OFFICERS OF GENERAL SYNOD

1999-2000

President .........................................................................................The Rev. Dr. Gregg Mast
Vice President ..........................................................................................
General Secretary .............................................................................The Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson

GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL

1999-2000

MINISTERS

Stephen Allison
Philip Bakelaar
Michael Bos
Stephen Breen
John Chang
Daniel Gillett
Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, ex-officio
Ronald Gray
John Hiemstra
Renee House
Rodney Koopmans
Frederick Kruithof, moderator
Louis Lotz
Toni Macon
Gregg Mast
David Melvin
Murray Moerman
Stephen Norden
Peter Nordstrom
Gene Poll
P. Okke Postma
Andres Serrano
Edward Suffern
Michael Vanden Berg
Roger Vander Kolk
Mark Volkers
Robert White

LAYPERSONS

Esa Attocknie
Mary Ann Bahnsen
Louise Bass
Harlan Bergman
Albert Bieber
Irvin Boersen
John Bos
Regina Brannock
Shirley Byers
Paul Darby
Tammy De Ruyter
Ruth Diephuis
Kristi Egger-Brown
Barbara Frierson
Carol Hageman
Arthur Hessinger
Stephen Janssen
Darrel Jongeling
Stephanie Kaper-Dale
Johanna Koning
Gerrit Koobs
Johnnie Lovejoy
James Marvel
Carol Mutch
Joan Nienhuis
Annie Lee Phillips
Gladys Rivera
Alice Rowan
Carol Schelin
Elmer Simon
Edward Smith
Deborah Swanson
Margo Taylor
Jilda Te Winkle
Lula Thomas
Marvin Tinklenberg
Betty Unger
Elmer Van Drunen
Gerald Verbridge
TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Formation of General Synod
   Opening of Synod ................................................................. 1
   Worship .................................................................................. 2
   Roll Call of General Synod .................................................. 5
   Advisory Committees .......................................................... 22
   Minutes and Journal ............................................................. 28
   Rules of Order ........................................................................ 28
   Tellers ................................................................................... 28
   Schedule ............................................................................... 28

II. Agenda of General Synod
   Disposition of Communications ........................................... 30
   Presentation and Referral of New Business ......................... 31
   Report of the President .......................................................... 33
   Report of the General Secretary .......................................... 42
   Report of the General Synod Board of Directors ................. 57
   Report of the Commission on Judicial Business .................. 76
   Reports of the Racial/Ethnic Councils ................................. 81
   Reports on Christian Unity ................................................... 90
   Reports on Theology ............................................................. 124
   Reports on World Mission .................................................. 156
   Reports on Christian Worship ............................................. 174
   Reports on Christian Heritage and Communications ............ 231
   Reports on Christian Education and Discipleship ............... 253
   Reports on Evangelism and Church Development ............... 298
   Reports on Church Vocations .............................................. 323
   Reports on Financial Support .............................................. 351
   Reports on Church Order ..................................................... 407
   Reports on Christian Action ............................................... 446
   Report of the Commission on Nominations ......................... 462
   Report of the Committee of Reference ................................. 468
   Election of Officers .............................................................. 474

III. Close of General Synod
   Close and Adjournment ...................................................... 474

IV. Directory and Tables
   Calendar of Special Days
   Incorporation of the General Synod and Board of Directors
   Recent Officers of General Synod
   Denominational Staff
   General Synod Council
   Commissions
   Ecumenical Delegations
   Agencies
   General Synod Professors
   Seminaries
   Statistical Tables
   Church Addresses
   Ministers’ Addresses
   Missionaries’ Addresses
   Ministers’ Surviving Spouses’ Addresses
   Elders, Deacons, and Laypersons’ Addresses
   Changes in Church Status/Name (Supplement A)
   Specialized Ministries (Supplement B)
   RCA Seminary Graduates, 2000 (Supplement C)
Ministers of Other Denominations and Preaching Elders Serving the RCA (Supplement D)
Interdenominational Changes in the Ministry (Supplement E)
Associates in Ministry (Supplement F)
New Field Ministries (Supplement G)
Financial Reports
General Synod and Regional Synod Officers and Stated Meetings
Classical Stated Meetings
INDEX TO VOLUME LXXX

*=See Directory
(Ov)=Overtures Received re:

A

Action, Christian (See Christian Action)
Ad Interim Appointments ................................................................. 59-60
Addresses .......................................................................................... *
Adjournment of General Synod ...................................................... 474
Administration (See General Synod Council: Policy, Planning, and Administration Services)
Adult Education .................................................................................. 270-271
Advisory Committees, Membership of ........................................... 22-27
Africa ................................................................................................. 158
Africa, Christian Church in ............................................................... 39
Africa, South (See South Africa)
African-American Council (See Councils)
Agencies of General Synod, Members of .......................................... *
American Indian Council (See Councils: Native American Indian Ministries Council)
Appeals: De Vries/Miedema and Regional Synod of Mid-America ....... 76-80
Appointments, Ad Interim (See Ad Interim Appointments)
Archives, RCA .................................................................................. 425-426
Archives, RCA, Report of ................................................................. 232-235
Archives (See also Historical Services, Office of)
Asian American Ministries, Council for Pacific and (See Councils: Pacific and Asian American Ministries)
Assessment Budget .......................................................................... 391-398
Assessments ...................................................................................... 356, 399-400
  Capping of (Ov) ............................................................................. 400-401
  General Synod ................................................................................ 399-400
  General Synod Operational Budget ............................................... 391-399
  Overtures re: .................................................................................. 250-251
  Retirement Income ........................................................................ 399
  Theological Education ................................................................... 399
(See also Budgets; Finance Services, Report of)
Audiovisual Production ..................................................................... 247-248
Audit, Annual ................................................................................... 356

B

Belhar Confession .............................................................................. 99-103
Benefit Services, Board of (See also Pensions, Board of) ................. 358-379
Bennett, William P., Dispensation for .............................................. 335-336
Bible, Year of the ............................................................................. 270-271
Board of Directors (See Directors, Board of)
Board of Pensions (See Pensions, Board of)
Book of Church Order (See Church Order, Book of)
Bread for the World .......................................................................... 446-447
Brooker, Darrell, Dispensation for .................................................... 336
Budget: Fiscal Year Change .............................................................. 63-65
  General Synod Assessment (Operational Budget) ...................... 391-398
Building and Extension Fund (See Extension Fund)
By-laws of General Synod, Amendments to .................................. 63
Calendar of Special Days.................................................................*
Campus Ministry..............................................................................324
Canada, Gift Planning in.................................................................387
Canadian Council of Churches.......................................................96
Candidates, Alternate Route for Satisfying Requirements by .......414-415
Certificates of Fitness for.................................................................333
Declaration for Licensed .................................................................143-144
Financial Assistance for (Ov).........................................................347-348
Ordination, Alternate Route for.......................................................332
Capital Punishment, Abolition of...................................................449-455
Cash Fund (See RCA Fund)
Catechism Instruction ....................................................................267-268
Central College: Board of Trustees Membership........................253
Campaign for ...................................................................................*253-256
CERCA (See Christian Education, Council for)
Charts (See Illustrations)
Chiapas..............................................................................................158
Chicago Airport Christian Ministry (See Appeals)
Children and Worship....................................................................268-269
Children’s Ministry.........................................................................266-267
China..............................................................................................156, 157
Christ, Uniqueness of, in a Pluralistic Society...............................124-139, 149-154
Christian Action, Commission on
Appropriation for.............................................................................397
Continuation of ................................................................................425
Members of.......................................................................................*
Report of.........................................................................................446-456
A Fair Share: Working to End Hunger .........................................446-447
Capital Punishment .........................................................................449-455
Ecumenical Observers....................................................................455-456
Organ and Tissue Donation..........................................................447-449
Christian Action, Members of Advisory Committee on.............22
Christian Action, Reports on..........................................................446-461
Christian Education and Discipleship, Members of Advisory Committee on.........22
Christian Education and Discipleship, Reports on.....................253-297
Christian Education, Council for .................................................271
Christian Education, Office of
Adult Education..............................................................................270-271
Catechism Instruction ....................................................................267-268
Certification of Associates in Ministry..........................................272
Children and Worship.................................................................268-269
Children’s Ministry.........................................................................266-267
Family Ministry...............................................................................270
Leadership Development.............................................................271
Report of.........................................................................................264-273
Year for Education.........................................................................265-266
Youth Ministry................................................................................269-270
Christian Heritage and Communications
Members of Advisory Committee on .............................................23
Reports on.......................................................................................231-252
(See also Archives, RCA; Historical Services, Office of; Communication and Production Services)
Christian Reformed Church ................................................................. 98

Christian Unity, Commission on
  Appropriation for ........................................................................... 397
  Members of ...................................................................................... *
  Report ............................................................................................ 90-110

  Belhar Confession ......................................................................... 99-103
  Christian Reformed Church Relations ........................................ 98
  Ecumenical Network with Classes .............................................. 91-92
  Ecumenical Officer ......................................................................... 91
  Ecumenical Relationships ............................................................. 90-91
  Formula of Agreement ................................................................. 105-110
  General Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Korea ................. 92-93
  Human Sexuality ........................................................................... 97
  Membership in the World Alliance of Reformed Churches ........ 97-98
  Moravian Church in America ....................................................... 104-105
  National Association of Evangelicals ......................................... 103-104
  Ordination of Homosexuals and Membership in Ecumenical Councils 95-98
  RCA Ecumenical Appointees ....................................................... 92
  Reformed Ecumenical Council ................................................. 103
  Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa ............................ 98-103
  World Alliance of Reformed Churches ....................................... 93-95
  Review of ........................................................................................ 424

Christian Unity, Members of Advisory Committee on ..................... 23

Christian Unity, Reports on ................................................................. 90-123

Christian Worship, Commission on
  Appropriation for ........................................................................... 397
  Members of ...................................................................................... *
  Report ............................................................................................ 174-227

  Order for Ordination to the Office of Minister of Word and Sacrament 185-192
  Order for Profession of Faith ......................................................... 175-184
  Order for Reception into the Classis and Installation of a
    Minister of Word and Sacrament .............................................. 192-200
  Order for the Ordination and Installation of Deacons and Elders .... 200-209
  Proposed Order for the Organization of a New Church .............. 209-227
  Work in Progress .......................................................................... 227

Christian Worship, Members of Advisory Committee on ..................... 24

Christian Worship, Orders of (See Orders of Christian Worship)

Christian Worship, Reports on ................................................................. 174-230
  Church Addresses ......................................................................... *
  Church Building Fund (See Extension Fund) ...................................
  Church Development, New ................................................................. *
  Church Development (See Evangelism and Church Development) ....
  Church Growth, Goals for ................................................................. 320-322

Church Herald
  Assessement for (Ov) ..................................................................... 250-251
  Award to ........................................................................................ 241
  Editorial Council of
    Members of ................................................................................ *
    Report .......................................................................................... 241
  Financial Statement ....................................................................... *
  Readership Survey for .................................................................... 242

Church Order, Book of
  Amendments to ................................................................................ 62-63
  Amendments to (Ov) ..................................................................... 441
  Appropriation for ........................................................................... 397
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page Numbers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authority of Footnotes of</td>
<td>422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Changes to (Ov)</td>
<td>440-441</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revision of Endnotes</td>
<td>408-409</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church Order, Commission on Approporation for</td>
<td>397</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members of</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report</td>
<td>407-422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admonition and Rebuke</td>
<td>407-408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternate Course of Study for Master of Divinity Candidates</td>
<td>414-415</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associates in Ministry</td>
<td>421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority of Footnotes in the Book of Church Order</td>
<td>422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care of General Synod Professors of Theology</td>
<td>409-411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Installation of Pastors from Formula of Agreement Churches</td>
<td>417-421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership on the Commission on Nominations</td>
<td>421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nominational and Election Procedures for the Officers of General Synod</td>
<td>422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedure for Bringing a Charge Against a General Synod</td>
<td>412-414</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor of Theology</td>
<td>412-414</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process for Dissent</td>
<td>422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status/Call of Copastors</td>
<td>416-417</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspension Pending Complaint</td>
<td>407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church Order, Committee to Review: Report</td>
<td>422-423</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church Order, Members of Advisory Committee on</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church Order, Reports on</td>
<td>407-445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church Planning and Development (See Evangelism and Church Development; New Church Development)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church Vocations (See Vocations, Church)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Churches (See Congregations)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City (See Urban Ministry)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecumenical Network with</td>
<td>91-92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gathering of, in Worship</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meetings</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Records of</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibilities and Purposes of Regional Synods and, Task Force on</td>
<td>429-437</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthening of</td>
<td>38-39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clergy (See Ministers)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleges (See Central College; Hope College; Northwestern College)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commissions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Synod</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership of</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of General Synod</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication and Production Services, Office of: Report</td>
<td>243-249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication, Office of (See also Christian Heritage and Communications)</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communications, Disposition of</td>
<td>30-31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communications Strategy</td>
<td>245-246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Technology (See Information Systems)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congregational Services, List of staff</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congregations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disbanded</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthy Characteristics of</td>
<td>46-47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Starts List</td>
<td>308-309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organized</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnership with Local Christian (Ov)</td>
<td>114-115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Records of</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource Ministries List</td>
<td>311-315</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Restarts List ....................................................................................................................310-311
Consistorial Report Form
  Church Location .............................................................................................................60
  Church Staff and Officers ...............................................................................................60
  Financial Stewardship .................................................................................................60
  Gift Planning Receipts ..................................................................................................60
  Indebtedness ..................................................................................................................60
  Pastor’s Professional Development and Continuing Education ....................................60
  Revision of .....................................................................................................................60
Consistories, Faithful: Office, Ministry, and Mission in the Reformed Church
  in America....................................................................................................................280-295
Consistories, Task Force on: Report ................................................................................274-295
Constitutional Questions, Report of Theological Commission on .....................................145-148
Council for Christian Education (See Christian Education, Council for)
Counsels
  African-American
    Appropriation for ........................................................................................................397
    Members of ................................................................................................................* 81-82
    Report of ......................................................................................................................81-82
Hispanic Ministries
  Appropriation for ........................................................................................................397
  Members of ................................................................................................................* 82-84, 316
  Report .............................................................................................................................82-84, 316
    Council’s Annual Meeting .........................................................................................83
    Development and Demographic Information .............................................................82-83
    Hispanic Department Model ......................................................................................83, 316
    Teaching Congregations ............................................................................................83-84
    Visits to Cuba .............................................................................................................84
Native American Indian Ministries
  Appropriation for ........................................................................................................397
  Members of ................................................................................................................* 84-85
  Members of ................................................................................................................* 84-85
  Report .............................................................................................................................84-85
  Ministry Initiatives: Native American Indian Youth Camp ............................................84-85
  Ministry Initiatives: Leadership Conference ..................................................................85
  Ministry Initiatives: Scholarships ................................................................................85
  Staff Search ....................................................................................................................84
Pacific and Asian American Ministries
  Appropriation for ........................................................................................................397
  Members of ................................................................................................................* 86-89, 456
  Report .............................................................................................................................86-89, 456
    Announce the Good News .........................................................................................87-88
    Engage the City ..........................................................................................................87
    Establish New Churches ..............................................................................................86
    Indonesia .....................................................................................................................88
    Learn to Call Forth Leaders .......................................................................................88
    Nurture the Gifts of the Laity .....................................................................................87
    Racism ..........................................................................................................................89
    Revitalize Congregations ...........................................................................................86
    Welcome All People ...................................................................................................87
Councils, Native Americans, Inclusion of, on Commission on Nominations .....................421
Councils, Racial/Ethnic, Reports of ....................................................................................81-89
Covenantal Relationships, Congregations/Classes establish ...........................................35, 171
Creation, Caring for .......................................................................................................458-459
Cuba, Visits to ...................................................................................................................84
De Jong, Gerald and Jeanne, Internship in the Archives .................................................. 233
Deacon, Office of ............................................................................................................. 36-37, 40
Deacons, Offering Prayers of Intercession by ................................................................. 230
Death Penalty (See Capital Punishment)
Debt Reporting ................................................................................................................ 60
Declaration
  for General Synod Professors of Theology ................................................................. 144-145
  for Licensed Candidates ............................................................................................. 143-144
  for Ministers of Word and Sacrament ....................................................................... 144
Delegates
  Corresponding ............................................................................................................... 18-21
  Ecumenical .................................................................................................................. 20
  National Council of Churches ...................................................................................... *
  Roll of .............................................................................................................................. 5-17
  Seating of ...................................................................................................................... 61
  World Alliance of Reformed Churches ........................................................................ *
  World Council of Churches ........................................................................................ *
Denominational Plan, New Churches in ......................................................................... 307
Denominational Staff ...................................................................................................... *
Development, New Church (See Evangelism and Church Development; New Church Development)
Diaconal Ministries, Office of: Report ........................................................................... 273-274
Dialogue with UCC (See United Church of Christ)
Direct Mail Solicitation ................................................................................................. 389
Directors, Board of
  Members of .................................................................................................................... *
  Report .............................................................................................................................. 70-75, 391-398
Directory and Tables ...................................................................................................... *
Discernment, Time for, at General Synod .................................................................. 46, 297
Discipling All Nations ................................................................................................. 52-53, 166-167
Dispensations .............................................................................................................. 335-339
Distribution Center ...................................................................................................... 244-245
Donation of Organs and Tissues .................................................................................. 446-447
Dual Membership of Ministers (Ov) .......................................................................... 437-438

