework by which New Brunswick Theological Seminary, Western Theological Seminary, and the Certification Committee work together to nurture all candidates under the care of classes, including responsibility to provide for the supervision of candidates attending non-RCA seminaries; and 3) overseeing the implementation of the General Synod’s standards for ministerial formation.
PRINCIPAL ACCOUNTABILITIES:

Coordination of the overall process of ministerial calling and formation

Coordinate the participation of congregations, classes, and seminaries in the formation of candidates for ministry in the RCA.

Provide staff leadership and support for the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency (MFCA).

Interpret the work of the MFCA at denominational and ecumenical meetings designated by the MFCA board of trustees.

Serve as the resource person for the MFCA in developing guidelines for and monitoring the implementation of Candidate Care Committees.

Serve as the resource person for the MFCA in developing guidelines for and monitoring the implementation of Teaching Churches and Ministries.

Ensuring the effective operation of the unified and cooperative framework

Help the MFCA develop and maintain a unified and cooperative framework for the supervision and support of all candidates in the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry process.

Facilitate communication and cooperation between the various elements of the unified and cooperative framework.

Monitor the effectiveness of the unified and cooperative framework.

Supervision of candidates for ministry at non-RCA seminaries

Oversee the supervision and support of candidates for the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry who are attending non-RCA seminaries.

Provide for such personality, vocational, and other appropriate assessments for determining suitability for ministry of Word and sacrament as the MFCA shall designate.

Serve as the resource person for the Certification Committee.

Identify and contract with RCA clergy to serve as regional supervisors of RCA candidates attending non-RCA seminaries.

Supervise the work of MFCA staff who maintain a personal relationship with and monitor the academic preparation, spiritual formation, ministerial development, personal wholeness, and denominational identification of candidates attending non-RCA seminaries.

Oversee summer intensive courses in RCA history, standards, worship, and polity for RCA candidates attending non-RCA seminaries.

Oversight of the implementation of the General Synod’s standards for ministerial formation

Maintain a roster of all RCA candidates for the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry.

Oversee the development and administration of the annual standardized examination for the Certificate of Fitness for ministry.
Administration
Supervise MFCA staff.
Recommend and administer the MFCA budget.

Appendix ii

COMMENTS FOR BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS

After several years of reports, comments, rethinking, rewriting and General Synod actions that revised the standards for training and ordaining ministers and set up a new framework to help the process along, the newly authorized Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency (MFCA) began its work in November 1998. Whether the MFCA continues to have work to do is, of course, dependent on classis votes during the winter and spring of 1998-99. If the classes approve the new language of the Book of Church Order, the MFCA board of trustees—and the staff that reports to it—will begin not only to replace the former TEA, but to fill the three perceived needs that led to all the reports, comments, rethinking, rewriting, and General Synod actions in the first place. These are described in the Constitution and Bylaws for the MFCA as follows:

The need for an organizational structure for theological education which provides quality standards that recognize the tradition of the Reformed Church in America as well as the challenges facing the new leaders who are to become the ministers of Word and sacrament in the future.

The need to develop a strategy to identify and recruit pastoral leadership for the church of the future.

The need for a flexible alternate route that culminates in the ordination of minister of Word and sacrament for those who are gifted for ministry but not able to meet the traditional requirements.

The MFCA board and its full-time director and other staff members look forward to working together to meet these needs. But if they are to take their mandate seriously, the mandate must come with at least a modest amount of additional money.

The agency members fully recognize that the denomination faces financial difficulties. But they believe that they must call attention to the dilemma the board faces as it attempts, in good faith, to implement its new mandates (if these are endorsed by the classes, as they hope they will be).

The statement of needs (above) is believed to be accurate. The General Synod (rightly in the minds of those involved with the MFCA) translated needs into specific new policies that the MFCA is required to undertake, in addition to all of the old work of TEA. The most obvious of these is the implementation of standardized examinations that all candidates, regardless of which seminary they choose, must take for certification. There are others as well. The MFCA and its staff are expected to provide oversight for the new alternative route for ordination; help classes share information regarding “identifying, caring for, examining, ordaining, and mentoring those called to the ministry of Word and sacrament”; maintain a census of all candidates for ordination; and help get the Teaching Churches and Ministries program off the ground.
The new policies are designed to elevate the importance of theological education and do it better, without reducing the autonomy or creativity of the two RCA seminaries. After two meetings, those on the board of trustees of the MFCA are excited about the contribution this can make to the denomination.

But the MFCA faces a simple, daunting fact: it has been given significant and expensive new mandates without a funding mechanism to implement them. The MFCA has been given $60,000 of General Synod Council support in its 1999 budget—enough to balance the budget (at expenditures and income of $278,000) in a startup year in which the agency was only beginning its work. It is estimated that it will cost the MFCA about $92,000 more in 2000, $102,000 more in 2001, and $122,000 more in 2002 to fund the programs it has been instructed to run and, in some cases, start from scratch. And the gap is worse than that because the agency will not retain the $60,000 it has in 1999 from General Synod Council.

While most of the MFCA agenda for the first two meetings did not focus on finances, the board quickly came to the conclusion that it faced a very painful dilemma.

The agency’s situation is very much like one the federal government has at times forced on states, or states on counties, when the higher level of government mandates an expansion of certain specified services—to be funded by the level of government below it. And simple economic reality suggests that the problems such unfunded mandates cause are similar to the ones that the MFCA will face if the denomination does not provide money along with its new and expanded charge. A state or county faced with unfunded mandates would have to: 1) cut back other services to fund the mandated new ones, 2) raise general taxes to fund the newly mandated services, or 3) scrounge for other sources of revenue (such as user fees on services that can easily be monitored and measured) to fund the newly mandated services.

Cutting back other services would be difficult at best for the MFCA, and probably impossible. Should the MFCA, for example, explain that it will severely limit the number of non-RCA candidates because it must run the new standardized examinations, and that the director cannot maintain the same level of supervision as TEA provided, given the new responsibilities?

The MFCA has no taxing power except what the General Synod gives it—and it has given none so far.

That leaves only one possibility, assuming the MFCA wants to implement its mandates in good faith: charging candidates or classes directly for services. The following fees are obvious possibilities:

- A fee for administering the standardized examination, which is estimated will cost $17,500 to 20,000 annually over the next few years.

- A charge for any candidate wanting to attend a non-RCA seminary, reflecting the cost to staff of monitoring non-RCA seminaries, working with classis committees, and the like.

- Higher charges for summer intensives to offset some of the overhead expenses.

- Administrative charges for candidates wanting to follow an alternate route.

In the absence of significant additional funding, the MFCA board of trustees would be lacking in seriousness if it did not consider these alternatives.

Indeed, the MFCA board of trustees is convinced it could raise the money. In some cases, it might not come from candidates even if it officially levied it on them, because classes or individual churches might help cover it.
But thinking about that possibility should allow us to consider the question a bit differently. Would any of these methods send the message we want to send to potential ministers, classes, or the rest of the church world?

The projected budget problems of the MFCA seem large in total dollars but represent 50 to 75 cents per RCA member. If the MFCA does its work effectively, it will have better-trained new clergy and a coordinated approach to theological education throughout the denomination. A denomination kept together largely by personal ties across churches, regions, and institutions will have an organization that encourages those personal ties (rather than one group that sees its constituency as non-RCA seminary candidates and others interested only in RCA seminarians). At a time when the RCA is facing issues of loss of homogeneity, this is a framework in which heterogeneous groups can talk.

It would be ironic indeed if the RCA had finally come up with a logical solution to the problems caused by the abolition of the Board of Theological Education in 1992—and refused to provide the funds to make it work.

Dr. Brad Lewis, member of the MFCA board of trustees, elder, First Reformed Church in Schenectady, New York

➢ The advisory committee recommended:

R-69
That the General Synod Council (GSC) include theological education as one of its critical and strategic priorities for implementing the RCA Statement of Mission and Vision; and further,

that the GSC explore ways to obtain adequate financial support for Western Theological Seminary, New Brunswick Theological Seminary, and the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. The RCA Statement of Mission and Vision states that “our shared task is to equip congregations for ministry.”

2. The RCA has a historical commitment to theological education and recognizes theological education as a core value. ≤

➢ The advisory committee recommended:

R-70
That the General Synod instruct the seminary presidents; the moderators of the boards of trustees of the seminaries; the director and the moderator of the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency; the director of the Ministry and Personnel Services Unit of the GSC; and the general secretary to work together to carry out R-69, and to report to the General Synod in 2000. (ADOPTED)

Reason: Recommendation 69 will be accomplished successfully only if the seminary presidents, the director of MFCA, the moderators of the boards, and the senior staff of the GSC and the General Synod work cooperatively to communicate the importance of theological education and to find a means to provide for adequate funding. ≤
Report of the Commission for Women

The Commission for Women met October 9-11, 1998, at the Lutheran Center in Chicago, Illinois, and January 29-31, 1999, at the Alma Mathews House in New York City. Both meetings concluded with worship. Worship in the Lutheran Center chapel used the liturgy for full communion with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), United Church of Christ, and the Reformed Church in America. In New York City commission members worshiped with the congregation of Middle Collegiate Church.

While the yearly focus of the commission’s work shifts depending on the needs and current issues before the church, it continues to seek to fulfill its responsibility: 1) to provide resources for developing awareness and raising consciousness concerning human liberation by providing information for appointments that will facilitate the partnership of women and men in professional and decision-making leadership of the denomination, 2) to ensure the use of inclusive attitudes, images, and language in all published material while working for systematic change to enable the full participation of women in church and society, and 3) to collaborate with RCA agencies, commissions, councils, and ecumenical agencies on issues affecting women, providing avenues for both input and learning.

WOMEN IN MINISTRY RESOURCES

The 1998 General Synod voted:

to urge all classes to include questions pertaining to the history of women in leadership in the RCA in the examinations of students under care (MGS 1998, R-10, p. 351).

The commission has sent a questionnaire to the chair of each classis student care committee, via the stated clerk, stating the recommendation and asking, “In your examination of students, how is the current and historical leadership of women addressed in the areas of mission and pastoral care? Are your students encouraged to be inclusive in their style of preaching?” Other questions that might be helpful in student exams and a bibliography were also included in the mailing.

There is an increasing amount of information and source material relating to women in ministry in the RCA; this material is not limited solely to the question of the ordination of women as ministers of Word and sacrament. The material is available from the RCA Archives, including the new RCA Historical Series volume, Patterns and Portraits, edited by Renee House and John Coakley. This book of essays is drawn from the two-year Standing Seminar on Reformed Church History at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, which focused on the RCA and women.

The Commission for Women heartily endorses this new volume of the historical series and thanks Renee House and John Coakley for their outstanding work.

R-71

To urge the RCA to fully support the publication and distribution of the book, Patterns and Portraits, and encourage the seminaries, classes, and RCA members to use this book in furthering their understanding of women in the life and ministry of the RCA; and further,

to support the production of a study guide to aid in the use of this volume. (ADOPTED)
MENTORING

The commission continues to communicate with women under the care of classes through mailings and personal conversations at the RCA seminaries. A list of ordained women willing to serve as mentors has been compiled and made available to students under care. There are an encouraging number of mentoring relationships already in place.

ADVOCACY

As the commission endeavors to advocate for women in the RCA, it followed through on a grievance filed by a woman seeking ordination. The commission is happy to report that the Judicial Business Committee handled the complaint in a fair, thorough, and timely fashion, and the woman has been duly ordained and installed as a minister of Word and sacrament.

RETREAT FOR THEOLOGICALLY TRAINED WOMEN

The commission continues to take seriously its mandate to provide a retreat for theologically trained women. On April 9-11, 1999, women gathered at the Chicago Cenacle Retreat House for a soul feasting banquet of art and architecture, prayer and conversation, relaxation and play. Along with time to build and renew relationships, the centerpiece of this retreat allowed a leisurely tour of some of Chicago's loveliest houses of worship, led by nationally known tour guide Ralph Achilles.

SEMINARIES

Communication between the commission and the seminaries will continue when the commission meets at Western Theological Seminary in October 1999. The schedule includes two special sessions: 1) a forum focusing on the gifts of women and men together in a ministry setting and how ideas and experiences about gender influence our ministry, and 2) a dinner hosted by the Commission for Women seminarians and local clergy.

REFORMED CHURCH WOMEN'S MINISTRIES (RCWM)

Commission representatives attended two RCWM meetings: the board meeting in November 1998 and a restructuring meeting in February 1999. The purpose of the February meeting was to discern how women's ministries can be affirmed, advocated, supported, and encouraged within the RCA. The task was to be in dialogue with the RCWM's proposals and to further the conversation. The commission was challenged to look at its structure, agenda items, and goals in order to determine how it can be more inclusive of women and their issues. There was agreement on the necessity of continuing the process and scheduling a future meeting.

CELEBRATIONS

The Rev. Joyce Stedge-Fowler, the first woman ordained in the RCA, was honored on the twenty-fifth anniversary of her ordination at the Classis of Mid-Hudson fall meeting. She was ordained in Rockland-Westchester County on October 7, 1973, and installed as minister at Rochester Reformed Church in Accord, New York, Mid-Hudson Classis. The commission joined in the celebration with the presentation of a certificate to the Rev. Stedge-Fowler, expressing appreciation for her as a leader in the RCA, expressing thanksgiving for her help in making it possible for other women to respond to God's call, and offering prayers for the continued working of the Spirit in her life.
The End of an Era

For twenty-five years the Rev. Dr. Alvin J. Poppen has provided constancy and excellence in addressing specific issues and services related to the practice of ministry in the Reformed Church in America. His retirement on December 31, 1998, marked the end of an era that had begun in December of 1969. As the result of a reorganization, the Office of Human Resources was created to gather the diverse personnel functions of the existing boards into a new office. Pension matters were also to become a part of this office’s responsibilities.

For nearly three decades Dr. Poppen has devoted himself to meeting the needs of clergy, their spouses, and professional church workers. During his tenure the services of the office of Human Resources, later renamed the Ministry and Personnel Services (MAPS), expanded greatly. For the faithful service of this servant of Jesus Christ, the Reformed Church in America gives thanks. While much has been written about servant leadership, Alvin Poppen has embodied what it means to be a servant leader. His retirement brings to an end an era of distinguished leadership.

Value Permeated

The values which shaped and guided MAPS reflect Dr. Poppen’s conviction and pastoral spirit. These can be partially summarized as follows:

The Reformed Church is best served by pastors who are genuinely cared for themselves, in hope and expectation they will then be more free to care for others.

The commitment of MAPS is to see [that those who serve the church as their primary vocation are] persons who are valued simply for who they are.

Those who engage in ministry are really trying to do their very best, and are bound by vows which they took at ordination...Thus an organization which supports their ministry must seek to maximize their efforts, enable their commitment, and encourage them in every way possible.

It is values such as these which have permeated MAPS.

MAPS Mission

Exactly what is the mission of Ministry and Personnel Services? The General Synod Council Handbook gives this answer:

The Ministry and Personnel Services Committee shall ensure that those who are engaged in all the ministries of the Reformed Church in America as their primary vocation are prepared for competent ministry, cared for spiritually, emotionally, and physically in order to faithfully fulfill their call and be motivated in competency to minister in the service of Jesus Christ (GSC Handbook, p. V-1).

A review of the minutes of the General Synod meetings over the past thirty years reveals how effectively this mission has been carried out. MAPS’ responsibilities span a minister’s years, beginning with concerns about standards for the preparation of ministry and continuing
throughout his or her retirement years. MAPS' concern is not merely for clergy, but for their spouses, families, congregations, and arenas of service.

The MAPS Manual

We are well served when we know where to find answers to our questions. MAPS has prepared a manual which addresses specific issues related to the practice of ministry in the Reformed Church in America. This manual is a loose-leaf notebook that points to resources, services, documents, and guidelines for ministers and consistorys. It is called Ministry and Personnel Services: Resources for Ministers and Consistorys. This manual gives an overview of services provided by MAPS, and answers many questions, including:

- The Minister's Profile...the Church’s Profile: how does it work and how can it work for you?
- What kinds of opportunities are there for continuing education and professional development?
- How can one go about getting a $300 grant to develop skills that will encourage church growth?
- How can the Clergy Consultation Service be helpful?
- What is involved in becoming an interim minister, and how does a congregation obtain this service?
- Does the RCA have a sexual ethics code? How does the RCA respond to allegations of sexual misconduct?
- Do you have questions about your annuity?

A Word of Commendation

The Reformed Church in America is to be commended for the manner in which it cares for its clergy. This care expresses itself in many ways. Through the General Synod it has taken actions that benefit the clergy. The provision for continuing education is but one example. General Synod has also encouraged pastoral care of clergy and their families. It has endorsed a program “Beginning in Ministry: An Educational Support Group for those Newly Ordained” (MGS 1988, pp. 286-288). The average compensation that RCA clergy receive is among the highest in the United States. In 1998 the average compensation of RCA clergy was $46,947 (salary plus housing).

Not only are RCA active clergy cared for; those who have retired continue to be reminded that they are not forgotten. A program of visitation of retirees is in place. The average retirement benefit for clergy retiring in 1998, for those who had served at least thirty years in the Reformed Church in America, was $27,550. In 1972 a minimum required annual contribution to the Reformed Church Annuity Fund was mandated for all clergy. Financial assistance is available from the General Fund of the Board of Pensions for older retirees who did not have this benefit and whose income from the Board of Pensions and Social Security is no longer adequate. The assistance is provided by benevolent gifts from churches and individuals and the $1.50 per member assessment. Last year the Board of Pensions allocated $704,209 in regular and special assistance grants to 181 persons. Of this number, 115 were widows. The total number of retired clergy and their spouses is 1,215.

The Reformed Church in America is to be commended for its care for the clergy. It is a comprehensive care—spiritually, emotionally, and physically.
From the Report of the Board of Pensions

RETIRED CLERGY

During 1998 thirty 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-72
To adopt the following resolution:

These have loved Christ and fed his sheep.
They have devoted themselves
to spreading the Word
and equipping the saints
for the work of ministry.

Their contribution to a needy world
is rich beyond measure;
their record is on high.

The Reformed Church in America,
with admiration,
deep affection,
and overflowing thanks to God
celebrates their lifelong service.

John Arnold
Zanesville, Ohio

Lloyd Arnoldink
Montague, Michigan

Paul Benes
High Falls, New York

Virgil Dykstra
Allison, Iowa

Victor Ebert
Mantorville, Minnesota

Frank Guinta
Dartmouth, Nova Scotia

Henry Haga
Chino, California

Herman Harmelink
Poughkeepsie, New York

Thomas Harris
Stony Brook, New York

Nancy Herlein
Muskegon, Michigan

I. John Hesselink
Holland, Michigan

Rudolf Katerburg
Delta, British Columbia

Earl Kennedy
Holland, Michigan

Richard Kooistra
Inwood, Iowa

George Kroeze
Wyoming, Michigan

Chung-Sheng Lin
Flushing, New York

James Medendorp
Cedar Lake, Indiana

Peter Mondeel
Vacaville, California
Barbara Nauta  
Plano, Texas

Robert Ondra  
Palmyra, New York

Walter Pickup  
Tinley Park, Illinois

Alvin J. Poppen  
Oakland, New Jersey

Kenneth Shields  
Levittown, Pennsylvania

Carl Van Farowe  
Johnston, Iowa

Howard Vande Guchte  
Fond Du Lac, Wisconsin

Gerald Vander Hart  
Newton, New Jersey

Richard Vander Voet  
Mount Vernon, Washington

Nicholas Vander Weide  
Penn Yan, New York

Erwin Voogd  
Jacksonville, Oregon

Raymond Weiss  
Orange City, Iowa

(ADOPTED)

The Rev. Gregg Mast, president of the Board of Pensions, introduced the Rev. Alvin Poppen and his wife, Gerry. Mast read a resolution honoring Poppen, who has retired after twenty-nine years of service on the RCA staff, most recently as director of Ministry and Personnel Services. Poppen addressed the synod.

Specialized Ministries

If there were a time when persons engaged in specialized ministries felt marginalized, it is not today. Today nearly one-third of clergy are engaged in specialized ministry. Each year prior to the General Synod there is a gathering of military and institutional chaplains. MAPS continues to encourage the church through its structures to utilize the gifts of persons in specialized ministries. Classes are asked to care for all the church’s clergy within their purview.

Organizational Change

Even as the decade of the sixties ended with organizational change, so too the decade of the nineties will end with organizational changes related to the offices of insurance and pensions. Structurally these two offices will become accountable to the office of Finance Services. Functionally they will continue to relate in many ways to the office of Ministry and Personnel Services.

From the Report of the African-American Council (p. 75)

The advisory committee recommended a substitute motion for R-13:

R-13 (substitute)  
To request the RCA seminaries, in cooperation with the racial/ethnic councils, to recruit African-American and other racial/ethnic students and to develop intentional training programs to help black and other racial/ethnic students from within the RCA as well as black and other racial/ethnic students outside of the Reformed Church in America make the transition to become Reformed Church in America pastors; and further,
to pair students with seasoned RCA pastors who will mentor them in order to provide pastors for the growing number of African-American and other racial/ethnic churches without pastors.

Reasons:

1. The GSC is not responsible for the curriculum of the seminaries or for the development of programs for the seminaries.

2. All of the racial/ethnic ministries of the RCA need to be included in the development of this program.

A motion was made from the floor to amend R-13 by adding the word “ethnic” following the word “seasoned” in the third paragraph. The amendment lost.

A motion was made from the floor to amend R-13 as follows (deletions stricken out):

R-13 (substitute)
To request the RCA seminaries, in cooperation with the racial/ethnic councils, to recruit African-American and other racial/ethnic students and to develop intentional training programs to help black and other racial/ethnic students from within the RCA as well as black and other racial/ethnic students outside of the Reformed Church in America make the transition to become Reformed Church in America pastors; and further,

to pair students with seasoned RCA pastors who will mentor them in order to provide pastors for the growing number of African-American and other racial/ethnic churches without pastors.

(ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

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From the Report of the President

P-3 from the president’s report (p. 40) was referred to the Advisory Committee on Church Vocations. The advisory committee recommended:

R-73
To instruct the General Synod Council, through its Ministry and Personnel Services Committee and staff team, to study how to make opportunities available for establishing collegial support groups; and further,

to explore how to make these opportunities available at least annually to RCA ministers of Word and sacrament, elders, deacons, and lay church workers, for report back to the General Synod in 2000.

(ADOPTED)
Reasons:

1. Support groups are necessary to help alleviate perceived loneliness in the lives of pastors and laity.

2. These groups may help preserve marriages, churches, and families.

P-4 from the president's report (p. 40) was referred to the Advisory Committee on Church Vocations. The advisory committee recommended:

**R-74**
To instruct the general secretary to bring together ten to fifteen ministers in a retreat-type setting, if funding is available; and further,

In this retreat setting to discuss the differing theological, philosophical, social, and other perspectives that make it difficult for members of the Reformed Church to dialogue as sisters and brothers in Christ, for report back to General Synod in 2000. (ADOPTED)

Reason: These discussions will help ease tensions developing among leaders of various regions of the Reformed Church that may contribute to misunderstanding.

P-5 from the president's report (p. 40) was referred to the Advisory Committee on Church Vocations. The advisory committee recommended:

**R-75**
To urge the General Synod Council, through its Ministry and Personnel Services Committee and staff team, to encourage gatherings of students studying for ministry in the RCA at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, Western Theological Seminary, and at other seminaries throughout North America, as well as faculty from the RCA seminaries and RCA professors teaching at other schools of theology, for the purpose of conversation, mutual understanding, learning, and worship; and further,

to urge the Ministry and Personnel Services Committee and staff to work cooperatively on this program with the director of the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Committee, the presidents of the RCA seminaries, and the RCA professors of theology; and further,

to urge the development of strategies for faculty exchanges among New Brunswick and Western Seminaries and other seminaries (insofar as this is feasible) where RCA students are studying for ministry. (ADOPTED)

Reason: These meetings will encourage fellowship and collegiality between the faculty and students of New Brunswick Theological Seminary, Western Theological Seminary, and the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency.

P-7 from the president's report (p. 41) was referred to the Advisory Committee on Church Vocations. The advisory committee recommended:
R-76
To instruct the General Synod Council, through its Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee and its staff director, to study the growth of the roles assigned to the president and vice president of General Synod with special attention to the demands placed on them by involvement in multi-year commitments and to study the ways in which these responsibilities have affected their working situations; and further,

to consider the merit of recommending to General Synod that the president of synod be offered a sabbatical year from other professional responsibilities during his or her term of presidency, for report to the General Synod Council not later than April 2000. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. In recent years there has been a significant increase in the time required to fulfill the offices of president and vice president of General Synod.

2. Accepting the office entails a three year commitment—a year as vice president of General Synod, a year as president of General Synod, and a year as moderator of the General Synod Council.

Overture

Supervision of General Synod Professors of Theology

1. The Classis of California overtures General Synod to develop a format for the care, accountability, and supervision of the Reformed Church in America General Synod Professors of Theology for report to the General Synod of 2000.

Reasons:

1. General Synod Professors of Theology are amenable to the General Synod, but there is an inadequate process in place to provide ecclesiastical oversight to these individuals who have the responsibility of preparing the future pastors and leaders of the RCA.

2. The General Synod is responsible to be proactive in caring for and seeking the spiritual well-being of the General Synod Professors of Theology in the same manner that the classes of the Reformed Church in America fulfill that responsibility for the ministers of Word and sacrament.

3. Accountability of the General Synod Professors of Theology to the General Synod in matters of theology and doctrinal beliefs is as necessary, if not more so, as is the accountability of ministers of Word and sacrament in theological and doctrinal beliefs to their respective classes.
4. The need for such a format of care, accountability, and supervision for General Synod Professors of Theology was made evident through recent actions and stated beliefs by Dr. Norman Kansfield, which have caused great concern in the church and which are contrary to positions adopted by the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America.

-The advisory committee reported that it believes Overture 1 to be out of order because it implies a charge (BCO, Chapter 3, Part II, Article 2, Section 7). The advisory committee requested the chair to rule Overture 1 out of order. The president ruled the overture out of order.

-The advisory committee recommended:

R-77
To instruct the Commission on Church Order to undertake a study and to develop procedures by which General Synod Professors of Theology are cared for, supervised, and held accountable by General Synod, to report back to General Synod in 2000. (ADOPTED)

Reason: While a procedure for government and discipline exists (BCO, Chapter 2, Part I, Article 3, Section 4), there is no procedure for providing pastoral care of General Synod Professors of Theology.
REPORTS ON EVANGELISM AND CHURCH DEVELOPMENT

Report of the General Synod Council's Evangelism and Church Development Services Committee

REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF EVANGELISM AND CHURCH DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

The General Synod of 1997 passed the following resolution:

To declare [North America] a primary mission field for the Reformed Church in America in the first two decades of the twenty-first century... and further, to encourage every congregation of the RCA to think of itself as a "mission station" and to think of its members as missionaries called to bear witness to the good news of God in Jesus Christ in the midst of a disbelieving culture (MGS 1997, R-4, p. 422).