E
Ecumenical Delegations and Agencies: Appropriation for .............................................. 397
EcumenicalGreetings/Program ...................................................................................... 29
Ecumenical Network with Classes ................................................................................ 91-92
Ecumenical Observers on Christian Action Commission ........................................ 455-456
EcumenicalPresentations ............................................................................................. 28-29
EcumenicalRelationships ............................................................................................ 43-46, 90-91, 97, 110-111, 114-115, 458
Ecumenism (See Christian Unity)
Education (See also Christian Education)
Education, Theological (See Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency; New Brunswick Theological Seminary; Western Theological Seminary)
Education, Year for ..................................................................................................... 265-266
Elder, Office of .............................................................................................................. 36-37
Elders, Offering Prayers of Intercession by ................................................................. 230
Elders, Preaching, Supervision of Churches Using ...................................................... 444-445
Endnote, Revision of ................................................................................................... 408-409
Ethnic Ministries (See Councils; Racial and Ethnic Ministries; Race and
Gambia.......................................................................................................................... 157
General Secretaries, List of........................................................................................... *
General Secretary, Report of ......................................................................................... 42-56, 297, 321-322
General Synod
Adjournment.................................................................................................................... 474
Agenda............................................................................................................................. 30-31
Appropriations for ........................................................................................................... 396
Assessments..................................................................................................................... 399-400
Ad Interim Administration.............................................................................................. 59-61
Ad Interim Appointments .............................................................................................. 59-60
Deadlines for Response to (Ov) ..................................................................................... 252
Election of Officers........................................................................................................... 474
Installation of Officers .................................................................................................... 4
Meeting............................................................................................................................ 61-62
Minutes and Journal of ................................................................................................. 28
New Business .................................................................................................................. 31-32
Officers, List of................................................................................................................ 1, *
Opening.............................................................................................................................. 1
Operational Budget.......................................................................................................... 391-398
Pentecost Letter ............................................................................................................. 30-31
Records............................................................................................................................... 234
Roll Call............................................................................................................................. 5-17
Rules of Order .................................................................................................................. 28
Schedule............................................................................................................................ 28-30
Secretary, Appointment of Assistant ............................................................................. 69
Tellers, List of..................................................................................................................... 28
Worships Services at......................................................................................................... 2-4
General Synod Council
Appropriation for ............................................................................................................. 397
By-laws of General Synod, Amendments to .................................................................. 63
Church Order, Book of: Amendments to ......................................................................... 62-63
Communion Offering ....................................................................................................... 61
Congregational Services Committee
Report
Office of Social Witness ................................................................................................. 457-459
Worship, Office of .......................................................................................................... 228-230
Consistorial Report Form, Revision of .......................................................................... 60
Dates and Sites ................................................................................................................. 61-62
Dates and Site for 2000 ................................................................................................. 62
Graphs (See Illustrations)
Hispanic Department Model ................................................................. 83, 316
Hispanic Ministries, Council for (See Councils) .............................
Historical Directory, Plans for RCA ............................................... 231
Historical Series, New Volumes in ................................................. 231
Historical Services, Office of, Report of ....................................... 232-235
History, Commission on
  Appropriation for ........................................................................ 397
  Continuation of ........................................................................... 427
  Members of ................................................................................ 427*
  Report ..................................................................................... 231
  Review of ............................................................................... 425-429
  Revision of Duties of ............................................................... 427-429
Hofstra University, Greetings from President of ............................ 28
Homosexuality (See also United Church of Christ)
Homosexuality ........................................................................... 95-98, 109-110, 118-121, 122-123, 154
Hope College
  Board of Trustees Membership ................................................ 256-259
Hunger Education, Office of: Report ............................................. 163-164
Hunger, Working to End ............................................................... 446-447
Hymnal Supplement ..................................................................... 228

Illustration
  Bequests and Planned Gifts by Synods, 1998 ............................... 386
  Change in Membership by Classis .............................................. 55-56
  Church Restarts Chart ,1999-2000 ............................................ 310-311
  Gift Designations, 1999 .......................................................... 386
  Gifts Received, 1999 .............................................................. 385
  New Church Starts Chart, 1999-2000 ..................................... 308-309
  Number of Mission Personnel By Category, 1990-2000 .......... 162-163
  Participation in Church Resource Ministries List, 1996-1999 ... 311-315
  Partner in Mission Shares and Inflation .................................. 167
  RCA Membership and Worship Attendance Trends, 1989-1999 50
  RCA Membership Trend, 1900-1999 ..................................... 48
  RCA Membership Trends, 1965-1999 ................................... 49
  Salary Ranges ....................................................................... 67-68
Indebtedness (See Debt Reporting)
India, Church of South ................................................................. 157, 161
Individual Solicitation of Contributions (See Direct Mail Solicitation)
Indonesia ..................................................................................... 88, 456
Information Systems ................................................................... 74-75
Insurance Program ...................................................................... 378-379
Investment, Board of Pensions .................................................. 354
Investment Program, Reformed Church ..................................... 353-354
Investments .............................................................................. 353
Investments: Mission ............................................................... 355-356
IRS Group Tax Exemption .......................................................... 356

J
Judicial Business, Commission on
  Appropriation for .................................................................... 397
  Members of .............................................................................. 397*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Report (De Vries/Miedema Appeal)</strong></th>
<th>76-80</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Justification, Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of</strong></td>
<td>94-95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**K**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Koopman, LeRoy, Retirement of</th>
<th>471-472</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Korea</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Forces in</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North, Mission in</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presbyterian Church in</td>
<td>92-93, 157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summit Meeting in</td>
<td>457</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kruse, Daniel W., Dispensation for</td>
<td>337</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**L**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Layperson’s Addresses</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Development</td>
<td>40, 85, 271, 350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leys, Lucas, Dispensation for</td>
<td>337-338</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lutheran/Catholic Dialogue</td>
<td>93-95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**M**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meetings: Schedule of Regional Synod and General Synod</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Membership</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in RCA</td>
<td>48, 49, 50, 55-56, 308-309, 310-311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statistics, Study of (Ov)</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trends in RCA, 1900-1999</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board of Trustees Membership</td>
<td>334-335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Funding of (Ov)</td>
<td>346, 347, 349</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report</td>
<td>331-339</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ministers</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Addresses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commissioning of (Ov)</td>
<td>441-442</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Declaration for</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dual Membership of (Ov)</td>
<td>437-438</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Installation of, from Formula of Agreement Churches</td>
<td>417-421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation of (Ov)</td>
<td>439-440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profile Forms for</td>
<td>348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired, List of</td>
<td>345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status/Call of as Copastors</td>
<td>416-417</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ministry and Personnel Services, List of staff</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Ministry and Personnel Services, Office of: Report of</td>
<td>341-344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ministry, Associates in</strong></td>
<td>421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certification of</td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criteria for (Ov)</td>
<td>295-296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listing of</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ministry, Certificates of Fitness for (See also Candidates)</strong></td>
<td>414-415</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ministry (See specific types of ministry, e.g. Prison Ministry, Youth Ministry)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority/Racial Ethnic Councils (See Councils)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minutes and Journal of General Synod</td>
<td>28-32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission 2000</td>
<td>2-4, 70-71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission and Vision Statement, Implementation of</td>
<td>70-75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission Is One Model</td>
<td>391</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mission, Reciprocal Flow of ................................................................. 157-158
Mission Services, Office of, List of staff ............................................................... *
Mission Services, Office of, Report of ............................................................... 156
Missionaries
   Addresses ........................................................................................................... *
   Categories of .................................................................................................... 162
   Listing of ......................................................................................................... *
   Retirement of .................................................................................................. 159-161
Moral Standards for Holders of Church Office ....................................................... 139-141
Moravian Church in America ............................................................................... 104-105
Multiculturalism (See Racial and Ethnic Ministries and Race and Ethnicity,
Commission on)

N

National Association of Evangelicals ................................................................. 43-44, 104, 115-116, 122
National Council of Churches ........................................................................... 96
Native American Indian Ministries Council (See Councils) .........................
NCCC: RCA Members of Governing Board ........................................................... *
Necrology (For specific individuals consult the name index.)
   Necrology Report .......................................................................................... 235-241
New Brunswick Theological Seminary
   Board of Trustees Members ........................................................................... *
   Campus Ministry ............................................................................................. 324
   Financial Statements ....................................................................................... *
   Graduates, List of ............................................................................................ *
   Parish Ministry ............................................................................................... 324-325
   Prison Ministry .............................................................................................. 323-324
   Professors, Lectors, and Administrators, List of ...........................................
   Report ........................................................................................................... 323-327
New Business ..................................................................................................... 31-32, 457
New Church Development ................................................................................... 86
   Evaluation of Pastors for ............................................................................... 305
   Goals and Objectives for ............................................................................... 304-305
   Training of Pastors for .................................................................................. 306
New Churches, Reception of ............................................................................... 307
New Initiatives (See Financial Planning)
Niger ...................................................................................................................... 157
Nominations, Commission on
   Appropriation for .......................................................................................... 397
   Members of .................................................................................................... *
   Membership on ............................................................................................... *
   Report ........................................................................................................... 421
Northwestern College
   Board of Trustees Membership ...................................................................... *
   Report ........................................................................................................... 259-260

O

O’Hare Airport Ministry (See Appeals)
Obituaries (See Necrology)
Observers/Resource People at General Synod ..................................................... 20-21
Office (See specific office, e.g. Deacon, Elder, or Theology, Professor of)
Officers, Church, Lifestyle of (Ov) ..................................................................... 442-443
Officers, Election of .............................................................................................. 474
Officers of General Synod, List of ..................................................................................................... *
On the Way 2 ................................................................................................................................... 501-502
Operational Budget, General Synod ............................................................................................. 391-398
Orders of Worship
Ordination and Installation of Deacons and Elders .......................................................... 200-209
Ordination to the Office of Minister of Word and Sacrament ........................................ 185-192
Profession of Faith ...................................................................................................................... 175-184
Proposed Order for the Organization of a New Church ................................................. 209-227
Reception into the Classis and Installation of a Minister of Word and Sacrament ...................... 192-200
Ordination, Alternate Route for ............................................................................................... 332
Ordination, Process for (See also Candidates and Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency)
Ordination, Revocation of (Ov) ................................................................................................. 438-439
Organizational Audit ................................................................................................................... 71-72
Overtures
Admonishing the United Church of Christ (Southwest Michigan) ........................................ 119
Affirmation of Convictions (East Sioux) .............................................................................. 154-155
Amendment of “The Crucified One is Lord: Confessing the Uniqueness of Christ in a Pluralistic Society” (South Grand Rapids) .................................................... 149-154
Amendment to the Book of Church Order Regarding Church Officers (South Grand Rapids) .................. 442-443
Amendments to the Book of Church Order and in Relation to the Whole (Orange) .................. 441
Apology Regarding Formula of Agreement (Canadian Prairies, Ontario) ............................. 116-117
Capping General Synod Assessments (California) .................................................................. 400-401
Church Growth Goal (RSGreat Lakes) ..................................................................................... 320-321
Commissioning of Ministers of Word and Sacrament (Orange) ........................................... 441-442
Communication to UCC on Congregation Opposing Homosexual Ordination (RSMid-America) ................. 122-123
Criteria for Associates in Ministry (Orange) ......................................................................... 295-296
Deadlines for Responses to General Synod (South Grand Rapids) ....................................... 252
Dialogue with the United Church of Christ (Wisconsin) ....................................................... 119-121
Discontinue Assessment for the Church Herald (Cascades) .................................................. 250-251
Doctrine of Sovereign Grace (Central California) ..................................................................... 149
Dual Membership (Lake Erie) .................................................................................................. 437-438
Financial Assistance to Those Preparing for Ordination (Mid-Hudson) ................................. 347-348
Follow-Up Investigation into Board of Pensions Asset Management (RSMid-America) ............... 349
Follow-Up on Investment Options (RSNew York) .................................................................... 404-405
Follow-Up on Submit New Constitution and Rules of the Board of Pensions... .......................... 405-406
Funding for the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency (Red River) ..................... 349
Funding of the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency and the Education of Candidates (Dakota) ..................................................................................................................... 346
History of Pension Fund (Wisconsin) ....................................................................................... 401
Investigate Board of Pensions Asset Management (Rockland-Westchester) ....................... 401-402
Investment Options (Rockland-Westchester) ........................................................................... 402-403
Membership in the National Association of Evangelicals (Illiana) ......................................... 115-116
Membership in the National Association of Evangelicals (RSMid-America) ......................... 122
Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency Registration Fee (Columbia-Greene) ..................... 347
Multiple Changes in the Book of Church Order (Orange) ..................................................... 440-441
Partnership with Local Christian Congregations (California, Canadian Prairies, Central California, Central Iowa, East Sioux, Illiana, South Grand Rapids) .................................................................................................................. 114-115
Profile Forms ............................................................................................................................. 348
Rebuke of United Church of Christ (Florida) .......................................................................... 121
Reduce Assessment for the Church Herald (Central California) ........................................... 250
Relationships with Denominations Showing Strong Growth (Central California) ................................................ 110-111
Remove Church Herald Assessment from General Synod Budget (RSFar West) ........................................... 251
Requirements for Certificate of Fitness for Ministry .......................................................................................... 349
Revocation of Ordination (Mid-Hudson) ........................................................................................................ 438-439
Separation from the United Church of Christ (California, Canadian Prairies, Central California, Central Iowa, Illiana, South Grand Rapids, Rocky Mountains, Zeeland) ..................................... 111-114
Standards for Ministerial Preparation (New York) .............................................................................................. 439-440
Study of Membership Statistics (Central California) ...................................................................................... 249
Submit New Constitution and Rules of the Board of Pensions (Rockland-Westchester) .................................. 403-404
Supervision of Churches Using Preaching Elders (RSHeartland) ....................................................... 444-445
United Church of Christ to Repent (Ontario) .................................................................................................... 118

Pacific and Asian American Ministries (See Asian American Ministries, Council for Pacific and)
Parish Ministry .................................................................................................................................................. 324-325
Partners in Mission
Anglican Diocese of The Gambia .......................................................................................................................... 157
Evangelical Church of the Republic of Niger ................................................................................................... 157
Northeast Theological Seminary, Shenyang, China ............................................................................................ 157
Yambian University, Yanji City, China .................................................................................................................. 156
Partnership in Mission Shares .......................................................................................................................... 167-168
Pastors (See Ministers)
Pension Fund, History of (Ov) .......................................................................................................................... 401
Pension Fund, Investigate Asset Management of (Ov) ...................................................................................... 401-402, 404-405
Pensions, Board of
Directors .......................................................................................................................................................... *
Financial Statement .......................................................................................................................................... *
Increase Investment Options of (Ov) .................................................................................................................. 402-403, 405
Investments ....................................................................................................................................................... 354
New Constitution and Rules for (Ov) .................................................................................................................. 403-404, 405-406
Report .............................................................................................................................................................. 344-345, 357-379
Retired Clergy ................................................................................................................................................... 345
Staff, List of Officers and .................................................................................................................................. *
Pentecost Letter .................................................................................................................................................. 30-31
Personnel and Evaluation Committee .............................................................................................................. 66-68
Personnel, Changes in Missionary ..................................................................................................................... 168-171
Appointments ................................................................................................................................................... 168
Change of Assignment .................................................................................................................................... 169-170
Deaths .............................................................................................................................................................. 170-171
Resignations/Completions of Service .................................................................................................................. 169
Volunteer Service Assignments ....................................................................................................................... 170
Personnel (See Denominational Staff; Ministry and Personnel Services; Personnel and Evaluation Committee; Missionaries)
Perspectives, Report on ........................................................................................................................................ 243
Pluralism and the Uniqueness of Christ .............................................................................................................. 124-139, 149-154
Policy, Planning, and Administration Services (See General Synod Council: Policy Planning and Administration Services)
President, Election of .......................................................... 474
President, Report of ................................................................. 33-41, 171, 230, 296-297
Presidents, List of ........................................................................* 246-247
Print Production .............................................................................* 246-247
Prison Ministry .................................................................................. 323-324
Productions, RCA ............................................................................. 247-248
Productions, RCA, Awards for .......................................................... 247
Professors, Lectors, and Administrators in the Seminaries, List of .................* 247
Professors of Theology, General Synod .........................................................* 247
Publications (See Print Production; Historical Series)

Race and Ethnicity, Commission on
Appropriation for .................................................................................. 397
Report ........................................................................................................ 460-461
Racial and Ethnic Ministries (See also Councils) ........................................... 72-73
Racism ......................................................................................................... 89, 100
Racism, Decade Freed from ................................................................. 459, 460-461
Racism (See also Race and Ethnicity, Commission on)
RCA Fund .................................................................................................. 353
Records Received in Archives .................................................................. 234
Reference, Committee of: Report ................................................................ 398-400, 468-473
Reformed Church Studies, Center for ......................................................... 326-327
Reformed Church Women's Ministries
Members of .................................................................................................* 261-263
Report ........................................................................................................ 262
2001 Trienniel Committee ......................................................................... 262
Ecumenical Partnerships .......................................................................... 262
Finances ...................................................................................................... 262
Footsteps: Hands-On Mission Trips .......................................................... 262
God's Spirit upon Us: Bible Study ............................................................. 262
New RCWM Consultant ........................................................................... 262
Regional Conferences ................................................................................ 262
Reformed Church World Service ............................................................... 163-164
Reformed Ecumenical Council ................................................................... 103
Regional Synods
Meetings ........................................................................................................* 59
Minutes ......................................................................................................... 429-437
Officers, List of ..........................................................................................* 338-339
Responsibilities and Purposes of, and Classes, Task Force on ....................... 468-473
Staff, List of .....................................................................................................* 399
Rensink, Marilyn, Dispensation for ............................................................ 159-161, 345
Retirements ................................................................................................. 303-304
Revitalization, Goals and Objectives for ...................................................... 303-304
Revitalization Summit Team ........................................................................ 303-304
Roll Call of General Synod ........................................................................ 5-17
Rules of Order of General Synod ............................................................... 28
Salary Ranges................................................................................................................. 67-68
Schrock, Roger.............................................................................................................. 157
Secretary, Appointment of RCA Assistant................................................................. 69
Seminaries (See New Brunswick Theological Seminary; Western Theological Seminary; See also Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency)
Seminary Graduates, RCA Theological (1999)......................................................... *
Senior Pastors Program........................................................................................... 378
Sexuality, Human.................................................................................................... 97, 154
Sing! A New Creation (Hymnal Supplement)......................................................... 228
Smith, Albert A., Fellowship................................................................................. 327
Social Witness, Office of, Report of ................................................................. 457-459
South Africa/RCA Partnership Coordinating Team: Appropriation for.................. 397
South India (See India, Church of South)
Southern Africa, United Reformed Church of...................................................... 98-103
Special Days, Calendar of..................................................................................... *
Special Gifts............................................................................................................ 387-388
Spouses, Addresses for Surviving....................................................................... *
Staff, List of Denominational............................................................................... *
Stated Clerks, Meeting of: Appropriation for.......................................................... 397
Stated Clerks, Meeting of Classis and Regional Synod............................................. 68
Statistical Report of RCA......................................................................................... 68
Stewardship Education....................................................................................... 380-382
Stewardship Education Team................................................................................. 381
Structure of the RCA................................................................................................
Structure of the RCA (See also Organizational Audit)

T

Tables (See Illustrations)
Tables, Statistical .................................................................................................. *
Task Force on Consistories, Report of the............................................................. 274-295
Task Force on Responsibilities and Purposes of Regional Synods and Classes,
Report of the............................................................................................................. 429-437
Tellers, List of........................................................................................................... 28
Theological Education
Assessment for....................................................................................................... 399
Financial Support for............................................................................................ 148
(See also New Brunswick Theological Seminary; Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency; Western Theological Seminary)
Theology, Commission on
Appropriation for.................................................................................................... 397
Members of........................................................................................................... *
Report ..................................................................................................................... 124-148
Constitutional Inquiry Questions ........................................................................... 145-148
Financial Support for Theological Education....................................................... 148
Moral Standards for Holders of Church Office..................................................... 139-145
“The Crucified One is Lord”: Confessing the Uniqueness of Christ in a Pluralist Society . 124-139
Work in Progress .................................................................................................. 148
Theology, Declaration for General Synod Professors of........................................ 144-145
Theology, Members of Advisory Committee on................................................... 26
Theology, Professors of......................................................................................... 35-36
Theology, Professors of, Care of......................................................................... 409-411
Theology, Professors of, Procedure for Bringing a Charge Against...................... 412-414

xix
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theology, Reports on</th>
<th>124-155</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TRAVARCA</td>
<td>244-245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treasurer, Appointment of RCA</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unitarian Clergy and Congregations, Toleration of (Ov)</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Church of Christ</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admonishing of (Ov)</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Called to Repent (Ov)</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication to Opposing Homosexual Ordination (Ov)</td>
<td>122-123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue With (Ov)</td>
<td>119-121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebut of (Ov)</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relations with</td>
<td>109-110, 111-114, 154-155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unity, Christian (See Christian Unity)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Ministries</td>
<td>273, 306, 388-389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Ministry Fund Drive</td>
<td>165-166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Ministry, Office of: Report</td>
<td>164-166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Van Bunschooten Bequest</td>
<td>384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Van Bunschooten Society</td>
<td>383</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice President</td>
<td>474</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Videos (See Productions, RCA)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocations, Church, Members of Advisory Committee on</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocations, Church, Reports on</td>
<td>323-350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers</td>
<td>161-162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website, RCA</td>
<td>248-249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcoming New Christians</td>
<td>229-230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Theological Seminary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board of Trustees Memberships</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Statements</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduates, List of</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professors, Lectors, and Administrators, List of</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report</td>
<td>328-331</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Planning</td>
<td>328-329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widows/Widowers of RCA Ministers, List of</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witness, Social, Office of (See Social Witness, Office of)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women, Commission for (See also Reformed Church Women’s Ministries)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriation for</td>
<td>397</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members of</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report</td>
<td>339-341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women, Office for</td>
<td>262-262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Ministries, Reformed Church (See Reformed Church Women’s Ministries)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words of Hope: Report</td>
<td>171-173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Alliance of Reformed Churches</td>
<td>93-95, 96, 97-98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Alliance of Reformed Churches: RCA Delegates to</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Alliance of Reformed Churches: RCA Members on</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Council of Churches</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Mission, Members of Advisory Committee on</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Mission, Reports on</td>
<td>156-173</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
World Service, Reformed Church ............................................................... 163-164
Worship (See Christian Worship)
Worship, Children and ........................................................................... 268-269
Worship, Christian (See Christian Worship)
Worship, Office of
  Report ...................................................................................................... 228-230
  Hymnal Supplement .............................................................................. 228-229
  Welcoming New Christians ................................................................. 229-230
  Worship Resources and Education .................................................. 228
Worship, Orders of (See Orders of Worship)
Worship Resources and Education ......................................................... 228

Y

Youth Ministry .......................................................................................... 84-85, 269-270
ACTS AND PROCEEDINGS

THE GENERAL SYNOD OF THE REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA CONVENED IN ITS ONE
HUNDERD NINETY-FOURTH REGULAR SESSION ON THE CAMPUS OF HOFSTRA UNIVER-
SITY IN HEMPSTEAD, LONG ISLAND, NEW YORK, ON FRIDAY, THE NINTH DAY OF JUNE,
A.D. TWO THOUSAND, AT 8:15 A.M., EASTERN DAYLIGHT TIME.

THE SPIRIT, ENGAGING THE WORLD.”

I. FORMATION OF THE SYNOD

OPENING OF SYNOD

The General Synod opened on Friday morning, June 9, 2000, with a worship service held
in the Hofstra Arena. Participants in the service were the Rev. Dr. Gregg Mast, president
of General Synod; elder Carol Mutch, vice president of General Synod; the Rev. Wesley
Granberg-Michaelson, general secretary of the Reformed Church in America; past
presidents of the General Synod; the Rev. Dr. Carol Bechtel, associate professor of Old
Testament at Western Theological Seminary, preaching; Paul Thé, pastor of celebration
arts at Palm Canyon Community Church in Moreno Valley, California, worship leader;
and John Redmayne, vocalist.

Participants in other worship services included the drama, worship, and dance teams; Jeff
and Karen Barker, presenting dramas; Paul Thé, worship leader; Felicia Ruperto, vocalist;
special music by the combined Taiwanese choirs; and Darnisha Taylor, vocalist.

The Rev. Willem Kroon, Ontario Classis, served as General Synod chaplain.
WORSHIP

Friday Morning
Opening Worship Service—The Rev. Dr. Gregg Mast
Elder Carol Mutch
The Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson
The Rev. Dr. Carol Bechtel
Paul Thé
John Redmayne
Past presidents of the General Synod:
  Warren Burgess
  James Cook
  Harry DeBruyn
  Donald De Young
  Marion de Velder
  John E. Hiemstra
  Harvey Hoekstra
  Leonard Kalkwarf
  Frederick Kruithof
  Kenneth Leestma
  Beth Marcus
  Edwin Mulder
  James Neevel
  Sylvio Scorza
  Charles Van Engen
  Bert Van Soest
  Anthony Vis
  Wilbur Washington

Mission Cameo—The Rev. Rowland Van Es, Jr.
Closing Prayer—The Rev. Kathy Jo Blaske

Friday Afternoon
Opening Prayer—The Rev. Bert Van Soest
Mission Cameo—Arlene Vander Loon
Closing Prayer—The Rev. Dr. Thomas Boogaart

MISSION 2000

Friday Evening
Preaching—The Rev. Dr. James A. Forbes, senior minister at Riverside Church, New York City

Sunday Morning
General Synod participants worshiped in the following RCA churches within the bounds of the Regional Synod of New York:

Classis of Brooklyn
  Canarsie Community Reformed Church
  Reformed Protestant Dutch Church of the Town of Flatbush
  Grace Reformed Church
  New Brooklyn Reformed Church
  New Lots Community Church
  New Utrecht Reformed Church
  Old First Reformed Church
  Iglesia del Redentor
Classis of Nassau-Suffolk
  Brookville Reformed Church
  Levittown Community Church
  Reformed Church of Locust Valley
  Community Reformed Church at Manhasset
  Manorville Community Church
  Massapequa Reformed Church
  New Church of Greater New York, Roslyn Heights
  New Hope Community Church, New Hyde Park
  New Life Community Church, Sayville
  St. Paul's Reformed Church of Babylon
  Formosan Reformed Church on Long Island, Williston Park

Classis of New York
  Bethany Memorial Reformed Church
  Brighton Heights Reformed Church
  Dewitt Reformed Church
  Elmendorf Reformed Church
  Fordham Manor Reformed Church
  Fort Washington Collegiate Church
  Grace Christian Church
  Japanese-American United Church
  Marble Collegiate Church
  Middle Collegiate Church
  Reformed Church on Staten Island
  Reformed Church of Prince Bay
  Union Church of Highbridge
  West End Collegiate Church

Classis of Queens
  Bowne Street Community Church, Flushing
  Cambria Heights Community Church
  Church on the Hill, Flushing
  The Community Church, Douglaston
  First Reformed Church of Astoria
  Iglesia de Cristo La Roca, Queens Village
  First Reformed Church, Jamaica
  Nakwon Reformed Church, Sunnyside
  Reformed Church of Newtown, Elmhurst
  Shin Kwang Church of New York, Bayside
  Siloam Church, Flushing
  Sunnyside Reformed Church, Long Island City
  Taiwanese American Reformed Church, Flushing
  Trinity Reformed Church, Ridgewood
  Winfield Reformed Church, Woodside

Classis of Rockland-Westchester
  Bronxville Reformed Church
  Crescent Place Reformed Church, Yonkers
  First Reformed Church, Hastings-On-Hudson

Sunday Evening
  Preaching—The Rev. Dr. Arthur Caliandro, senior minister at Marble Collegiate Church, New York City.

Monday Morning
Preaching—The Rev. Dr. Robert H. Schuller, senior minister at Crystal Cathedral, Garden Grove, California

Monday Mission 2000 Closing Worship
Preaching—The Rev. Dr. Emilio Castro, former general secretary of the World Council of Churches

WORSHIP

Monday Afternoon
Opening Prayer—The Rev. Dr. Gregg Mast
Mission Cameo—The Rev. Dr. Antonio Barro
Closing Prayer—The Rev. George Grevenstuk

Tuesday Morning
Preaching—The Rev. Dr. Emilio Castro

Tuesday Afternoon
Opening Prayer—Elder Shirley Byers
Closing Prayer—The Rev. Dean Wolbrink

Tuesday Evening
Opening Prayer—Elder Rosalie Attocknie
Mission Cameo—Bishop Solomon Tilewa Johnson
Closing Prayer—The Rev. Arthur Van Slageren

Wednesday Morning
Preaching—The Rev. Dr. Emilio Castro
Mission Cameo—Deborah Braaksma
Closing Prayer—Elder Doris Neese

Wednesday Afternoon
Opening Prayer—The Rev. Judith Marvel
Mission Cameo—The Rev. Hak-Kwon Lee
Closing Prayer—The Rev. C.W. Kim

Wednesday Evening
Opening Prayer—Elder Iris Shaffer
Synod of New York Celebration

Thursday Morning
Morning Prayers—The Rev. Pamela Ennis
Preaching—The Rev. Dr. Emilio Castro
Mission Cameo—The Rev. Allen Ramirez
Closing Communion Service

An installation service for the new officers of General Synod and a Communion service were held on Thursday morning, June 15. Participants in the service included the Rev. Dennis TeBeest, moderator of the Commission on Christian Worship; the Rev. Dr. Gregg Mast, president of General Synod; elder Carol Mutch, president-elect of the General Synod; the Rev. Steven Brooks, vice president-elect of the General Synod; and the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, general secretary of the Reformed Church in America.
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CHRISTIAN ACTION

Moderator: Norman Chang (Queens)
Vice Moderator: Ted Dykstra (Canadian Prairies)

Ministers:

Thomas Archer (North Grand Rapids)  Louis LaFazia (Delaware-Raritan)
Pamela Ennis (Albany)  Dale Matthews (South Grand Rapids)
Carl Hiemstra (Albany)  Wai Tan (Nassau-Suffolk)
Wayne Hoglin (California)  Steve Young (Passaic Valley)

Elders:

Rosalie Attocknie (Red River)  Michael Morris (California)
William Barth (New Brunswick)  Keith Nollen (Central Iowa)
Elly Butler (Zeeland)  James Russell (Southwest Michigan)
Shirley Byers (Montgomery)  Sara Thompson (Delaware-Raritan)
Donald Drayton (Muskegon)  Nicholas Van Wingerden (Lake Erie)
John Humphreys (North Grand Rapids)  Paul Vande Berg (East Sioux)
Joan Lesko (Rockland-Westchester)  Adrian Vander Sluis (Holland)

Corresponding:

Fred D. Mueller (Comm. on Christian Action)  Oliver Patterson (Comm. on Race and Ethnicity)

EDUCATION AND DISCIPLESHIP

Moderator: Marjorie Giles (Central Iowa)
Vice Moderator: Sharon Atkins (Brooklyn)

Ministers:

Christine Battjes (Montgomery)  Donald Ringnalda (Minnesota)
William Boersma (Holland)  Allen Schut (Dakota)
Richard Heusinkveld (South Grand Rapids)  Larry Ten Haken (Wisconsin)
Lucille Kramer (Montgomery)  Rowland Van Es (Zeeland)
Walter Opmeer (Canadian Prairies)  Timothy Van Heest (Chicago)
Bruce Osbeck (South Grand Rapids)  Arthur Van Slageren (Synod of Canada)
Kenneth Ramsay (Ontario)

Elders:

Phyllis Allen (Brooklyn)  Barbara Hughes (Illiana)
Edward Burdick (Wisconsin)  Don Kuiper (Minnesota)
Kenneth Coddington (Orange)  Joann McManis (Central California)
Lynne Gilgore (Schenectady)  Alyce Prins (Holland)
Christopher Haines (British Columbia)  Rex Schultz (Rocky Mountains)
Ann Harvey (South Grand Rapids)  Philip Sheets (California)

Corresponding:

Kathryn Brown (RCWM)  Gloria Nollen (RSH)
James Bultman (Hope College)  David Roe (Central College)
Margot Kramer (RCWM)  Raymond Weiss (Northwestern College)
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CHRISTIAN HERITAGE AND COMMUNICATIONS

Moderator: Kathryn Davelaar (Holland)
Vice Moderator: Lula M. Thomas (RSNY)

Ministers:

Jay Braband (Central Iowa)
William Crowder (Southwest Michigan)
Carl Czirr (Lake Erie)
Angelo Forleo (Orange)
Ronnie Helmink (Central Plains)
Donald Mac Donald (Illiana)
Warren Seibert (Mid-Hudson)
Arnold Van Beek (Muskegon)

Elders:

Barry Cummings (Greater Palisades)
Dwight D. Hougheem (Illinois)
Thomas Moenter (Rochester)
Coy Moody (Central California)
Waldo Roa (New Brunswick)
Darrell Roorda (Dakota)
Robert Slager (Southwest Michigan)
Paul Szasz (Columbia-Greene)
Jacob Van Maanen (Ontario)
Barbara Weber (Orange)
Larry Whitcomb (Zeeland)
Donald Wynalda (South Grand Rapids)

Corresponding:

Mark Kraai (Church Herald)
Joleen Oldenburger (RSFW)
Jennifer M. Reece (Comm. on History)

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CHRISTIAN UNITY

Moderator: Charles Morris (New York)
Vice Moderator: James Schoon (Central California)

Ministers:

Robert Bouwer (Illiana)
R. Leslie Boyd (Ontario)
John Coakley (New Brunswick Seminary)
Ronald Franklyn (Passaic Valley)
Renée House (New York)
Paul Janssen (Greater Palisades)
Kenley Korver (California)
Ronald Opmeer (Canadian Prairies)
David Sterk (East Sioux)
Stephen Struikmans (California)
Bert Van Soest (Orange)
Frederick Vander Meer (Greater Palisades)
Dean Wolbrink (Florida)

Elders:

Joan Baehm (Schenectady)
George Berkompas (Cascades)
Jane Fuller (Schoharie)
Ronald Hesche (Zeeland)
Gerald Juzwiak (Chicago)
Joan Rannie (New York)
Aart Van Leeuwen (Canadian Prairies)
Roger Vander Schaaf (Minnesota)
Robert Viney (Rochester)

Corresponding:

Richard Brihn (Comm. on Christian Unity)
Joyce Fieldhouse (RSM-AM)
Vivian Rippentrop (RSH)
Allison Van Slageren
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Moderator: Jan Hoffman (Schenectady)
Vice Moderator: D. Marc de Waard (Cascades)

Ministers:

David Alexander (California)  Daniel Kolenbrander (Illinois)
Eric Blahut (Columbia-Greene)  Daniel Ramaker (Minnesota)
Felix Busby (Brooklyn)  Thomas Smith (Minnesota)
Kent Fry (North Grand Rapids)  James Vander Roest (Southwest Michigan)
Daniel Heemstra (Zeeland)  Kevin Ver Hoeven (Pleasant Prairie)
David Jones (Passaic Valley)  Lyle Zumdahl (Illiana)