The Statement of Mission and Vision of the Reformed Church says:

The Reformed Church in America is a fellowship of congregations called by God and empowered by the Holy Spirit to be the very presence of Jesus Christ in the world.

Our shared task is to equip congregations for ministry—a thousand churches in a million ways doing one thing—following Christ in mission, in a lost and broken world so loved by God.

Response to the Above Statements

The Evangelism and Church Development Services response to the above statements is a vision entitled “Faithful Witnesses.” The vision is based on Matthew 25:14-30 and Acts 1:8. The passage from Matthew is commonly known as the parable of the talents. In this Scripture passage it becomes clear that:

1. God has given his stewards/servants gifts/talents.

2. God expects his servants to “invest” what they have received from him, not merely keep it safe. When the person who was given five talents returns five additional talents, the response was, “Well done, good and trustworthy slave” (v. 21). The same response is given to the person who was given two talents when the servant returned the two talents plus another two.

However, a different response occurred when the person who was given one talent returned the same one talent. The master said, “You wicked and lazy slave...take the one talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents” (vv. 26, 28).

Acts 1:8 states: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”
GOAL

The people of the Reformed Church in America will be faithful witnesses of faith using and developing the resources and gifts God has given them. This will manifest itself in spiritual renewal that leads congregations and people to launch out in faith, following Jesus Christ, serving one another and the world.

STRATEGIES

Evangelism and Church Development Services will work together with Mission Services, Congregational Services, and the racial/ethnic councils on three strategies to accomplish this goal. They are:

1. EVANGELISM

Definition

Evangelism is winsomely and effectively sharing in word and deed the good news: that God, in Christ, has come to deliver his people from their sins. Through the proclamation of the gospel, God’s sons and daughters are called to repentance from sin, to faith in Jesus Christ, to membership in the church, and to service in God’s world. Evangelism is “one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread” (D. T. Niles).

Goals

1. To assist congregations and classes to evangelize in word and deed.
2. To remind the church that evangelization includes seeking justice and peace.
3. To encourage churches to develop specific, contextual evangelization strategies.
4. To train church members to become effective, winsome witnesses.
5. To make available resources to assist congregations to reach out to the unchurched.
6. To assist congregations to view themselves as mission outposts.
7. To develop new paradigms for doing ministry.
8. To work cooperatively with sister denominations to evangelize the world.

Objectives (by the year 2003)

1. To provide 200 congregations with specific tools to do ministry and mission more effectively.
2. To develop a mission focus to provide all RCA congregations with resources for older persons—especially to those fifty-five years of age and older.
3. To assist congregations as they examine themselves and their systems for the purpose of viewing themselves as mission outposts.
4. **To develop** the model of an intentionally small, highly disciples, mission-centered church as an example of a new paradigm for doing ministry, based on the Church of the Savior in Washington, D.C.

5. **To encourage** synods, classes, and congregations to use the ministry of regional evangelism trainers.

6. **To assist** congregations as they train members to become effective, winsome witnesses.

7. **To continue** the “Evangelism Connections” partnership with sister denominations.

During the period from April 30, 1998, to April 30, 1999, Evangelism and Church Development Services engaged in the following activities that relate to the “Evangelism” section of the “Faithful Witnesses” program.

**Major Evangelism Workshops.** The RCA participated in a cooperative alliance of mainline Protestant denominations in producing three major evangelism workshops in Atlanta, Georgia; Los Angeles, California; and Cincinnati, Ohio. Total attendance for the three events was more than 2,000. Plans are now underway for three similar events in the year 2000. Participating denominations are: Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Episcopal Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), United Church of Christ, United Methodist Church, and Reformed Church in America. Several other denominations are planning to participate in events in 2000, including the African Methodist Episcopal–Zion Church and the American Baptist Church.

> The advisory committee recommended to amend R-78 as follows (additions are underlined):

**R-78**

*To encourage members of RCA congregations to attend an evangelism event in the year 2000, in particular to encourage those people who have been identified as those to whom God has given the gift of evangelism.* (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

Reasons:

1. The amendment acknowledges God’s design and empowerment for the church in giving spiritual gifts.

2. The amendment would impact congregations when passionate and effective people return to train others.

**Invite a Friend Campaign.** People who do not attend church continue to report in interviews that the main reason they do not attend is because no one has invited them. In 1998 Religion in American Life (RIAL) secured free radio advertising time worth $23 million to promote this campaign. Churches in the RCA who have made use of the materials of RIAL report significant increases in attendance and in reconnecting people to their faith community. The media and a volunteer advertising agency produce public service announcements on radio and television that add momentum to local churches celebrating “Invite a Friend” Sunday. Last year more than ten thousand congregations participated, including many RCA churches.

**R-79**

*To encourage RCA congregations to use the materials from Religion in American Life (RIAL) and to implement an “Invite a Friend Sunday” during the next twelve months.* (ADOPTED)
On the Way 2 Evangelism Emphasis. Two hundred four congregations are currently enrolled in On the Way 2, a five-year evangelization emphasis.

The second On the Way 2 evangelism resource packet was sent to participating churches in late November 1998. It contained a number of relevant resources for evangelism in the local congregation. Also enclosed was information regarding Evangelism with Integrity workshops and Faithful Witness seminars, plus a list of regional evangelism trainers.

➢ The advisory committee recommended to amend R-80 as follows (additions are underlined):

R-80
To encourage all RCA congregations to participate in the On the Way 2 program, with the goal of enrolling 150 additional congregations by 2003. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

Reasons:

1. The amendment adds a measurable goal for staff and synods.

2. The goal offers a greater incentive for churches to become involved in On The Way. <

Evangelism with Integrity Workshops.

1. Evangelism with Integrity workshops are designed to help and equip church leaders to discover strategies for doing ministry, mission, and outreach more effectively. Theoretical and practical tips are provided.

2. Does your congregation spend more of its resources on maintenance than on mission? The workshop provides an excellent process that enables revitalization and revisioning to happen.

3. Free leadership is available. Costs are covered by the RCA. Call Bruce Laverman at (602) 861-3872, your regional synod executive, or your regional evangelism trainer.

Twenty persons participated in the annual regional evangelism trainers retreat held at the Franciscan Renewal Center in Scottsdale, Arizona, from February 1-3, 1999. Sally Morgenthaler, author of Worship Evangelism, and Dale Olson, pastor of Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Mesa, Arizona, led the retreat.

➢ The advisory committee recommended a substitute for R-81:

R-81
To encourage RCA congregations to make a study of membership additions over the past ten years; and if less than 20 percent of the congregation's membership growth is by conversion, evangelism should be made a priority; and further,

to encourage these congregations to host an evangelism workshop. (ADOPTED)
Reasons:

1. The RCA’s goal is to reach the unchurched.
2. Each congregation must evaluate how well it is reaching that goal.
3. A humble assessment of where the church is can stir faith and action based on God’s promises.

2. REVITALIZATION

Definition

To give new life or vigor to congregations so that they may thrive in their mission to be the salt and light of Christ in the community in which they are present.

Goal

To provide opportunities and to initiate processes by which churches may experience revitalization through the formation and re-formation of effective leadership.

Objectives

1. Encourage seminaries, regional synods, and classes to consider using “assessment centers” at strategic points of a pastor’s development and ministry, such as early in seminary training, following the first pastorate, and in mid-career.

2. Request RCA congregations, through their consistories, to place a priority on identifying, encouraging, and supporting persons within their congregations who have shown that they have the spiritual gifts essential for leadership in the church.

3. Provide, in cooperation with Congregational Services and Ministry and Personnel Services, regular periodic training events that further equip pastors, elders, deacons, and other church leaders to fulfill their ministries effectively and fruitfully.

4. Urge each classis of the RCA to reflect upon, discuss, and develop a strategy for revitalization by the year 2003, encouraging each of its congregations to annually review how it is a vital center of witness in its community.

5. Work to transform consistories into communities of spiritual leaders.

During the period from April 30, 1998, to April 30, 1999, Evangelism and Church Development Services engaged in the following activities that relate to the “Revitalization” section of the “Faithful Witnesses” program.

The Revitalization Report has been sent to all RCA churches for study.

The Revitalization Summit Team met in Chicago, Illinois, on November 12-13, 1998. Members of the team include the Revs. Barbara Alexander, Jhonny Alicea-Baez, Thomas DeVries, Arthur Hudak, Taylor Holbrook, Vicky Menning, Charles Morris, Tony Vis, and Peter Semeyn, and General Synod Council staff the Revs. Bruce Laverman and Richard Welscott. At that time the team reviewed the progress of the denomination’s revitalization networks, made plans for the additional training needed for year two in the Church Resource Ministries model (held April 8-10, 1999, in Chicago), and discussed other revitalization models. The team made plans to meet November 10, 1999, with the Rev. Donald Troost,
Albany Synod executive, and the Rev. Dr. George Hunsberger, professor at Western Theological Seminary, to consider the “missional church” model being implemented by the Synod of Albany.

R-82
To urge every classis and congregation of the RCA to reflect upon, discuss, and develop a strategy for being “faithful witnesses” in their community. (ADOPTED)

3. NEW CHURCH DEVELOPMENT

Definition

New churches will be defined as communities of people who have the following characteristics:

1. Know Christ and seek to be his disciples.
2. Worship together regularly.
3. Live and serve in community.
4. Grow in following Jesus Christ as Lord.
5. Grow numerically (reaching out to those who do not know Christ).
6. Strive to be financially self-sufficient within an agreed-upon time frame.
7. Strive to reproduce themselves as a Christian community.

Goal

Each regional synod and the majority of the classes and congregations of the RCA are involved in new church starts that use a diversity of models and locations and include Hispanic, Asian, African-American, Native American, and Anglo populations.

Objectives

1. To encourage and enable each RCA racial/ethnic council to be actively involved in starting new multicultural churches.
2. To resource and work collaboratively with each regional synod to establish specific goals for beginning new churches in their region.
3. To develop processes by which resources (i.e., money and volunteers) may cross regional boundaries to areas of great opportunity and need for a new Reformed congregation.
4. To improve the procedures for identifying qualified candidates for new church development.
5. To improve the networking and training of pastors for new church developments.
6. Work with the city ministries staff person to develop new churches in the urban frontiers of the North American mission field.
7. Add a new category to New Church Development called “Restart.” Restart is defined as an established church with ministry opportunities, but which requires outside intervention and additional resources to reach its potential. Work with regional synods and classes to identify potential churches to “restart,” utilizing what has been learned from new church development.

8. Collaborate with RCA ecumenical partners in strategies, resources, and new models for establishing new congregations that effectively reach their communities with the gospel of Christ.

During the period from April 30, 1998, to April 30, 1999, Evangelism and Church Development Services engaged in the following activities that relate to the “New Church Development” section of the “Faithful Witnesses” program.

Evaluation. 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. Two methods—an assessment clinic and a Gallup interview—were used in the past year to evaluate new church development candidates.

The assessment clinic is an intensive, four-day evaluation of new church development candidates. The clinic was held in January of 1999, with ten couples participating.

During a Gallup interview, candidates interested in new church development receive feedback on their qualifications (gifts) for this ministry. Twenty-one persons received feedback from the Gallup interview in the last year.

The advisory committee recommended to amend R-83 as follows (additions are underlined):

R-83
To encourage Reformed Church in America congregations and pastors to identify persons who have the gifts and skills to begin new RCA congregations and to assist those persons in pursuing the option of beginning a new congregation and to regularly pray that the Lord of the harvest will provide these people. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

Reasons:

1. The internal call to ministry is the work of the Holy Spirit.

2. God will answer prayer.

3. Prayer undergirds the call to ministry.<

Consultations. The coordinator for new church development is available to the regional synods and classes as a resource person. Each regional synod executive was contacted in the past year, and several classes were consulted concerning new church development.

The 1998 General Synod passed the following action:

to direct [the Office of Evangelism and Church Development Services] to examine ways to bring each classis to develop a strategic plan for developing new churches; and further,

to direct said office to propose models for operation of churches in communities that are too poor for those churches to be self-sufficient; and further,
to direct said office to report on these matters to the General Synod of 1999 (MGS 1998, R-1, p. 390).

In response to this directive, the director of Evangelism and Church Development has been in communication with numerous classes church planning and development committees and churches interested in beginning a new congregation. The director has also met with each racial/ethnic council staff person and the director of urban ministries. Models for beginning new congregations are being developed that meet the needs of indigenous people within their particular communities (MGS 1998, R-10, p. 423). There is no one model that fits every situation. A model for beginning a new congregation must take into account the economic, cultural, and ethnic settings in which the church is to be started. The involvement of a local congregation is a healthy way to begin a new congregation.

The advisory committee recommended to amend R-84 as follows (additions are underlined; deletion is stricken out):

R-84
To encourage every RCA congregation and classis to become involved in parenting at least one new congregation before 2005. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

Reason: Some churches and classes are capable of being involved in beginning more than one new congregation and should be challenged to do so. <

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 Community Church, Chowchilla, California; California Classis
RiverTree Community Church, Grandville, Michigan; South Grand Rapids Classis
Maple Avenue Ministries, Holland, Michigan; Holland Classis
Korean Choong Hyun Church of Orlando, Orlando, Florida; Florida Classis
Igreja Evangelica Vida Nova, Toronto, Ontario; Ontario Classis
Rejoice Community Church, LeMars, Iowa; West Sioux Classis
Sunrise Community Church, Tulare, California; Central California Classis
Iglesia Reformada La Senda, Norwalk, California; California Classis

R-85
To request that congregations celebrate the beginning of eight new ministries in the RCA by supporting them with prayer and highlighting their ministries. (ADOPTED)

Reception of New Congregations. The following congregations celebrated their organization between April 1998 and April 1999:

Grace Reformed Church, Thorold, Ontario
Community of Joy, Traverse City, Michigan
Cornerstone Community Church, Chowchilla, California
R-86
To adopt the following resolution:
BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred and ninety-third session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting on the campus of Augustana College on the fourteenth day of June, 1999, gives recognition and heartily celebrates the organization of the following congregations:
  Grace Reformed Church, Thorold, Ontario
  Community of Joy, Traverse City, Michigan
  Cornerstone Community Church, Chowchilla, California
(ADOPTED)

98 by '98. The 98 by '98 new church development program began January 1, 1989, and ended December 31, 1998. The Reformed Church in America can celebrate the accomplishments of meeting the objectives of the program. The 98 by '98 chart following this report shows the participating churches in the program.

Intended Results

We believe and trust these strategies will result in the following:

1. A 10 percent increase in the total communicant membership of the Reformed Church in America by the close of the year 2005 (310,648 in 1997 to 341,712 by 2005).

2. Eighty new churches from January 1, 1999, to December 31, 2005. Eighty new congregations have filed denominational plans.

3. Two hundred congregations voluntarily participating in strategic church revitalization networks by the year 2003. These networks would be affinity groups (a safe place) where personal transformation of leaders takes place through reflection, prayer, discussion, and mutual accountability within an atmosphere of trust and mutual encouragement.

Evangelism and Church Development Services reports the following statistics that relate to the “Intended Results” section of the “Faithful Witnesses” program.

Persons Involved in Revitalization Networks. The following numbers indicate the number of persons involved in a network whose goal is revitalization.

- RCA network facilitators trained in Church Resource Ministries
- Networks having completed Year One (pastors)
- Networks currently in Year One (1998-99)
- Networks having completed Year Two (1998-99)
- Networks currently in Year Two (1998-99)
- Networks currently in Year Three (1998-99)

Churches Involved in Revitalization Networks. The following numbers indicate the number of churches involved in a network whose goal is revitalization:

- Churches completed or currently in Year One
- Churches in Year Two
- Churches in Year Three

Reported Results. The following results were reported for revitalization networks:

1. Improved communication between pastors and congregations regarding ministry directions.
2. Improved relationships between pastors and congregational leaders.
3. Increases in attendance, membership, and participation.

**ADDENDUM**

**98 BY '98**

**NEW CHURCH STARTS**

**1989 - 1998**

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**REGIONAL SYNOD OF THE GREAT LAKES**

- **Columbus House Church**
  - Columbus, Ohio
  - 1-91

- **Franklin Fellowship Church**
  - Franklin, Tennessee
  - 4-89
  - 10-18-87
  - 1-12-92

- **Christ's Community**
  - Ft. Wayne, Indiana
  - 11-89
  - 9-16-90
  - 3-21-93
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**REGIONAL SYNOD OF NEW YORK**

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<tr>
<td>Roslyn Heights, New York</td>
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**LEGAL:***

A church listed with an asterisk * indicates the church organized or filed a denominational plan prior to January 1, 1989.

Not all denominational plans were recorded in the timeline.

The dates for a denominational plan which are in parentheses await approval at a future GSC meeting.

A full description of the Denominational Plan for Church Development is in the GSC Handbook, Evangelism and Church Development Services section.

A strikeout is an indication that the church has gone independent or closed.

The parentheses opposite the church name contain the letter (P) if a pastor is on the field. If no pastor is on the field the parentheses are left blank ( ).

The date of first worship may not be recorded.

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 (GSC). Its purpose is to support the work of the GSC 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). Detailed information regarding these two loan funds (such as the amounts that can be borrowed from them, the purposes for which funds can be borrowed, the requirements which must be satisfied in order to borrow funds, and how one can invest in the EFF) can be obtained through the “Resources” section of the RCA’s website (www.rca.org).

The primary sources of funds for the CBF are 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 approximately two, five, and 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—Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin. The rates of interest paid on EFF notes are established quarterly by a subcommittee of the RCABEF board.

At the end of 1998, the corporation had assets of over $33.36 million. Of this amount over $20.5 million was in the form of loans outstanding to RCA congregations, and nearly $3.5 million was committed but not yet funded. At the end of 1998, 103 CBF loans and 52 EFF loans were outstanding (or committed but not yet funded) to local RCA congregations. Following this report is a list of all churches who currently are borrowers from the RCABEF.

During 1998, seventeen loans were paid off (the same number of loans that were paid off in 1997). The number of loan commitments issued in 1998, as well as the total dollar amount committed, was higher than in recent years. Specifically, twenty-two commitments for loans were issued to RCA congregations in 1998 (compared to eight in 1997 and ten in 1996), and the total dollar amount committed was nearly $4.4 million (compared to $1.6 million in 1997 and $2 million in 1996). The RCABEF rejoices with the congregations whose loan applications have been approved, and prays that the facilities that are built or remodeled will glorify God and help the congregations fulfill their call to ministry in their communities.

The increase in the total number (and aggregate dollar amount) of loan commitments issued in 1998 is due in no small part to the continuing growth in total assets of the RCABEF. This growth in total assets has resulted from interest received on outstanding loans and investments of idle cash, and from the generosity of donors (including those who have contributed generously to the $9.8 by '98 fund drive).

This growth in assets has made several other things possible for the RCABEF. First, the RCABEF has been able to revise its loan limits by increasing the aggregate amount that an established church (i.e., a church other than a new congregation building its first facility) can borrow. That amount, previously $500,000, is now $650,000. The additional $150,000 comes entirely from the CBF. Because the interest rate for CBF loans is lower than the interest rate for EFF loans, this revision results in a lower total (or “blended”) interest rate for such churches.
Second, the RCABEF has been able to think a bit more creatively about how to help local churches obtain the total financing they need for construction projects. For example, one of the commitments issued in 1998 was issued in tandem with a loan commitment issued by a local bank. By borrowing from both a local bank and the RCABEF, the church was able to receive all the financing it needed; and because some of the funds were from the CBF (at “below market” rates), the total interest cost for the church was lower than what it otherwise would have been.

Third, the RCABEF (with the assistance of an *ad hoc* committee comprised of representatives from the GSC's Evangelism and Church Development Services, the RCA's Urban Ministries Team, the GSC, and the Council of Field Secretaries) is continuing to revise its policies and programs. The RCABEF wants its resources—and in particular the growing resources of the CBF—to be used effectively in supporting the RCA's church development endeavors. As this process continues, the RCABEF board remains ever mindful of its need to vision, plan, strategize, prioritize, and act in ways that are consistent with the 1997 General Synod's adoption of the RCA's Statement of Mission and Vision and its declaration that the RCA is a missionary denomination.

As the RCABEF continues its work and its process of discerning how to use most effectively the resources that have been entrusted to it, it asks for your continued support and prayers.

**Canada**

Bethel Reformed Church, Fort MacLeod, Alberta  
Christ Community Church, St. Albert, Alberta  
New Life Community Church, Burnaby, British Columbia  
Grace Community Church, Surrey, British Columbia  
Bethel Reformed Church, Brantford, Ontario  
Drayton Reformed Church, Drayton, Ontario  
Emmanuel Reformed Church, Woodstock, Ontario  
Faith Reformed Church, Stevensville, Ontario

**United States**

New Hope Community Church, Gilbert, Arizona  
Christ’s Community Church, Glendale, Arizona  
Prescott Community Church, Prescott, Arizona  
Hope Community Church, Scottsdale, Arizona  
Eden Korean Church, Buena Park, California  
Canyon Lake Community Church, Canyon Lake, California  
Corona Community Church, Corona, California  
Crossroads Community Church, Elk Grove, California  
New Hope Community Church, Fremont, California  
New Hope Community Church, Glendora, California  
Calvary Community Church, Hemet, California  
CrossWinds Community Church, Hesperia, California  
Living Faith Community Church, Modesto, California  
Palm Canyon Community Church, Moreno Valley, California  
Rancho Community Reformed Church, Temecula, California  
New Hope Community Church, Aurora, Colorado  
The Springs Community Church, Colorado Springs, Colorado  
Christ Community Church, Denver, Colorado  
Church of the Rockies, Denver, Colorado  
Our Saviour’s Church, Lakewood, Colorado  
Faith Community Church, Littleton, Colorado
West Broward Community Church, Fort Lauderdale, Florida
First Reformed Church, Tampa, Florida
Rolling Hills Community Church, Zellwood, Florida
North Atlanta Community Church, Roswell, Georgia
The 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
First Reformed Church of Prairie City, Prairie City, Iowa
First Reformed Church, Rock Valley, Iowa
New Life Reformed Church, Sioux Center, Iowa
Westview Church, Clive, Iowa
Twin Falls Reformed Church, Twin Falls, Idaho
New Life Community Church, Wendell, Idaho
Downers Grove Community Church, Downers Grove, Illinois
Peace Reformed Church, Mt. Prospect, Illinois
Christ's Community Church, Fishers, Indiana
Christ's Community Church, Fort Wayne, Indiana
Crossroads Church, Overland Park, Kansas
Harvest Community Church, Wichita, Kansas
Boston Taiwanese Christian Church, Framingham, 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
University Reformed Church, East Lansing, Michigan
Resurrection Reformed Church, Flint, Michigan
Thornapple Community Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan
Glen Lake Community Reformed Church, Glen Arbor, Michigan
Trinity Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan
Covenant Community Church, Hudsonville, Michigan
Second Reformed Church, Kalamazoo, Michigan
Martin Reformed Church, Martin, Michigan
Church of the Savior, Niles, Michigan
Fourth Reformed Church, Oshtemo, Michigan
Gun Lake Community Church, Wayland, Michigan
Riverside Reformed Church, Bloomington, Minnesota
Peace Reformed Church, Eagan, Minnesota
Minnesota Valley Community Church, Prior Lake, Minnesota
American Reformed Church, Worthington, Minnesota
Christ Community Church, Blue Springs, Missouri
Christ's Church, St. Peters, Missouri
Westwood Church, Omaha, Nebraska
Second Reformed Church, Irvington, New Jersey
First Reformed Church, Lincoln Park, New Jersey
Ocean Reformed Church, Manahawkin, New Jersey
Pine Island Community Church, Toms River, New Jersey
Community Church of Colonie, Albany, New York
United Reformed Church of Williamsbridge Road, Bronx, New York
New Lots Community Church, Brooklyn, New York
Old First Reformed Church, Brooklyn, 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
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
Pultneyville 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, Newtown, Pennsylvania
The Reformed Church, Willow Grove, Pennsylvania
Good News Reformed Church, Sioux Falls, South Dakota
Franklin Fellowship Church, Franklin, Tennessee
Christ Community Church, Dallas, Texas
St. Thomas Reformed Church, St. Thomas, U. S. Virgin Islands
Fourth Corner Community Church, Bellingham, Washington
Servants of Christ, Federal Way, Washington
Trinity Reformed Church, Kent, Washington
Church of the Good Shepherd, Lynnwood, Washington
East Valley Reformed Church, Yakima, Washington
New Life Community Church, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
Emmanuel Reformed Church, Clinton, Wisconsin
Bethany Reformed Church, Sheboygan, Wisconsin

From the Report of the General Secretary

P-1 (p. 52) was referred to the Advisory Committee on Evangelism and Church Development. The advisory committee recommended:

R-87
To ask each consistory, in preparation for the mission convocation at General Synod 2000, to reflect on the meaning of being in mission in the congregation's local vicinity, including the numbers of those not involved in any worshiping community; and further,

to include in the consistorial report form for the coming year an appropriate question or questions that would encourage this reflection and shared response, which can then be utilized as a resource in the work of the 2000 Mission Convocation and General Synod. (ADOPTED)
From the Report of the African-American Council (p. 75).

R-15
To encourage Evangelism and Church Development Services, as well as the Urban Ministry Team, to consult with the African-American Council in an effort to intentionally recruit African-American pastors for RCA churches; and further,

to set aside funds from these agencies for this recruitment. (ADOPTED)

From the Report of the Council for Hispanic Ministries (p. 80)

➢ The advisory committee recommended amending R-19 as follows (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken out):

R-19
To instruct the Office of Evangelism and Church Development to proclaim a church-wide day of fasting (for those who are physically and medically able), and prayer for church revitalization and evangelization; and further,

to request the Office of Social Witness and Worship to prepare appropriate liturgies for use by congregations and other assemblies of the RCA for that day. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

Reasons:

1. This addition directs the recommendation to an office of the General Synod Council.

2. This addition clarifies the need for worship resources rather than liturgical forms.

From the Report of the President

➢ P-6 from the president’s report (p. 41) was referred to the Advisory Committee on Evangelism and Church Development. The advisory committee recommended:

R-88
To urge all RCA classes to explore, with the director of Evangelism and Church Development Services and the coordinator of urban ministry, the potential of the classis for involvement in the
development of and/or support for city ministries in Canada and the U.S.A.; and further,

to instruct the director and coordinator to report annually to the General Synod Council through its Evangelism and Church Development Services Committee and Mission Services Committee, regarding how these classis projects are developing. (ADOPTED)

Overture

General Synod Gather for Prayer and Witness

1. The Classis of Wisconsin overtures the General Synod to designate the first Sunday of each General Synod meeting for everyone at the General Synod to come together in a Concert of Prayer. This will be followed by all of the members at the General Synod going out into the community where General Synod is held and being involved in a witnessing experience where they actively share the gospel with the people in the community. The witnessing experiences would be in cooperation with the local churches of the Reformed Church in America in the community where General Synod is held.