Elders:

Roger Bloemers (Wisconsin)  Doris Neese (Albany)
Stanley Brink (Rocky Mountains)  Marilyn Padgett (South Grand Rapids)
Jean Cook (Holland)  Sandra Swan (North Grand Rapids)
June Denny (Southwest)  Howard Van Oort (West Sioux)
Sherrie Hoglin (California)  Wesley Wiggers (Zeeland)
Everon Kanengieter (West Sioux)

Corresponding:

Dorothy Kemp (RSM-AM)  Dennis TeBeest (Comm. on
Donna Sheppard (RSM-AT)  Christian  Worship)

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CHURCH ORDER

Moderator: Paul Walther (New Brunswick)
Vice Moderator: Grace Johnson (Delaware-Raritan)

Ministers:

Thomas A. Boogaart (Western Seminary)  Phillip Sneller (Illinois)
John Bowen (Columbia-Greene)  Brian Steenhoek (West Sioux)
John Branford (Rockland-Westchester)  Charles Stickley (Mid-Hudson)
Steven Brooks (Rocky Mountains)  Donald Veltman (Lake Erie)
Darrell Franken (Holland)  Bruce Wilterdink (Illiana)
Allan Janssen (Albany)

Elders:

Robert George (Delaware-Raritan)  Dorothy Van Dillen (Passaic Valley)
Stuart Kemp (Florida)  Willis Vander Wal (Dakota)
Howard Mikkelsen (Central Iowa)  Richard Wolters (Holland)
Jack Orquist (Muskegon)
Robert Rager (Greater Palisades)

Allan Janssen (Comm. on Church Order)

Corresponding:

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CHURCH VOCATIONS
ADVISORY COMMITTEES

Moderator: Philip Schuiling (Rocky Mountains)
Vice Moderator: Loretta Rolle (Lake Erie)

Ministers:

Brian Akker (West Sioux)
James De Hoog (Red River)
James S. Harrison (Southwest Michigan)
Roger Huitink (Illinois)
James L. Johnson (Rockland-Westchester)
Walter Jones (Pleasant Prairie)
Cornelis Koolhaas (British Columbia)

Calvin Rynbrandt (Synod of Mid-America)
Harry Tysen (Central Plains)
Harlan Van Oort (East Sioux)
Kent Vant Hul (Wisconsin)

Elders:

Henry Bleeker (Zeeland)
James Cooper (Red River)

Johanna Koning (South Grand Rapids)
Zolton Koye (New Brunswick)

Henry Lauer (Columbia-Greene)

Emily Robison (Mid-Hudson)
Robert Wisniewski (Albany)

Cecil Wynalda (Illiana)

Corresponding:

Beverly Bell Winslow (NBTS)
Mary E. Bos (Comm. for Women)
Thomas Goodhart (WTS)
Ronald Hartgerink (WTS)

Norman Kansfield (NBTS)
Stephanie Kaper-Dale (MFCA)

Janelle Koolhaas (WTS)
Cornelis Kors (MFCA)

Doris Brumels (RSGL)

EVANGELISM AND CHURCH DEVELOPMENT

Moderator: Allen Pruis (Wisconsin)
Vice Moderator: Russell Siders (Central California)

Ministers:

Carl Boersma (West Sioux)
Keith Dragt (South Grand Rapids)
Taylor Holbrook (Mid-Hudson)
Diane Konynenbelt (South Grand Rapids)
Maurice Millican (Dakota)

John Ornee (Zeeland)
James Schoon (Central California)
Rick Van Haitsma (Northern Michigan)
Timothy Vander Baan (California)

Elders:

Charles Atkinson (Central Plains)
Shirley Buchanan (Schoharie)
Fred Chen (Queens)

Robert Derrick (British Columbia)
Pharis Fedde (California)
Bradford Gourdie (Florida)

Marvin Hoogeveen (West Sioux)
Sonja Howe (Mid-Hudson)

John Huff (Illiana)
Ruth Newhouse (South Grand Rapids)

Marvin Roemmich (Central Iowa)
Edward Stielstra (Holland)

Donald Tegeler (Illinois)
Marna Vander Hart (Southwest Michigan)

Corresponding:

Doris Brumels (RSGL)
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Moderator: Peter Nordstrom (Florida)
Vice Moderator: Anthony Vis (Central Iowa)

Ministers:

Peter Berry (New Brunswick)  Charles Hesselink (Schoharie)
Thomas Bos (North Grand Rapids)  Lary Jackson (Muskegon)
George Grevenstuk (Zeeland)  James Lemmenes (Central Iowa)
John Hiemstra (Synod of the Mid-Atlantics)  Robert Wallinga (West Sioux)

Elders:

Robert DeGroot (North Grand Rapids)  Craig Proctor (California)
James Donkersloot (Synod of the Great Lakes)  David Raak (East Sioux)
Ruby Johnson (Queens)  Dale Rusch (Wisconsin)
Frank Krueger (Passaic Valley)  Iris Shaffer (Pleasant Prairie)
Corine Overkamp (Passaic Valley)  John Trojahn (Southwest)
Frank Pinckney (Mid-Hudson)  Bert Van Ittersum (Ontario)

Corresponding:

Donald J. De Vries (Comm. on Judicial Business)  Cynthia Van Lunen (RSM-AT)
                                      Robert White (Board of Pensions)

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THEOLOGY

Moderator: Keith Krebs (Southwest)
Vice Moderator: Kathy Jo Blaske (Schenectady)

Ministers:

James Brownson (Western Seminary)  John Opmeer (British Columbia)
Thomas Dekker (Wisconsin)  Karen Patterson (Schoharie)
Ronald Geschwendt (Muskegon)  Thomas Stewart (Red River)
David Hensley (Central Iowa)  Paul Van Elk (Delaware-Raritan)
David Hill (Delaware-Raritan)  David Waanders (New Brunswick Seminary)
Donald Lindskoog (East Sioux)  Keith Lohman (Southwest Michigan)
John Nyitray (Zeeland)  Thomas Welscott (Northern Michigan)
John Oldenburger (Synod of the Far West)  Harold Willemstyn (Rochester)

Elders:

Annabelle Forester (Greater Palisades)  Norman Perkins (Northern Michigan)
Harry Koops (South Grand Rapids)  Sylvia Simpfendorfer-Ishmael (New York)
Kenneth Martin (Nassau-Suffolk)  Jane Van Dyke (Chicago)
                                      Melvin Vander Meer (Wisconsin)

Corresponding:

Susan Becksvoort (RSGL)
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON WORLD MISSION

Moderator: Calvin Spann (Brooklyn)
Vice Moderator: Bruce Brumels (Northern Michigan)

Ministers:

James Baar, Jr. (Holland)  Douglas Scholten (California)
Judith Broeker (Greater Palisades)  John Smith (Nassau-Suffolk)
Chang Whan Kim (Queens)  Steven Stam (Holland)
Judith Marvel (Southwest)  Mark Vander Meer (New Brunswick)
Vernon McNear (Cascades)  Ronald VerWys (Zeeland)
Harold Rust (Chicago)  Donald A. White (Rochester)

Elders:

Elfrieda Bridges (Muskegon)  Donald Nielsen (East Sioux)
Donald Broek (Synod of the Heartland)  Holly Schut (Dakota)
Daniel Bussema (Southwest Michigan)  James Siebrands (Pleasant Prairie)
James Corzatt (Illinois)  Alfonso Surrett (Illiana)
Dorothy Doxey (Nassau-Suffolk)  Alvin Van Marel (West Sioux)
John Lautenbach (Cascades)  Robert Wingate (Rockland-Westchester)
Kenneth Mallory (Central Plains)
MINUTES AND JOURNAL

The Acts and Proceedings of the 194th regular session of the General Synod were read by title.

The General Synod authorized its officers to approve the journal of actions.

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, Stephen Norden, and Arthur Vander Meulen were appointed as tellers. The following seminarians were also appointed as tellers:

- Patricia Allen
- Jim Berkebile
- Joyce A. Carroll
- Sarah Crance
- Thomas Goodhart
- Eric Johnson
- Seth Kaper-Dale
- Stephanie Kaper-Dale
- Abraham Mulder
- David Parrish
- Marilyn Rensink
- David Taylor
- Peter TeWinkle
- Julie Vander Veen
- Edward VanKampen
- Vishal Varghese
- Don Waterhouse
- Rinaldo Wolf
- David Wygmans
- Nancy Zeller

SCHEDULE

The General Synod approved a schedule based on the agenda of General Synod prescribed in the *Special Rules of Order* (*BCO 1999*, Chapter 3, Part II, Article 1).

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 Orientation—Thursday evening**

The 2000 General Synod provided an orientation that covered a review of the purpose, rules of order, and presentation of business at the General Synod meeting. The leadership participants were Jane Richardson, Carol Mutch, the Rev. Dr. Gregg Mast, and Russell Paarlberg.

**Welcome—Friday morning**

Dr. James M. Shuart, president of Hofstra University, the Rev. Jon Norton, executive minister of the Regional Synod of New York, and Lula Thomas, president of the Regional Synod of New York, welcomed delegates, guests, and staff.

**Ecumenical Representatives and Mission Partners Luncheon—Friday noon**

Ecumenical representatives, mission partners, those preaching at General Synod and Mission 2000, and the officers of General Synod met to honor past General Synod presidents and their spouses.

**Mission 2000: Discerning the Spirit, Engaging the World**
General Synod recessed at 4:30 p.m. on Friday, June 9, in order to convene the Mission 2000 convocation. The community of faith gathered to discern what God’s Spirit was saying to the Reformed Church in America at this time in history. A “Pentecost Letter” was developed for distribution to the church at large. Participants were challenged to set the future course of mission and ministry for the Reformed Church in America, and to return home to lead their churches to recommit to mission that is locally engaged and globally connected.

**Ecumenical Luncheon—Monday noon**

An ecumenical luncheon was held on Monday noon in honor of the ecumenical delegates to General Synod, ecumenical representatives to Mission 2000, and RCA ecumenical mission partners. All brought greetings from their churches. The Rev. Dr. Robert H. Schuller also attended.

**Introduction of Ecumenical Guests and Mission Partners—Monday afternoon**

The Rev. Douglas Fromm, RCA associate for ecumenical relations, and the Rev. Bruce Menning, director of the General Synod Council’s Mission Services unit, introduced the ecumenical guests and mission partners:

**Ecumenical Guests**
- Gabriel Adde, Archdiocese of the Syrian Orthodox Church for the Eastern United States
- John A. Algera, Christian Reformed Church in North America
- Andrea DeGroot-Nesdahl, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
- Betty Gamble, United Methodist Church
- Margaret Larom, Episcopal Church
- Eugene McKelvey, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
- Florence McKelvey, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
- John Norwood, International Council of Community Churches
- Brenda Stiers, United Church of Christ
- T.M. Thomas, Mar Thoma Church

**Mission Partners**
- Antonio Barro, Brazil
- Craig Bourne, The Way Out Ministries, Hawaiian Gardens, California
- Wincap Cassy, Honduras
- Francisco Magana Castellanos, Mexico
- Elias Dantas, Toronto
- Govada S. Dyvasirvadam, India
- Sung Hyun Hong, Korea
- Hidefumi Kitani, United Church of Christ in Japan
- Anne Marie Kool, Hungary
- William J.K. Lo, Taiwan
- Abner Lopez, Mexico
- Gaspar Hernandez Lopez, Mexico
- Andras Lovas, Hungary
- Daniel Maluleke, South Africa
- Marcus Maphoto, South Africa
- Jack Midence, Honduras
- Hampton Morgan, Jr., Board of World Mission for the Moravian Church
- Sam Pick, South Africa
- A.A. Sasu, Malawi
- Eveline Steele, Cook College and Theological School, Tempe, Arizona
- Carl Swart, South Africa
II. AGENDA OF GENERAL SYNOD

DISPOSITION OF COMMUNICATIONS

The general secretary noted that all communications received by the Office of the General Synod were referred to appropriate committees. The general secretary reported that General Synod had received a “Pentecost Letter” from the representatives of the congregations of the Reformed Church in America and the ecumenical and mission partners of the RCA who had just concluded the convocation, Mission 2000: Discerning the Spirit, Engaging the World.

The Pentecost Letter

We, your sisters and brothers, called together on the weekend of Pentecost to discern the Spirit and engage the world, have on this Lord’s Day, June 11, 2000, heard the voice of the Spirit—like a trumpet—saying, “Write a letter of what you have seen and heard. And send it to every church, name by name.”

This is our testimony. We walked among many congregations in diverse cultures. We heard their witnesses in our minds and our hearts. They were like lampstands showing forth the love and grace of God. We saw the presence of Christ moving about these lampstands—at times easily recognized, but at other times a shadowy glimpse or signal. And we asked the Spirit to give us a discerning eye to see and name that Presence and envision a new future. Now we are compelled to write what we have seen to the angels who care for the life and the health of each congregation.

To the angel of the church called “Reformed” in North America:

You are heirs of the kingdom with a rich heritage; a church reformed and being reformed according to the Word of God. You are known for your commitment to the truth of God’s Word and the centrality of Scripture for your life in Christ. You have a history of grateful and responsible response to God’s call to mission, reaching out in God’s love for you in Jesus Christ to a diverse people. As you live in love you live in God, for God is love. You conduct your life together with decency and order. Your faith has been expressed in action, in concern for all people and for the whole person. Recognizing that the kingdom of God is greater than the Reformed Church in America, you have joined with partners in ministry around the world.

The wind of the Spirit blows in your midst. God is with you now. Your sails are filled as you give your consent to God’s presence and action in you. The Spirit is at work in new ways among you—moving you in mission. This movement of the Spirit is bringing to you the joy of being the full, working body of Christ.

As we rejoiced with the Spirit in our midst, we also clearly heard the voice of the Spirit challenging us to meet Christ in his passion. To us the Spirit often said: Where is the fire of your love for Christ? I see you making idols out of your comfort, your safety, your rules, your busy work in and out of your churches. I call to you outside your window, but you do not hear me. I call as the single parent and as the homeless child, as generations who cry out to you for a living faith. I call to you as your brother who speaks a different language and as your sister who looks different from you, or as the one who walks an unfamiliar path, and you do not listen to me.
I knock at your door looking for a welcoming home, but your door is too often closed. To us the Spirit said, I invite you to repent, and so this we did: for not making a bold witness for Christ; for failing to meet the needs of people in a purposeful way; for not expressing our unity around the Word of God.

Today I call you, the Reformed Church in America:

- To fall on your knees in prayer, as a church made up of “houses of prayer.”
- To discern God’s yearnings for new ministries in the new millennium.
- To venture into new frontiers of servanthood, leading to worldwide ministry in cities, suburbs, and the countryside.
- To be a people who can lead others into a saving relationship with Christ.
- To identify spiritual gifts and passions so that all persons can name their places in ministry.
- To partner with other churches and denominations in ministry.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, this Pentecost weekend we threw open the windows of our minds and hearts. We felt the same joy and excitement that the people of dozens of neighborhoods and congregations feel in their streets, programs, and worship. And we heard the Spirit speak this promise to us and to you: if you are faithful, I promise to bless you. Your acts of faithfulness will be multiplied. What you ask in Christ’s name will be given to you. The fruit you bear will nourish others even as you, yourselves, are fed and healed.

We claim this promise with you: that in recognizing the face of Christ in those around us, we will feel the Spirit of God filling us. In walking with Christ, we will discover the abundant life of God’s kingdom.

Let those who have ears to hear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

PRESENTATION AND REFERRAL OF NEW BUSINESS

The following new business was presented by a delegate, registered for consideration by General Synod, and referred to the Committee of Reference:

1. To instruct the General Synod Council to create a separate and autonomous office for addressing the concerns for mission in North Korea.

   The following reason was offered:

   The opportunity for mission in North Korea calls for an autonomous office.

2. In light of the upcoming summit between North and South Korea next week, to request the General Synod through the Office of the General Secretary to express its strong concern to the president and Congress of the United States that it discontinue military support for forces in the Korean peninsula.

   The following reasons were offered:

   a. The climate on the Korean peninsula has become one of seeking peace, and the church should support this changed climate as a matter of conscience.

   b. For fifty-five years the United States has had to be the strong supporter of peace in Korea through military means. This is no longer the way to bring peace because it will continue to divide the Korean people who see each other as sisters and brothers.

   Upon recommendation of the Committee of Reference, item number one was not accepted as new business because this item could have been presented through the church’s assemblies,
agencies, or commissions.

Upon recommendation of the Committee of Reference, item number two was accepted as new business and was referred to the Advisory Committee on Christian Action (see p. 457).
REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT

The Rev. Dr. Gregg Mast

I imagine a solitary candle. The faces of the fearful disciples are barely visible, and it feels as if someone has sucked all the air out of the room. They had huddled behind locked doors day after day. The shadow of the cross has cast a pall over the house that any promise from an ascending Christ could not remove.

And then with the sound of a thousand jumbo jets and a thousand locomotives the faces of the fearful disciples are illumined by flickering flames, and the breath of Jesus fills their lungs and they speak no longer to each other but to a world eager to hear the good news in its own language.

Barbara Brown Taylor has described that Pentecostal moment as the day the conspiracy was launched. To be sure, it was the day on which the disciples were inspired in spiritus—in invade by the Spirit. But it was also the day that they began to conspire together con spiritus—they, we, breathe in and out the same Spirit; we are enlivened by the same wind. Taylor notes in her poetic sermon entitled “The Gospel of the Holy Spirit” that the same ancient air keeps recirculating in our atmosphere, generation after generation. Taylor creatively writes:

We breathe air that circulated in the rain forests of Kenya and air that turned yellow with sulfur over Mexico City. We breathe the same air that Plato breathed, and Mozart and Michaelangelo, not to mention Hitler and Lizzie Borden. Every time we breathe, we take in what was once some baby’s first breath, or some dying person’s last. . . .

When Jesus let go of his last breath—willingly, we believe, for love of us—that breath hovered in the air in front of him for a moment and then it was set loose on earth. It was such pungent breath—so full of passion, so full of life—that it did not simply dissipate as so many breaths do. It grew, in strength and volume, until it was a mighty wind, which God sent spinning through an upper room in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost.

It is Pentecost again. Two thousand years have come and gone, but the wind still blows. The wind, the ruah, the Spirit of God, still blows open locked lives and sparkles with eternal flames and sends us out into the streets of the cities we love: to share the good news in languages a wandering world can understand and follow. I cannot imagine a more appropriate time for the Reformed Church in America to gather in synod and convocation than this Pentecost weekend. We live in a world thirsty for God’s love, hungry for God’s will, yearning to feel the breeze of God’s leading.

David Myers, distinguished professor of psychology at Hope College, has recently published a book entitled The American Paradox: Spiritual Hunger in an Age of Plenty. Myers observes that “we now have, as average Americans, doubled real incomes and doubled what money buys. We have expresso coffee, the World Wide Web, sport utility vehicles, and caller ID. And we have less happiness, more depression, more fragile relationships, less communal commitment, less vocational security, more crime (even after the recent decline), and more demoralized children.”

Spiritual hunger in an age of plenty.

Those are, almost exactly, the sentiments I heard again and again during this past year. I heard the words in New Brunswick and Chicago, in Pella and Kalamazoo. And I also heard them abroad—out there—among our global partners in mission. I grew up, as I expect many of you did, praying for the people of Africa and India, for China and Central America. Interspersed through my presidential year of listening, I had the enormous privilege of visiting,
and listening to, our Christian brothers and sisters in Rwanda, India, Oman, Nicaragua, and Cuba. They spoke with great affection of the historic commitment the Reformed Church in America has had to the people and needs of their respective lands. We exchanged stories of missionaries who had generously shared life and hope.

But when we bowed our heads in prayer, I heard their enormous concern for the soul of the North American church. I listened in wonder as they prayed for the soul of our church in a culture of rampant materialism. I listened closely as they prayed for the soul of our community of faith in a culture of individualism. I was surprised and moved when they prayed for a North American church that seems to be managed by professionals rather than led by faithful leaders, mutually supported and accountable.

With such prayers stuck in my throat and heart, I returned to our shores only to discover that the Spirit had invoked the same concerns in our congregations. How can we be a praying community in the midst of so much materialism? How can we be a covenantal community in the midst of so much individualism? How can we move from seeing ourselves as a learned society of believers to becoming a learning community of disciples?

With these prayers and visions, I have turned again to the simple request of a nameless disciple, “Lord, teach us to pray.” As we begin a new millennium, inspired by the Spirit, conspiring together for the Spirit, I humbly suggest that we need to turn to God again with the words, “Teach us to pray.” In an age of plenty, with very real spiritual hunger, we need to echo the words of a first century disciple, “Teach us to pray.” For in these words we hear the call of the church to be a learning community, a covenantal community, and a praying community.

1. Lord, teach us to pray.

First, we need to be a teachable community—a learning community. When Peter stood up to preach on that first Pentecost, he chose as his text a portion from the prophet Joel. I’m not sure Peter fully understood the implications of his Scripture text. I’m not sure any preacher does. But buried in the midst of his text for the day, he exclaims that slaves—those who are economically marginalized—will serve as prophets; that both our daughters and sons will speak as prophets; that the very young and the very old will have the gift of prophecy. As Peter looked out at a crowd of adult Jewish men, albeit gathered from many lands, but still all Jewish, and all male, he followed the gaze of Joel to the edges of the morning crowd. It was there, where children, and women, and slaves stood, that he understood the prophets would appear and speak.

A few months ago, as an American religious leader, I had the privilege of attending a concert at the Roman Catholic cathedral in Baltimore, Maryland. The story was told of the visit of Mother Teresa to the cathedral a few years ago. The place was packed, and the small woman from Calcutta was the focus of a great procession down the side aisle of the cathedral. The procession moved across the narthex and began a stately walk up the center aisle. Everyone was on their feet trying to catch a glimpse of Mother Teresa. About half way up the aisle the procession came to a sudden stop, with the whispered words, “Where is she?” They had lost Mother Teresa! She had simply not made the turn. Instead she had walked out the front doors of the cathedral to visit with those who stood outside—those who could not get in and those who had no interest in attending but were working the crowd as beggars. She had not come to speak, she said, but to listen.

Such was the vision of Joel, and St. Peter, whether he knew it or not. It is our vision as we recommit ourselves to be a teachable community, a learning community, a listening church. It is a vision that calls us to listen more closely to the prophets who live on the margins of the crowd. In that regard, my time abroad reinforced my long-standing belief that we have
a great deal to learn from the global church. The church in Asia can teach us how to be a
faithful community in a pluralistic society. The church in India, Cuba, and Chiapas can teach
us how to be a courageous community in the midst of persecution. The church in Africa can
teach us how to be a resourceful community in time of scarcity.

It was the prayers of the churches in these lands that whispered to me how much we have to
learn from our family abroad. I worry at times that we do not seek out their voices as Mother
Teresa so poignantly did. There are congregations that have come to the conclusion that all
mission and ministry needs to be local. “Charity begins at home,” they exclaim. There are
other congregations that send missionaries abroad, believing they have everything to share
and little to learn.

Because we did not embrace these perspectives, First Church in Albany, where I have served
as pastor for the past twelve years, established a sister church relationship with a Christian
Reformed Church in Cuba. For five years we have prayed for each other, week after week,
month after month. We have shared the excitement of new ministries and the challenge of
being urban churches. Our children have met each other through notes and pictures, and our
consistories have met together, fifteen hundred miles apart.

To be a teachable church, a learning community, we will need to look to those who stand
at the edge of the crowd, to find our prophets. We will need to listen closely to the young
and the old, to daughters and sons, to those who are poor in body but rich in soul. I was
particularly moved about a month ago with my visit to Meredith Drive Reformed Church
in Des Moines, Iowa, where they have made mission—partnership with those at the edge of
the crowd—the center of their youth ministry program. Already beginning in the fifth grade,
children are encouraged and led to commit an evening every month to mission. By the time
these children have grown into the high school group, they are committed to serving two
local missions, five national sites for mission, and two international sites, in Mexico and
Haiti. Our sons and daughters serve as our prophets. They are nurtured to spend time away
from their crowds, with those from whom they have much to share and much to learn. With
the sound of children’s voices in my ears and heart, I offer the following proposal:

**P-1**

To direct the General Synod Council, through Mission Services and
the Office of the General Secretary, to assist every congregation and
classis to establish a covenantal relationship with an ecumenical
and/or global partner, in order to more clearly hear the voice of
God and share prayers and programs of ministry.

kUpon recommendation by the Committee of Reference, P-1 was referred to the Advisory
Committee on World Mission. See p. 171.l

It may come as a surprise to you that, as we look closely to the margins of the crowd, we
find one of the offices of the Reformed Church in America. I believe it is accurate to observe
that the Reformed Church is the only denomination that has an office for teachers. It is called
the fourth office, although John Calvin, in Geneva, actually identified it as the second office,
which appropriately served as a bridge between the office of ministers of Word and sacrament
and the offices of elder and deacon. It is quite remarkable that we have maintained this office
in the Office of General Synod Professor of Theology.

Of the twenty-five or so faculty in the two Reformed Church seminaries, only nine have
been installed into this office by the General Synod. It was not a coincidence that we had
one of them, the Rev. Dr. Carol Bechtel, preach this morning. Over the years the church
has at times grown cautious, or even intimidated, by this office. I think that is tragic. This
gift from the past can serve us well in a learning church and a learning culture. As is often
the case, the church lags behind our culture in understanding and responding to important needs. We live in a learning culture symbolized by the presence, in my congregation and yours, of eighty-year-old grandparents who are mastering their first computer in order to email their children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. Gone is the day when the church is understood within the local community as the place of great knowledge led by the most learned citizen of the village. Indeed, the church is more often viewed as representing a day that is long past and responding to questions that are no longer asked.

Quite amazingly, we have within our tradition a teaching office that has been, and can continue to be, a great asset in our call to be a teachable, learning community. These nine teachers of theology have been carefully chosen to lead us in our theological discernment. They are accountable to the General Synod, and thus it is very appropriate that they be with the synod as it gathers each year. A few months ago I spent an afternoon with our teachers, and they bring to their office remarkable gifts of theological reflection as well as pastoral hearts. Their love of the church and loyalty to her mission is an important part of our global conspiracy of the Spirit. It is my hope that you will seriously consider the proposals regarding our General Synod professors of theology at this synod. It is also my hope that they will begin to see themselves as a community of teachers who will gather regularly to reflect on our common mission to love God with our minds as well as our hearts, and share with the church their insights as prophets from the margins of the crowd. The deeper our roots in the soil of the gospel, the sturdier the tree.

2. Lord, teach us to pray.

The “us” part of this request is of deep concern in the Reformed Church. The Pentecost story as recorded in the second chapter of Acts begins with the words, “When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.” In spite of the inspiring and dramatic illustration of this sentence as reflected in our synod and convocation, we are not convinced in our souls that “we are together in one place.” There continues to be deep concern about where other people have staked their positions. Some have wondered about the faith of others, and others have questioned the love of brothers and sisters within our covenantal community.

Our feelings mirror the suspicion and cynicism of our culture. Broken homes, broken families, broken lives, broken dreams, have left us deeply wounded. What we need most—the love and affirmation of a covenantal community—is often what we fear most. Our global partners pray for us because they know the rugged individualism that has formed our culture. How can we commit ourselves to a “we” when “me” is at the center of our living? Even our spirituality is tinged with this self-centeredness. How is it possible for our society to be so enamored with spirituality while our communities of faith, committed to spirituality and prayer, wither? Part of the answer has to do with a strong strain of narcissism that pervades our spiritual lives. Books, magazines, videos, and even Bible studies address the personal longings of the heart for Christ while ignoring our covenantal call to belong and be accountable to the body of Christ.

I believe there is a different kind of response to this frustrated hunger for community and for a common spirituality to feed our hopes and faith. We have unfortunately allowed an office within the Reformed Church, the office of elder, to wither for lack of nurture. Quite remarkably, in a culture that wants to learn more about prayer and spirituality, we have for more than four hundred years called and ordained gifted people to an office committed to prayer, spirituality, and pastoral care.

On a March Sunday I found myself spending the day with New Hope Reformed Church in Powell, Ohio. The morning services were filled with families, inspired by faith, and graced with joy. But it was a quiet evening service that caught my heart. Almost fifteen years ago the
Reformed Church published a “Service of Healing” that many congregations have adapted to their own setting. From New York to California, urban to rural, rich to poor, black to white, congregations have understood and responded to the deep human need to pray for healing. In a darkened sanctuary with a handful of people, elders stood with individuals who sought such prayers. Embracing each other, they bowed their heads and sought God’s peace.

It has slowly dawned on me that the offices of elder and deacon we say we value so highly we nurture so little. When people are called to the office of minister of Word and sacrament, we interrogate them, receive them under care, educate them, test them, pray for them, and finally ordain them. When a person is called to the office of elder or deacon, we rejoice that someone will fill the consistory seat and may offer an hour’s orientation somewhere down the line.

Our General Synod Workbook has within it a report from a task force on consistories that, I believe, has the seeds of a conspiracy that may change the landscape of our churches. The paper has the audacity to suggest that the secret to our destinies is found in our rich heritage. We have received from our Reformation roots the gift of offices to nurture compassion, mercy, justice, prayer, spirituality, and care. The offices of elder and deacon, with the office of minister of Word and sacrament, constitute the local consistory—more importantly, its ministry—and the ministry of the three offices together represent the pastorate of the church. Allow me to say that again: the ministry of elders, deacons, and ministers is the pastorate of the church.

I know that this sounds strange to our ears, but our understanding of Scripture and our heritage sustains this perception of the pastorate. We must begin to understand again that it is not the pastorate of the minister but the pastorate of the consistory. When we pray together, work together, minister together, the pastorate comes alive. When we are mutually supportive and mutually accountable, the pastorate is undergirded. In my travels across the denomination, I have been deeply disturbed by the number of conflicts that have flared between ministers and congregations. I have even heard it said that if a team hasn’t reached its goals, the coach needs to be fired.

My friends, this is not the vocabulary of the church; it is not the conversation of the saints; it is not how we understand the pastorate of our congregations. The long-term response to pastoral problems is a new, indeed an old, understanding of the pastorate of the church. The offices of elder and deacon need to be nurtured, and the office of the minister of Word and sacrament needs to be placed within a community of faithful leaders. I am deeply aware that we have begun to make great strides in nurturing and supporting the office of deacon. At the same time, it is clear that the office of elder remains anemic at a time when prayer, spirituality, and care are sought by believers as well as our culture.

With such a clear need for the nurture and support of all of the offices of our local congregations, I offer the following proposal:

P-2
To direct the General Synod Council, as the program arm of the General Synod, to reconstitute its structure in a way that the local offices of elder, deacon, and minister of Word and sacrament are nurtured, supported, and encouraged to assume responsibility for the pastorate of the church.

Upon recommendation by the Committee of Reference, P-2 was referred to the Advisory Committee on Christian Education and Discipleship. See p. 296.
Before we leave this section focused on the “us” of the request, “Teach us to pray,” I would like to return to the concern for covenantal community in a culture of individualism. The Reformed Church expects that our community be both a faithful one and a gracious one. I know that there are those who would emphasize grace or faith, but our foundation remains sound when we embrace both grace and faith with equal passion.

A few weeks ago a group of eighteen Reformed Church ministers, gathered from the widest theological spectrum, met in Chicago, Illinois, for two days of intentional dialogue. This gathering, suggested by my two predecessors in this office, the Revs. Tony Vis and Fritz Kruithoff, began with prayer and worship and was nurtured with the telling of our faith journeys. We finally turned to one of the most difficult issues facing the Reformed Church, homosexuality. When the intense conversation was finished, or rather paused, we discovered that all of us, no matter where we stood on the theological spectrum, had a deep loyalty to the inspired Word of God as revealed in Christ and Scripture, and that all of us also had a deep need for safe places for biblical discernment to happen.

In retrospect, not only of this retreat but of my year, it has become clear to me that our ministers need more places where they can be vulnerable, pastored, and challenged. The offices of elder and deacon have withered for lack of nurture and direction, while the office of minister of Word and sacrament has begun to wither from too many expectations and too little mutual accountability in a community of faithful leaders.

I would also like to turn our eyes toward the life of our classes. The classis is at the very heart of our polity. It brings enormous power and responsibility to our government. In the work of a local classis, pastors are called, nurtured and retired; students are taken under care, tested, and ordained; congregations are formed, supported, and challenged; common challenges are explored, understood, and addressed. As you know, a classis is both a legislative assembly and a judicatory consisting of elders and ministers.

A number of our classes have spent the last few years reflecting on their vision for ministry. The Classis of New Brunswick has set out on an exciting agenda of mission. The Classis of Queens, the most diverse of our classes, in our most diverse regional synod, worships in a dozen languages every Sunday morning and reflects the rich mosaic of this historic city of our birth. The Classis of Southwest Michigan regularly commits itself to the task of both local and global mission. A number of our classes have spent time in retreat and Bible study. All of these actions have enhanced the quality of our life together.

I think we can do more. The word “classis” brings to mind a fleet of ships sailing together under a common flag and moving toward the same port. Each ship within the fleet looks a bit different from the others, but our common loyalty to Christ and our common mission in the world keeps us together. The meeting of classis brings together a few leaders from each ship but fails to celebrate the remarkable life and service that go on under the banner of Christ.

The section in the Book of Church Order that describes the responsibility of the local classis highlights the fact that the classis should exercise general superintendence “over the interests and concerns of the churches within its bounds” (BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 2, Section 1). Some classes do this through a regular schedule of visitation. I dream of the day when a classis could exercise such superintendence through celebrating the multitude of ways congregations commit themselves to ministries and missions. How do we care for our own, and how do we reach out to a world in need? How do we worship, and sing, and play, and serve? Like an iceberg, most of the “interests and concerns” of local churches are under the water line, under deck on the classis’ ships, under the radar screen of the classis’ work. With these thoughts in mind, I propose:
REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT

P-3
To urge all of the classes of the Reformed Church in America to initiate annual or biannual festivals of ministry and mission that will celebrate their common work and nurture their common vision of service.

kUpon recommendation by the Committee of Reference, P-3 was referred to the Advisory Committee on Christian Worship. See p. 230.

3. Lord, teach us to pray.

As Jesus moved toward his ascension, he commanded his disciples to go back to Jerusalem in order to wait for the promise of God. And so they did. Luke tells us that they went back to their upper room and prayed. There are a lot of similarities between waiting and praying. Both require great patience. Both call us to simply be in the presence of God. Both encourage us to acknowledge that at times waiting and praying are very painful.