Reasons:

1. This yearly focus at the General Synod would hold us accountable in a very practical way to living out our vision as the Reformed Church in America. We would no longer be doing business as usual, nor our usual business but be involved with our greatest calling as God’s people as we share the life-changing gospel with the religious lost and secular lost people in the community where General Synod is held.

2. The 1997 General Synod adopted a Statement of Mission and Vision for the Reformed Church in America in which the focus is clearly a calling to mission and ministry at all levels of our denomination (MGS 1997, pp. 78-80). In the report given by general secretary Wesley Granberg-Michaelson at the 1997 General Synod we read the following:

Simply put, mission is the intentional crossing of boundaries in word and deed for the sake of proclaiming the gospel (MGS 1997, p. 51).

As a General Synod, representing the people of the Reformed Church in America by being intentional and proclaiming the gospel in word and deed in the communities where General Synod is held every year, we would be modeling for the rest of the world around us that we do not just talk about the need for mission, but we actually take the commands of our Lord Jesus Christ to heart and set aside time to focus on sharing our faith with the spiritually lost.

3. Jesus modeled for us a lifestyle of reaching out to the spiritually lost. He talked about reaching out to the spiritually lost throughout his earthly ministry and he gave the task of evangelism to his disciples and by extension to us. In Luke 10:1-37 Jesus talks about the need to live a lifestyle of reaching out to the lost as he sends out the seventy-two and shares the parable of the “Good Samaritan.” In Luke 10:1-2 (NIV) we read:
After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

It is clear that this focus on reaching out to the spiritually lost was a priority in the life of our Lord and in the lives of his followers. As the General Synod intentionally reaches out to the spiritually lost for a day, we would be an answer to prayers offered that there would be more workers sent out into the harvest. Also, we would have the privilege of seeing some come to know Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior.

4. It would focus our leaders on the task of equipping people to reach out to the spiritually lost so that they will be prepared to share their faith when they come to General Synod.

The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ (Eph. 4:11-12).

5. The Bible says that time spent reaching out to the spiritually lost is wise. Proverbs 11:30 (NIV) says, “he who wins souls is wise.” Ephesians 5:15-16 says, “Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil.”

The General Synod would be wise to implement this overture, making the most of the opportunity that we have at General Synod to reach out to the spiritually lost as we live out our vision and mission in a very practical way.

The advisory committee recommended:

R-89
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. The Mission 2000 design team is already planning the event.

2. There could be confusion about the words “witnessing experiences.”

3. The committee is offering a new recommendation which it believes addresses the concern of the overture. <

The advisory committee made the following recommendation, which was subsequently amended from the floor (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken out):

R-90
To urge the design team for the 2000 General Synod and the Mission 2000 event future General Synod planning teams to incorporate in the Saturday or Sunday format a concert of prayer and servant evangelism experience for all members of the General Synod and to incorporate the concert of prayer and servant evangelism experience in future General Synods. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

Reason: This recommendation fulfills the intent of the overture from the Classis of Wisconsin.

(A motion to substitute “request” for “urge” in the first line lost. An earlier amendment had inserted the word “all” before “future General Synods” in the last line, but this entire phrase was removed by the subsequent amendment.) <
REPORTS ON FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Report of the General Synod Council's Finance Services Committee

REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF FINANCE

The overall objective of the Office of Finance is to provide quality financial service to the General Synod, General Synod Council units, and affiliated entities (e.g., the Board of Pensions, the RCA Building and Extension Fund, the RCA Foundation, and Reformed Church Women's Ministries). It is the mandate of the Office of Finance to ensure that adequate financial systems and controls are in place to ensure that the officers and directors of RCA corporations can adequately fulfill their fiduciary responsibilities.

In 1999 the Office of Finance assumed responsibility for the administrative oversight of the pensions administration and insurance offices, which provide pension and insurance services for all ordained ministers and their families and for career church workers. Consolidating all financial functions under one roof will permit the Office of Finance to provide these services in the most professional, cost-effective manner possible. Selected financial and advisory services are also offered to other denominational agencies and institutions, including regional synods, classes, RCA seminaries, and RCA congregations.

Dedicated, hardworking personnel carry out the daily administrative tasks that are essential in assisting the Reformed Church in America in living out its Statement of Mission and Vision. The RCA treasurer and chief financial officer is charged with primary responsibility for the oversight of all activities related to the Office of Finance.

Within the Finance Services unit, staff members handle a wide range of tasks, including: 1) proper recording of contributions and other income; 2) payment of all bills, including the program expenditures that make up the RCA's total mission worldwide; 3) exercising of necessary budget and cash controls; and 4) preparation of payroll for RCA staff and missionaries. Finance staff are also responsible for interfacing with legal counsel, independent auditors, state regulators, the Internal Revenue Service, and corporate insurance providers.

Staff members in the pensions administration office handle all of the day-to-day administration and record-keeping for the RCA's retirement plan, which is comprised of 1,957 clergy, missionaries, and career church workers. Pension administration also administers the assistance programs of the Board of Pensions. The insurance office staff administers the RCA's self-funded insurance program and provides assistance with comprehensive medical, dental, long-term care, group life, long-term disability, pastoral liability, and fidelity bond insurance plans.

Finance Services—1998 Highlights and Challenges for 1999

In 1998 Finance Services made progress toward its objective of providing quality financial service to the General Synod Council units and the affiliated entities it serves in the following areas:

- With the Board of Pensions, formed the Ad Hoc Working Group on Investments to review and make recommendations with respect to outsourcing investment management and related administrative functions.

- Hired a new financial systems analyst to provide the expertise to assist the RCA's Finance Services unit to respond to its Y2K and other computer systems challenges.
With the other General Synod Council units and in cooperation with the Information Technology staff, embarked on a project to install Raiser's Edge, the new contribution management and name and address data-entry system, which is targeted for implementation in the third quarter of 1999.

Participated in the Budget Summit process to provide long-range budgeting and financial planning for the RCA, along with solutions to some of the more immediate challenges.

In addition to ongoing work in the above areas, tasks for 1999 that continue to demand attention include:

- Review and implement outsourcing alternatives for a variety of administrative functions that are presently being managed internally.

- Continue to work on Finance Services organization, staffing, and training to ensure that the organization can fulfill its fiduciary responsibility in an effective, professional manner.

- Change to a fiscal year-end that is more appropriate for an organization that receives most of its cash in the last quarter of the calendar year.

- Review and revise internal and external reporting to better satisfy the needs of the RCA's officers and directors and to implement sound budget control procedures.

Financial Summary—1998

The following is a summary of the total 1998 revenue and expenses for the various agencies serviced by Finance Services.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1998 Revenue</th>
<th>1998 Expenses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Synod Council</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operating Fund</td>
<td>$13,495,172</td>
<td>13,614,642</td>
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<tr>
<td>RCWS Disaster Relief Fund</td>
<td>762,690</td>
<td>334,788</td>
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<td>RCA &quot;If-raised&quot; Fund</td>
<td>664,905</td>
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<td>RCA Distribution Center Fund</td>
<td>1,665,058</td>
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<td>Leadership Development Fund</td>
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<td>Audiovisual Fund</td>
<td>307,059</td>
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<td>$9.8 by ’98 Fund Drive (cumulative)</td>
<td>5,996,786</td>
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<tr>
<td>Urban Ministry Fund Drive (cumulative)</td>
<td>106,358</td>
<td>93,728</td>
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<td>Reformed Church Women’s Ministries</td>
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<tr>
<td>General Fund</td>
<td>186,572</td>
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<td>Triennial Fund</td>
<td>289,752</td>
<td>202,396</td>
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<td>Beth Marcus Scholarship Fund</td>
<td>4,486</td>
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<td>Board of Pensions</td>
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<tr>
<td>General Fund</td>
<td>2,076,490</td>
<td>1,870,069</td>
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<td>Church Annuity Fund</td>
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<td>Annuity Bond Fund</td>
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<td>Support Fund</td>
<td>3,835,814</td>
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<td>Investment Fund</td>
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<td>Insurance Fund</td>
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FINANCIAL SUPPORT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1998 Revenue</th>
<th>1998 Expenses</th>
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<tr>
<td>RCA Foundation</td>
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<tr>
<td>General Fund</td>
<td>226,589</td>
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<tr>
<td>Endowment &amp; Trust Fund</td>
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<td>New Jersey Fund</td>
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<td>Philanthropic Fund</td>
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<td>Gift Annuity Fund</td>
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<td>Revocable Gift Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pooled Income Fund</td>
<td>(8,239)</td>
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<td>Unitrust Fund</td>
<td>(10,252)</td>
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<th>1998</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RCA Building and Extension Fund, Inc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Extension Foundation Fund</td>
<td>867,815</td>
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<td>Church Building Fund</td>
<td>1,309,495</td>
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<table>
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<th>1998</th>
<th>1998</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RCA Fund</td>
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Investments

The RCA Fund

The trustees of the General Program Council designed the RCA Fund (formerly the RCA Cash Program) in 1979, primarily as a means for providing capital for the RCA Extension Foundation. In addition to raising new capital for the building of churches, the program makes it possible for the local churches, classes, agencies and regional synods to receive an attractive rate of return for the short-term investment of surplus funds.

The RCA Fund operates similar to a money market fund, with actual earnings being distributed to individual participants on a quarterly basis. The net return for investors during 1998 was as follows:

- First Quarter: 6.06 percent
- Second Quarter: 6.09 percent
- Third Quarter: 6.02 percent
- Fourth Quarter: 5.61 percent

Up to 20 percent of the RCA Fund's outside depositor assets of $18 million (or $3.6 million) may be invested in Extension Foundation Fund (EFF) notes; however, given the present liquidity of the EFF, only about 5 percent of the RCA Fund's outside deposits are presently comprised of EFF notes. The remainder of the assets may be invested as follows:

1. U.S. or foreign debt securities assigned one of the four highest ratings (AAA, AA, A, BBB) or equivalent rating at the time of purchase.

2. Money market funds, FDIC-insured time deposits, and certificates of deposit.

3. Prime commercial paper.

4. U.S. Government direct obligations or its agencies' notes, bonds, and mortgages.

5. Covered options and futures contracts.

Formerly under the internal management of the RCA’s managing director of investments, these funds have recently been transferred to the Bank of New York, which has assumed the role of custodian and transitional investment manager. This is pending the recommendation of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Investments and the decision of the General Synod Council as to the most optimal management of the funds.

In October 1998 the Board of Pensions established the Ad Hoc Working Group on Investments in response to a 1998 General Synod recommendation on outsourcing (MGS 1998, R-2, p. 450-451). The working group, which is comprised of members of the investment subcommittee and other financial professionals from the denomination and is chaired by the president of the Board of Pensions, has the responsibility to:

1. Review the current investment programs managed by the Church.
2. Consider and recommend outsourcing alternatives for investment management, reporting, and administrative functions.
3. Advise the chief financial officer at key stages in the investment management transition process.
4. Develop a proposed implementation plan for retirement plans for approval by the Board of Pensions at its April 5, 1999, meeting.

Reformed Church Investment Program

The Reformed Church in America integrated the management of its permanent investment funds (endowment funds) in 1994 to the newly-formed RCA Foundation. Participation in the Reformed Church investment program is limited to organizations or groups affiliated with the RCA. 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.

Scudder Kemper Investments serves as investment manager for the bulk of the Reformed Church investment program, which had assets of $12,438,795 as of December 31, 1998. (Fleet holds a small portfolio for endowments that are legally restricted to remain in a New Jersey banking institution.) The Security National Bank in Sioux City, Iowa, provides accounting and custodial services for the securities held in the Reformed Church’s endowment accounts.

The RCA Foundation annually establishes a rate of payout. For 1998 the established rate of payout was 8 percent (prior year-end market value), and payments were paid in four equal quarterly installments. Beginning in 1999 the rate will be changed to 6 percent of a five-year rolling average market value.

Board of Pensions—Investments

As of December 31, 1998, the Board of Pensions asset base totaled $294,327,149. These assets represent four separate funds within the BOP. The first and largest of the four funds is the Church Annuity Fund (CAF). CAF assets are invested primarily in a wide range of fixed-income securities, such as U.S. Treasuries, government-backed obligations, and corporate bonds. Formerly under the internal management of the RCA’s managing director of investments, these funds have recently been transferred to the Bank of New York, which has assumed the role of custodian and transitional investment manager. This is pending the recommendation of the previously mentioned Ad Hoc Working Group on Investments concerning the most optimal management of the RCA’s pension program in the future.
The Canadian portion of the CAF operated until December 1996 under a group annuity contract with the Imperial Life Insurance Company in Toronto, Ontario. In January 1997 the funds were withdrawn from Imperial Life and given over to the Regional Synod of Canada for management. The Regional Synod of Canada in turn has obtained the services of an outside manager to invest the funds according to policy.

The second fund within the Board of Pensions is the Annuity Bond Fund. This fund was established in 1981 (BOP 81-16) and was designed to provide a member of the CAF with an alternative to having an annuity purchased 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 to have funds invested during the period between retirement and the time when he/she reached the age of seventy 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 CAF members investing in the Annuity Bond Fund. 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 1986 (MGS 1985, p. 183). This action created both the third and fourth fund within the Board of Pensions. Under the terms of the plan, a retiree, having reached 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 the account balance to purchase an annuity contract with an outside firm.

The Pension Support Fund is one component of the Support/Investment Plan. Amounts in this fund accumulate earnings, and payments to a participant 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 interest and principal are amortized over the actuarial life span of the participant so as to achieve equal quarterly payments. In short, this instrument is similar to purchasing an annuity contract. The advantage to investing in the Pension Support Fund 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, instead of being consumed by the issuer of the annuity.

The Pension Investment Fund is the other component of the Support/Investment Plan. Amounts in the Pension Investment 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 1998 the distribution payments were made using a 7.75 percent rate of return. As with the Pension Support Fund, the value of the investment (original book value in this case) is paid to the estate of the retiree at the time of death, thus leaving a financial legacy.

Mission Investments

In 1970 the General Synod Executive Committee (GSEC) established a mission investment policy that directed the General Program Council to make “available for mission investment purposes 10 percent of the appropriated and unappropriated operating reserve” (GSEC Action 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 fourteen banks, credit unions, and other organizations total $321,226. Mission investment monies are placed with firms such as the South Shore Bank, located in the African-American section of Chicago; the Lumbee Bank of Pembroke, North Carolina, which serves a population primarily made up of members of the Lumbee Indian nation; the NCCC Minority Bail Bond Fund; the Shared Interest Group, which is investing in South Africa's democratic development; and our most recent investment, the Navigators Kenya, which is making small business loans in impoverished parts of Kenya.

Because of certain maturities in recent years, 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 mission investing.

Assessments

Of the total 1998 assessment giving, 97 percent was collected by the due date of December 31. Of the outstanding 3 percent, all was received early in calendar year 1999. The total assessment for 1998 was $27.52 per communicant member. It was comprised of an $22.77 figure for the General Synod Operation Budget, $1.50 for the Board of Pensions General Fund, and $3.25 for theological education. A verbal report will be given at General Synod regarding any balances that continue to be outstanding.

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 Internal Revenue Service (IRS) on January 17, 1986. The exemption covers all participating churches, 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 church 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 revisions under the RCA group exemption umbrella. The report, filed with the commission in August 1998, listed four newly formed churches to be added, three name/address changes, one merging church, and five churches/agencies to be removed from the list.

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 1998 financial statements of the Reformed Church in America were examined and certified by Lambrides, Lamos, Moulthrop & Co., Certified Public Accountants, and were presented in person to the General Synod Council at the spring meeting. Copies of the annual audit are reprinted in the official minutes of the General Synod and are also available to members of the Reformed Church in America by calling the RCA's Office of Finance in New York City.
Report of the Board of Pensions

The mission of the Board of Pensions is “to provide retirement income, annuities, supplemental pensions, assistance grants, insurance benefits, and certain specified investment and personnel support services for all ordained ministers and their families, and for church workers of the Reformed Church in America in accordance with the rules prescribed in the two major divisions of the Board of Pensions and its departments as outlined herein; namely, 1) the Reformed Church Annuity Fund and 2) the General Fund.”

As this report is being written, the Board of Pensions is taking active measures to address issues that have been raised with respect to the structure of the Church Annuity Fund (which at the end of 1998 stood at $256,377,354) and the investment options available to participants. In response to an overture adopted by the 1998 General Synod (MGS 1998, p. 451), the board has created a working group of investment professionals, pastors, and qualified laypeople who are presently assessing alternatives for the management of our investment funds. As part of this important discussion, the working group is also reviewing how best to provide participants with a suitable number of investment options regarding funds in their accounts.

The Board of Pensions, which consists of sixteen members from across the denomination, deeply values the historic covenant between participants, congregations, and the board. The board is committed to a progressive pension plan that will provide a comfortable retirement for those who have faithfully served the church. It is committed to investing the funds given by congregations and participants in ways that are both safe and appropriate for long-term goals. The board is committed to increasing the number of options participants have in investing the funds in their accounts, providing clear and understandable reports of investments, and providing an increased number of educational opportunities for all participants to learn about how to be full partners in planning for their retirement.

At the 1999 General Synod further details will be presented concerning the very positive and exciting decisions the Board of Pensions is making concerning the structure and investment management of the RCA pension plan. This is a time of dramatic change in which the church is called both to respond to a new generation of expectations and to provide a safe foundation for the future of all participants. Upheld by the prayers of its constituents, the board is strengthened by their trust as its members work together to sustain and nurture a covenant of care within the church.

In carrying out its responsibility on behalf of the Reformed Church in America, the Board of Pensions currently serves retired ministers, missionaries, their spouses, and church workers who have served the church through its congregations and agencies. In 1998, 983 people directly benefited from the provisions made in past years for them in retirement. Of these, 181 also received benefits through the General Fund of the Board of Pensions, which supplements inadequate retirement incomes and provides special assistance in cases of need. During 1998, $704,209 was allocated in regular or special assistance grants. The continued support of the church at large through its per-member assessments, contributions, and special individual gifts (including those of retirees) will be necessary for some time in order to meet the needs of a shrinking but nonetheless needy group of persons.

The ministry of the Board of Pensions is individualized through the ongoing work of a network of senior pastors who make visits and keep contact in other ways with retirees on behalf of the board and the Reformed Church in America. Senior pastors have many stories to tell. At an annual meeting in January, they meet with the Board of Pensions and share the experiences they have had on visits throughout their often vast parishes. Their reports give immediacy and faces to the continuing work of the board and its staff. The stated purpose of the ministry of the senior pastors is 1) to express the continuing concern and interest of the Reformed Church in America to persons who are often separated from their previous church
relationships by reasons of geography and health, and 2) to determine when and if financial need exists which can be alleviated by assistance from the General Fund. The ministry of these senior pastors, however, includes a broad range of caring. Currently those serving as senior pastors are the Rev. and Mrs. Eric Schulze (far western region of the U.S. and Canada), the Rev. and Mrs. Cornie Keunen (central U.S. from Minnesota to Texas), the Rev. and Mrs. Henry Mouw (Great Lakes area), the Rev. and Mrs. Russell Pater (Regional Synod of Albany), the Rev. Roger Leonard (Regional Synod of New York and New England), the Rev. and Mrs. Edwin Mulder, (Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics), the Rev. and Mrs. Bruce Penn (southeastern U.S. from the Carolinas to Kentucky to Florida), and the Rev. and Mrs. John Ver Hoog (eastern Canada).

The Board of Pensions wishes to add a word of appreciation for the dedicated service rendered over the past twenty-nine years by the Rev. Alvin Poppen. Many friends and colleagues gathered in January in Tarrytown, New York, for a dinner that celebrated Al’s life and ministry as he entered retirement.

RCA INSURANCE PROGRAM

The Board of Pensions offers an extensive choice of insurance coverage to employees of the Reformed Church in America. The insurance committee and the insurance staff review the insurance program every year to ensure that the plan provides comprehensive benefits choices for employees of the RCA. The benefit needs of employees have changed over the years, and at times increased benefits have been offered to meet these needs.

Major changes in the insurance program have occurred in the 1998-99 year. The changes include expanding benefits to include long-term care and the change of the third party administrator for the medical and dental plans. This has involved a number of additions to the computer programs and included testing all programs to insure Y2K compliance.

The Board of Pensions increased the Reformed Church in America’s insurance coverage by expanding its long-term disability program to include long-term care coverage. An open enrollment was held in September, allowing employees who were not enrolled in long-term disability to add long-term care to their insurance package. There was guaranteed coverage for all active employees and for the spouses of clergy and missionaries regardless of their medical condition. The basic long term-care policy provides a payment of $2,200 per month for three years for nursing home care or assisted living.

As part of the search for a new third party administrator, a survey was completed to determine which doctors are being used by medical participants. This survey is being used to develop a more inclusive network for the medical program and to ensure as little disruption as possible in the changeover. Work to enroll each doctor is being carried out by the new administrators.

At the 1998 meeting of the General Synod, the Classis of Illinois overtures synod to direct the Board of Pensions to include in the RCA medical insurance program coverage of prenatal and postnatal expenses for RCA medical insurance participants who are adopting. The synod referred the overture to the Board of Pensions for study and a report to the 1999 General Synod (MGS 1998, p. 376). At its October 1998 meeting the Board of Pensions voted to report to the General Synod that coverage for prenatal and postnatal care expenses in the cases of adoption not become part of the RCA medical insurance program, as funds are not available. The Board of Pensions further considered at its April 1999 meeting whether the assistance department or the children’s Christmas appeal department could provide a funding source for prenatal and postnatal expenses relating to adoptions. The Board of Pensions voted that funds are not available in either department that could be allocated for this purpose.
The Reformed Church in America endeavors to maintain an insurance program that provides a quality of care that participants deserve and want. The programs are administered with concern and compassion while striving for excellence in a fast-changing and challenging arena.

Report of the RCA Foundation

The mission of the RCA Foundation is to serve RCA members, congregations, and affiliated ministries by teaching biblical stewardship, encouraging people to give, acquiring resources for ministry, and managing the RCA Foundation resources.

The foundation provides fund-raising services to the RCA, General Synod Council, and the broader constituency of the denomination. The foundation works in six program areas that reflect its mission statement: stewardship education, financial campaign services, special gifts, direct mail, gift planning, and fund management.

Currently the foundation has four full-time staff persons: the Rev. Wayne Antworth, director; the Rev. Norman Tellier, gift planning coordinator; Larryl Humme, special gift coordinator; and Jane Richardson, stewardship educator and urban ministry capital campaign consultant. There are also three part-time capital campaign consultant staff on contracts: Fay Marcus, Milton Nieuwsma, and Harold Ritsema.

The structure of the RCA Foundation board has been changed. The membership of the board formerly came from Stewardship and Communications Services of the General Synod Council. The bylaws of the foundation were changed to elect five members from the membership of the General Synod Council, with four at-large members to be appointed by the General Synod. The new board members from the General Synod Council were elected at the October, 1998, General Synod Council meeting:

John Elliott, Jr. 1999
John Buteyn, Jr. 1999
Harlan Bergman 2000
Arthur Hessinger 2000
Rodney Koopmans 2000

The General Synod Council also appointed four at-large members as ad interim appointments until the General Synod meets in June 1999:

Valery Craane 1999
Ed Mondore 2000
Harry DeBruyn 2001
Marilyn Norman 2001

The foundation board at the April 14, 1998, meeting instructed staff to develop a business plan. The budget deficit that the foundation experienced in 1997 and anticipated in 1998 indicated that radical steps needed to be taken to ensure the future of the foundation. The major agenda for the November 23, 1998, meeting of the foundation board was to review and act upon the recommendations from the business plan. These recommendations are being implemented by the foundation staff.
In 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, and 1998, the foundation raised more than $5 million in life income gifts, the philanthropic fund, special gifts, and direct-mail appeals. In addition, RCA Financial Campaign Services has raised more than $3 million during the last three years for local congregations and other ministries. Funds were also specified for ministry each year by raising the awareness of persons to the possibility of remembering the ministries of the church in their will, trust, or other estate plan.

Despite the good performance of the foundation, funding issues continue to be a challenge. The foundation was started without adequate funding. It is the goal of the foundation to become a viable entity with adequate financial support. This must be the primary concern of the foundation staff and board.

The RCA Foundation did not receive any funds to capitalize its operation when it was started in 1996. In 1998 the General Synod Council gave a grant of $400,000 from the unrestricted General Synod Council endowment funds, plus a $50,000 grant to offset the 1997 deficit of $431,946 and to provide a “financial cushion” for the 1998 budget. At December 31, 1997, the foundation had $135,748 in unrestricted reserves.

The business plan addressed a number of financial issues, including the elimination of two part-time positions in the 1998 budget. Even though these measures were taken to lower the budget and reduce expenses, there was a deficit in 1998 of $265,000. The foundation requested and was granted an additional grant/loan of $230,000 from the General Synod Council. This allows the foundation to cover the 1998 overdraft of $110,000 and provides an additional $120,000, which gives the foundation an unrestricted reserve balance of $120,000. An unrestricted reserve balance of at least $100,000 is needed to write gift annuities in several states. This increases the amount of the grant/loan to the General Synod Council to a total of $630,000. A long-term concern for the foundation will be the repayment of the $630,000 grant/loan.

The budget for 1999 that was approved by the Foundation board is $741,000. Beginning in 1999 the General Synod Council is providing funding of $220,000 from basic services. This is crucial for the ongoing financial viability of the foundation. This made it possible for the foundation to appoint a director ($125,000), continue the position of coordinator for special gifts ($50,000), and fund the stewardship education part-time staff position and program ($45,000). The foundation is continuing to review all of its programs and the ability of these programs to generate revenue so that it can balance its budget.

**TEACHING BIBLICAL STEWARDSHIP**

All RCA Foundation staff members teach biblical stewardship as they work with congregations and individuals. However, the foundation also provides stewardship resources and assistance to congregations through the Office of Stewardship Education.

**Stewardship Education and Annual Giving**

Stewardship education is a continuing priority of the RCA Foundation’s mission. Since a great deal of the stewardship education that occurs in RCA congregations is done in conjunction with annual giving programs, responsibility for these are linked in structure and planning. Jane Richardson, a contract staff person, works eighty days a year to review and evaluate stewardship education resources and to promote annual giving programs in the congregations.
Resources

Consecrating Stewards and Consecration Sunday continue to be the most popular and effective programs in use in the RCA for annual giving. The two programs are similar in theology and educational approach and are appropriate and effective annual giving programs for RCA congregations. The RCA Foundation continues to encourage and support utilization of these programs throughout the church through the orientation and deployment of “guest stewards.”

All God’s Children Need to Give is a new annual giving program, published this year (May 1999) in the new ecumenical Giving magazine. All God’s Children Need to Give is built on the same theological and educational foundations as the Consecrating Stewards and Consecration Sunday models, and it uses small group meetings to implement the program.