In October I traveled to Rwanda, where I had been invited to be a participant in the first dialogue between Reformed Christians and the Organization of Indigenous African Churches. As one would expect, it was a fascinating and rewarding experience. But the site of our dialogue, Kigali, is the heart of a country that is still reeling from the genocide of 1994. In one hundred days almost a million people lost their lives. Imagine that one out of every seven of your family and friends were suddenly killed. We visited two of the genocide sites that are Christian churches. At the insistence of the survivors, the sanctuaries have been left as they were found six years ago. The sights and stories seared their way into my soul, and I have yet to find places in my heart for them to rest. And then I listened to the prayers of the church in Rwanda, where 90 percent of the population is Christian. They wait. They pray. They wait. How could this happen here? Among us? How could we do such a thing? What possessed us? For many, praying is waiting, and waiting is praying for the wounds to heal and hope to be restored.

The prayers of the church are the blood that courses through our veins. Without prayer, we wither and die. Without prayer, our life is empty and without passion. The challenge of the church is to gather our prayers and make them an expression of our common pains, joys, and longings. Dr. Leanne Van Dyk, in a recent article in Perspectives, described prison life on Tasmania, an island off the shores of Australia. Because Tasmania was a part of the English empire, those who ran the prison felt a need to have a chapel. But because the prison rule was complete isolation, they needed to devise a way of getting every prisoner to worship without seeing or hearing another. Van Dyk writes, “What should have been the pews were instead upright boxes where the prisoners could stand, a sort of coffin on end. The prisoner could see the preacher, but no one else. Wooden boards surrounded him on all sides, except for a small opening in front of his face. Each wooden box had a lock. This was Christian worship in the Tasmanian prison.”

You can see it with your mind’s eye and feel the terrible isolation with your heart. Row after row of coffins on end. Tragically, the picture describes the life of some of our congregations. Believers come alone—stand alone—pray alone—leave alone. We are alone together. It is the responsibility of a covenantal community to pry open the locks—to tear out the boards—and embrace each and every one of our members with prayer. In response to this high calling, the Regional Synod of Canada and a number of classes have committed themselves to a very intentional discipline of prayer in this coming year. Consistories, congregations, classes, and synods have discovered that the command to pray is a gift that makes us one.
The office of deacon has assumed an increasing role in translating our prayers into action. Prayers for mercy, compassion, and justice, are given feet that walk into the world in mission. Prayers for the hungry, thirsty, and dispossessed are given hands that reach out into the world with grace. The nurture of the office of deacon has taken hold across the church as congregations with different geography and theology look to their deacons to lead the way from worship to work, from worship services into services of compassion in the world. The early church looked to deacons to do exactly that—to wait on church tables and to share food with the hungry of the world. It appears also to have been the case that deacons would often offer the prayers of intercession before they entered the world. Such a role in public worship tied together, in a very visible way, the worship and work of a congregation, the prayers and works of piety that were inspired by those prayers. With this in mind, I propose:

P-4:
To strongly urge congregations to utilize their deacons in offering prayers of intercession each Sunday morning, and to direct the Office of Diocesan Ministries and the Office of Worship to distribute models of such prayers to all of the RCA’s congregations and boards of deacons.

kUpon recommendation by the Committee of Reference, P-4 was referred to the Advisory Committee on Christian Worship. See p. 230.i

It has become apparent to me in my travels that there is a growing number of our members who are retiring at younger ages, ready and willing to assume volunteer roles in the mission of our church. The Offices of Volunteer Services, Disaster Relief, and Diocesan Ministries are kept busy with those individuals and congregations willing to commit themselves to serve God in concrete, sacrificial ways. I commend their work and encourage every congregation to explore ways our newest cadre of volunteers can advance the mission and ministry of local congregations as well as supporting the work of our national and global partners. Those who retire with good health, financial security, mobility, high skill levels, good insight, and sound judgment will be, if they are not already, the arms and legs of our prayers.

Lest you have the sense that my call to nurture faithful leaders in the church—elders, deacons, and ministers of Word and sacrament—ignores the call of each of us to use our gifts in a learning, covenantal, praying community, allow me to say a word about two programs in the RCA that have caught my attention and heart. The Ministry Associate training program began in 1992 with the Classis of California. Because of the faithful and creative direction of the Rev. Dr. Ken Van Wyk, the program has now become the lay leadership component of the Regional Synod of the Far West. The program has three modules: course work, discipleship training, and ministry apprenticeship. It is now moving into videotaping its classes and making them available beyond southern California. Almost seventy lay leaders have been trained in less than a decade.

During this same period the Regional Synod of Albany has nurtured lay training through its Ephesus II program. This fall the program will become “Living Stones.” It will challenge every elder, deacon, and minister in the synod’s bounds to commit a day every year to training and growth. In these programs, and many others, the prayers of our lips become the deeds of our lives. Such is the foundation to the mission convocation that begins today. As we look to this city that gave our church its first home almost four hundred years ago, we have much to learn. We will pray in the tongues of Pentecost; we will watch the wind of God’s Spirit open locked lives; we will catch inspiring glimpses of the fire that burns brightly in the missions and ministries of this city we love.
Lord, teach us to pray.

Lord, give us a teachable spirit.
Lord, give us a faithful, gracious community.
Lord, give us a passion for prayer and the courage to give our prayers feet and hands.

We enter this third millennium as pilgrims of Pentecost. As we long to be faithful witnesses in a world hungry for God’s love, we are also called to nurture faithful leaders—teachers, elders, deacons, and ministers committed to God’s mission.

I express my deepest gratitude to our denominational staff that has smoothed the paths of travel I have walked; my congregation, First Church in Albany, which has accepted this year as their honor as well as mine; and my wife, Vicki, who has patiently waited for my return to our home by the side of the road.

It was T. E. Lawrence who once wrote something like this: “All of us dream in the dark recesses of our minds, and when we wake in the morning all is vanity. But some people dream with their eyes open; they are dangerous people.”

Pentecost has inspired the conspiracy. It is a conspiracy of light in a world of shadows. It is a conspiracy of peace in a world of violence. It is a conspiracy of love in a world of cynicism. It is a conspiracy that prompts us to plant seeds of hope. My friends, that’s dangerous business—and Pentecost makes us dangerous people when we dream with our eyes open.

To God be the glory.
REPORT OF THE GENERAL SECRETARY

The Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson

A few weeks ago my wife Karin and I went out for breakfast at a favorite restaurant of ours in New Jersey. The couple who own and operate this restaurant are long-time members of a Reformed Church in America congregation. Henry is the cook; he’s also an elder. That morning he wanted to talk—not about my omelette, but about his church.

“For a long while,” he began, “my consistory has been saying that we need time for brainstorming about new ideas for our mission and ministry. But we always run out of time because of other business. Well, before I go off consistory at the end of June, we’re going to take a whole meeting to do just that. We need to just try, and see what will happen.”

My friend continued: “Take mission for instance. We’ve got a mission subcommittee that’s part of the consistory. But we also have all these other members who have ideas and passion about mission, and we’ve got to get them involved. I think we should just form them into a group that would take a look at all our mission opportunities, review what we’re doing, and use their gifts.” There was more. “The way I see it, we’re either growing or declining. It’s like that in life. You can’t just stay at a plateau. If things are at a plateau here at the restaurant, my electricity bill still goes up. You’ve got to be growing, or else you’re declining.”

He paused for a moment, while Lois, his wife, poured Karin and me some more coffee. “You know, our church has been through a lot. But I believe it’s all for a purpose that God still has in store for us.”

The teachers of the church are everywhere, including behind the counter of a family-owned restaurant in northern New Jersey. This elder’s observations about his congregation apply to us all, to the whole Reformed Church in America. We’ve got to make space in our meetings for listening with open ears and fresh hearts to God’s Spirit. We have to empower our members to reach out in mission. And we have to ask whether we are declining, at a plateau, or growing. All to be ready for what God has in store for us.

Tonight we embark on Mission 2000, a journey into God’s mission for the Reformed Church in the twenty-first century. We will make space to listen and discern where God is calling the RCA and its 950 congregational mission stations in the new millennium. I’m excited to discover what this weekend will bring. I hope you are filled with expectation for how this time may be used by God to shape our future.

But before we do that, I want to think with you this afternoon about what the fresh winds of God’s Spirit might also say to us about the question Henry asked me. Let’s ask ourselves: is the church, is the Reformed Church, declining, at a plateau, or growing?

Of this, we are sure: God wants the church to grow rather than decline. Always. In every place and every time. Scripture is abundantly clear—the gospel of Jesus Christ is intended for everyone. And it is equally clear that you and I have been entrusted to bring this good news to those who have not heard. As our Statement of Mission and Vision says, we are “to follow Christ in mission in a lost and broken world so loved by God.”

But what do we mean in the church when we talk about growth? There’s more to measuring our bottom line as a denomination than doing what a restaurant does when it measures the receipts and rising price of coffee. So how do we live as a church if we profess that God wants the church to grow?
Let me offer these three affirmations:

**God wants the church to grow:**

- In the depth of our faithfulness.
- In the quality of our health.
- In the number of our members.

These are the three areas I want to think about with you today.

**First, God wants the church to grow in the depth of our faithfulness.**

Our Christian commitment is and should always be first a commitment to faithfulness: faithfulness rooted in the inward assurance that God’s grace is trustworthy and that God holds each of us—and the whole church—lovingly and securely in a holy, covenanted embrace. Faithful people look to the future with the quiet but clear certainty that God is sovereign, that the risen Christ is victorious, and that the Holy Spirit empowers the church.

But even the most faithful people are also painfully human, and anxiety in the face of trouble or uncertainty is all too human a response: anxiety over a child’s falling grades, or a spouse’s health, or a job’s security. The disciples were anxious about all manner of things, from the simple to the complex: about children messing up the agenda, about Jesus talking to a Samaritan woman, about where the next meal would come from, about the future of the church and who would be a part of it.

So, too, in the Reformed Church, does our faithfulness sometimes get tangled in anxiety. As some congregations trade liturgy for praise choruses, others worry about the completeness of our theology. We hear worries about preserving our precisely defined interpretations of doctrine, about safeguarding our precise polity and liturgy, about protecting our own expressions of piety and purity. We worry about those with whom we are seen—whether we will be understood by them or whether our presence with them will be misunderstood by others.

This last question, of our relationship with other Christians and other churches, has deeply stirred the natural anxieties of some hearts in this past year. And while there are deep and profound questions amidst these churning waters—questions we cannot ignore—there is also the damaging potential here for our anxieties to do what anxiety does best: cloud our focus on mission and the gospel.

Let me offer a pastoral word to help address and clarify these matters.

The Reformed Church in America is evangelical and ecumenical. Faithfulness, not anxiety, has long guided the Reformed Church in America to this place in our relationships with other Christians and churches. We take both of these commitments seriously and see them biblically, integrated together, “so that the world may believe,” in the words of John’s gospel (17:21). Indeed, this biblical understanding was the cornerstone of “An Ecumenical Mandate for the Reformed Church in America,” approved by the General Synod in 1996 to guide our commitments to the rest of God’s church. A year later we acted on these commitments when, together with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the United Church of Christ, we adopted the *Formula of Agreement* with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. And we acted on these commitments when, at the very same time, we initiated conversations concerning membership by the Reformed Church in America in the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE).
Now we can test those commitments again at this synod, in two important ways. First, due to the persistent initiative of the RCA, the door has been opened for us to pursue membership in the NAE, a body that gives evangelical expression to ecumenical commitments. When the NAE was formed, its bylaws prohibited the membership of denominations that also belonged to the National Council of Churches (NCC). We challenged this institutional division because it seemed to build walls rather than bridges. On your behalf, I met with the past two presidents of the NAE, and this spring the NAE officially changed those bylaws, eliminating the prohibition against churches that also belong to the NCC.

We have a historic opportunity to make clear our commitment to be evangelical and ecumenical by becoming the first denomination to belong to the NAE as well as the NCC and the WCC, the World Council of Churches. Therefore, the Commission on Christian Unity brings to this General Synod the recommendation that the RCA join the NAE. We will serve as a bridge, and as an example, between the diverse parts of Christ’s body. We would be doing what we have long believed God is calling us to do.

Second, some are asking to evaluate our relationship with the United Church of Christ (UCC) in light of some important theological differences, especially our understanding of Scripture as it is expressed in our church’s views on homosexuality.

For more than a century we have been in fellowship with the denominations that now comprise the UCC. They are part of the worldwide Reformed family. That’s why it was so important that in 1997, when the _Formula of Agreement_ was approved, we also initiated a dialogue with the UCC about our differences. This has been a healthy, helpful discussion that has modeled honest ecumenical dialogue for other denominations.

At the same time, we continue in cooperative actions with other denominations, including the UCC. So, for example, we work with other denominations to host national conferences on evangelism, to share ideas for stewardship, and to develop a joint website for Christian educators; through Church World Service we rebuild burned churches, respond with disaster relief, and organize CROP walks; and with _Formula of Agreement_ partners we are exploring cooperative work in both urban and rural settings. These are the kinds of ventures that characterize our ecumenical relationships.

So we will consider two key decisions around relationships—relationship with the NAE and relationship with the UCC—and there is some deep anxiety about both. Why? Ecumenical relationships, because they are relationships with other denominations, are with those with whom we do not have complete agreement and, in fact, have differences. Such differences may be over our biblical response to social and moral issues, such as abortion, the use of military force, gambling, birth control, divorce, and homosexuality. They may be over questions like the role of women in ministry, infant versus believer’s baptism, or the veneration of icons. They may even be over matters like the understanding of the virgin Mary, the nature and number of sacraments, speaking in tongues, or apostolic succession in ministry. And interwoven with nearly all these issues are differences over the interpretation of Scripture. Naturally, there’s tension in such fellowship.

But in the Reformed tradition, these inevitable differences in social, moral, or hermeneutical issues do not prevent fellowship. Unlike some other denominations, the Reformed view begins by recognizing that we are but a part of God’s one true church. While we are steadfast in our particular understandings of truth, we are committed to fellowship with all of God’s church. And the church is God’s, not ours; its members are chosen by God. This is where our anxieties can be calmed through the strength of our faithfulness to Reformed theology. Our differences over theology and practice need not break our fellowship, for we celebrate one body broken and one cup poured out, for the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation to God through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is how we can discover the
boundaries and common bonds for our fellowship with the wider church

I believe that, passionately, with all my heart; you can probably hear it in my voice. And I believe it even more after an experience I had six weeks ago. On the recommendation of two past General Synods, we gathered eighteen RCA pastors, representative of the ethnic, geographical, and theological diversity of the RCA, “to discuss the differing theological, philosophical, social, and other perspectives that make it difficult...to dialogue as sisters and brothers in Christ” (MGS 1999, pp. 40, 267).

Each of us who attended agreed, in advance, to a “covenant for dialogue” developed by a planning team. We agreed that we were willing to allow God to change us; that though conflict was inevitable, we would work toward reconciliation; that none of us has the whole truth; that we are bound together in Christ.

We rooted our time in worship. We shared our stories of faith. Each reflected on those persons, places, and events that had been decisive intersections of God’s grace. We went on to explore how labels like “evangelical,” “liberal,” “conservative,” “fundamentalist,” and “social activist” so often promote stereotypes that are misleading and only reinforce prejudices.

Yes, there was pointed dialogue about issues that seem divisive, such as homosexuality, how we interpret the Bible, and our views toward those who are non-Christians, as well as how we should worship and carry out our ecumenical relationships. We looked honestly at our differences. But what happened was encouraging and inspiring. We discovered that our community in Christ is far, far stronger than our diverse views on particular matters. These places of disagreement did not divide us. Common commitments enlivened us—above all, the commitment to seek together the understanding of God’s Word and to discover the way to follow Jesus. As one participant said, “The RCA should sit around any table discussing differences in our midst as if it were the Lord’s Table.”

Let me speak with you from a pastor’s heart. I sense that the anxiety some express toward the UCC or even the NAE is misdirected. Isn’t it really anxiety felt toward others in the RCA? It seems to me that some fear that parts of our own family are neglecting the authority of Scripture, becoming relativistic, or compromising central beliefs. At the same time, others fear those who would break committed, ecumenical partnerships. Maybe it is easier to criticize another denomination than to be honest within our own family. But let’s talk more deeply with one another. What I have discovered from listening throughout the denomination, and what we discovered on this recent “diversity retreat,” is most encouraging. My friends, we share the same frame of reference throughout the Reformed Church in America—seeking to discern the truth of God’s Word in the context of our ministry in the world. No one questions this. And it’s time for us to make biblical discernment a more central part of our decision-making: not polarizing debate, not preoccupation with routine administrative business, but discovering how to nurture “safe spaces to build communities of biblical discernment,” in the words of the retreat participants.

We’ve already begun to make changes at General Synod, and other assemblies have also been experimenting. The Mission 2000 convocation beginning this evening is a historic initiative in this direction. But we must do more if we are to grow in the depth of our faithfulness to God and our commitment to each other.

For this reason, I offer to you the following proposal as a way to encourage growth in the depth of our faithfulness:
P-1
To instruct the officers of General Synod, the General Synod Council, and RCA staff responsible for planning General Synod, to arrange the schedule of General Synod 2001 to enable delegates to engage in biblical discernment through small Bible study and reflection groups focused on important issues facing the General Synod; and further,

to adjust other agenda items to accommodate this priority, adding neither to the time nor expense of General Synod as a result; and further,

to consider ways for permanently changing the structure and means of decision-making of General Synod so that biblical discernment and implementation of local and global mission will always receive a priority of time and attention in the agenda, for report to General Synod 2001; and further,

to encourage classes and regional synods to expand their pursuit of discernment-style decision-making and space for shared biblical reflection.

kUpon recommendation by the Committee of Reference, P-1 was referred to the Advisory Committee on Christian Education and Discipleship. See p. 297.