A broad array of additional annual giving and stewardship education resources, both print and audiovisual, continue to be available from the RCA Distribution Center.

Faithful Generations is the working title for a new stewardship education program on planned giving, designed to be used in conjunction with a special anniversary or other celebration in the life of a congregation. It provides a way for congregations to tell individual stories of faith within the church’s membership and to encourage members to participate by making a planned gift.

RCA Stewardship Education Team

In June of last year the RCA Foundation stewardship education staff convened a staff consultation to:

1. Assess the state of stewardship in the RCA.

2. Identify future strategies and direction for stewardship education in the RCA.

3. Provide consultation participants with an expanded awareness of the opportunities and responsibilities to teach and encourage stewardship. Twelve persons participated, representing Mission Services/diaconal ministries, Congregational Services/children’s ministries/media; regional synods; RCA Foundation; and local congregations.

One of the primary affirmations of the consultation is that stewardship education can and needs to be done in a variety of arenas throughout the church—most importantly, in the congregation. All of the denominational agencies and offices represented in the consultation have important roles to play, providing congregations with resources, models, energy, and passion for the task of stewardship education. Any steps that can be taken to enhance the cooperative and holistic nature of the various ways in which this support is provided for congregations will enhance the work and better serve congregations.

Creation of a stewardship education team integrated into existing structures is the first and most basic of the recommendations. This is being addressed currently by the RCA Foundation staff in the person of Jane Richardson, who serves as coordinator for stewardship education. The first annual meeting of the stewardship education team is planned for mid-June and will include representation similar to that of the consultation. Both a revised and expanded bibliography and a mediography of stewardship resources has been developed and added to the diaconal notebooks. These resources are also being distributed through other existing networks such as mission stewardship associates and guest stewards.
Theology of Stewardship

The consultation also recommended that the RCA articulate a theology of stewardship. This concern has been sounded in other venues in the denomination during the past year. The Staff Consulting Group, made up of the regional synod executives, the General Synod Council directors, the general secretary, the college and seminary presidents, the TEA director, and representatives from the Church Herald and Reformed Church Women’s Ministries, met on November 17, 1998, in Chicago.

Sharon Miller, adjunct professor of sociology at Hope College, spoke to the group about trends in giving and research on what motivates people to give. As a result of the input and discussion that followed, the Staff Consulting Group also affirmed the need for work on a theology of stewardship for the RCA. Development of a strong theological statement on stewardship requires input from the RCA Foundation staff, the stewardship education team, and the Commission on Theology. If approved by the RCA Foundation board, a request will go to the General Synod this year to appoint a task force, including the representation outlined above, to articulate a theology of stewardship for use throughout the RCA.

Internal Networks

Steps have been taken within the Foundation’s stewardship education office to expand the working relationship with several key “circles” within the RCA in which stewardship education is done. There are eight such circles, and the personnel of these groups should be in communication with each other concerning resources and other key information. The circles are: RCA Foundation staff, diaconal ministry stewardship specialists, guest stewards, regional synod executives and staff, Mission Services staff, mission stewardship associates, stewardship education team, and the Council for Christian Education. Additional work is needed to develop a stronger sense of partnership with these networks.

Ecumenical Partnerships

The Ecumenical Stewardship Center continues to be the RCA’S strongest ecumenical partnership for stewardship education. The introduction this year of the new Giving magazine is a tangible benefit for RCA congregations. The annual giving program insert in the magazine, contributed this year by the RCA, will in future years be coordinated with theme materials such as bulletin covers, envelopes, and stationery. Availability of these resources will allow the RCA Foundation to send an annual stewardship packet to congregations.

ENCOURAGING PEOPLE TO GIVE

All RCA Foundation staff members are engaged in encouraging people to give—to contribute their financial resources for current and future programs of the Reformed Church in America and its related congregations and organizations. Members of the RCA Foundation staff strive to accomplish this goal by educating RCA members about the importance and rewards of stewardship and assisting them with estate and financial planning.

Gift Planning

The task of the RCA Foundation’s Office of Gift Planning is to promote the variety of methods available for making gifts to the RCA and its related organizations.

During 1998 the office had one full-time staff person, the coordinator, Norman J. Tellier. (For three months Walter Pickup worked half-time in the four states surrounding Lake Michigan. His position was eliminated in March 1998 because of budget constraints.) The coordinator makes presentations on estate planning and/or financial planning to groups in churches and
FINANCIAL SUPPORT

other organizations. These presentations explain the need for estate planning, share something of the intricacies of estate taxation, and explain how charitable giving may reduce estate taxes. Several methods are used to communicate the benefits of gift planning to members and friends of the RCA.

The coordinator for gift planning also makes presentations to deacons, consistories, and other decision-making bodies. These presentations suggest that churches establish endowment funds and establish guidelines for the use of gifts or bequests prior to the receipt of contributed funds.

In addition, the coordinator, a CFP® licensee, offers estate and financial planning to members and friends of the RCA at no cost. (CFP® and CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER® are federally registered marks of the Certified Financial Planner Board of Standards, Inc.)

The office keeps on hand a large supply of literature on the value of having a will and how gifts can be made in other ways. These materials are sent on request and are distributed at workshops and displays.

The Office of Gift Planning has a partnership program with several organizations who contribute to the RCA Foundation to encourage gifts through gift planning. At the current time the following organizations are members of the partnership:

- New Brunswick Theological Seminary, New Brunswick, New Jersey
- Western Theological Seminary, Holland, Michigan
- Hope College, Holland, Michigan
- 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
- Bethany Christian Services, Grand Rapids, Michigan
- Bethany Home, Ripon, California
- Elim Christian School, Palos Heights, Illinois
- Geneva Camp and Conference Center, Holland, Michigan
- Hope Haven Inc., Rock Valley, Iowa
- Jackson County Ministries, Annville, Kentucky
- Manitoua Ministries, Frankfort, Illinois
- Marble Collegiate Church, New York City
- Rest Haven Christian Services, South Holland, Illinois
- Trinity Christian College, Palos Heights, Illinois
- Words of Hope, Grand Rapids, Michigan

The RCA Foundation 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 1998 the RCA Foundation has continued working toward registering its gift annuity program in those states that require registration and in which the foundation staff expects to generate annuities.

Van Bunschooten Society

In 1814 Dominie Elias Van Bunschooten made the first planned gift to the RCA. His gift continues to provide scholarship funds to this day. In honor of that gift the RCA has formed 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. In 1998 the Office of Gift Planning held luncheons across the country to express the church’s gratitude to the members of the society. These luncheons will continue in 1999 in other areas of the church.

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 yard of First Reformed Church of New Brunswick, New Jersey. In his last will and testament he added over $3,000 to his former donation, making a total of more than $17,000—a princely gift for those days. (Additions of income have increased the principal to $20,000.) Dominie Van Bunschooten thus had the honor of making the first substantial contribution for assisting young students of theology. His example has been followed from time to time by others, thus realizing his desire as expressed in the bequest “that he might be an humble pattern for others to copy after.” It would be impossible to catalogue all the results that have flowed from these donations. For more than a century they have made possible the education of candidates for the ministry, for the work both at home and abroad. All honor to him and the other liberal donors who have followed his example (MGS 1937, pp. 8-9).

In honor of Dominie Elias Van Bunschooten, the Van Bunschooten Society has been formed in the Reformed Church in America to honor those who have included the Reformed Church in America in their wills.

ACQUIRING RESOURCES FOR MINISTRY

Acquiring resources for ministry is directly associated with encouraging people to give. The results reported below are a result of teaching biblical stewardship and encouraging people to give. These gifts are given through the Office of Gift Planning and the Office of Special Gifts.
The work of the two offices resulted in gifts totaling $1,605,003 during 1998. These gifts were received in the following forms:

**Planned Gifts Received—1998**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gift Instruments</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Charitable Gift Annuities</td>
<td>10.1% $162,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charitable Trusts</td>
<td>11.5% $180,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endowments</td>
<td>22.7% $394,739.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GIFTS Philanthropic Fund</td>
<td>14.8% $233,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Gifts</td>
<td>17.1% $265,003</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total gifts received: $1,605,002.73

The GIFTS Philanthropic Fund is a donor-advised fund that allows donors to make a gift to the RCA Foundation, and the gift is 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. In 1998 $364,739.73 was received in this fund, and $140,526.22 was distributed to charities. The foundation received one-half of the interest earned on GIFTS Philanthropic Fund accounts. In 1998 this was $6,501.82.

The gifts received by the RCA Foundation during 1998 in all funds were designated as follows:

**Gift Designations—1998**

- Deferred Gifts
- Special Gifts
- GIFTS Fund

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Designation</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regional Synod</td>
<td>24.2%</td>
<td>$333,949</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Church</td>
<td>24.0%</td>
<td>$336,947</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundation</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>$31,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partners</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>$10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endowments</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>$1,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GIFTS Philanthropic Fund</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missions</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>$63,959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missions</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>$63,959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>$26,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fund Drives</td>
<td>32.4%</td>
<td>$448,053</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total gifts designated: $1,380,604

The amounts on the above chart do not equal those of the previous chart since gifts to the GIFTS Philanthropic Fund are carried over into following years.
One of the benefits to congregations is that while the RCA Foundation promotes giving through wills and other means, often persons will act upon the suggestions made by RCA Foundation staff without notifying the foundation of the gift. These gifts come to the churches at a later time. In order to judge the effectiveness of the RCA Foundation program, the churches of the RCA are asked to report the number and amount of bequests and planned gifts received by them each year. While reading the consistorial reports for 1996 and 1997, gift planning staff noted that bequests and planned gifts came more frequently from churches where the RCA Foundation has worked than from other churches. In 1997 RCA churches reported receiving 344 bequests totaling $6,729,729 and 22 planned gifts totaling $484,835. The planned gifts came in the form of trust distributions and matured annuities. Total bequests and planned gifts reported by the congregations amounted to $7,214,564. The distribution of these gifts by synods is as follows:

**1997 Bequests and Planned Gifts**

**Distribution by Regional Synod**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Synod</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Great Lakes</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>$641,875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heartland</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>$580,730</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-America</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>$397,706</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Far West</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>$447,607</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albany</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
<td>$1,232,350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>$4,138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>$1,311,059</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-Atlantic</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
<td>$2,656,218</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total received:** $7,214,564

The Office of Planned Giving also promotes the RCA Building and Extension Fund (RCABEF) investment notes. Investments in the RCABEF are used for the construction of church buildings. Promotion is done by Church Herald ads, publicity material, and personal contacts. The office is also responsible for obtaining state registrations and issuing new and rollover notes.

**Special Gifts**

Encouraging people to give is also done by the Office of Special Gifts. The goal is to seek gifts from individual donors to fund projects which would not otherwise be funded. This service is offered to all offices and assemblies of the RCA.

The Office of Special Gifts identifies and solicits funding from individual donors for special programs or projects. The coordinator for special gifts, Larry Humme, is responsible to identify, cultivate, and solicit RCA individuals who may be interested in making gifts to various RCA ministries. The RCA programs or projects identified as needing funding are items that either the General Synod Council or the RCA’s Leadership Advisory Team has approved.

In funding these approved programs or projects, the coordinator for special gifts looks at a variety of potential funding sources. The coordinator for special gifts works with individuals who previously contributed to RCA appeals and/or fund drives and then works toward transferring their support to new RCA programs. Additionally, the coordinator for special gifts works with current donors to RCA programs and continues to identify and solicit new donors to contribute to RCA programs.
In 1998 the coordinator for special gifts raised approximately $1 million in cash and pledges for the following programs and/or projects:

- $9.8 by '98—$352,159
- 1998 special projects—$228,110
- Urban Ministries (gifts)—$84,794
- Urban Ministries (pledges)—$420,000
- Total cash and pledges—$1,085,063

The coordinator for special gifts is currently serving as director of the Urban Ministries Fund Drive. Through December 2000, 75 percent of his time will be devoted to the Urban Ministries Fund Drive and 25 percent will be devoted to special gifts. At the end of the Urban Ministries Fund Drive the coordinator for special gifts will resume 100 percent of the time with special project funding.

The Office of Special Gifts is located at 8765 W. Higgins Road, Suite 410, Chicago, Illinois 60631, (800) 228-3813.

Urban Ministries Fund Drive

Believing that the best hope for the city is God’s grace in Jesus Christ, that the gospel has power to change lost lives and oppressive systems, and that the future of the whole church depends on crossing cultural boundaries in mission, the Reformed Church is taking bold, visionary, and sacrificial steps to strengthen its ministry in cities across North America.

The RCA had its beginnings in the city. New Amsterdam in 1628 was just a shadow of New York City today, but it was the center of commerce and culture in the New World.

In the almost four hundred years since the gospel was first preached in New York, the RCA has organized, and at times, closed vital ministries in urban centers like Los Angeles, Chicago, Detroit, Toronto, and Philadelphia. But the RCA still has two hundred churches worshiping and working in the urban centers of the United States and Canada. Christ’s message of grace and redemption is alive in North America’s cities.

Today there is a new awakening in the RCA that it must provide vital ministries to the great urban centers of our nations. Dynamic steps have been taken by the leadership of the RCA to establish a solid and ongoing commitment to urban ministry.

The RCA is committed to raising $5 million for urban ministries to fund programs and an endowment to underwrite program and administrative costs.

The guidance of hundreds of urban pastors and laypeople has resulted in a plan to bring God’s grace to cities in exciting, effective ways. The plan has goals in four areas:

- **People:** Develop effective leaders.
- **Places:** Revitalize congregational life and witness.
- **Program:** Establish partnerships between urban and nonurban churches.
- **Prophecy:** Challenge social injustice.
Our Future Depends on the City, the RCA’s fund drive for urban ministries, officially began January 1, 1999. Prior to that, many hours of planning and preparatory work went into structuring the campaign, recruiting a steering committee, and staffing the fund drive.

The Urban Ministries Steering Committee is comprised of laypeople from across the denomination. The Rev. Dr. Edwin G. Mulder, general secretary emeritus, is serving as the chairperson for the fund drive. Other committee members are Bud Mouw from Visalia, California; Oliver Patterson from Queens Village, New York; James Rieke from Grand Rapids, Michigan; Don Triezenberg from Palos Park, Illinois; Carol Wagner from Palos Heights, Illinois; and Bill Waldorf from Brookville, New York.

Staff members working in conjunction with the steering committee:

1. Larry Humme, coordinator for special gifts, is serving as director of the Urban Ministries Fund Drive. He is working out of the RCA office located at 8765 W. Higgins Road, Suite 410, Chicago, IL 60631. Humme will be spending 75 percent of his time working on the Urban Ministries Fund Drive, with emphasis being placed on the synods of the Great Lakes, Mid-America, and the Heartland.

2. Wayne Antworth is serving as coordinator for the Urban Ministries Fund Drive. He works out of the RCA office located at 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10115.

3. Jane Richardson, also working out of the 475 Riverside Drive office, has been hired to coordinate the fund drive in the synods of the Mid-Atlantic, Albany, and New York.

4. Fay Marcus, 5309 W. Kings Avenue, Glendale, AZ 85306, has been hired to coordinate the fund-raising work in the Synod of the Far West.

5. Jon Nordstrom of Holland, Michigan, is serving as the fund drive consultant.

The Urban Ministries Fund Drive’s goal is to raise $5 million. $2.5 million will be used to fund four program areas, and the other $2.5 will provide seed money to begin an endowment fund that will support urban ministry into the future.

This fund drive will be conducted somewhat differently than previous RCA fund drives. The target audience will be individual donors who have the capability of making a significant contribution as well as having an interest in urban ministry. Additionally, about thirty congregations across the denomination will be asked to participate in this fund-raising program. These are congregations that have an interest in urban ministry and programs designed for urban ministry.

The urban ministry fund-raising efforts have just begun. As of February 15, 1999, a total of $550,000 had been pledged from the steering committee and the RCA staff toward the goal of $5 million. The steering committee and the staff are beginning the process of taking the mission of this program to those who may have an interest in funding it. They are anticipating that all fund-raising efforts for this program will conclude by June 1, 2000.

Those who are interested in assisting the steering committee and/or the staff, or have an interest in becoming vitally involved in this program, should contact Larry Humme at (800) 228-3813 for more information.
$9.8 by '98 Fund Drive

The RCA embarked upon a program to establish ninety-eight new churches by 1998, a ten-year emphasis on evangelism and growth within the Reformed Church. The $9.8 by '98 fund-raising campaign became a partner with the 98 by '98 church growth program. The $9.8 by '98 focus was threefold:

1. Increasing the capital of the Church Building Fund for loans to new congregations.
2. Supporting the recruitment and training of new church development pastors and other resource materials for new church starts.
3. Supporting the revitalization of urban, rural, and small membership churches.

The allocations for the $9.8 by '98 campaign are:

- Seventy-five percent of the campaign proceeds for RCA Church Building Fund loans to new congregations seeking to finance their first worship facilities.
- Ten percent of the campaign proceeds for the training and recruitment of new church development pastors and for resources to enhance the ministry of new congregations.
- Fifteen percent of the campaign proceeds for revitalizing urban, rural, and small membership churches.

As of January 31, 1999, $7,747,479 had been raised in gifts and pledges. Although 1998 was the last year of the drive, the RCA continues to receive gifts and payments on pledges. Some 570 RCA congregations have participated in the $9.8 by '98 fund drive. Additionally, over twelve hundred RCA members made individual contributions to the drive.

Disbursement of the $9.8 by '98 grants began in the spring of 1996. The committee disburses funds in April and October. As of January 1, 1999, thirty-seven churches had shared $244,465 of $9.8 by '98 monies for the revitalization of their ministries and sixteen churches had shared $53,390 to train and recruit new church development pastors or for resources to enhance their ministries. The grant process continues through 2006. For more information on the grant application process, individuals and congregations may contact the Rev. Richard Welscott, coordinator for new church development, at (616) 698-7071.

Under the 98 by '98 evangelism and church growth plan, the Church Building Fund has made loans to twenty-seven new church starts, totaling $6,589,228. More information on Church Building Fund loans is available from Paul Karssen, fund executive, at (712) 737-4958.

The Reformed Church in America is grateful for the generosity of the congregations and many friends who participated in this campaign. The RCA is thankful that it can continue to reach people for Jesus Christ by developing new churches and revitalizing existing congregations.

Direct Mail

The direct mail program was implemented in response to the 1992 action of the General Synod to "strengthen its program of direct solicitation of contributions from individuals in its future denominational fund-raising efforts" (MGS 1992, R-26, p. 71). This decision was made to increase the financial support for General Synod Council mission programs.
The amount by which congregations can increase their benevolent support of RCA mission programs is limited. The 956 congregations of the RCA have limited financial resources. A dependence on benevolent contributions only from RCA congregations limits the growth potential of the RCA mission program.

Individual members of RCA congregations have substantial financial resources. Many RCA members give directly to other mission organizations and causes. The direct mail program gives RCA members the opportunity to also support their own denominational mission programs with direct financial gifts without reducing their commitment to their local congregation.

Four direct mail appeals were conducted in 1998. The editorial and graphics staff of Communication and Production Services, together with Mission Services staff, wrote and produced the 1998 direct mail appeals. This seems to be a manageable number and creates a good feeling with donors.

**Lent.** The 1998 Lenten appeal was mailed in April to approximately twenty-eight thousand RCA households and was designated for ministries among Native Americans. The total donors for this appeal was 863, with a total income of $141,361.50. This appeal received a large gift from one donor of $100,000, which was a direct result of the mailing.

**Fall Newsletter.** A publication, the Mission is One newsletter, was mailed to approximately twenty-eight thousand RCA households in the fall of 1998. This newsletter highlights the ways that mission contributions were being used throughout the worldwide ministries of the RCA. The total number of donors for this appeal was 247 with a total income of $16,527.00. The purpose of this mailing was informational with a very low-key financial appeal component.

**Thanksgiving.** The Thanksgiving appeal was mailed in November to approximately thirty-eight thousand RCA households and was designated for underfunded mission opportunities. These opportunities included a "graduate" of Prince of Peace Home in Guayaquil, Ecuador, who is studying for the ministry; the Church in Sudan; SWAP volunteers in Taiwan; The Way Out Ministries in Hawaiian Gardens, California; educational materials for the Soviet Union; and RCA diaconal ministries. The total number of donors for this appeal was 449 with a total income of $47,750.48.

**Year-end Direct Giving Appeal.** The 1998 year-end appeal was mailed to approximately five thousand RCA households that had previously contributed to the RCA through direct-mail or other funding appeals. About 50 percent of the needed mission income for the RCA mission programs comes in during the last two months of the year. The income that was received during the closing days of 1998 was critical in meeting the RCA's mission commitments. The total number of donors for this appeal was 287 with a total income of $49,964.98.

The General Fund of the Board of Pensions sends a special Thanksgiving Offering appeal for assistance grants to ministers, missionaries, and their spouses who retired before the RCA Annuity Fund could be of much financial help. The Board of Pensions also sends a special Children's Christmas Fund appeal each year to benefit the dependent children of deceased RCA ministers and missionaries.

The Office of Social Witness sends a special appeal each year. In 1998 this appeal was designated for grants to ecumenical organizations involved in public witness ministries. Mission Services annually asks congregations to consider extra gifts for RCA mission projects and programs as congregations allocate year-end benevolence contributions.
Financial Campaign Services

Reformed Church in America/Financial Campaign Services (RCA/FCS) was established in 1996 by the RCA Foundation. The purpose of RCA/FCS is to assist congregations, agencies, and institutions in the implementation of capital campaigns. These capital campaigns can be for a building project, debt reduction, mission outreach, or other program that furthers their mission.

RCA/FCS provides the expertise necessary to carry out all phases of a capital campaign. This includes preparing the campaign plan, organizing the campaign, developing the case statement, recruiting leaders, training volunteers, and preparing campaign materials.

Six persons are currently providing campaign consulting services through RCA/FCS: the Rev. Wayne Antworth, Milton Nieuwsma, Harold Ritsema, Larry Humme, Jane Richardson, and Fay Marcus. RCA/FCS has provided capital campaign consultation to more than twenty congregations and agencies. During 1998, RCA/FCS worked with the following groups:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ORGANIZATION</th>
<th>CAMPAIGN GOAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Synod Council, $9.8 by '98 Fund Drive</td>
<td>$9,800,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Synod Council, Urban Fund Drive</td>
<td>$5,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reformed Church Women's Ministries</td>
<td>$4,500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classis of California</td>
<td>$3,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meredith Drive Reformed Church, Des Moines, Iowa</td>
<td>$1,500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope Reformed Church, Holland, Michigan</td>
<td>$350,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manitouqua Ministries, Frankfort, Illinois</td>
<td>$1,200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clancy Street Ministries, Grand Rapids, Michigan</td>
<td>$400,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church of the Thousand Isles, Alexandria Bay, New York</td>
<td>$300,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old First Reformed Church, Brooklyn, New York</td>
<td>$300,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Bergen Church, Jersey City, New Jersey</td>
<td>$300,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bethany Reformed Church, Sheboygan, Wisconsin</td>
<td>$500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bentheim Reformed Church, Hamilton, Michigan</td>
<td>$400,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace Reformed Church, Zeeland, Michigan</td>
<td>$400,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinnelon Reformed Church, Kinnelon, New Jersey</td>
<td>$300,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holland Christian Home, North Haledon, New Jersey</td>
<td>$1,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palm Beach Community Church, North Palm Beach, Florida</td>
<td>$2,000,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RCA/FCS charges an on-site consulting fee for services. The fee is $3,000 for congregations up to 200 members, plus travel expenses and related campaign costs. For churches with more than 200 members, there is an additional charge of $15 per member. This fee includes up to six on-site visits. Additional visits are $500 per visit, plus travel expenses.

MANAGING FOUNDATION RESOURCES

The RCA Foundation is responsible for managing the RCA Endowment fund and other funds that receive life income gifts. The services of the Office of Finance are used in order to accomplish this management. The foundation is working toward developing investment funds to better serve local churches and other assemblies and organizations.

A financial advisory committee has been formed to monitor the investments of the foundation. The members of the committee are Richard Doll, Harry De Bruyn, Thomas Putnam, and Gerald Verbridge. The committee has completed an investment policy for the RCA Foundation and will monitor the appropriateness and performance of invested funds. Complete financial reports for 1998 are available from the Office of Finance or the RCA Foundation offices as well as the foundation’s annual printed report.
The RCA Foundation and its staff have sought to be faithful to the mission of the foundation. The results reported here indicate that it is having success in doing so. Stewardship education is going forward, gifts are being received, and funds are being managed appropriately. The work of the RCA Foundation is going forward and will be a blessing to the Reformed Church in America.

➢ The advisory committee recommended:

R-91
To request that the General Synod restore in the 2000 assessment budget for General Synod operations the budget figures for those commissions whose budgets were reduced in the proposed 2000 budget to the 1999 budget level; and further,

to request the resulting $17,000 increase in the proposed 2000 assessment budget for General Synod operations be achieved by adjusted cuts to be made by the general secretary and senior staff to other budget line items, for report to the General Synod Council in October 1999. (ADOPTED)

From the Report of the General Synod Council/Board of Directors Report

➢ Upon a motion from the floor, (p. ___), synod voted to refer the section of the General Synod Council/Board of Directors report entitled "Budget" and the section entitled "Supervision" to the Advisory Committee on Financial Support.

BUDGET

2000 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 other such 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 April 1999 meeting the General Synod Council reviewed requests for the 2000 General Synod Operational Budget totaling $4,558,460. Aware of the concerns expressed by congregations and classes about the rising rate of assessments approved for regional, classical, and General Synod operations, GSC has again instructed the general secretary and senior staff to prepare the 2000 budget with a cap of 3.75 percent on the increase for the operational assessment, thereby reducing the requested amount by $44,800. Therefore the revised request for the General Synod operational budget presented to this synod is $4,513,660.
The GSC noted at its April 1999 meeting that recommendations calling for additions to the operational budget may be presented by General Synod delegates during the meeting of General Synod. Since the General Synod will consider these proposals for addition to the assessment, a recommendation on the total assessment for the 2000 General Synod Operational Budget will be presented for adoption by the Committee of Reference at the 1999 General Synod meeting. Also, the 1998 confessing members total will become available just prior to the General Synod meeting. This number is used for computing the final allocation of the assessment on a per-member basis.

### 2000 General Synod Operational Budget

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meeting Expenses</td>
<td>$156,770</td>
<td>$190,000</td>
<td>$260,796</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiatives</td>
<td>20,640</td>
<td>18,000</td>
<td>18,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printing &amp; Postage</td>
<td>110,598</td>
<td>90,000</td>
<td>90,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insurance</td>
<td>3,833</td>
<td>4,200</td>
<td>4,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Synod Video</td>
<td>7,438</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>$299,280</strong></td>
<td><strong>$317,200</strong></td>
<td><strong>$388,096</strong></td>
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</table>

II. Staffing Costs (General Synod Council Units)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wages &amp; Salaries</td>
<td>$1,088,978</td>
<td>$1,210,892</td>
<td>$1,362,292</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contract Staff</td>
<td>44,214</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fringe Benefits</td>
<td>224,099</td>
<td>283,177</td>
<td>274,846</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>10,472</td>
<td>14,600</td>
<td>11,058</td>
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<tr>
<td>Staff Travel</td>
<td>216,344</td>
<td>190,000</td>
<td>187,162</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rent</td>
<td>101,213</td>
<td>109,450</td>
<td>113,506</td>
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<tr>
<td>Office Maintenance</td>
<td>4,666</td>
<td>3,100</td>
<td>6,042</td>
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<tr>
<td>Office Supplies</td>
<td>16,114</td>
<td>12,400</td>
<td>15,567</td>
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<tr>
<td>Telephone</td>
<td>55,109</td>
<td>60,100</td>
<td>60,621</td>
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<tr>
<td>Printing</td>
<td>26,064</td>
<td>26,150</td>
<td>28,052</td>
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<tr>
<td>Postage</td>
<td>28,111</td>
<td>26,650</td>
<td>30,865</td>
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<tr>
<td>Depreciation</td>
<td>41,605</td>
<td>28,200</td>
<td>40,713</td>
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<tr>
<td>Office Equipment &amp; Repair</td>
<td>14,458</td>
<td>8,500</td>
<td>6,604</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contingency</td>
<td>5,145</td>
<td>6,400</td>
<td>5,426</td>
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<tr>
<td>Capital Replacement</td>
<td>5,145</td>
<td>6,400</td>
<td>5,500</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>$1,881,736</strong></td>
<td><strong>$1,979,619</strong></td>
<td><strong>$2,148,253</strong></td>
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</table>

III. Committees/Commissions/Task Forces

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Synod Council Meetings</td>
<td>$162,572</td>
<td>$123,500</td>
<td>$109,600</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commissions:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Action</td>
<td>6,359</td>
<td>7,500</td>
<td>4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Unity</td>
<td>20,682</td>
<td>8,000</td>
<td>6,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Worship</td>
<td>8,094</td>
<td>8,000</td>
<td>4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church Order</td>
<td>3,855</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>4,166</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>2,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Judicial Business</td>
<td>1,038</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nominations</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theology</td>
<td>7,676</td>
<td>7,000</td>
<td>7,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>10,981</td>
<td>8,000</td>
<td>4,500</td>
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<tr>
<td>Race &amp; Ethnicity</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7,500</td>
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### Task Forces:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task Force</th>
<th>1998</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discipline/Judicial Procedures</td>
<td>309</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standards for Ministry</td>
<td>6,462</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Church Herald Study</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>RCWM Structure</td>
<td>12,432</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regional Synod/Classes Responsib.</td>
<td>15,519</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gifted Youth for Ministry</td>
<td>4,112</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Consistories</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8,000</td>
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</table>

### Councils:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Council</th>
<th>1998</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>31,546</td>
<td>28,000</td>
<td>24,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S Africa/RCA Partner Coord Team</td>
<td>2,076</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>2,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>21,645</td>
<td>23,300</td>
<td>21,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asian-American</td>
<td>22,384</td>
<td>22,300</td>
<td>20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>3,514</td>
<td>14,000</td>
<td>15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff Consulting Group/COURSE</td>
<td>26,632</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministerial Formation Agency</td>
<td>60,000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classes Stated Clerks Meeting</td>
<td>9,661</td>
<td>9,500</td>
<td>9,500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total:** $441,717 $301,100 $266,100

### IV. Publications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publication</th>
<th>Actual</th>
<th>Budget</th>
<th>Proposed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Church Herald</td>
<td>$878,650</td>
<td>$971,000</td>
<td>$971,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Book of Church Order</td>
<td>10,276</td>
<td>8,000</td>
<td>12,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perspectives</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>8,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Loose-leaf Liturgy (Reprint)</td>
<td>3,493</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>2,540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reprints (Miscellaneous)</td>
<td>5,741</td>
<td>8,000</td>
<td>8,000</td>
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</table>

**Total:** $904,159 $995,500 $1,001,540

### V. Ecumenical Delegations & Agencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>1998</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NCC Delegation</td>
<td>$5,778</td>
<td>$6,000</td>
<td>$6,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lutheran/Reformed Studies</td>
<td>933</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>URCSA Partnership</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Reformed Church</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel of Ecumenical Appointees</td>
<td>18,583</td>
<td>16,000</td>
<td>16,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretive Speaking</td>
<td>2,635</td>
<td>3,500</td>
<td>3,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23rd General Council Meeting</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WCC Assembly</td>
<td>7,130</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecumenical Contingency</td>
<td>5,431</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Alliance of Reformed Churches</td>
<td>14,000</td>
<td>16,000</td>
<td>16,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada Council of Churches</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>1,000</td>
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</table>

**Total:** $54,909 $50,000 $50,000

### VI. Other

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expense</th>
<th>Actual</th>
<th>Budget</th>
<th>Proposed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presidential Expenses</td>
<td>$19,952</td>
<td>$10,000</td>
<td>$10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice President</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastoral Coverage</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theological Education</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seminarian Seminar</td>
<td>15,157</td>
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<td>15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment Relief</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10,000</td>
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</table>
FINANCIAL SUPPORT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RCA Survey</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18,000</td>
<td>18,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastoral Services</td>
<td>11,518</td>
<td>24,000</td>
<td>29,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaplains Conference</td>
<td>29,351</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>15,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in Ministry Events</td>
<td>5,021</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>2,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration Assistance</td>
<td>17,340</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>9,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standards TF Follow-up</td>
<td>5,628</td>
<td>9,000</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Contingency</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic Service Costs*</td>
<td>$522,950</td>
<td>$580,487</td>
<td>$540,970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$626,917</td>
<td>$707,287</td>
<td>$659,670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>$4,208,720</td>
<td>$4,350,706</td>
<td>$4,513,660</td>
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</tbody>
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(The $4,513,660 number amount divided by the 1998 confessing member total of 185,074 equals an amount of $24.39 for the 2000 assessment for the General Synod Operational Budget. As noted previously, the final 1998 confessing member total will be available at the beginning of the 1999 General Synod meeting, and other additional matters or recommendations presented during the week of synod will cause this preliminary amount of $4,513,660 to change.)

* The 2000 Basic Service Costs of $540,970 represent contributions toward the operations of the following offices:

- Office of Finance  
- Office of Information Systems  
- Archival Office  
- Personnel Office  
- Communication and Production Services

NOTE: ASKINGS

It is important to note that the assessment amount requested does not meet all funding requirement needs for the denomination. The assessment amount covers primarily administrative and operational costs. The assessment does not cover the General Synod mission program or the program element of GSC unit budgets.

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 has been asked to make contributions to pay for ecumenical membership in these two agencies of the following amounts:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NCC</td>
<td>$32,500</td>
<td>$32,000</td>
<td>$32,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WCC</td>
<td>$31,500</td>
<td>$32,000</td>
<td>$32,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

R-92

To approve the 2000 General Synod Operational Budget of $4,503,660; and further,

to set the 2000 per-confessing-member assessment for the General Synod Operational Budget at $24.58.

(The 1999 General Synod Operational Budget assessment is $23.51 per confessing member.)
A motion was made and supported to amend R-92 by adding “and further, that General Synod phase out the use of assessment monies to finance the Church Herald by General Synod 2001 and further,

to instruct the appropriate agency to aid the Church Herald in finding alternative funding sources.”

The synod:

VOTED: To not adopt the amendment to R-92.

The advisory committee recommended to amend R-92 as follows (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken out):

R-92

To approve the 2000 General Synod Operational Budget of $4,503,660 $4,513,660; and further,

to set the 2000 per-confessing-member assessment for the General Synod Operational Budget at $24.58 $24.63. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)<

2000 General Synod Assessments for Retired Clergy (pre-1973) and for Theological Education Administration

In addition to the General Synod Operational Budget, the General Synod has authorized other assessments to ensure adequate funding for denominational concerns.

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

*$3.50 to provide unified funding for the administration of theological education ($3.35 in 1999).

$5.00 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 Operational Budget assessment and the Board of Pensions General Fund budget assessment. At its October 1996 meeting, GSC again voted to designate the 1998 General Synod assessment for the administration of theological education at 13.4 percent of the 1998 General Synod Operational Budget assessment and the Board of Pensions General Fund budget assessment. GSC also voted to maintain this same percentage of 13.4 percent annually until a review is requested. (Using the 13.4 percentage, $24.63 is the preliminary total amount of the assessment for the General Synod Operational Budget and $1.50 is the assessment amount for the Board of Pensions General Fund. $24.63 plus $1.50 equals $26.13. $26.13 multiplied by 13.4 percent equals $3.50.) As noted previously, the final 1998 confessing member total will be available at the beginning of the 1999 General Synod meeting, and additional matters or recommendations presented during the week of synod that will affect the total amount of the General Synod operational budget will cause this preliminary amount of $4,513,660 to change.
R-93
To fix the 2000 budget for other General Synod assessments (sufficient retirement income and theological education administration) at $5.00 per confessing member.

(The 1999 General Synod assessment amount for the above two items per confessing member is $4.85.)

A motion was made and supported to amend R-93 by adding "and increase the Theological Education Assessment by $.50 per member and to divide the Theological Education Assessment equally among New Brunswick Theological Seminary, Western Theological Seminary, and the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency."

The synod:

VOTED: To not adopt the amendment to R-93.

A motion was made and supported to amend R-93 by adding "And to add $.50 to the Theological Education Assessment per member."

The synod:

VOTED: To not adopt the amendment to R-93.

VOTED: To adopt R-93.

2000 Special One-Time General Synod Assessment for Information Technology

Background

A. Y2K Issues Summary

Not unlike corporations, government agencies, public utilities, and other religious and not-for-profit agencies, the RCA has been analyzing the potential inability of its computer systems to successfully operate following January 1, 2000 (commonly referred to as Y2K). Beginning in early 1998, the director of Policy, Planning, and Administration Services has been reporting periodically to the New York State Commissioner of Insurance on the ability of RCA systems (hardware and software) to successfully operate the church’s pensions administration programs and insurance programs. In early 1998 the RCA insurance program successfully tested through the change-over date in an internal test done by the RCA’s computer department. Additional external testing is scheduled for the spring to have the system certified. The pensions administration program would need to be upgraded. However, the Board of Pensions indicated its preference to outsource this system in 1999. The computer hardware on which these programs operate, an early vintage IBM AS/400, is not certified as Y2K compatible. This means that while programs may run successfully on the computer, IBM will not guarantee ongoing compatibility, and the New York State Commissioner of Insurance Office will not certify the RCA systems to be Y2K compliant.

In the Michigan regional center, critical operations that support the mailing, shipping, video loan library (TRAVARCA), and distribution inventory control systems are not Y2K compliant. TRAVARCA, for example, is currently maintaining reservations for
video use after January 1, 2000, on a card file system to assure no data is lost. The RCA Distribution Center continues to operate a program imported when the current center was relocated from Grandville in the early 1990s. That system was designed for a far smaller distribution operation than the one the RCA presently runs.

B. General Computer and Technology Issues

In addition to the widely reported Y2K problems facing all computer users, the RCA, like others, has become increasingly dependent on electronic technology with a built-in short depreciation cycle. Every aspect of the life, ministry, mission and administration of the Reformed Church in America uses computer technology for word processing, accounting, contribution management, fundraising, constituent communication, daily mail, and fax services, personal computers (PCs), and portable laptop computers now need to be depreciated and replaced approximately every three years. Technology changes, new software requirements, manufacturer designed obsolescence, and hard use (particularly true for traveled laptops) render older equipment inefficient, failure prone, too slow, or inoperable because memory is insufficient. Software manufacturers continue to introduce new products and upgraded products while notifying users that older software will no longer be supported.

Since it first used computers in the 1970s, the RCA has purchased hardware and software on an “as needed” basis. Desktop PCs were purchased with an understanding that they would be kept in service indefinitely. The AS/400, purchased about a decade ago (with smaller supporting units placed more recently in Orange City and Grand Rapids) is twenty-four months beyond its recommended useful life. Until a few years ago, no one was raising serious concern about computer failure in 2000 or on any of the other potentially lethal “drop dead” dates (9-9-99). Purchases have been made by approving expenditures from the RCA’s cash reserves with a built-in “pay-back” period that was at first five years and more recently changed to three years.

C. Proposed Solutions

1. PC/laptop scheduled replacement. In late 1998, faced with aging hardware no longer able to sustain current and planned software conversions to meet Y2K and other user requirements, the RCA ended its policy of purchasing equipment on an “as needed” basis. It began a program of proactive scheduled replacement of all desktop PCs and laptops on a three-year cycle. This program included a first-time full inventory of computer hardware, date of purchase, and specifications. By mid-1999 this program will include new software that will monitor placement, upgrades, tracking of equipment when offices are relocated or reassigned, software installations, helpdesk requests, and outside service calls on every PC/laptop. This small investment in software and the assignment of one technology staff person to this task will finally resolve the reactive environment our technology staff and other RCA personnel have had to live with since computers were first introduced.

The cost of the 1998/1999 end-user replacements is estimated to be $200,000 (assuming two-thirds of the equipment is outdated and costs continue to be approximately $2,500 per user). About 50 percent of the anticipated replacements have been made. Almost $40,000 of the cost was paid from 1998 revenue. The remaining cost for the replacements is $160,000.

Subtotal

$160,000

Sufficient funding is required to replace remaining PC’s/laptops in 1999 without decreasing the RCA’s financial reserves. This will make it possible for the
technology staff to connect all users to Internet e-mail and standardize the RCA’s word processing, contribution management, data management, and other software without saddling current budgets with a large depreciation expense which will reduce funds available for ministry, mission, and program development, and will be added to future year assessments and mission costs.

2. Future/ongoing replacement plan. A planned replacement policy will not be sustainable unless the RCA also develops a capital equipment replacement fund. Without such a fund, the RCA will always operate with self-imposed pressure to keep old equipment operational as long as possible. This means facing unplanned, expensive, emergency replacement costs as well as decreased productivity and increased end-user frustration. The 2000 budgets are being created with a $1,000 per workstation capital equipment replacement cost built into staff budgets, with the understanding that these funds will be transferred by year-end to a capital equipment replacement fund. This will assure that sufficient financial resources are being set aside to replace current PCs, laptops, and related software on a three-year cycle. The General Synod Council in April 1999 authorized the finance office to develop a plan for a capital equipment replacement fund for all equipment (such as copiers, printers, and furnishings) and to report back on how this fund will be established and operated.

3. Y2K solution, systems upgrades and cost. In late 1998 and continuing in 1999, the RCA has engaged the services of information technology consultants to assist in identifying Y2K solutions and to assist with other system and software conversions and upgrades in several mission critical areas. These areas include production, distribution, communication, name and address database, contribution management, insurance, and pensions.

The projected cost for systems conversions and solutions that must be accomplished in 1999 is $330,000 (actual estimate $329,330). The cost breakdown is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Training of current staff (including IT personnel)</td>
<td>$10,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consulting services (data mapping, systems solutions, programming support, installations, and operational training)</td>
<td>73,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Software (purchases and licensing agreements)</td>
<td>104,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardware (servers, T-1 lines, training stations, AS/400 Y2K solution, hardware upgrades in the RCA Distribution Center and TRAVARCA)</td>
<td>$140,430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal</strong></td>
<td><strong>$329,130</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Project Cost</strong></td>
<td><strong>$489,130</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Presented with these costs early in 1999, a staff team and representatives from the GSC and the other corporations and agencies of the RCA considered the following alternatives:

1. Develop a focused capital campaign in which a few potential contributors with an interest in information technology are asked to provide the financial resources to pay these costs.

2. Prepare a proposal for a one-time, one-year assessment of $2.68 to raise approximately $500,000 for infrastructure and Y2K solutions. If approved by the General Synod Council, this recommendation would be included in the report of the Board of Directors to the 1999 General Synod.
3. Borrow the necessary funds from the RCA's reserves or from outside sources.

The advisory group requested that staff develop a plan that essentially merged proposals one and two above. Between the meeting that considered these alternatives and the spring meeting of the General Synod Council, unit directors raised $151,000 of the required $500,000. Unit directors and the general secretary committed themselves to raising additional special gifts between mid-April and the start of General Synod in June. An oral report on this fundraising effort will be presented to synod delegates. Acting in April, the GSC approved a plan to request a special one-year assessment to complete the computer systems replacements in 1999/2000, not to exceed $1.89 per member.

➢ The advisory committee recommended that R-94 be amended as follows (addition is underlined):

R-94
To approve a one-time special assessment in 2000 in the amount of up to $154,500 to pay for the replacement of computer hardware and software and the related costs for consultant support, Y2K certification, and technology staff retraining. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

Total 2000 General Synod Assessments

The preliminary total assessment for General Synod concerns in 2000 is $30.47 ($24.63 plus $5.00 plus the one-time computer assessment of $8.44) per confessing member. This is an approximate increase of 7.44 percent over the 1999 total of $28.36 ($23.51 plus $4.85) per confessing member.

➢ The advisory committee recommended that R-95 be amended as follows (addition is underlined):

R-95
To fix the total 2000 General Synod assessment budget at up to $30.47 per confessing member. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

SUPERVISION

Personnel and Evaluation Committee

The Personnel and Evaluation Committee is comprised of four members from the General Synod Council. The members are the Rev. John Elliott, Jr., chair; the Rev. Gregg Mast; Ruth Diephuis, and James Marvel.

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 that 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 in effect beginning in July of the current year appears below:

**SALARY RANGES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLASSIFICATION</th>
<th>low</th>
<th>mid-point</th>
<th>high</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Executive Staff</td>
<td>(80%)</td>
<td>(100%)</td>
<td>(120%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>$93,900</td>
<td>$117,380</td>
<td>$140,860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>75,120</td>
<td>93,900</td>
<td>112,680</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IIIA</td>
<td>65,730</td>
<td>82,160</td>
<td>98,590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IIIB</td>
<td>46,950</td>
<td>58,690</td>
<td>70,430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Associates IV</td>
<td>(85%)</td>
<td>(100%)</td>
<td>(115%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Staff V</td>
<td>$30,790</td>
<td>$36,220</td>
<td>$41,650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretarial and Office Staff VIA</td>
<td>21,310</td>
<td>25,070</td>
<td>28,830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIB</td>
<td>18,290</td>
<td>21,520</td>
<td>24,750</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

*Ranges include housing allowances for ministers of Word and sacrament who are executives.

The advisory committee recommended:

**R-96**
To request that the General Synod Council, through its appropriate committee, review the current salary ranges and review the process by which the salary ranges are established among different classifications, and give a rationale for the ranges in each classification, for report to the 2000 General Synod. (ADOPTED)

The advisory committee recommended:

**R-97**
To request that Ministry and Personnel Services and the Commissions on Church Order and Theology review the place of and the financial support for theological education in the RCA, for report to the 2000 General Synod. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The Reformed Church in America has demonstrated through actions of General Synod, such as the recent establishment of MFCA, its commitment to excellence in the theological education of those preparing for service as ministers of Word and sacrament. It must consider the cost of providing this education.

(A motion to amend R-97 by adding, “and further, to encourage classes which have seminary students under their care which are not attending RCA seminaries to offer additional funding for the MFCA,” was not adopted.)
The advisory committee recommended:

R-98
To request that the Finance Services Committee of the General Synod Council, in consultation with the Commission on Church Order, address the issue of sources of funding for all new initiatives; and further,

to request that, if necessary, appropriate amendments to the Book of Church Order be proposed for report to the 2000 General Synod. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The General Synod and the General Synod Council have approved the development of new programs and the formation of new agencies without adequate planning to assure the ability of the church to fund these institutions.

Overture

Funding of the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency

1. The Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics overtures the General Synod of the RCA to amend the General Synod budget for 2000, raising the assessment if necessary, to ensure that the grants to New Brunswick and Western Seminaries from the assessment for theological education remain at the 1999 level.

Reasons:

1. The General Synod violated its own rules by establishing an agency without including a plan for funding.

2. Both seminaries had approved their budgets and fundraising plans, which depend on assessment monies from the General Synod Council (GSC) action.

3. GSC provided no notice to the seminaries of their intention to consider an assessment reduction.

4. It is manifestly unjust for General Synod to require the seminaries to pay for an agency for which the synod itself is unwilling to pay.

The advisory committee recommended:

R-99
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)
Reasons:

1. The substance of the overture was dealt with at a meeting on June 1, 1999, with representatives of the seminaries and MFCA.

2. In light of the importance of theological education, the Financial Support Advisory Committee is referring to Ministry and Personnel Services and to the Commissions on Church Order and Theology a recommendation to review the place of and the ongoing financial support of theological education in the RCA, for report back to the 2000 General Synod.
Report of the Commission on Theology

The Commission on Theology met on June 10, 1998, October 2-3, 1998, and January 29-30, 1999. Along with work on the various projects assigned by synod, the commission reflected at some length on its role in the church and how it might foster conversation about theological issues.

The commission has no major papers to present this year. It was fully prepared to revise and submit both "The Crucified One Is Lord" (MGS 1998, R-1, p. 464) and "Moral Standards for Holders of Church Offices" (MGS 1998, R-2, p. 469). The 1998 General Synod set April 1, 1999, as the deadline for responses to both papers, a date which was not only two months after the winter meeting of the commission, but several weeks after the reports were due in the New York office. To complete the revision of the papers would have meant disregarding a number of responses that arrived in February and March.

The commission encourages the General Synod to consider this matter when establishing deadlines for responses to future papers. A date later than January 31 will likely mean a two-year cycle for the revision of papers. If the synod wishes to wait two years for a revision, it could suggest a deadline such as August 15 of the following year, which would provide a longer time period for responses as well as adequate time for the commission to consider them. On the other hand, if the synod wishes to have papers resubmitted in one year rather than two, a deadline of April 1 is impossible. If the synod wishes to extend the time allotted for response while retaining a deadline of January 31, the commission suggests that synod ask that all papers that request a response from the churches be mailed out within six or eight weeks of the close of synod, thus making them available for fall meetings of classes and consistories.

The paper entitled "The Crucified One Is Lord" was distributed as General Synod directed in 1998 and has provoked a great deal of conversation and debate. Classes and consistories have devoted time to study, discussion, and response. The responses illustrate the range of opinions within the RCA. Some readers believe that the paper is too limited in its discussion of the scope of salvation. Others argue that the paper is too broad in its understanding of the work of Christ. Clearly the commission will be unable to revise the paper in such a way that everyone will agree with it, but the commission will consider all the comments it receives.

The debate points to a recurring question within the RCA about the role and authority of papers produced by the Commission on Theology. Is their primary function an educational one, that is, to set forth a framework for thinking about an issue, and therefore to spark conversation and thought without necessarily offering an absolute answer? Or, should a paper such as this be confessional, providing a definitive answer to a theological question? Is such a definitive answer always possible given the diversity of viewpoints present both within the RCA and in the broader realm of Reformed theology? During the past year the commission considered how it might best help the church engage in productive and meaningful conversation. How can the commission assist the church in discussing difficult issues with civility and humility?

The commission continued its work on the Brief Declaration of Faith by sponsoring conversations about the draft in several regional synods and with other commissions. The commission has found this to be a very exciting and energizing aspect of its work. Participants appreciated the opportunity to engage in theological conversation which was relatively safe and which did not end in a vote. They were grateful for the space to carry out their role as pastor-theologians and expressed their desire to do it more often. Many participants also concluded that writing a Brief Declaration of Faith was an extremely difficult task! The commission will continue these meetings throughout the next year.
The paper entitled "Moral Standards for Holders of Church Offices" was distributed throughout the church as directed by the 1998 General Synod (MGS 1998, R-2, p. 469).

In an effort to encourage conversation within classes and congregations, and also to address the need for more time to respond to papers distributed after a synod meeting, the commission encourages General Synod delegates to report to their classes about those papers for which comment has been requested. Classes and congregations could then arrange opportunities to discuss the papers even before the pamphlets or the Minutes of General Synod arrive. The Book of Church Order specifies that delegates officially remain delegates until their successors are appointed, and therefore their work does not end when they return from the General Synod meeting. Rather, delegates should play a crucial role as interpreters of General Synod decisions, and particularly of papers which are being distributed.

The Commission on Theology is in consultation with the Commission on History and the editor of the Historical Series of the RCA regarding a second volume of The Church Speaks. The first volume has been very helpful in the seminaries and the Theological Education Agency, and it is likely that a volume of more recent papers would be equally useful within the church. The 1998 General Synod asked the commission to prepare a paper exploring the role of the constitutional inquiry questions (MGS 1998, R-6, p. 477), and the commission has begun its work on this project. Synod also assigned the task of producing a paper dealing with the theological issues surrounding the media.

The 1998 General Synod assigned the task of producing a paper dealing with the theological issues surrounding the media. Work on this paper continues, but at this time the commission is providing a list of resources which it hopes will encourage conversation, thought, and reflection about the positive and negative aspects of the media in contemporary life.

**RESOURCES FOR EVALUATING THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA**

The Commission on Theology has been instructed to prepare a study document outlining a biblical and reformed response to the influence, both positive and negative, of the entertainment media on our society and personal lives (MGS 1998, R-29, p. 154). In anticipation of the full report to be presented to the 2000 General Synod, the commission presents this partial list of resources:

**Understanding the Influence of the Media**

Many resources are available from the Center for Media Literacy, 4727 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 403, Los Angeles, CA 90010; Helpline: (800)226-9494.

**On the Church, Faith, and Media**

The National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA designated 1997-1998 as "Media Awareness Year." Resources include "The Church and Media: Statements from the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA," available from the NCC Communication Commission, 475 Riverside Dr., Room 850, New York, NY 10115; phone: (212) 870-2227. Also available is a general curriculum for adults and youth which includes the principles of media literacy, theological reflection, Bible study, and a guide to communication advocacy and resources.

Another useful resource is "Communication for Human Dignity," an article in the November/December 1997 issue of Church and Society, a magazine of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 100 Witherspoon St., Louisville, KY 40202; phone: (800) 524-2616.


**Curriculum on Faith and Media for Youth**

"The Power of the Media" is a social action course in the Celebrate curriculum for younger youth. *Every Night Live: Making Choices about TV* is part of the LifeWise series.

Video resources are also available from TRA VARCA, including:
- Mediaworld: Music, Movies, TV, Sold!
- Beyond Blame: Challenging Violence in the Media
- Beyond News: TV Violence and You
- Creating Critical TV Viewers
- Ethics in Media: Evaporating Values or News You Can Use
- Signs of the Times: Reading Our Culture with the Eyes of Faith
- Kids Talk TV: Inside/Out

**Overtures**

**Modify Paper on Uniqueness of Christ**

1. The Classis of Columbia-Greene overtures the General Synod to direct the Commission on Theology to modify its paper, "The Crucified One Is Lord: Confessing the Uniqueness of Christ in a Pluralistic Society," so that it states more perfectly the Reformed Church’s stance on the authority of the Scriptures and the centrality of Jesus as Lord and Messiah.