Second, God wants the church to grow in the quality of its health.

Faithfulness, in our connections to Scripture and to each other, will nurture health in our corporate life together and in our congregations. And healthy bodies grow in healthy ways. How then does a church nurture and strengthen its health?

There is an abundance of studies that analyze congregations and evaluate what makes them vital and healthy, as opposed to ill and dysfunctional. The Alban Institute, with the support of the Lilly Foundation, has been studying the needs of congregations. The Gospel and Our Culture Network has developed “Twelve Empirical Indicators” of the missional church. Loren Mead speaks about four priorities for church health. The RCA congregation where my family and I worship took part in a “Healthy Church” seminar, led by a consultant, to examine our congregational life. Peter Steinke has written *Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach*, and the Synod of New York used that background to describe twelve healthy congregations in their region as diverse, inspiring examples. Their “Report on Congregational Health Factors” was completed in this past year.

The list of resources goes on, and while there is no one true and right resource, I want to hold up one particular study on church health and growth done by Christian Schwarz to guide our thinking about healthy churches. Schwarz’s institute, located in Germany, studied over one thousand diverse congregations on five continents and in thirty-two countries to discover empirically what factors are present in healthy, growing congregations. He concludes that growing churches have eight quality characteristics in common. Let me share them with you:

1. **Empowering Leaders.** Leaders in such congregations “equip, support, motivate, and mentor individuals to become all that God wants them to be.”

2. **Gift-Oriented Ministry.** These congregations help members “identify their gifts and integrate them into ministries that match their gifts.”
3. **Passionate Spirituality.** While spirituality is expressed in a variety of ways in these congregations, the common feature is that “faith is actually lived out with commitment, fire, and enthusiasm.”

4. **Functional Structures.** “The most important criterion for forms and structures in the church is if they fulfill their purpose or not. Church structures are never an end in themselves.”

5. **Inspiring Worship.** The research showed that the style of worship—liturgical or more free-flowing—is not the deciding factor. More important is the answer to the question, “Is the worship service an inspiring experience for those who attend it?”

6. **Holistic Small Groups.** “Growing churches have developed a system of small groups where individual Christians can find intimate community, practical help, and intensive spiritual interaction.”

7. **Need-Oriented Evangelism.** These congregations “share the gospel in a way that meets the questions and needs of non-Christians.”

8. **Loving Relationships.** “Unfeigned, practical love endows a church with a much greater magnetic power than all the marketing efforts of this world.”

These eight qualities are described in more detail in a small booklet called *The ABC’s of Natural Church Development.*

What intrigues me about the Schwarz model, however, is not just the data, but the image he uses to illustrate it: that of a barrel built with eight vertical slats, each representing one of those eight characteristics. But unlike a regular barrel, each of the eight slats in this church health barrel is a different length, based on the relative strength of each quality in the life of a particular congregation.

When you pour water into this kind of barrel, the water, quite obviously, spills out at the level of the lowest slat. The point: a congregation is only as strong as its weakest slat. For example, if a congregation has inspiring worship and effective, need-oriented evangelism, but lacks small groups where members find community, its strengths in worship and evangelism won’t carry it. The lack of small group connections will always allow the water to leak out. Healthy congregations nurture all eight qualities. We can’t pick and choose some that we’re good at and ignore others.

When all eight parts that contribute to the quality of a congregation’s health are being nurtured, then healthy growth is likely to occur naturally. I trust that this resource might be useful to help “equip congregations for ministry.” Through the office of Dick Welscott, director of Evangelism and Church Development, you can acquire more information about how your congregation can use this resource, as well as others, to nurture the quality of your health.

Allow me to simply plant this seed: even as we use these qualities to evaluate the health of our congregations, might we also ask these same questions of the Reformed Church in America as a whole, in our structures and life together? Might we ask, in our meetings, programs, policies, and agencies, if these qualities are present: Empowering Leaders, Gift-Oriented Ministry, Passionate Spirituality, Functional Structures, Inspiring Worship, Holistic Small Groups, Need-Oriented Evangelism, and Loving Relationships?
Finally, God wants the church to grow in the number of its members.

We began with faithfulness, to the gospel and to our calling, which led to health, which naturally leads to people. We expect that faithfulness and health will result in fruitfulness. We expect it will result in an increase in the number of those who are part of RCA congregations. We expect the number of those congregations to increase. By being faithful and healthy, we expect that our declining numbers will be reversed.

And those numbers have been declining.

In 1999 the number of “confessing members” of the Reformed Church in America totaled 182,337. This was a decrease of 915 members from 1998. And in the year before, 1998, membership figures represented a decrease of 1,822 members from 1997. This trend of decreasing membership has continued, almost unbroken, for the last thirty-two years. The last year in which the Reformed Church in America showed an increase in membership was 1984.

At this, the first General Synod to meet in this new millennium, and on the eve of the Mission 2000 convocation, which can shape the future direction of the Reformed Church in America, it is time to talk seriously about these numbers.

(Graphs courtesy of Dr. Roger Nemeth and Dr. Donald Luidens, Hope College)

**RCA MEMBERSHIP TREND**

**RCA MEMBERSHIP TRENDS**

**Graph 1: 1900-1999**

Membership in the RCA has always been influenced by wider demographic and social developments. We’ve gone through various stages in our long history. In the last century alone, most notable was the growth following World War II. In the 1950s and early 1960s the RCA undertook a major church planting initiative that concluded in the mid-'60s. Eleven percent of our present congregations were begun during that period.
Like many denominations, the RCA at the end of the century has seen a steady decline in members and numbers of congregations. Note, however, that the rate of decline has begun to level off. This past year's decrease of 915 members was one of the smallest membership declines in recent years.
Graph 3: Worship Attendance
The RCA began collecting statistics regarding average worship attendance in 1988. When we look at confirmed membership and worship attendance over these last ten years, we see that though there is some fluctuation, there is less of a sense of overall decline in worship attendance. And this past year, though membership declined, worship attendance increased. We may already be seeing indications that the trend of the last quarter-century is changing.

There are regional differences in this picture. But even these don’t always fit our preconceptions. For instance, I often hear people say, “Our churches in the East are declining while churches in the West are growing.” Historically that’s been the case at times. But this is changing. Many churches here, in the Regional Synod of New York, have been through a major time of transition; and, in fact, membership in four of the seven classes within the Synod of New York increased this past year. Meanwhile, churches in the Regional Synod of the Far West are facing new challenges, and last year three of the five classes in the synod showed a slight decline. Of the RCA’s forty-six classes, seventeen showed net increases in membership last year while the other twenty-nine experienced net declines. Do you know which is the case for your own classis? A summary table comparing 1999 and 1998 membership in each classis is available with this report (p. 55).

Let’s face reality. By nearly any measurement, our overall membership has been in decline, even as our stated purpose has been to welcome people into the embrace of God’s love as they become members of the body of believers. We desire growing numbers of such people. And this is possible. It is happening in individual congregations of the RCA in every region, of every ethnic background, with diverse styles of worship and points of theological emphasis. Shouldn’t we be asking why? Denominations grow one congregation at a time. Our decline in membership is not inevitable. It can be reversed.

Integrating Growth in Faithfulness, Health, and Numbers
For too long in the Reformed Church in America we have endured a stale and unproductive debate about church growth. We have fed caricatures of one another—congregations willing to pander to any cultural whim in order to get people in the doors, and congregations dogmatically frozen in traditions that leave them oblivious to outreach and renewal. So we
set up dichotomies between faithfulness and growth. At the beginning of a new century, as we turn our focus to mission, it’s time we leave this false dichotomy behind and bring faithfulness, health, and growth together—where they belong.

A few days ago I took my monthly retreat day at the Carmel Retreat Center, near my home. The Scripture in the lectionary for the day was taken from John 15: “I am the vine, you are the branches.” The message of that passage resonated with powerful simplicity. If we abide in Christ—meaning, if we are truly grafted into his life—and follow his commandment to love one another, then we will bear much fruit. Faithful, healthy congregations will grow. What are we doing, and what might we do, then, to nurture this faithfulness, health, and growth? In 1997 General Synod adopted our Statement of Mission and Vision in which we said that:

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.

Since then, the General Synod Council has adopted twelve priorities to focus our work toward this end. Staff is presently working to establish clear objectives to measure our implementation of these priorities.

In addition, two initiatives, one called “Faithful Witnesses” and the other called “Discipling All Nations,” capture the essence of our efforts to fully implement the Statement of Mission and Vision.

“Faithful Witnesses” involves initiatives in congregational revitalization, new church development, racial/ethnic diversity, congregational leadership, and discipleship for all ages.

Are you aware, for example, that two hundred pastors from across the denomination are already involved in “refocusing groups” begun by their classis or regional synod in collaboration with Evangelism and Church Development staff? What is a refocusing group? It involves pastors coming together in small groups to share their spiritual journeys and calling, to build relationships of accountability, and to discover new directions for their ministry within their congregations. And what we are discovering is that when pastors do these things, they reconnect with their love for ministry and find new energy. Elders, deacons, and lay leaders are then involved in a similar process. All this takes place, typically, over a three-year period. When this effort began, we hoped to have two hundred pastors involved in refocusing networks by the year 2003. We have already reached that goal, three years ahead of schedule. Our new goal is to have four hundred RCA congregations involved in strategic church revitalization networks by the year 2005.

Similarly, “equipping classes for new church starts” is one of the twelve priorities established by the General Synod Council. New churches are most effectively begun today when an established congregation, with the support of its classis, takes responsibility for starting a new congregation.

Many regional synods and classes have launched visionary plans for new church development. The classes of the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes are developing plans to support their “25 by 2005” goal, while the Regional Synod of Canada, “Lord willing,” starts eleven new congregations and the Regional Synod of the Heartland plans “fifty new ministries that will reach ten thousand people for Christ.” In the Regional Synod of the Far West, the Classis of Cascades has a “4 x 4” initiative (four new churches by 2004), and the Classis of Central California has the “20/20 Vision” required for twenty new churches by 2020. Efforts like these
demonstrate the RCA’s commitment at all levels to the future of mission on this continent. **Our overall denominational goal is to start eighty new churches by the end of 2005 and to “restart” twenty in that same period.**

Many of the new churches being planted do not worship in the English language. RCA congregations within this region where we meet today, the Synod of New York, worship in eleven languages. And many of those not worshiping in English are growing. I spoke recently with an RCA pastor who served in the Synod of New York about twenty-five years ago. “At that time, most of us doubted if we’d have any RCA churches left in the city by the end of the century,” he told me. Not only do we still have churches in New York, we have churches growing in faithfulness, health, and numbers, ministering amidst the holy confusion of different tongues. As we work in translating the *Book of Church Order* into Chinese and Korean, we simultaneously welcome new language groups. Opportunities for ministry continually arrive at our doorsteps.

We celebrate the RCA churches here as the custodians of our historical heritage. But, my friends, these RCA congregations are the harbingers of our future. Within the first half of this new century, if we are faithful to our mission, congregations in every single region of this continent will be dealing with the same daily realities of ministry within God’s rich diversity of languages and cultures.

As our president, the Rev. Gregg Mast, has already emphasized, in our polity congregational leadership is shared among ministers of Word and sacrament, elders, and deacons. Nurturing healthy congregations requires that deacons and elders are empowered and trained to carry their leadership roles. Training programs and resources are already well developed for deacons; now we must initiate efforts to more thoroughly equip elders for their ministry. Then, having equipped congregational leaders, the way is prepared for calling forth the gifts of all members, learning how to match those gifts with opportunities of ministry. And, thus, the “Faithful Witnesses” plan also includes resources for discipleship for all ages; a new model for welcoming adult converts into the life of a congregation; an emphasis on faith formation and biblical engagement for all members; social witness opportunities; and other efforts.

This “Faithful Witnesses” initiative points the way for local mission. In the same fashion, “Discipling All Nations” will cast a vision for global mission. For the past year and a half our director of Mission Services, the Rev. Bruce Menning, other members of Mission Services staff, our missionaries and mission partners around the world, and others committed to the cause of mission have been preparing a comprehensive framework for our future in global mission. As a result, a working document titled “Discipling All Nations” examines the changing global context for mission, our theological foundations, the principles of partnership that guide us, and priorities by which we will make future mission commitments.

But this is not completed. Purposely. We are looking to the Mission 2000 convocation to provide the discernment and direction that will decisively shape the final outcome of “Discipling All Nations.” In order to facilitate this, mission partners from around the world will be with us to offer their wisdom, experience, and discernment. Thus, we not only engage in mission in partnership with other churches around the world; we also envision future mission in dialogue with global partners.

At the General Synod of 1995 we declared, “Mission Is One.” We have been trying to live that way since then. Mission is rooted in every congregation. For each one is called to “follow Christ in mission,” locally engaged and globally connected. Thus, our congregations are called together to be “Faithful Witnesses, Discipling All Nations.”

We have said “our shared task is to equip congregations for ministry.” Our **shared task.** In today’s environment, congregations will be “equipped for ministry” only if all assemblies—
consistories, classes, regional synods, and the General Synod, through its General Synod Council—are cooperating together in response to those needs identified by congregations themselves, teaching each other, learning from each other, in true partnership. Last year I pledged to do everything I could to foster those relationships across our judicatories. This year I can report that General Synod and regional synod staff entered into a new “covenant” to deepen our cooperation and share responsibilities as we strive to implement our Statement of Mission and Vision.

“Our shared task is to equip congregations for ministry.” Equipped congregations are healthy congregations. And healthy congregations grow numerically. If indeed we work together to implement the Statement of Mission and Vision as it is further articulated in “Faithful Witnesses” and “Discipling All Nations,” we expect that by the close of the year 2005 we will see a 10 percent increase in the membership of the Reformed Church in America.

Do we believe this can happen? Are we genuinely convinced that God wants the church to grow? Are we prepared to work together to achieve such growth:

- In the depth of our faithfulness?
- In the quality of our health?
- In the number of our members?

If so, let’s express this in one bold goal, a goal that expresses faithful expectations for our future and a goal that can be achieved only if we all cooperate together with a singleness of purpose. I’d suggest something like this:

In the year 2005 the covenanted community called the Reformed Church in America will consist of more than one thousand congregational mission stations with a total membership of more than two hundred thousand confessing members, mission stations growing in health, expanding in their ethnic diversity, and engaging in local and global mission.

That’s only a suggestion to start the discussion. It may not be bold enough, or specific enough. Or is it too ambitious? What do you think? What will we all think after Mission 2000?

Here’s my advice. Let’s decide together, as a denomination, what we expect from our commitment to implement our Statement of Mission and Vision. Therefore, I offer the following proposal:

P-2
To request the general secretary, in implementing the directions of the Mission 2000 convocation, to facilitate a process for establishing a clear and compelling five-year goal as the expected result of our mission and ministry together as a denomination; and further,

to request the general secretary, in the course of this process, to intentionally seek the input of all classes, regional synods, boards, and agencies; and further,

to request the General Synod Council to finalize the proposed goal in April 2001, for report to the General Synod that year.

kUpon recommendation by the Committee of Reference, P-2 was referred to the Advisory Committee on Evangelism and Church Development. See p. 321.
This road to faithfulness, health, and growth takes us tonight to a new place. The Mission 2000 convocation is a bold experiment. We intend to begin this new millennium focused on our call to mission by allowing it to reshape our life together as General Synod. More than a thousand members of the RCA will gather together these next three days; nearly half of all congregations in the RCA will be represented.

Remember what the elder shared with me at his restaurant about his consistory meetings. Here, at this meeting, when we begin the Mission 2000 convocation, we will allow God’s call to mission to interrupt the normal business of General Synod. Indeed, we will “no longer do business as usual, nor our usual business.”

But will we be open to change? Change in our lives, in our congregations, and in our life together as a denomination? For change always accompanies growth. And we know that sometimes, perhaps often, we resist change. It has often been this way in the life of the church. Recall with me the story of Jesus in the second chapter of Mark. Jesus is in a house crowded with those listening to the teaching he had to offer. Some scribes are there too, armed and ready with their questions.

But there are four outside the house who are on a mission. That mission is grounded in faith and creates among them a unity and sense of purpose. They want to bring their paralyzed friend into the presence of Jesus. That is their passionate goal.

But they can’t get through the door. The people inside have no room for them. So they go through the roof. They are determined to open up space in that meeting, space in which health and wholeness can thrive. Their unity, their commitment to reach out to a “lost and broken world so loved by God,” and their determination to “follow Christ in mission” change everything.

Jesus recognizes their faithfulness. He refuses to let religious folk erect barriers that would stand in the way of ministry. He wants to offer God’s love to those in need, forgiving their sins, and empowering them to rise up into new life. And these friends of the paralyzed man sense it. So they do whatever is necessary to make room for growth. They are faithful in their actions. That makes room for greater health and for growth in the numbers of those welcomed into Christ’s community.

What will we, the Reformed Church in America, do? Will we be like those religious folks who insist that the focus be on internal agendas and insular arguments? Or will we, like the four, with unity and undaunted passion nurtured by a common mission, bring others into the presence of Jesus? Will we make room for growth? Will we make space for the Spirit to shape our future during these pentecostal days spent here together?

Things either grow or decline.

**God wants the church to grow,**
- to grow in the depth of our faithfulness,
- to grow in the quality of our health, and
- to grow in the number of our members.

We can.