Reasons:

1. The paper, "The Crucified One Is Lord," states that "our culture increasingly is suspicious of all claims to objective truth and all final allegiances" (p. 4). While there may be truth to this statement, the church needs some definite statements of faith in this pluralistic world or it will appear wishy-washy. For this reason, the Classis of Columbia-Greene requests that the General Synod reinspect "The Crucified One Is Lord" relative to the Scriptures and to the Messiah so a clearer and more definitive statement of faith can be produced. We make this request based on the following affirmations:
a. “The Crucified One Is Lord” is very selective in its use of scriptural references. The
Belgic Confession affirms that the Scriptures are “for the regulating, founding, and
establishing of our faith. And we believe without a doubt all things contained in
them—not so much because the church receives and approves them as such, but
above all because the Holy Spirit testifies in our hearts that they are from God, and
also because they prove themselves to be from God” (Article 5). “The Crucified One
Is Lord” appears to pick and choose which verses and chapters are more authoritative
than others, thus compromising the power of the affirmation of Jesus’ lordship.

b. In Article IV, Sections 6 and 7 of “Our Song of Hope” we are reminded that the
Scriptures set “God’s truth in human language, placing God’s teaching in ancient
cultures, proclaiming the gospel in the history of the world.” The article goes on to
affirm that “the world is called to bear witness to Christ in faithfulness to the
Scriptures.” Our opinion is that “The Crucified One Is Lord” does not bear such
witness as faithfully as it could.

c. Granted, the church has engaged in a number of tyrannical measures to defend itself
against those whom it envisioned as being threats to faith. Comparing these
bloodbaths with those of other world religions does not excuse or justify the
church’s actions. However, the statements of faith that point to the centrality of the
Christ and the commission to bring his message of salvation to the nations (cf.
Matthew 28:19-20), must influence and color the missionary zeal of the church. We
must “proclaim Christ boldly.”

d. There may be some passages of Scripture we do not like to read. There may be some
things in Scripture that disturb our consciences. There may be words in Scripture
that sound out of sync with our world. Nevertheless, Scripture still states, “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). Peter is here referring to Jesus, the
Christ. The nature of that statement sets Christianity apart from the other world
religions. Salvation is in Jesus Christ alone, and that is the primary, solitary,
absolute that has carried Christianity through the ages.

2. With Scripture being such a crucial part of our faith affirmation and our creedal
structure, what Scripture says must be taken as the Word of God. This cuts through the
pluralism of the world and the practices of the world’s religions. When Scripture
records Jesus as saying to his disciples, “I am the way, the truth and the life; no one goes
to the father except by me” (John 14:6, GNB), we are to affirm this statement and not
find salvation in another system of beliefs. In our opinion, this affirmation is not made
strongly enough in the “The Crucified One Is Lord.”

3. The Heidelberg Catechism focuses on the central and solitary place of Jesus for
salvation in questions 29-41.

4. The Preamble of the Constitution of the Reformed Church in America states that “the
holy Scriptures are the only rule of faith and practice in the Reformed Church in
America.” If we pick and choose which passages of Scripture are more comfortable to
a particular stance we wish to adopt, the Scriptures degenerate into a volume of familiar
quotations—much akin to Bartlett’s Book of Familiar Quotations.

5. While it may be uncomfortable, and while we may be marked as different and peculiar
because of our stance concerning the authority of Scripture and the centrality of Jesus
as Lord, we need to hear the words of Paul to the Romans. He writes, “do not be
conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind that you may
prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:2).
The advisory committee recommended:

R-100
To refer the content of Overture 1 to the Commission on Theology for its consideration and use during its process of evaluation and revision of the paper, "The Crucified One Is Lord: Confessing the Uniqueness of Christ in a Pluralistic Society"; and further,

to commend the commission in its efforts to revise the paper. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. The Commission on Theology recognizes the need for revision and is currently engaged in that process.

2. The referral obligates the Commission on Theology to consider seriously the substance of the concerns of the overture, along with other responses.

3. The Advisory Committee on Theology recognizes the need for the Commission on Theology to revise the document to more clearly and concisely reflect the Reformed Church's stance on the authority of Scripture and the centrality of Jesus as Lord and Messiah.

Declare Status Confessionis on Sexual Ethics

2. The Classis of Florida calls upon the 193rd regular session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America to declare a Status Confessionis, reaffirming the absolutely essential character of Christian sexual ethics as part of the Christian gospel which may never be compromised without rejecting Jesus Christ's lordship over his church, by making the following declaration:

We declare to all, in the presence of the living God who will judge the living and the dead, that the affirmation of lifestyles involving heterosexual relations outside the bonds of marriage, bisexual relations, or homosexual relations is a rejection of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Christ purchased by his own blood men and women, rescuing them from walking in the darkness of unrepentant sin. To say one can walk in the darkness and have fellowship with Christ and true believers is to trample his blood underfoot. We call upon all denominational staff and General Synod Professors of Theology to unambiguously join us in affirming the Status Confessionis or resign their positions. We sever all ecumenical ties with churches which, after serious dialogue from our leadership, unrepentantly continue to affirm the false gospel that encourages people to claim the name of Christ while living a life of heterosexual relations outside the bonds of marriage, bisexual relations, or homosexual relations.

Reasons:

1. The end of the twentieth century has resulted in an unprecedented affirmation of homosexual, bisexual, and extramarital sexual activity as being compatible with the Christian gospel by churches, institutions, clergy, and lay people in the name of Christ.

2. This directly contradicts the gospel itself, that Jesus Christ has made believers into new creations who no longer live in the practice of unrepentant sin any more than in other sins.
3. Faithful Christians have invoked at two other times in this century a Status Confessionis. In each case, practices and ideologies which the church itself was defending were incompatible with the gospel. During the Second World War the Barmen Declaration denounced the way the church tacitly supported the sin of the Nazi state. In the 1970s the Belhar Confession denounced churches that supported the heresy of apartheid. Today we face churches already defending the practicing homosexual and bisexual lifestyle and a growing discussion in some churches of no longer requiring heterosexual fidelity of clergy. We must take an uncompromising stand, for the gospel itself is under attack.

4. The defense of sinful lifestyles prevents individuals from finding the forgiveness and healing God both desires and promises in the true gospel.

➢ The advisory committee recommended:

   R-101
   To deny Overture 2.

Reasons:

1. The RCA has already spoken clearly that all sexual relations outside the bonds of heterosexual marriage (heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual) are contrary to Scripture.

2. While the advisory committee is deeply concerned about sexual morality in our culture and believes the church should use its resources to address it, it does not believe that the concerns raised by this overture justify so drastic a measure as declaring a status confessionis.

A substitute motion was made:

To refer the content of Overture 2 from the Classis of Florida to the Commission on Theology, for report to the synod of 2000. (NOT ADOPTED)

A division of the house confirmed the defeat of the substitute motion.

VOTED: To deny Overture 2.<

Modify Paper on Uniqueness of Christ

3. The Classis of Illiana and the Classis of Wisconsin overture the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America to instruct the Commission on Theology to correct the confusion of certain statements and the fundamental errors that are contained in the document distributed to the church entitled, "The Crucified One Is Lord: Confessing the Uniqueness of Christ in a Pluralistic Society." In light of the Word of God and our historic Reformed doctrinal standards, we overture the following changes:

a. Delete the sentence, "We can also learn from the serenity of the Buddhist, the moral vigor of the devout Muslim, the celebrative affirmation of the law in Judaism, and the sensitivity of Native-American religions to the spiritual world," on page seven.
b. Delete the words "almost" and "general" from "It is almost impossible to reconcile such a general approval of all religions with the message of Jesus," on page seven.

c. Clarify the statement on page eight "[Christians] expect to learn from others, including adherents of other religions" to show that this does not include matters of faith.

d. Change the negative answer to the question on page eight, "Does this mean that Christians regard other religions as entirely false?" to a positive one, and clarify its intent.

e. Rework the section "Salvation in the Name of Jesus" on page eleven to state that the Old Testament saints of the old covenant were saved by grace, through faith in the promised Messiah, according to the covenant promises of God, which the Bible declares in Hebrews 11.

f. The document must close the door to any extra-biblical revelation by removing the statement, "God’s action to save at times precedes the witness of the church and at times may go beyond its proclamation."

g. The document’s conclusion must state definitively the biblical declaration of John 14:6 and Acts 4:12 concerning the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the only way to eternal life.

Reasons:

1. The Word of God unquestionably declares that there is no learning about salvation in any other person than the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. The deletions clarify that there are no possible ways to reconcile other religions with the message of Jesus Christ.

3. The Bible and the Reformed standards clearly state that salvation is by faith through grace alone in Jesus’ name.

4. We believe that the Christian faith is the only true and living faith, and all others are false.

5. Surely the Bible declares Old Testament saints living under the old covenant were saved by faith in the promised Messiah. (See Hebrews 11:13-16, 39.)

6. The Word of God is the full and final revelation of God. There is no other.

7. The document must point clearly at its conclusion to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the only way to eternal life, leaving no one to question where we stand regarding the uniqueness of Jesus Christ in this pluralistic society in which we live and work.

➢ The advisory committee recommended:

R-102
To refer the content of Overture 3 to the Commission on Theology for its consideration and use during its process of evaluation and revision of the paper, "The Crucified One Is Lord: Confessing the Uniqueness of Christ in a Pluralistic Society"; and further,
to commend the commission in its efforts to revise the paper.  
(ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. The Commission on Theology recognizes the need for revision and is engaged in that process.

2. The referral obligates the Commission on Theology to consider seriously the substance of the concerns of the overture, along with other responses.

3. The Advisory Committee on Theology recognizes the need for the Commission on Theology to revise the document to more clearly and concisely reflect the Reformed Church's stance on the authority of Scripture and the centrality of Jesus as Lord and Messiah.
"I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see." With these familiar words from his beloved hymn, John Newton celebrates the life-changing grace of God in Jesus Christ. In the same way, Jesus declares his purpose in John 10:10, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." Where there is darkness, Jesus brings light. Where there is guilt, Jesus bring forgiveness. The hope of Jesus is stronger than despair. The freedom of Jesus breaks shackles of bondage.

It goes back to two years ago when I lost my second child that I met Jesus Christ for the first time. My second baby was born prematurely...My husband, daughter, and I all loved him so much and he grew day by day as if he was responding to our love...The news of his sudden death was totally unexpected and devastated us thoroughly, beyond anyone's imagination. At that time I did not know anything about Jesus Christ who was crucified for my sins. I was very angry with the chaplain, was jealous that other children were cured and went home from the hospital, and also jealous that other women were pregnant...About one month after my son's death, a friend of mine told me that I had better come to a Japanese Bible study. I went with my friend without expecting to get anything out of it and thinking I would go only once. However, like a sponge absorbing water, Jesus Christ and his word written in the Bible flooded into my body. The more I learned about Jesus Christ, the more I wanted to come close to Jesus Christ. Day after day I spent time feeling that I was confined in a dark room. Jesus Christ shed a light into my life in the darkness. When I threw out my feelings of jealousy, and anger to Jesus Christ, he extended his arm to save me...I will continue praying with gratitude that I can keep following Jesus Christ for as long as I live. I pray that my prayer would reach to my son in heaven.

—The testimony of Chie Kitamura upon the occasion of her baptism, November 15, 1998, Japanese worship service, Battle Creek, Michigan, the Rev. Andy Nakajima, pastor

Changing lives, says Peter Drucker (Managing the Nonprofit Organization, preface xvi) is the business of nonprofits. As a Christian mission agency, the Reformed Church in America confesses that individual lives and, indeed, the historical course of nations, are changed by the providence of God, the love of Jesus, and the power of the Holy Spirit. As a Christian nonprofit organization, we are in the business of serving God’s life-changing activity in God’s world. This affirmation lies at the heart of the RCA’s Statement of Mission and Vision.

The Reformed Church in America is a fellowship of congregations called by God and empowered by the Holy Spirit to be the very presence of Jesus Christ in the world...congregations mission-minded...locally oriented, globally connected.

The objective of this annual report is to tell the story of how lives are being changed for time and eternity through the deployment and support of RCA mission personnel in response to partners’ requests around the world. The story includes accounts of individual lives, field reports, updates on General Synod recommendations, policy changes, and statistics. The program of Mission Services seeks to fulfill the RCA’s Statement of Mission and Vision.
Definition of Mission

In 1998, the General Synod Council (GSC) approved a new definition of mission (GSC, 10/6-8/98, p.31) that will shape the RCA's understanding of mission as the *missio deo*, the mission of God. The definition reflects both the answer to the fifty-fourth question of the Heidelberg Catechism and the scholarly work of Dr. Charles Van Engen.

In the belief 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, the Reformed Church in America defines mission as our personal and corporate participation in this work of God by intentionally crossing barriers from church to nonchurch, faith to nonfaith, to proclaim by word and deed the coming of the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ, in works of evangelism, witness, reconciliation, healing, and diaconal service, gathering people into the church through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit with a view to the transformation of the world as a sign of the coming kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Mission Convocation

The 1998 General Synod approved the following recommendation:

To instruct the General Synod Council and its Mission Services Unit to convene a global/local Mission Convocation of the Reformed Church in America, to be held in the spring of 2000; and further,

to design the convocation to reflect the global/local nature of mission in today's world; to reflect the multi-ethnic reality in which we live; and to highlight the global opportunities for evangelism and church planting among unreached peoples, especially in the cities of Europe and North America and around the world; and further,

to include a number of different mission initiatives that together present a realistic picture of the numerous ways in which the RCA is becoming "a missionary denomination for the twenty-first century" (*MGS 1998*, R-4, pp. 502-503).

Plans are nearing completion for the Mission Convocation, which will take place within the context of General Synod in 2000 (see GSC Agenda, April 1998, 7.11-L2). It will involve as participants not only the General Synod's delegates, but also 1,800 additional participants gathered from across the denomination and from the global church in mission around the world. As the Spirit speaks to the church, Mission Services anticipates that its future mission strategies will be greatly impacted by the discerning of critical challenges to the missional church of the next millennium.
At the end of the second millennium of the church in mission, there is little doubt that mission is one. In the enterprise of mission, the language of senders and receivers is obsolete. Rather, all brothers and sisters in Christ around the world are partners in mission together, sharing the gifts and resources of the Spirit with each other for the sake of the gospel. The RCA continues to rejoice as its life is changed for good by the global church.

Experiential Journeys

For the last three years, groups of RCA members have participated in experiential journeys in Chiapas, Mexico, and the Middle East. The journeys have two purposes: 1) to observe RCA missions first-hand; and 2) to understand the geopolitical and historical context of the missions. The combination of personal interaction with indigenous Christians and the societal forces that often negatively impact their lives is a powerful impetus for change.

Rukshana, an Indian woman married to one of the pastors of the Protestant Church in Oman, shared about being raised as a Muslim. She became a Christian as a teenager through the power of the Holy Spirit and the influence of a Christian school in India. I was impressed by the courage of her convictions and the risk she took in going against her family.

Lizzie, an Indian expatriate and part of the Protestant Church in Oman, shared her faith journey and how the Lord had never failed her. She shared a time of financial hardship for her family, how they trusted God to provide for their needs, and how God used an Omani Muslim as an instrument of his exceeding abundance. I was inspired by her faith and wondered whether my faith would have been as great under similar circumstances.

Buje, Susan, and Nubie are an Indian family working as English teachers in an isolated Muslim village in Oman, the only Christians for many miles around. We observed the simplicity of their lifestyle and their joy in receiving Christian visitors. I realized that God is able to send his people as his witnesses into remote places anywhere. I also realized the importance of our encouraging other Christians, especially those apart from other believers.

—Nancy VanAntwerp, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, participant in the 1999 Middle East Experiential Journey

Prior to a recent Middle East Experiential Journey, I had never had a twenty day experience with so much life-changing potential... Our journey from Oman to the West Bank to Jericho to Bethlehem, Hebron, Gaza, the Northern West Bank, Nablus, Galilee, Samaria, Nazareth, and Tel Aviv offered us the unique opportunity to interact with people of all political persuasions, all walks of life, and all ethnic backgrounds... Never again will I read or watch the news in the same dispassionate or indifferent way. The maps, pictures, and other depictions of current events have a new meaning since we, too, suffered the indignities of going through check points at Gaza, and witnessed the confrontation of Palestinian townpeople and Israeli soldiers in Hebron. We experienced the genuine and generous hospitality of Palestinian Christian families in Zebabde, a West Bank Palestinian village, and visited a Palestinian refugee camp where injustice and poverty is rampant. We witnessed the restricted and oppressive atmosphere of East Jerusalem versus the economic freedom and progress in thriving, glitzy West Jerusalem. And, we climbed the ruins of a "house demolition" site near Hebron... As I open my hymnbook on Sunday morning I will see some new things. Verses three and five of "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" jump out at me. I will want to rewrite the hymns, "There Is a Balm in Gilead" and "I Walked Today Where Jesus Walked." The hymn that most
aptly describes my feelings about this part of the world is "Where Cross the Crowded Ways of Life": "'Til sons of men shall learn thy love, and follow where thy feet have trod; 'till, glorious from thy heaven above, will come the city of our God." Jesus' teaching in miracles and, much more importantly, the need for his love as demonstrated by his suffering, death, and resurrection, are much more appreciated after our journey to this most "unholy land." Where is the balm in Gilead (Jeremiah 8:22)?

—Dr. Ron Zoutendam, Sheldon, Iowa, participant in the 1999 Middle East Experiential Journey

Deacon Exchange

An interchange between RCA deacons and deacons from the National Presbyterian Church in Chiapas, Mexico, has added a rich component to the diaconal ministries program. Representatives from five regional synods—accompanied by Roger De Young, coordinator for the RCA Chiapas mission program and Betty Voskuil, RCA coordinator for diaconal ministries—visited Chiapas from February 22 to March 1, 1999. The trip was organized by Vern and Carla Sterk, RCA missionaries to Chiapas. The RCA diaconal pilgrims traveled across the state of Chiapas, engaging deacons in five presbyteries in dialogue and exchanging ideas and experiences. Much was learned, including the fact that deacons in Chiapas do a lot more preaching and leading in worship than RCA deacons. The deacon exchange was completed with a return visit of Chiapan deacons, who attended the annual RCA diaconal gathering April 23-25, 1999, at the Gull Lake Bible Conference Center in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

The Chiapan deacons explained how they help with the resettlement of fellow believers (six hundred in Chamula alone) who have been forced from their homes and fields because of their religious beliefs. They shared how deacons and elders visit the sick and help lead and preach in the worship services. They showed where deacons and others had spent six months hauling supplies to remote villages after torrential rains in September 1998 caused fifty rivers to overflow, washing away entire neighborhoods. Deacons provided a glimpse of how they evangelize their friends and neighbors even when it means risking eviction or death...It forever has changed my life. Thank you, God.

—Milt Roorda, Palm Grove Reformed Church, Holiday, Florida

If there ever was a day to feel good about helping someone this was it.

—Steve Hoffman, First Church in Albany, Albany, New York

Even if you can’t give us any more, our hearts are strengthened just by your visit.

—Chiapas deacon

CHANGED...BY NEW PARTNERSHIPS

St. Andrews Church, Cairo

The 1998 General Synod approved the following recommendation from the report of the president, the Rev. Dr. Chuck Van Engen:

To instruct Mission Services of the General Synod Council, in cooperation with the Commission on Christian Unity, to explore ways to develop three new mission partnerships (one each year for the next three years) with churches or mission agencies in Africa, Asia, Middle East, or Latin America for mission in a third location; and further,
that special attention be given to experimental mission endeavors in the cities of the world, seeking active participation on the part of RCA congregations in the ongoing ministry of these new partnerships; and further,

that these partnerships focus on long-term initiatives that emphasize religious freedom, calling for a reduction of religious persecution worldwide, especially for Christians; and further,

that these partnerships foster compassionate witness in word and deed among unreached peoples found in cities, especially in situations of religious persecution and among displaced peoples and refugees (MGS 1998, R-5, p. 503).

The first of the partnerships in response to Van Engen’s recommendation involves the St. Andrews Church of Cairo, Egypt, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and the Lutheran Church in America. At the request of St. Andrews, Peter and Shannon Vogelaar serve the church’s Joint Relief Ministry that reaches out to the many refugees coming to Cairo, primarily from Sudan and the Horn of Africa. As coordinator of the ministry, Peter works with the directors of the various educational and social programs offered by the ministry and is also the liaison with embassies, churches, United Nations agencies, and other groups. Shannon teaches English part-time, assists with the refugee program, and takes care of their daughter, Abigail.

South Africa

In 1998 the RCA, in cooperation with several mission partners, undertook a new venture in South Africa by assuming partial support of Louis and Janice Haveman as world mission program associates. Lou Haveman’s primary responsibility is to assist the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) in developing a countrywide plan for diaconal ministry that creates much-needed employment opportunities. The program is directed by the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee in partnership with the URCSA. Christ Memorial Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan, has made a special commitment to the program.

Yemen

In 1998 Roger and Adilee Bruggink were reassigned to Yemen from their work at the Al Amana Center in Oman. Roger is serving as the pastor of the Christ’s Church in Aden, Yemen. The RCA’s partner in Yemen is the Anglican Diocese of Cypress and the Gulf.

West Africa

Upon graduating from Western Theological Seminary in May 1999, Rowland Jr. and Jane Van Es were appointed as RCA missionaries in West Africa. Although predominately Muslim, West Africa nations such as Senegal, Gambia, and Niger are open to receiving missionaries who provide much-needed services for their people.

CHANGED...BY THE CITY

In the almost four hundred years since the gospel was first preached in New York, the RCA has organized and at times closed vital ministries in urban centers like Los Angeles, Chicago, Detroit, Toronto, and Philadelphia. But the RCA still has two hundred churches worshiping and working in the urban centers of the United States and Canada. Christ’s message of grace and redemption is alive in North America’s cities. Believing that the best hope of the city is God’s grace in Jesus Christ, that the gospel has power to change lost lives and oppressive systems, and that the future of the whole church depends on crossing cultural boundaries in mission, the RCA has taken bold, visionary, and sacrificial steps to strengthen its ministry in
cities. The RCA is committed to raising $5 million for urban ministries to fund programs and establish an endowment to underwrite program and administrative costs. A campaign progress report is found in the report of the RCA Foundation.

Imagine having a young man come into your office, crushed by the weight of a difficult and painful divorce. As he shares his story, he tells you about his two kids who are confused, angry, hurting, and scared. Scared like daddy. Scared like mommy. As an urban pastor, you counsel, you pray, you cry, and you pray some more. A couple of years go by and you continue to see God at work. The young man meets a young Christian woman with one daughter. The couple falls in love and comes to you for premarital counseling and you perform their wedding ceremony. They are in love, yet they struggle. But God is at work!

Let me introduce you to another young man whose wife has just been informed that the cancer is back. Imagine having a young wife dying of cancer. She believes in Jesus Christ as her Lord and Savior! She comes to you and says “Pastor, I know I may not have long to live, and that is okay. But how do I share my faith with my husband so that he too will know the Lord before I die?” You pray with her, you counsel, and you pray some more.

You establish a “ministry team” around them to care for them and to share Christ with the young husband. You tell him about the Lord. You meet with him, you counsel, you pray, you cry with him, and you pray some more. You perform a funeral and you cry with this lonely, lonely husband. Inside, you celebrate because her prayers are answered! Before she dies, he commits his life to Jesus Christ!

Let me tell you how God answered this pastor’s prayers. In January 1999 I preached at Church of the Rockies in Denver, Colorado. It was the first Sunday that their new pastor, the Rev. Bert Jara, was with the congregation. Rev. Jara’s first order of business was to ordain new elders and deacons. Their names are Tony Martinez and Dan Olson. You have read about them, and now you can celebrate with this urban pastor. God is doing a mighty work among us in these days!

—The Rev. Stan Perea, coordinator for urban ministry, Chicago, Illinois

CHANGED...BY DISASTER AND SUFFERING

Report of the Office of Reformed Church World Service and Hunger Education

This has been a year of many disasters. As a result, unprecedented numbers of people have been hungry and homeless, cut off from loved ones and livelihoods. One Hurricane Mitch survivor said the only words that describe his experience are those recorded in Habakkuk 1:2a, “O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen?”

Outpouring of Gifts to Reformed Church World Service

Members of the Reformed Church in America heard the cries of the needy and responded very generously. Contributions to Reformed Church World Service (RCWS) totaled $762,690 and came from over four hundred congregations and scores of individuals. Donations ranged in size from $5 to $20,000 and came from small and large congregations throughout the denomination. Although over $460,000 was designated for Honduras, Nicaragua, and other countries damaged by tropical storms, other designations included Chiapas, aid following various natural disasters in the United States, the hunger program, Sudan, the Moscow Soup Kitchen, North Korea, and Kenya.
On a recent visit to Chiapas with several RCA deacons, RCWS coordinator Betty Voskuil was able to see how some of these gifts have been used. Tin roofs and other building supplies were provided for people who had to rebuild their homes. Corn and beans were purchased to provide food for numerous families. Legal assistance and transportation for visits was provided for the families of those wrongly imprisoned. Medical care was provided for the sick. Over and over again the diaconal pilgrims from the United States were told, “We are so grateful for what members of the RCA have done for us, and we also appreciate that you have come to be with us.”

In Honduras and Nicaragua, immediate relief was provided through partners in the form of food, medical supplies, tents, and generators. Long-term volunteers will be rebuilding roads, bridges, homes, and community buildings over the next few years. Public health services are being enhanced by employing additional personnel and providing equipment and motor boats in both Honduras and Nicaragua. All of these efforts are providing seeds of hope in a geographical area gripped by hopelessness and depression. Long-term assistance in development will be needed and continued for a number of years.

One Great Hour of Sharing Celebrates Fiftieth Anniversary

For half a century, the ecumenical community has joined together in One Great Hour of Sharing to bring hope to people overwhelmed by poverty, hunger, disease, conflict, and natural disasters in more than seventy countries around the world. Reformed Church in America members have been enabled to participate in this effort through RCWS. New education, worship, and offering materials are developed collaboratively each year and sent to each RCA congregation. Although the first Sunday in October is the designated day for One Great Hour of Sharing, many congregations use the materials in Lent or around Thanksgiving.

Gifts to One Great Hour of Sharing have enabled Reformed Church World Service to fulfill the biblical mandate to feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick, and visit the imprisoned (Matthew 25:35-36). Refugees have been resettled, disaster victims have been provided with assistance and rehabilitation, and hungry people have received emergency food and water and support for developing long-term solutions to their problems.

New Hunger Education Resources Now Available

New hunger education resources have been completed and made available through the RCA Distribution Center. A Fast That Lasts is a twenty-four- to thirty-hour retreat intended for junior and senior high youth groups. This new resource illustrates ways we can respond to a hungry world and includes many activities and a videotape featuring the experiences of Rowland Van Es, Jr., when he worked in Malawi. The kit, Kids Pages: Asia, produced in conjunction with Congregational Services and the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee, completes a series intended for elementary children which focuses on children and some of the problems they face in the United States, Canada, Central America, and Africa.

A new book, Grace at the Table: Ending Hunger in God’s World, is being published to coincide with Bread for the World’s twenty-fifth anniversary. This is a primer on hunger written by Art Simon and David Beckman, former and current presidents of Bread for the World. The book will be featured in the hunger packet mailed to each RCA congregation in August.

Jubilee 2000

This year’s Offering of Letters will focus on debt relief for the world’s poorest countries. Debt burdens took on new meaning in the aftermath of Hurricane Mitch. As people watched the tragedy unfolding in Honduras and Nicaragua, they learned of an ongoing crisis faced by
these countries. Honduras owes $4.5 billion in debt and pays $450 million each year in interest payments alone. In 1997 Nicaragua’s spending on debt service was eleven times its recurrent spending on primary health care. With bridges, roads, and homes washed away, along with coffee and banana crops worth $500 million and 70 percent of the year’s grain harvest, repaying just the interest on the debt becomes an insurmountable barrier to recovery.

In 1996 the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund identified forty countries in Africa, Latin America (including Honduras and Nicaragua), and Asia as heavily indebted countries. These nations are home to nearly one-fifth of the world’s population. Their citizens suffer from malnutrition and high levels of illiteracy. In sub-Saharan Africa, where thirty-three of the forty countries are located, governments owe foreign creditors an average of almost $400 for every man, woman, and child—more than most Africans make in an entire year. Debt repayments leave governments very little money for development of infrastructures and programs to improve the quality of life for their citizens.

Christians around the world are joining together to proclaim the biblical concept of Jubilee in the year 2000. The book of Leviticus calls for a year of Jubilee every fifty years. People who have lost their land or liberty because of heavy debts are to be freed from this burden.

In 1999 thousands of Bread for the World members and churches will participate in a nationwide Offering of Letters, “Proclaim Jubilee: Break the Chains of Debt.” With this offering, Bread for the World members will join a global movement to enact the biblical principle of Jubilee and relieve the enormous debt burden of the world’s poorest countries.

R-103
To urge every congregation to participate in the “Proclaim Jubilee: Break the Chains of Debt” Offering of Letters. (ADOPTED)

CHANGED...BY FAITHFULNESS

The mission program of the RCA is characterized by faithfulness. Its commitment to missions in the Middle East, India, and Asia is over a hundred years old. For better than a century the RCA has carried out missions of compassion and mercy in what today is identified as the 10/40 window of unreached peoples. It is work that requires faithfulness because the conversions to Christianity have been so few in number. The RCA also remains committed to more recent initiatives in Latin America in the last fifty to seventy-five years. Now as then, RCA missionaries share the good news in word and deed in the belief that Spirit is alive and active in the lives of people and nations, both when the harvest is great and when it is small. And, there are stories of remarkable faith to share.

Mr. Z., from a Muslim background, had financial problems. He had made his decision to follow Jesus but was confused about how the Lord was leading him. When the local fellowship heard about it, they brought it to the Lord in prayer. That same evening they took an offering; it amounted to more than $1,000. Mr. Z. came to know in a very real way that the Lord is good and that he takes care of his own.

—The Rev. Dick Westra, pastor, National Evangelical Church, Bahrain

You would be happy to learn that the gospel is spreading rapidly among the young people in the Xiamen area. Every church in Xiamen has its fellowship and choir for the youth, and young church leaders have emerged by group. From the strong and sturdy rising generation, we foresee the bright future of churches in the Xiamen area.

—Chu Su-beng, East China University of Chemical Technology, Shanghai, China
Wario Hussein is one of a handful of Christians among the Islamic Orma people in Kenya. When news reached home that he had become a Christian at boarding school, Wario was immediately labeled an outcast. Upon graduation, he lived with Del and Deb Braaksma for one and a half years, assisting with translation and evangelism. Later he became reconciled to his family and community. Wario is now enrolled in the Hope College nursing program. In some small ways, the RCA mission program has changed Wario’s life, but in a greater way he has changed us. His commitment to evangelism and service, and the price he paid to follow Christ, has been an inspiration to RCA missionaries and now to the Hope College Community.

—Deb Braaksma, supervisor of RCA mission programs in Africa, coordinator of mission stewardship, Synod of Mid-America, Chicago, Illinois

The Prince of Peace Home cares for and educates street children in Guayaquil, Ecuador. One of these children is Alexandra. She was found abandoned on the streets. She had severe skin problems and other handicapping conditions. The home has searched for her family and has been unable to find them. Alexandra’s skin condition has cleared up, thanks to a volunteer RCA medical doctor. She will always have learning problems and some difficulty walking. Alexandra has been at Prince of Peace for six years and is now helping with the younger children. She is a strong Christian and is often heard praying for others as she was, and is, prayed for. Alexandra is a loving and caring person who still has a deep desire to locate her family.

—Nola Aalberts, supervisor of American Indian ministries; liaison for RCA mission programs in Ecuador, Central America, and western U.S. and Canada; coordinator for mission stewardship, Synod of the Far West, Corona, California

**CHANGED...BY GENEROSITY: RECEIPTS AND EXPENSES**

Undergirding the mission program of the RCA is the generosity of her people and churches, a generosity that has changed lives, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Luke12:34). While the text of the above report illustrates that we are in the business of changing lives, there is a very important fiscal and statistical aspect of RCA missions that must be reported as well. In tandem with stories, statistics are indicators of organizational health. To that end several charts and graphs are presented.
Number of Mission Personnel by Category, 1989-99

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RCA missionaries are appointed by Mission Services for a specific ministry. Mission Services establishes salary and benefits and supervises these missionaries. World mission program associates are employed by partner organizations. They are under the supervision of partners, who also establish and regulate salaries and benefits. Volunteers are appointed by the Office of Volunteer Services to specific job responsibilities; they generally receive housing and a stipend. Mission affiliates are members of the RCA who work outside the boundaries of the U.S. and Canada, who give evidence of being intentional in their desire to represent Jesus Christ among non-Christians, and who agree to maintain the discipline of worship and service within the fellowship of the Christian community where they are based. They do not receive financial benefits or supervision from the RCA.

Since 1996 Mission Services has been guided by the principle of increasing the number of world mission program associates both by moving RCA missionaries into that category where feasible, and by making new world mission program associate appointments.

1999 Mission Budget by Region/Category

Budgeting variance from region to region depends upon the size of the mission personnel contingent, the number of RCA missionaries compared to world mission program associates, and cost of living differentials.
In contrast to most mainline Protestant denominations in recent years, the RCA’s mission program has generally experienced increased revenues from year to year. On average, however, annual revenues have risen only 2.2 percent while expenses have risen 4 to 5 percent. The obvious result is that area budgets are getting very tight and undesignated income is at a premium.

Computation of Missionary Personnel Costs

The RCA as a sending mission agency is very solid and responsible regarding the salary and a range of benefits for its missionaries. RCA missionaries are compensated and supported at a standard equal to that of RCA pastors. While on the field RCA missionaries are free of worry about support and so can give themselves fully to their ministry. In retirement they know they can live comfortably. This level of support is a factor for which RCA members can feel justifiably proud. The following items have been included in the per-unit costs for missionaries: salaries, medical expenses, housing, language training, annuity fund, recruitment, insurance, professional development, children’s education, taxes, promotion, administration, travel/freight, and orientation. Computation of these costs leads to the following per-unit 1999 costs for missionary couples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>$107,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>91,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>79,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>108,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>$94,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Asia/Pacific</td>
<td>141,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>107,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PIM Costs and Inflation

Some 76 percent of the support for the RCA’s mission program is generated by Partnership-In-Mission (PIM) shares. The value of a PIM share in 1999 is $4,000. This means, for example, that a missionary in the Middle East (per-unit cost of $108,000) is fully supported by twenty-seven PIM shares. In 1972 the value of a PIM share was set at $1,000. In order to keep up with inflation, the value of PIM shares has been frequently adjusted. The graph below indicates the changing value of $1,000 due to inflation and the commensurate adjustments to the value of PIM shares.
In order to maintain the value of PIM shares in real dollars, and to continue to assure the fiscal foundation of the RCA’s mission program, the General Synod Council, at its April 1999 meeting, approved raising the PIM share to $4,200 for the year 2000.

** R-104 **

To encourage all churches and individuals who fund Partnership-In-Mission (PIM) shares to increase their level of giving in the year 2000 to $4,200 for a full share; and to encourage each RCA congregation to underwrite at least one PIM share in a missionary or mission program of its choice. (ADOPTED)

** CHANGES IN MISSIONARY AND MISSION SERVICES STAFF **

** Appointments **

The Rev. Stanley Perea, who served as the pastor of Church of the Rockies in Denver, Colorado, was appointed coordinator for urban ministries. Stan Perea began his work on July 1, 1998, from the RCA offices in Chicago, Illinois.

Debra Braaksma, former missionary to the Orma people in eastern Kenya, was appointed coordinator for mission stewardship in the Regional Synod of Mid-America and the supervisor of the RCA mission program in Africa. She began her work in the RCA offices in Chicago, Illinois, on September 1, 1998.

The Rev. Paul Nulton began his work as the coordinator for volunteer work groups and disaster reconstruction services on November 16, 1998. Prior to his appointment, he was pastor of Allwood Community Reformed Church in Clifton, New Jersey. Nulton works out of the RCA offices in Chicago, Illinois.

The Rev. David Detmers, who has served RCA congregations in Massapequa, New York, and Littleton, Colorado, was appointed supervisor of RCA mission programs in Eastern Europe and Russia, coordinator of mission resources, and coordinator for mission stewardship

The Rev. John Jong-Pyo Lee, who last served Willow Grove Korean Reformed Church in Willow Grove, Pennsylvania, was appointed supervisor of RCA mission programs in East Asia and the Pacific. He also serves as coordinator for mission stewardship in the Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantic, the Classes of Brooklyn, Nassau-Suffolk, New York, and Queens, and the RCA’s Asian and Pacific congregations. Lee, who works out of the RCA office in New York City, began his work on February 1, 1999.

Peter Vogelaar, the youngest son of RCA missionaries Harold Vogelaar and the late Neva Vogelaar, was appointed a world mission program associate. With his wife, Shannon, he directs the joint relief ministry of St. Andrews Church in Cairo, Egypt.

Louis and Janice Haveman were appointed world mission program associates. They are assisting the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa in developing a diaconal ministry plan for the development of private business.

Amy Oliver has been appointed as a world mission program associate. She is working in India with the Summer Institute of Linguistics (the overseas arm of Wycliffe Bible Translators) for a four-year assignment.

Tom Scudder was appointed a world mission program associate. He will become the managing editor of NewsReport and the website manager for the Middle East Council of Churches, with headquarters in Cyprus.

Rowland Van Es, Jr. and his wife, Jane, have been appointed missionaries to Africa. Rowland and Jane bring years of experience in east and west Africa, where they have served as world mission program associates. Their new assignment will make use of their skills in community development and theological training.

Resignations/Completions of Service

Edward and Pamela Ryan were appointed missionaries in 1988. They served in Oman, from 1988 to December 1, 1998.

The Rev. Douglas and Aleta Shepler were appointed missionaries in 1988. They served in Caracas, Venezuela, from 1988 to June 1, 1998.


The Rev. Kenneth Zorgdrager, who served on the Mission Services staff since 1993, was placed on disability leave effective mid-November 1998.
Change of Assignment

Larry and Linda McAuley returned to Africa July 1, 1998, after a time of study in the United States. They will work in conjunction with the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee in doing community development work in Malawi.

The Rev. Roger and Adilee Bruggink, who served in Oman since 1986, have begun a three-year assignment in Yemen serving an international congregation and an emerging medical clinic.

Paul Hoekstra, who has served Audio Scripture Ministries as Asia director since 1989, has been approved to relocate to the United States through 1999.

The Rev. Wendell Karsen, who had been serving as senior minister of Union Church in Hong Kong, has resigned from that position. With his wife, Renske, he will spend two years assisting English-speaking congregations in Taiwan and Indonesia.

Debra Wilson, who had been working in the area of community development in Cambodia, is now working as a development consultant with the ZOA-Lao People’s Democratic Republic pilot program through the Christian Reformed Church World Relief Committee.

The Rev. Harold Vogelaar, who has been teaching at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago, is now also assisting with the establishment of Muslim-Christian dialogue programs in other settings.

The Rev. Roger Schrock, who works as mission supervisor for RCA mission programs in the Middle East and coordinator of mission stewardship for the Regional Synod of the Heartland, has added South Asia (India and Pakistan) to his portfolio of mission supervision.

The Rev. Roger De Young, who works as mission supervisor for RCA mission programs in Mexico and Venezuela and coordinator of mission stewardship for the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes, is now also liaison to mission programs in Appalachia.

Betty Voskuil, who works with diaconal ministries and hunger education, has added coordinator for Reformed Church World Service to her portfolio.

Volunteer Service Assignments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Name 1</th>
<th>Name 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>Landon and Johanna Van Eyke</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>Bart Hisgen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gambia</td>
<td>Sarah Klaasen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>Andras and Angelika Jo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>Ken and Erinn Bentley</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Melody Chen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anita Dries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Carolyn Freilink</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jodie Grabill</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jason Green</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rebekah Hanousek</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hans Harder</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kathy Lang</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marti Peters</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Susan Shibe-Davis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kevin Tysen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Victor and Ruthanne Van Voorst</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sorrell Yu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Kenya: Greg Grylls  
Karen Hoffman  
Mexico: Susan Kingma  
Slovakia: Sarah Kuipers  
Betty Marple  
Taiwan: Jeff and Kristen Gowman  
Dr. Mary Oyer  
Tanzania: Jay Harsevoort  
United States:  
Apache, Oklahoma: Jill Floyd  
Kentucky: Jeff Trytko  
Angela Hoover  
Sonja Rawie  
Project Hospitality: Laura Myers  
Amanda Meulenberg  
The Way Out: Heidi Jones

Deaths

Neva Vogelaar died on May 18, 1998. With her husband, Harold, she served as an RCA missionary in the Middle East.

Sara Zwemer died on June 20, 1998. With her husband, Ted, she served as an RCA missionary in India for many years.

Christina Gosselink died on October 1, 1998, in Rochester, New York. With her late husband, George, she served for forty-one years in the Middle East.

Johanna De Vries died on October 30, 1998. She served as an RCA missionary in India from 1937 to 1952 and later as a nurse at Central College.

Benjamin De Vries died on December 10, 1998. He and his late wife, Mildred, served at Annville, Kentucky, for two years and in India for thirty-six years.

Nancy Garden died on April 18, 1999. She served as an RCA missionary in Bahrain from 1956 to 1962. With her husband, Jeff, she served an additional nineteen years in the Middle East.

Madeline Holmes died on December 22, 1998. She served as an RCA missionary in Kuwait and Bahrain for sixteen years.

Ruth Van Engen died on February 17, 1999. With her husband, Garold, she served as an RCA missionary in Chiapas, Mexico, from 1942 through 1978.

Harvey Staal died on February 21, 1999. With his wife, Hilda, he served for thirty-eight years as an RCA missionary in the Middle East.
Thurman “Happy” Cook, RCA world mission program associate and ministry assistant at Omoho Reformed Church in Macy, Nebraska, died on Good Friday, April 2, 1999.

From the Report of the Council for Hispanic Ministries (p. 80)

➢ The advisory committee recommended that R-18 be amended as follows (additions are underlined):

R-18
To encourage congregations to send work groups to Honduras and Nicaragua; and further,

to include RCA Hispanic and Spanish speaking pastors and tradespeople with cultural sensitivity in the groups, in effect encouraging unity within the Christian community and making the work groups more effective. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

Reason: There may be other bilingual pastors and tradespeople who have cultural sensitivity and who can be effective in this endeavor.<

Report of Words of Hope

Words of Hope’s International Radio Broadcasts Continue to Bear Fruit

Words of Hope broadcasts gospel radio programs in over forty languages worldwide—especially among many of the world’s least evangelized peoples. Reports received during 1998 and early 1999 indicate significant impact in a number of mission fields:

Asia

Indian subcontinent. Words of Hope broadcasts over twenty-five programs every week to this spiritually needy region in the languages of Hindi, Dogri, Bhojpuri, Garhwa-li, Nepali, Dzongkha, Kashmiri, and Banjara. Words of Hope’s efforts to manage the growing complexity of its regional partnerships with Trans World Radio and FEBA Radio (Far East Broadcasting Associates) are now being enhanced by the addition of a full-time administrator—veteran Hindi broadcaster Stephen Paul. In 1998 Stephen left his position as a senior divisional manager in a government manufacturing firm to become Words of Hope’s full-time India coordinator. Stephen assists his fellow producers in developing and implementing enhanced programming strategies and by providing Words of Hope Bible study materials in the Hindi language to aid their respective program preparations.
Persecution has recently intensified in this region, including the January 23, 1999, killing by Hindu militants of Australian missionary Graham Stewart Staines and his two young sons. Such incidents have sparked considerable controversy within India. One silver lining: Indian news coverage has been extensive and has tended to portray Christians in a positive, sympathetic light. Unhindered by the rising tide of persecution and strife, Words of Hope's radio broadcasts are continuing and have never been more strategic.

Amoy. Words of Hope has been broadcasting gospel programs in the Chinese dialect of Amoy since the 1950s. Veteran broadcaster Tessie Tan Veloso is a radiant radio ambassador to the Amoy people in China and the Philippines, and has been involved in the production of those Amoy broadcasts for thirty-five years. Tessie recently reminisced: “I can remember 1963-64 when Temple Time (Words of Hope’s name prior to 1973) provided all the equipment for Chinese broadcasting at our church. I remember the console, the tape recorders, tapes, microphone, and especially a Chevy van. So Temple Time and Words of Hope are so close and so dear to my heart. On behalf of the Chinese Christians here in the Philippines I want to thank you so much! And thank God we can work together to witness to the Chinese people here and in China.”

Tibetan. For decades, missiologists have categorized Tibetans among the world’s most hard-to-reach people. Not only were they geographically isolated, but Tibet’s unique brand of Buddhism appeared to hold an iron grip on virtually all areas of life. Recently, however, signs of major change have become evident. Words of Hope is a partner in FEBA Radio’s very successful “Gaweylon” program, which airs thirty minutes every day from the Seychelles. Listener response continues to multiply—from 700 letters during 1996 to over 2,500 in 1998. Surprisingly, much of the response to the radio programs comes from the monasteries, long considered to be the real strongholds of Tibetan-Buddhist influence. The “Gaweylon” team leader affirms, “United prayer has been key!”

Hmong. During recent years, Southeast Asia’s Hmong people have converted to Christianity in massive numbers. Hundreds of thousands of Hmong have committed their lives to Jesus Christ. Words of Hope’s gospel programs via Far East Broadcasting Company have helped to spread the good news of Jesus among these hard-to-reach mountain-dwelling people. However, a variety of recent reports indicate that persecution against the Hmong is increasing in various parts of Southeast Asia. Some local authorities are using a variety of methods to pressure Hmong believers to deny their faith. Despite imprisonment, deportation from home villages, deprivation of property rights, beatings and killings, the number of Hmong Christians is growing rapidly.

Islamic World

Arabic. Words of Hope’s Arabic broadcasts are on the air seven times every week. They emanate from four very powerful radio stations: two AM transmitters of Radio Monte Carlo (one from Cyprus to the Middle East and the other from France to North Africa) as well as two shortwave transmitters (one from the Seychelles to the Arabian Peninsula and North East Africa and the other from South Africa to North and West Africa). Arabic broadcaster the Rev. Victor Atallah reports: “The response to the broadcast continues to be very encouraging. A growing number of Muslim listeners are expressing quite clearly how they are provoked to think about God’s ways and to consider the gospel of God’s grace in the Lord Jesus Christ.” An Egyptian pastor recently told Words of Hope: “Anba An Sarra broadcasts are reaching many, many people, I think especially Muslims. They listen and are very happy. In addition, many people in my [450-member] church listen to these broadcasts. They sometimes ask me about subjects they hear about on the radio.”
Azeri. In a recent report, Words of Hope's Azeri producer reiterated his conviction that gospel broadcasts are crucial: "We see encouraging results both from working among Iranian congregations here [in the West] as well as the news we receive from inside the country. Iranians are a most responsive group of people. They are very open to the gospel. And, of course, the Islamic republic has had a very good impact regarding this because they show to the people what true Islam is like. [Disillusioned], the people have just two options: seek after the true God or just go on being an atheist. Iran's fundamentalist regime has brought a great spiritual hunger. Yes, Iran remains a closed country, so for [most Iranians] the only means now available for evangelizing is radio. Everybody has a radio!"

Europe

Albanian. Following the collapse of widespread pyramid schemes in early 1997, extraordinary chaos engulfed Albania. Random violence and gangster vendettas claimed thousands of lives. Heavily armed criminals roamed freely. But the gospel is now bringing hope to a land of utter despair. Responding to Words of Hope's Albanian programs heard via Trans World Radio, a Muslim listener recently wrote: "Your broadcasts are just right—powerful, knocking on the door of every home every night. I see them as a way of light, tolerance, and reconciliation. I listen in with great passion, although I am not a Christian. I congratulate you for this and would be very thankful if you could tell me how I could obtain a Bible in Albanian."

Africa

Dinka and Nuer. Sudan is experiencing intense persecution which may be unparalleled since the first century. The efforts by authorities to impose Islam on the population have led to the deaths of two million people who have resisted forced conversion. The Christian Information Network reports the crucifixion of many Sudanese, the destruction of numerous Christian villages and churches, and an active slave trade. This systematic persecution has displaced more than three million people. Words of Hope Vice President Lee De Young visited southern Sudan and saw considerable evidence that despite the unimaginable persecution Sudanese people have endured, the Church appears to be growing faster in Sudan than anywhere else in the world. Anglican missionary Marc Nikkel described the mass conversions of recent years: "Sudan is a place of remarkable paradox—[home to] some of the most virulent forms of Islam in the world today and yet a church that is thriving in the face of that!" With the dispersal of Christians over vast areas of Sudan and neighboring countries, Nikkel affirms the role of Words of Hope broadcasts in the languages of Dinka and Nuer: "The fragmentation and lack of communication is one of the great problems our people face. The ministry via FBBA Radio among our scattered peoples is extremely valuable."

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 ninety-three megalanguages which have been added for broadcast since the World by 2000 project was initiated in 1985. There is a probable need to add approximately a hundred more languages; more than one billion people speak these languages.

AD2000 and Beyond Movement. During each day of October 1999, millions of believers around the world will be praying for the sixty-three nations of the 10/40 Window. Organized by the AD2000 Movement's United Prayer Track, earlier "Praying
Through the Window” efforts focused on the least evangelized countries (1993), the “gateway cities” (1995), and the unreached peoples (1997) of that area extending from West Africa to East Asia between 10° and 40° north of the equator. The October 1999 Words of Hope devotional guide will highlight the official list of unreached peoples for each day. Words of Hope also plans to produce a special 31-day series of two-minute radio programs based on these devotional meditations to be aired daily on numerous domestic and international stations.

Other Media Involvement

New book. *Strength in Weakness* is a collection of uplifting meditations by Steven Laman—a vibrant Christian in his late twenties who has lived with cerebral palsy since birth. Today he lives and ministers with his parents in Ripon, California. Words of Hope’s David Bast observed: “There are many things Steve cannot do, basic things like walking and talking, but as you get to know Steve through his writing, you quickly discover that he has learned the secret of happiness. Steve is positive and joyful. He loves life, he loves nature, he loves his family and his church. Most of all, he loves Jesus Christ. By putting his trust in the Lord, Steve’s weaknesses have turned into strength.” Free copies are available upon request from Words of Hope.

Internet Worldwide Website. Access to Words of Hope’s worldwide website remained fairly steady throughout most of 1998. From February through December we consistently averaged 220,000 “hits” per month. (“Hit” is an Internet term which refers to a single computer file accessed by a web user.) User activity rose sharply in January 1999 as that month’s accesses topped 300,000 for the first time ever. RealAudio is one of Words of Hope’s website’s enhanced features, including weekly radio programs and each day’s devotional meditation with a related Scripture passage.

New Videos. Words of Hope is offering two new video presentations to interested individuals and groups. “A Lily Among the Thorns” documents the remarkable perseverance of the persecuted Christians of Sudan. This thirteen-minute production highlights the impact of Words of Hope’s strategic new gospel broadcasts to Sudan and includes video footage shot inside Sudan and Kenya. “Building the People of God” spotlights Words of Hope’s cooperative efforts with the Middle East Reformed Fellowship (MERF) in ministering via radio to the Middle East and North Africa. Contact Words of Hope to request a free copy of either video.

New Development Director

In June 1998 Todd Schuiling joined Words of Hope as Director of Development. He brings considerable experience to that role, having successfully served Hope College as a regional advancement director since 1987. Todd is excited about his role in leading Words of Hope’s efforts to generate a wide and generous base of support. Todd succeeded the Rev. Kenneth Kuiper, who left his position as Minister for Stewardship to become the senior pastor of First Reformed Church of Lansing, Illinois.

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 1998 RCA congregations contributed a total of $885,073 including $705,483 in regular giving and $179,590 in specially designated gifts. Give praise for God’s faithfulness!
REPORT OF THE COMMISSION ON NOMINATIONS

The Commission on Nominations met in person on April 14, 1999. Having done its work in recent years via conference call, the committee determined that a face-to-face meeting was necessary to more effectively fulfill the responsibilities of the commission as stated in the Bylaws of the General Synod:

The commission, in consultation with the general secretary, shall search the denomination for suitable nominees. In making nominations it shall consider the geographic location, occupation, and record of previous service to the denomination of persons suggested by classes, regional synods, and other sources. It shall consider this and other pertinent data in light of each commission’s or agency’s responsibilities, membership needs, suggested nominees, and place and schedule of meetings. (Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 7.c.2.)

In reflecting on the responsibilities of the commission, members found a popular acronym to be helpful. The commission added “LY” to the acronym in order to reflect its desire to involve those with special leadership abilities and young adult members of the RCA. The goal of the commission is to match people with positions on the basis of their:

- Spiritual Gifts
- Heart (or passion)
- Abilities
- Personality
- Experience
- Leadership
- Youth

The Commission on Nominations proactively “searched the denomination” and believes that those nominated have spiritual gifts, heart, abilities, and other traits that are particularly well-suited for the work of the positions for which they are being nominated.

In addition to finding the best possible people for positions on the RCA’s various commissions and agencies, the Commission on Nominations also bears responsibility for ensuring that the Book of Church Order and its Bylaws are upheld. The commission is pleased to report that this year’s slate of nominees meets the requirements set forth.

As it looks toward next year’s nominations process, the commission is eager to build a base of as many qualified candidates as possible. Those interested in serving on one of the commissions or agencies on the list that follows are asked to fill out a Talent Bank Form (a brief two-page application) available from the stated clerk of each classis or regional synod or from the Commission on Nominations through its staff person, Shari Brink, (212) 870-2711 or sbrink@rca.org. The Commission on Nominations submits for consideration and election the following names:

Note: * indicates a final term.
# indicates an official nomination from the assembly, institution, or agency listed.

GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL

Class of 2000

David Van Lant ........................................................ Classis of California#
Annie Lee Phillips ................................................... African-American Council#
Vacant ................................................................. Native American Indian Ministries Council#
Class of 2001
Gregg Mast ......................................................... President of General Synod
Gladys Rivera ...................................................... At-large
Andres Serrano ..................................................... Council for Hispanic Ministries#

Class of 2002
*Mary Ann Bahnsen .............................................. Classis of Mid-Hudson#
*Philip Bakelaar .................................................... Classis of New Brunswick#
Michael Bos ........................................................ Classis of Red River#
*Regina Brannock .................................................. At-large
*Shirley Byers ........................................................ Classis of Montgomery#
John Chang .......................................................... Council for Pacific and Asian American Ministries#

Tammy De Ruyter ................................................... Classis of Central California#
Barbara Frierson .................................................... At-large
Johanna Koning ...................................................... Classis of South Grand Rapids#
Johnnie Lovejoy .................................................... At-large
Murray Moerman .................................................... Classis of British Columbia#
John Rottenberg ..................................................... Classis of Orange#
Carol Schelin ........................................................ At-large
Carol Simon ........................................................... At-large
Margo Taylor ........................................................ Classis of North Grand Rapids#
Jill Te Winkle ....................................................... Classis of Wisconsin#
*Marvin Tinklenberg .............................................. Classis of Minnesota#
*Pacia Vamvas ........................................................ Classis of Schoharie#
Carol Mutch .......................................................... Vice President of General Synod
Vacant .................................................................. Classis of Central Plains#
Vacant .................................................................. Classis of Florida#
Vacant .................................................................. Classis of Holland#

COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN ACTION
Class of 2002
Sara Tolsma
*Eddy Aleman
*Terry Troia

COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN UNITY
Class of 2000
Vacant

Class of 2002
David Baak
*Liala Beukema
Sue Damon

COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN WORSHIP
Class of 2002
Sandy Damhof
David Tripold

COMMISSION ON CHURCH ORDER
Class of 2002
*John De Koster
Howard Moths
COMMISSION ON HISTORY
   Class of 2002
   Robert Terwilliger
   *J. Jeffrey Tyler

COMMISSION ON JUDICIAL BUSINESS
   Class of 2002
   Judith Gorsuch .............................................. Regional Synod of New York#
   Mark Schouten .............................................. Regional Synod of the Heartland#

COMMISSION ON NOMINATIONS
   Class of 2000
   *Fritz Kruithoff ........................................ Past President of General Synod
   Samuel Kwon .............................................. Council for Pacific and Asian
                                                      American Ministries#

   Class of 2002
   Randy Kooy .............................................. Regional Synod of Mid-America#
   Everett Zabriske ........................................ Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantic#
   Vacant ..................................................... Council for Hispanic Ministries#

COMMISSION ON RACE AND ETHNICITY
   Class of 2000
   Brigido Cabrera ........................................ Council for Hispanic Ministries#
   Vacant ..................................................... Native American Indian Ministries
                                                      Council#
   Gretel Van Wieren ...................................... At-large

   Class of 2001
   Jeff Lee .................................................. Council for Pacific and Asian
                                                      American Ministries#
   Victoria Menning ....................................... At-large
   Jim Myer .................................................. At-large

   Class of 2002
   Oliver Patterson ....................................... African-American Council#
   Steve Hoogerwerf ...................................... At-large

COMMISSION ON THEOLOGY
   Class of 2002
   *Thomas Boogaart
   Kathryn Roberts
   Michael Andres
   Vacant (for Christian Reformed Church observer)

COMMISSION FOR WOMEN
   Class of 2000
   Evelyn Diephouse

   Class of 2002
   *Gary De Witt
   Christine Dyke
BOARD OF PENSIONS
Class of 2001
Jack Dalenberg ......................................................... At-large

Class of 2002
*Harry De Bruyn ......................................................... At-large

BUILDING AND EXTENSION FUND
Class of 2000
Thomas Leach

Class of 2002
*Simon Lin
Timothy Pang

EDITORIAL COUNCIL OF THE CHURCH HERALD
Class of 2002
Susan DeBoer ........................................................ Regional Synod of the Far West #
Robert De Young ......................................................... Regional Synod of Albany#
Jane Konitz ............................................................... Regional Synod of New York#
*Sophie Mathonnet-Vanderwell ................................ At-large
Joe Velten ................................................................. Regional Synod of Canada#

MINISTERIAL FORMATION COORDINATING AGENCY
BOARD OF TRUSTEES
(In conversation with the new Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency, the terms of the following board members have been adjusted to the classes shown in order to allow for the continuing balance of the board. The board must include four lay people, three parish pastors, one specialized minister and one professor of theology.)

Class of 2000
Carol Wagner

Class of 2001
George Brown

Class of 2002
Marti Bultman
Brad Lewis
David Schutt

RCA FOUNDATION
Class of 2000
Edward Mondore ......................................................... At-large

Class of 2001
Harry De Bruyn ......................................................... At-large
Marilyn Norman ........................................................ At-large

Class of 2002
Vacant ................................................................. At-large
NOMINATIONS

NEW BRUNSWICK THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
BOARD OF TRUSTEES
(All nominees to the boards of the seminaries are the official nominees of the board, MGS 1993, R-4, p. 300. However, some have been made in consultation with the regional synods and are designated as Regional Synod Trustees.)

Class of 2000
Laurel Brundage ....................................................... New Brunswick Theological Seminary#

Class of 2002
*David Cooper ............................................................ New Brunswick Theological Seminary#
*Clifford Feakes .......................................................... New Brunswick Theological Seminary#
*Eugene Fisher ........................................................... Regional Synod of the Far West
John Hubers ............................................................. Regional Synod of the Great Lakes
*Brad Langstraat ....................................................... New Brunswick Theological Seminary#
*Hak Kwon Lee ......................................................... New Brunswick Theological Seminary#
*Kenneth Saunders ................................................... New Brunswick Theological Seminary#
David Van Ningen ..................................................... Regional Synod of the Heartland

WESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY BOARD OF TRUSTEES
(All nominees to the boards of the seminaries are the official nominees of the board, MGS 1993, R-4, p. 300. However, some have been made in consultation with the regional synods and are designated as Regional Synod Trustees.)

Class of 2000
Phyllis Palsma .......................................................... Regional Synod of Albany

Class of 2002
*Barbara Alexander .................................................... Regional Synod of New York
*Herman Chapman ......................................................... Regional Synod of Mid-America
*Karen Hanson ............................................................ Western Theological Seminary#
*Anthony Vis .............................................................. Regional Synod of the Heartland

CENTRAL COLLEGE BOARD OF TRUSTEES
Class of 2002
Bruce Heerema
*Harold Molenaar
Ronald Schipper

HOPE COLLEGE BOARD OF TRUSTEES
Class of 2003
*I. Kermit Campbell
*Fritz Kruithof

NORTHWESTERN COLLEGE BOARD OF TRUSTEES
no action
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES
(Each of the following people is currently serving on the Reformed Church in America’s delegation to the NCC. In the past, nominations have been made to staggered terms. However, other communions nominate their delegation on the basis of the NCC quadrennium. In order to work more effectively within this framework, the Commission on Nominations recommends appointing all members of the RCA’s delegation to terms that expire in 2003.)

Class of 2003
*Liala Beukema
*Taylor Holbrook
*Lynn Japinga
Wesley Granberg-Michaelson
*Mark Nieuwsma

WORLD ALLIANCE OF REFORMED CHURCHES
Class of 2002
*Jeffrey Gargano

R-105
To elect the above named nominees to the respective General Synod agencies and commissions as indicated. (ADOPTED)
EDITORIAL REPORT

In accordance with the *Book of Church Order (BCO)*, Chapter 3, Part II, Article 3, Section 2, all proposed amendments to the *BCO* that have been approved shall be referred to the corresponding delegates from the Commission on Church Order in consultation with the general secretary for final wording and report back to Synod.

Of the *BCO* amendments approved at this meeting, one required additional mention by this General Synod.

**R-106**

To approve the editorial changes to the substitute for R-52, pp.224-225 (additions are underlined):

*Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 11.*

The classis, in forming new churches, shall appoint a committee to meet with those persons who desire to be organized into a church. The classis, through this committee, shall determine that the organizational document of the church includes a provision substantially in the form of Formulary 15. The committee shall act as a board of elders in receiving members on confession, reaffirmation, or certificate. Notice of the time and place of the proposed organization, and of the election of elders and deacons, shall be published for three Sundays in the church or usual place of worship. The ordination of elders and deacons shall follow the regular procedure. The first elders and deacons of a newly organized church shall determine by lot, at the first meeting of the consistory following upon their installation, who of their number shall serve for one year, who for two years, and who, if it should be necessary, for three or more years.

*Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 22.*

The classis, in exercising its authority to receive a congregation as a local church of the Reformed Church in America, shall first satisfy itself that:

a. such congregation truly desires to organize and function as a local church in accordance with and in all respects subject to, the provisions of the *Government of the Reformed Church in America*;

b. such congregation has satisfied all prerequisites required by the denomination, if any, with which it has been affiliated, for withdrawing from the jurisdiction of that denomination;

c. such congregation could function more effectively as a local church of the Reformed Church in America, and would be welcomed as such by the other churches of the classis; and

d. such congregation has adopted an organizational document that includes a provision substantially in the form of Formulary 15.
Formulary 15. Provision to Include in Church Organizational Document

Notwithstanding anything to the contrary contained in this [insert description of organizational document], this [corporation/organization] is a member church in the Reformed Church in America; is (and at all times shall be) subject to and governed by the Constitution of the Reformed Church in America; and agrees that the provisions of this [article/chapter/paragraph] shall not be amended or modified in any manner without the prior written consent of the classis of which this [corporation/organization] is a member. (ADOPTED)

(Editorial note: The editorial changes consist in indicating that the Formulary number is 15.)
REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE OF REFERENCE

LEAVES OF ABSENCE

All requests for leaves of absence were received and found to be acceptable.

APPROVAL OF THE JOURNAL

The journal of actions for synod for Friday and Monday were posted for information and review by the delegates. The synod:

VOTED: To approve the Journal of Actions for the General Synod sessions of Friday and Monday, and to authorize the officers to approve the Journal of Actions for the sessions on Tuesday and Wednesday.

RESOLUTIONS

The Committee of Reference presented the following resolutions:

R-107

WHEREAS the delegates and guests of General Synod have been graciously received by Augustana College; and

WHEREAS the beautiful setting, hospitality of the city of Sioux Falls, and meeting space have been conducive to the work, comfort, and productivity of the delegates;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-third General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, on the sixteenth day of June, 1999, expresses its gratitude to Augustana College and the city of Sioux Falls for their hospitality in hosting delegates of the General Synod. (ADOPTED)

R-108

WHEREAS the ministers and members of area churches within the Classes of Dakota, Minnesota, and West Sioux opened their houses of worship to the delegates for Sunday worship; and

WHEREAS these Christian brothers and sisters hosted the delegates of General Synod in their communities, homes, and farms with extreme grace and thoughtfulness;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-third General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, on the sixteenth day of June, 1999, expresses its sincere appreciation to the pastors and members of the churches of the Classis of Dakota, the Classis of Minnesota, and the Classis of West Sioux. (ADOPTED)

R-109

WHEREAS the local planning committee for General Synod provided delegates with a delicious and relaxing picnic on Saturday evening; and
WHEREAS the musicians of First Reformed Church, Community Reformed Church, and Good News Reformed Church presented a festival of music and praise for the enjoyment and edification of the delegates on Saturday evening;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-third General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, on the sixteenth day of June, 1999, expresses its sincere appreciation to the local planning committee, the musicians, and members of First Reformed, Community Reformed, and Good News Reformed churches of Sioux Falls. (ADOPTED)

R-110
WHEREAS Our Savior’s Lutheran Church of Sioux Falls graciously hosted the General Synod for its daily worship;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-third General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, on the sixteenth day of June, 1999, expresses its sincere appreciation to the pastors and members of Our Savior’s Lutheran Church of Sioux Falls. (ADOPTED)

R-111
WHEREAS Dr. John Witvliet led us in music and singing in a creative, energetic, and spirit-provoking manner, through both traditional and contemporary music, therein creating both joyous and celebrative worship experiences;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-third General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, on the sixteenth day of June, 1999, expresses its sincere gratitude to God for sending this gifted musician to share his talents with us. (ADOPTED)

R-112
WHEREAS the Rev. Carolyn Holloway and the Rev. Steve Stam and the Worship Planning Committee provided leadership for a joyous and inspiring worship focused on our synodical theme, “God’s Spirit Upon Us: Celebrating”;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-third General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, on the sixteenth day of June, 1999, expresses its sincere appreciation to the Rev. Carolyn Holloway, the Rev. Steve Stam, and the Worship Planning Committee for their inspiration, illumination, and encouragement. (ADOPTED)

R-113
WHEREAS the Rev. Frederick (Fritz) Kruthof presided with sensitivity, sincerity, enthusiasm, and commitment during his tenure as president of General Synod, focusing on prayer and encouragement for the church at home and abroad;
THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-third General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, on the sixteenth day of June, 1999, expresses its heartfelt thanks to almighty God for the dedicated and inspired service of the Rev. Frederick (Fritz) Kruithof. (ADOPTED)

R-114
WHEREAS the Rev. Vernon Hoff's, vice president of General Synod, has faithfully discharged his duties throughout the past year;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-third General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, on the sixteenth day of June, 1999, expresses its gratitude to Vernon Hoff's and pledges to him its prayers and support in his new position as director of Ministry and Personnel Services for the Reformed Church in America. (ADOPTED)

R-115
WHEREAS the Rev. Dr. Gregg Mast has been elected president of General Synod; and

WHEREAS elder Carol Mutch has been elected vice president of General Synod;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-third General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, on the sixteenth day of June, 1999, expresses its congratulations and commends the Rev. Dr. Gregg Mast and elder Carol Mutch to the care of the Sustainer. (ADOPTED)

R-116
WHEREAS the general secretary of the Reformed Church in America, the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, has continued to encourage dialogue throughout the church; and

WHEREAS he has served the denomination with passion, integrity, and courage;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-third General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, on the sixteenth day of June, 1999, expresses its sincere appreciation and thanks to its general secretary and praises God for the gifts we receive through his leadership. (ADOPTED)

R-117
WHEREAS the moderators and vice moderators of the various advisory committees, staff members, and resource persons facilitated the work of the advisory committee and the General Synod with open minds and open hearts, to the end that all things were done decently and in good order;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-third General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting
in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, on the sixteenth day of June, 1999, expresses its heartfelt thanks for their dedicated service. (ADOPTED)

R-118
WHEREAS the many elder delegates offered their tireless energies and careful consideration to the work and deliberations of the General Synod; and

WHEREAS many of them are doing so at the cost of sacrificing personal vacation time;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-third General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, on the sixteenth day of June, 1999, expresses its thanksgiving to almighty God for the commitment and love of its elder delegates to the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America. (ADOPTED)

R-119
WHEREAS the Honorable William J. Janklow, governor of South Dakota; the Rev. Robert Scholten, president of Dakota Classis; and the Rev. Dean Meeter and Kenneth Heeren, local arrangements co-chairpersons, made us feel at home in the great state of South Dakota;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-third General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, on the sixteenth day of June, 1999, expresses its heartfelt thanks to Governor Janklow, the Rev. Robert Scholten, the Rev. Dean Meeter, and Kenneth Heeren. (ADOPTED)

R-120
WHEREAS the staff of the Reformed Church in America have given of themselves tirelessly with enthusiasm, grace, good humor, dedication, and openness;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-third General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, on the sixteenth day of June, 1999, expresses its sincere appreciation to the following RCA denominational staff and offers its prayers for God's blessings upon each and every member of the staff and their families:

Ann Saigeon, Dorothy Schmidt, Roger Schrock, Jane Schuyler, Phil Tanis, Norm Tellier, Jack Tice, Norma Violante, Betty Voskuil, Arlene Waldorf, and Richard Welscott. (ADOPTED)

R-121
WHEREAS Russell Paarlberg has served the General Synod as its parliamentarian with competence and patience;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-third General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, on the sixteenth day of June, 1999, expresses its thanks to Russell Paarlberg for his dedicated contribution to the work of the synod. (ADOPTED)

R-122
WHEREAS members of various General Synod commissions, councils, and agencies are completing their terms of service this year, having served the Lord and the church faithfully in their respective capacities;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-third General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, on the sixteenth day of June, 1999, expresses its enthusiastic appreciation to these dedicated servants of the church. (ADOPTED)

R-123
WHEREAS Dr. John Jacobson has served Hope College notably as its president for the past twelve years; and

WHEREAS the leadership of Dr. Jacobson has enabled Hope College to continue to be a noted liberal arts college in North America;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-third General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, on the sixteenth day of June, 1999, expresses its thanksgiving to God for Dr. Jacobson’s leadership and wishes him well in his retirement. (ADOPTED)

R-124
WHEREAS Dr. James Bultman has served Northwestern College ably over the past years and has brought the college to new heights academically, financially, and spiritually; and

WHEREAS he has accepted the position of the presidency of Hope College;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-third General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, on the sixteenth day of June, 1999, expresses its thanks to God for Dr. Bultman’s years of service at Northwestern and wishes him well as he accepts the mantle of leadership at Hope College. (ADOPTED)
R-125
WHEREAS Chaplain Donald Jiskoot offered pastoral counsel and care to the delegates by serving as the General Synod chaplain;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-third General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, on the sixteenth day of June, 1999, expresses its appreciation to the Rev. Donald Jiskoot for his care. (ADOPTED)

R-126
WHEREAS Allen Price ably organized and chaired the transportation committee; and

WHEREAS many volunteer drivers have cheerfully and competently provided transportation for General Synod delegates;

WHEREAS Marion Mouw provided vehicles to facilitate the transportation coordination needs of synod delegates and staff;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-third General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, on the sixteenth day of June, 1999, expresses its sincere appreciation to Allen Price, the volunteer drivers, and Marion Mouw for their thoughtfulness and generosity. (ADOPTED)

R-127
WHEREAS Audrey Den Herder served the denomination through active involvement in Reformed Church Women's Ministries, as a member of the search committee for the general secretary, and as chairperson of the Commission on Nominations; and

WHEREAS Audrey, in her professional capacity, sought to be gracious and accommodating in working cooperatively with Reformed Church staff and committee members to arrange travel in the most efficient, convenient, and comfortable ways possible; and

WHEREAS Audrey succumbed to her battle with cancer on May 30, 1999;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-third General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, on the sixteenth day of June, 1999, expresses its gratitude to God for Audrey Den Herder's cheerful and diligent service to the church and commends her family to God's grace and care. (ADOPTED)
ELECTION OF OFFICERS

The Rev. Dr. Gregg Mast, pastor of First Church in Albany, New York, was elected president. Carol Mutch, an elder at Wyckoff Reformed Church in Wyckoff, New Jersey, was elected vice president.

Upon his election as president of General Synod, the Rev. Gregg Mast thanked his parents, his home church, and educational institutions, and others that had helped shape his life. He concluded:

“As we pray for the General Synod and Mission Convocation of the year 2000, we are reminded that our gathering will surround the celebration of Pentecost. And so we pray for the Spirit to come from the four corners of the world—to come with fire to light our way, to warm our spirits, and to inspire our faith—and to come with wind to enliven our lives and our faith and to blow open our locked lives so we may again be sent into the streets of the cities we love in order to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ.”

III. CLOSE OF GENERAL SYNOD

CLOSE AND ADJOURNMENT

President Frederick Kruithof presented president-elect Gregg Mast with the traditional bell and gavel and the presidential cross.

The Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, RCA general secretary, addressed the synod with closing remarks:

During this week I have often felt that we still have unresolved and conflicting perspectives about how the life of this denomination can best be governed and I want to try to articulate some of those questions and invite our reflection together as we move towards the General Synod 2000 and beyond.

Let me explain to those of you who are new delegates that we are living into a restructuring process that began and was implemented back in 1992 and 1993. What that process did was take what was the old General Synod Executive Committee and the old General Program Council and put them into a General Synod Council, made up of representatives from each classis, as you have just nominated now, as well as members at large. The moderators of the units of the General Synod Council were named as the Committee of Reference for the General Synod.

The restructure did this realizing that General Synods do some things very well. They do a good job of dealing with overall questions of church order, struggling with our ecumenical relationships, and dealing with issues of standards for ministerial formation. But when it comes to the guidance of specific program priorities and their administrative and financial details, the restructuring committee assumed that those were areas that a body this large, meeting this infrequently, could not do fully and responsibly. Thus they established the General Synod Council as the board of directors of this body and the program agency of the church to do that work with accountability to the General Synod. The restructuring also made an important change that maybe some of you do not know about. It came before my service. It instructed the general secretary to give a report to General Synod that was to include recommendations. Prior to 1994 that was not the practice.
We have been living into this new structure for five or six years. I think some people have reservations. Maybe they are even unknowing ones, but yet I think we do have some serious questions before us. It feels to me at this General Synod that the relationship between the General Synod and the General Synod Council is characterized by misunderstanding and by some mistrust. And you can’t have that in the long run in a relationship between a larger body and a group that is to be its board. I have reflected over this week, and I think that link is in fact pretty fragile.

And maybe we shouldn’t be surprised. Because apart from the Committee of Reference, there is no direct participation between the General Synod Council and the General Synod. When we meet in the General Synod Council in October, we have to educate ourselves about what the General Synod has done. And when the General Synod meets here, you have to be educated about what the General Synod Council has done. Last year there was a recommendation before General Synod that we take one of the three meetings of the General Synod Council and have it meet at the same time as General Synod and make the General Synod Council members General Synod corresponding delegates. That recommendation was turned down. We still need to figure out a mechanism between these two bodies that allows trust to be built if the new structure is in fact to work.

I think also in an unfortunate way the proposal brought to you by the General Synod Council and supported by myself and staff to reduce the budget of some commission meetings contributed to this mistrust. I think some of you as delegates saw that as an attempt to erode the power of General Synod’s way of doing its work between synods instead of part of a plan to live within the fiscal restraints requested by the wider church. I think some of you as delegates saw that as an attempt to erode the power of General Synod’s way of doing its work between synods instead of part of a plan to live within the fiscal restraints requested by the wider church.

I think we’ve come to a good solution to that. Yet the solution simply says “restore this and then you go back and figure out how to make the adjustments.” It again raises the issue of where and how the detailed decisions about budget and priorities in administration and finance are to be made. I give you another example.

I think the role of the president and vice president as it has evolved also reflects some of this uncertainty. We have had very proactive presidents over the past five years. They’ve modeled a very healthy and proactive stance. It has also increased expectations for these offices—expectations over a three-year period that are becoming more difficult to fulfill without a very serious disruption in one’s pastoral, educational, or other vocational life. I think it’s good that we’ve decided to study this whole matter as a synod.

But maybe even more fundamental to those questions is the issue of the basic purpose, style, and functioning of General Synod meetings. You must know that we choose as a church to invest very important resources in the meeting of General Synod. For the meeting of the synod itself our direct costs are about $360,000. But when we calculate the cost of staff in preparation for the work of the General Synod, it easily adds another $1 million. So we’re talking about an investment of the church’s resources of easily between one and one and a half million dollars for the purposes of running a good General Synod.

Now, we’ve tried to broaden the educational features of synod around its edges. You’ve attended this year’s workshops. We’ve tried over the years to have more focused worship, to have visits to local congregations, and to have thematic presentations. But to control costs, we’ve also reduced the length of General Synod. I think now we’re beginning to encounter two different expectations of what General Synod is to do in governing the church in accord with our polity and in response to our needs.
I think that some of us fully expect that General Synod is the place for specific administrative direction of the denomination. Others, I think, expect that General Synod should gather the church to clarify our basic mission and inspire our participation and support. We have to think clearly about those expectations and see if we can come to a common mind.

Our mission and vision statement calls us to equip congregations for ministry. I think we all firmly agree. Yet, as I’ve thought about this week, the reality is that the agenda that dominates the life of General Synod is one that is significantly distant from the concerns felt most deeply by most congregations.

This was illustrated in a striking way by the informal poll we conducted when we were planning for the use of time last evening, which we thought, very naively, would be free from our business. Listen to the top five items chosen as the most critical issues facing your congregations as you voted and selected:

1. How do we develop leaders and encourage the gifts of all members?
2. How do we assimilate and incorporate new Christians into our congregations?
3. How do we move beyond a survival mode into spiritual revitalization?
4. How do we turn our congregations outward?
5. How do we do evangelism and discipleship in a winsome way?

Those are what you reported as the most critical issues facing your congregations. But then note how little of our business agenda in the Workbook, and our discussions during these sessions, has touched directly on those concerns. Now, we must recognize that by nature a General Synod as the gathered church needs to deal with the matters of the church’s order, the church’s organization, the church’s relationships with the wider church ecumenically, the church’s prophetic witness in society, the church’s worship liturgies, and similar matters. These things are essential to maintaining our life together.

Yet, we must dare to ask whether and why the largest expenditure of shared resources and staff time should be devoted to an event whose focus seems to be significantly distant from the most deeply felt needs of our congregations—especially if we are serious about equipping congregations for ministry.

Resolving these issues will be no easy or simple task. Yet, as we approach General Synod 2000 and our Mission Convocation, and then General Synods in subsequent years, I believe we must begin addressing these underlying tensions in a direct and transparent manner and think together about how best we do the business of the church together at General Synod and how we also use the resources of General Synod to assist in equipping congregations for ministry.

My purpose here in sharing this with you is simply to reflect on what I have heard and to articulate matters which I feel we can no longer afford to ignore. I hope you will lend your voices from your particular perspective of General Synod and its commissions and agencies in thinking about this question as we move into the future.
At the same time, I want to express deeply my sincere thanks—thanks from all the staff and from the church at large, for the commitment, the faithfulness, the diligence, and the responsible participation and enthusiasm that has characterized your participation in the 193rd General Synod of the Reformed Church in America.

The 193rd General Synod concluded its business and adjourned at 12:15 p.m. on Wednesday, June 16, 1999 with the installation of officers and a worship service of Word and sacrament. The next regular session of the General Synod will be held at Hofstra University in Hemstead, Long Island, New York, June 9-15, 2000.

The Rev. Frederick Kruithof, president
The Rev. Vernon Hoffs, vice president
The Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, general secretary