Let us pray for the Reformed Church in America, that God’s will be done.
# REPORT OF THE GENERAL SECRETARY

## CHANGE IN MEMBERSHIP BY CLASSES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REGIONAL SYNOD OF MID-AMERICA</th>
<th>CONFIRMED MEMBERS 1982</th>
<th>CONFIRMED MEMBERS 1983</th>
<th>INCREASE OR DECREASE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chicago</td>
<td>4,160</td>
<td>4,118</td>
<td>(42)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>5,020</td>
<td>5,063</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>6,658</td>
<td>6,645</td>
<td>(13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>15,838</td>
<td>15,826</td>
<td>(12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>REGIONAL SYNOD OF ALBANY</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saratoga</td>
<td>4,436</td>
<td>4,389</td>
<td>(47)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>4,436</td>
<td>4,389</td>
<td>(47)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>REGIONAL SYNOD OF THE MID-ATLANTICS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>1,700</td>
<td>1,700</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>2,968</td>
<td>2,968</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>4,668</td>
<td>4,668</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>REGIONAL SYNOD OF THE SOUTH</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>5,112</td>
<td>5,163</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>5,112</td>
<td>5,163</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>10,224</td>
<td>10,326</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>REGIONAL SYNOD OF CANADA</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ontario</td>
<td>6,814</td>
<td>6,814</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>3,990</td>
<td>3,990</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>10,804</td>
<td>10,804</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>REGIONAL SYNOD OF THE FAR WEST</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>1,592</td>
<td>1,630</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>1,669</td>
<td>1,700</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>3,261</td>
<td>3,330</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>REGIONAL SYNOD OF THE PACIFIC</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>15,481</td>
<td>15,538</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>15,481</td>
<td>15,538</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>REGIONAL SYNOD OF THE SOUTHWEST</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southwestern</td>
<td>1,296</td>
<td>1,346</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>19,255</td>
<td>19,649</td>
<td>394</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>REGIONAL SYNOD OF THE GREAT LAKES</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>5,428</td>
<td>5,428</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>2,401</td>
<td>2,401</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>7,829</td>
<td>7,829</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>REGIONAL SYNOD OF THE HEARTLAND</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Illinois</td>
<td>6,126</td>
<td>6,126</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Ohio</td>
<td>1,504</td>
<td>1,504</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>7,630</td>
<td>7,630</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:**
- **CONFIRMED MEMBERS:** The number of members confirmed in 1982.
- **CONFIRMED MEMBERS:** The number of members confirmed in 1983.
- **INCREASE OR DECREASE:** The change in membership from 1982 to 1983.
GENERAL SYNOD BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Report of the General Synod Council

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 responsibilities assigned to the General Synod Council are in the Bylaws of the General Synod (Book of Church Order, Chapter 3, Part 1, Article 3, Section 6).

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 1999 are dealt with throughout the report.

Ad Interim Administration

# Regional Synod Minutes
# Ad Interim Appointments
# Debt Reporting
# Revisions of Consistorial Report Form

General Synod Meeting

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

Budget

# 2001 General Synod Operational Assessment Budget (Board of Directors)
# Other 2001 General Synod Assessments (Board of Directors)
# Total 2001 General Synod Assessments (Board of Directors)

Supervision

# Personnel and Evaluation Committee
Other

# Classes and Regional Synod Stated Clerks Consultation
# Appointment of General Synod Treasurer and Assistant Treasurer
# 1999 Statistical Report of the RCA
# Implementation of the Statement of Mission and Vision
# General Synod/Mission 2000
# Organizational Audit
# Racial and Ethnic Ministries
# Information Systems/Computer Technology
# Revised Procedures for the Review of General Synod Commissions

From the General Synod Council Committees

1. Congregational Services

   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 Communications)

   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 Development)

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

3. Finance Services

   Office of Finance Services (Financial Support)

4. Ministry and Personnel Services

   Office of Ministry and Personnel Services (Church Vocations)
5. Mission Services

Office of Mission Services (World Mission)

Changes in Missionary Personnel (World Mission)

Office of Hunger Education (World Mission)

6. Policy, Planning, and Administration Services

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)

Committee of Reference

# Referrals

# 2001 General Synod Assessments

# Leaves of Absence

# Resolutions

AD INTERIM ADMINISTRATION

Regional Synod Minutes

The GSC received, and found to be in good order, the 1999 minutes of the regional synods of Albany, Canada, the Far West, the Great Lakes, the Heartland, Mid-America, the Mid-Atlantics, and New York.

Ad Interim Appointments

To the General Synod Council:

Esa Attocknie, representing the Native American Indian Ministries Council, Class of 2000.


The Rev. Daniel Gillett, representing the Classis of Holland, Class of 2002.


Alice Rowan, representing the Classis of Schoharie, Class of 2002.


John Bos, representing the Classis of California, to fill the unexpired term of the
Rev. David Van Lant, Class of 2000.


Stephanie Kaper-Dale, at-large member, to fill the unexpired term of the Rev. Dr. Gregg Mast, Class of 2000.

**R-1**

To approve the ad interim appointments. (ADOPTED)

**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.

At its April 2000 meeting the GSC voted to revise the Consistorial Report form to indicate that indebtedness information is collected for the use of the classis, not the denomination.

**Revisions of the Consistorial Report Form**

At its April 2000 meeting, the GSC voted to revise the Consistorial Report as follows:

A study of Part I, Section C—“Financial Stewardship” indicated that not all income is easily placed within item 18 as it stands. In an attempt to clarify what is being requested, item 18 has been edited to indicate that income collected from organizations within the church is net income. Changes in 18a, 18b, and 19b are editorial. Item 18d is a new item added to provide a place to note income from quasi-church organizations that provide additional income to the church.

**III Addendum A** was retitled **III Gift Planning Receipts** and was rewritten by the coordinator for gift planning and for promotion of the RCA Building and Extension Fund to clarify the terms to reduce confusion; the information requested remains the same.

**IV Addendum B** was retitled **IV Indebtedness** and edited to indicate that indebtedness information is collected via the denominational form for the use of the classis to fulfill the directive from the *Book of Church Order* Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 9 (page 13), which indicates that “the consistory shall not incur a total indebtedness which exceeds two-thirds of the prior year’s expenditures for congregational purposes, as reported to the General Synod, without the approval of classis.” It is a classis obligation to supervise congregations, not a General Synod or General Synod Council responsibility. Stating this clarifies this position. This information will not be collected or registered at the denominational level.

**V Addendum C** was retitled **V Pastor’s Professional Development and Continuing Education** with editorial changes made to allow more space for reply.

Part II, which requests “Church Location” and “Church Staff and Officers of Consistory,” was deleted in its entirety. Thirty-six stated clerks were polled regarding the need for this information. Of those responding, none asked that this part of the form be retained. The coordinator for diaconal ministries and hunger education indicated that the information on
deacons is too old to use by the time the data is collected and entered into the database. Other units were polled and none used the data, as it is not timely. Deleting Part II will save churches the time it takes to record the data on the form and save the denomination the substantial data input costs as well as printing, paper, and shipping costs. The information on churches and ministers of Word and sacrament is gathered for the denominational database in other ways and need not be duplicated on the Consistorial Report form.

GENERAL SYNOD MEETING

Referral of Business

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

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

Communion Offering

Upon recommendation by the president of General Synod, the GSC designated the 2000 General Synod offerings to Reformed Church children’s ministries and for the church’s commitment to Children and Worship International.

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 1999 and 2000 General Synod assessments at the General Synod meeting.

Dates and Sites

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 were 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.

2000 was set for Friday, June 9, through Thursday, June 15, at Hofstra University.

### 2001 General Synod

At its June 11-16, 1999 meeting, the General Synod accepted the invitation of Central College to host the 2001 meeting of General Synod on the campus (*MGS 1999*, R-7, p. 229). The meeting will be held June 8-13, 2001.

### POLICY AND PLANNING

#### Amendments to the *Book of Church Order*

The General Synod in 1999 adopted and referred to the classes for approval eight amendments to the *Book of Church Order*. The amendments are recorded in the 1999 *Minutes of General Synod*, pp. 209, 211-218, 224-225.

**Proposed Amendments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposed Amendments</th>
<th>Approved</th>
<th>Disapproved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Ministers transferring from one classis to another</strong></td>
<td>45</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(<em>MGS 1999</em> p. 209)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(<em>BCO</em>, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 13, p. 49)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(<em>Formulary 9</em>, p. 131)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Grounds for complaint</strong></td>
<td>40</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(<em>MGS 1999</em>, p. 211)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(<em>BCO</em>, Chapter 2, Part II, Article 1, p. 89)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Supervision of students of theology</strong></td>
<td>34</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(<em>MGS 1999</em>, pp. 212)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(<em>BCO</em>, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 8, p. 40)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Complaints and appeals in union churches</strong></td>
<td>46</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(<em>MGS 1999</em>, p. 215)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(<em>BCO</em>, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 7, Section 2, p. 22)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5. Membership on regional synod judicial business committees</strong></td>
<td>39</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(<em>MGS 1999</em>, p. 216)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(<em>BCO</em>, Chapter 1, Part III, Article 6, p. 61)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6. Ministers under contract</strong></td>
<td>45</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(<em>MGS 1999</em>, p. 217)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(<em>BCO</em>, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, p. 12)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7. Licensed candidates under contract</strong></td>
<td>46</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(<em>MGS 1999</em>, p.217)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(<em>BCO</em>, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, p. 32)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8. Articles of incorporation for new congregations</strong></td>
<td>45</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(<em>MGS 1999</em>, p. 224)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(<em>BCO</em>, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 11, p. 33; and Section 22, p. 38)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(<em>Formulary 15</em>)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

R-3
To declare amendments 1-8 to have been approved by the classes for incorporation into the 2000 edition of the Book of Church Order. (ADOPTED)

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

The 1999 General Synod approved in first reading for recommendation to the 2000 General Synod the following amendment to the Bylaws of the General Synod and Special Rules of Order of the General Synod:

GSC Meeting Frequency—BCO, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 5a (MGS 1999, R-10, p. 68).

R-4
To declare the above amendment approved by the 1999 General Synod in first reading to be incorporated into the 2000 edition of the Bylaws of the General Synod. (ADOPTED)

Change of Fiscal Year-End to September 30, Effective September 30, 2000

In April 1999 the General Synod Council (GSC) voted (GSC 99-34):

To request all GSC units and affiliated entities to assess the impact of a change in fiscal year-end to September 30 and report back to Finance Services with any suggestions by June 30. To further request GSC to take action on this request in October 1999 in anticipation of a change in fiscal year-end beginning in 2000.

In October 1999 Finance Services recommended that the change in the fiscal year-end be delayed until September 30, 2001, due to internal staffing constraints, which had prohibited an investigation process from taking place. The GSC responded by voting “that the change in fiscal year-end be postponed for one year” (GSC 99-99).

In January 2000 Finance Services succeeded in hiring a new assistant controller, who was charged with the responsibility of researching the feasibility of changing the fiscal year-end. The conclusion of Finance Services is that present staff capacity is adequate to implement this change and that the benefits of doing so clearly outweigh any disadvantages.

Benefits of a September 30 Fiscal Year-End

1. A More Functional Budget

Presently, with the fiscal year ending at December 31, a major portion of RCA income is collected during the last quarter of the year. This is due to the large volume of contributions received during the Christmas season. The obvious downfall is the inability to predict the amount of contributions that will be received. Under the current calendar year, GSC units spend money (according to budgeted figures), then wait until the end of the year to see if all of the income that had been budgeted is actually received. By changing the fiscal year-end to September 30, the major portion of GSC’s income will be received in the first quarter of the fiscal year. This will better position the denominational offices to work within a balanced budget. Also, after seeing the first quarter results, staff would have the opportunity to either modify the budget, or if necessary, run an appeal for anticipated shortfalls. Thus, a change in the fiscal year-end will significantly improve the budgeting process and control over spending.

2. A More Timely Audit and Financial Reporting Process
Without the distractions of year-end contribution receipts, 1099s, W-2s, and various other filings (Gift Annuity and State Insurance Dept. Reports, etc.), staff will be able to prepare audit work papers in a more timely fashion. This will allow staff to report the financial results internally and to governing boards within a shorter period of time than is presently possible.

3. Improved Efficiencies in Finance Services

This change would also grant staff the capacity to more evenly distribute the work load throughout the year, enabling a more efficient use of staff resources and the ability to minimize overtime costs during the busy season.

Who Is Affected and Who Is Not Affected

The change in fiscal year-end applies to the General Synod, the General Synod Council, the Board of Pensions, the RCA Building and Extension Fund, and the RCA Foundation.

The change in fiscal year-end does not apply to churches, classes, regional synods, or other agencies of the Reformed Church in America whose financial results are not consolidated with those of the General Synod.

Some important things that would not be affected by a change in year-end include:

1. Payroll tax returns/W2s/1099s (IRS reporting of taxable earnings and interest).
2. Church Annuity Fund participant statements and payments.
3. Insurance billing, which will continue to be done on a calendar year basis.
4. Pledges, which will still be tracked on a calendar year basis for the donor’s benefit.

There will be no change in the frequency or timing of classis assessments at this time.

Consequences of Not Implementing a FYE Change

If the fiscal year-end is not changed, the budgets will not be effectively managed and Finance Services staff will continue to work six days per week from November through February.

Required Steps

General Synod Council approval was obtained at the April 2000 meeting, but the following details will need some attention in order to effect these changes:

1. The “Corporate Bylaws of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America” need to be amended at this meeting. Note: The “Corporate Bylaws” is a separate and distinct document from the Book of Church Order, Chapter 3, “The Bylaws and Special Rules of the General Synod,” Part I. The “Corporate Bylaws of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America” are printed for distribution at this meeting of the General Synod beginning on page 71 in the General Synod Workbook. These bylaws may be amended by action of the synod at this meeting and do not require a second reading at the next meeting of synod in 2001.

2. The “Bylaws of the General Synod Council (GSC) of the Reformed Church in America, Inc.” will need to be amended by the members of the GSC in a special action prior
to the October meeting of the GSC. Note: If the General Synod approves the change, the GSC Coordinating Committee (attending synod as the Committee of Reference) is prepared to set a special conference call meeting for the GSC prior to September 30.

3. Since the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency (MFCA) is not separately incorporated, the GSC board may need to authorize the year-end change for MFCA.

4. The Board of Pensions year-end needs to be approved by the State Insurance Department until such time as the Reformed Church is released from filing with them. (Incidentally, this change would give much-needed extra time necessary for filing. Whether the year-end is 12/31 or 9/30, reports must be filed with them by 2/28.) The Board of Pensions has already made the necessary changes by passing a motion at its October 1999 meeting to use the same fiscal year as the GSC.

5. The RCA Foundation has already made the necessary changes by passing a motion to use the same fiscal year as GSC at its October 1999 meeting.

6. The RCA Building and Extension Fund has already made the necessary changes by passing a motion to use the same fiscal year as GSC at its November 1999 meeting.

7. The Finance Office needs to make modifications to the accounting system in order for the computer to recognize the new starting and ending periods. This should happen in July 2000, after General Synod has approved it.

8. Board meeting dates for 2000 and the future may need to be changed.

R-5
To amend the “Corporate Bylaws of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America,” Article VIII, Section 8.01 as follows (additions underlined; deletions stricken out):

Section 8.01. The fiscal year of the corporation shall begin on October 1 and end on September 30. (ADOPTED)

R-6
To adopt a fiscal year-end of September 30, effective September 30, 2000. (ADOPTED)

Policy for Business and Financial Plan for New Initiatives (GSC 99-69)

The 1999 General Synod passed the following recommendation to address the issue of funding of new initiatives:

R-98 (MGS 1999, p. 324)

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.

At its meeting on February 10-11, 2000, the Commission on Church Order reviewed the above issue and as reflected in section 8.7 of their minutes recorded the following:

Finance Services concern about funding of new initiatives - The GSC Finance
Services Committee asked the commission to consider any changes necessary in the BCO concerning the funding of new initiatives. The commission understands that adequate written policies are in place within GSC and within the instructions to advisory committees at General Synod. It is the opinion of the commission that no changes are necessary in the BCO to respond to this very real concern. Present policies are adequate and need to be adhered to.

While not specifically cited in its minutes, the commission was making reference to R-4 (MGS 1995, p. 348):

To reaffirm the action of the 1990 General Synod:

To request that all recommendations and overtures presented at General Synod which would affect the rate of assessments include an approximation of the costs involved and the impact on assessments (MGS 1990, R-5, p. 388, and MGS 1993, R-3, p. 412); and further,

to extend this request to the president and the general secretary for their respective reports.

and R-3 (MGS 1993, p. 412):

To reaffirm the action of the 1990 General Synod:

To request that all recommendations and overtures presented to General Synod which would affect the rate of assessments include an approximation of the costs involved and the impact on assessments (MGS 1990, R-5, p. 388); and further,

to request the General Synod Council to provide for a method whereby any recommendation or overture presented at General Synod includes a projected cost analysis and a proposal as to how said recommendation or overture is to be funded.

As the Commission on Church Order has determined that no changes are necessary in the BCO, no further action is required on this recommendation. The moderator of the Advisory Committee on Financial Support will, however, need to be prepared to challenge any proposals or overtures that do not contain the required cost analysis and funding proposal.

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. Robert White, chair; the Rev. David Melvin; 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 (including housing allowances) in effect in April of the current year appears below.

**SALARY RANGES**

The benchmark (average salary*) figure reported to the Church Pensions Conference in December 1999 was $44,570, which compares with $46,950 for 1998.

The formula for basing executive salary ranges on percentages of average RCA clergy salaries was introduced in 1995 when the Personnel and Evaluation Committee voted “to adopt the average salary* paid to a full-time installed pastor of the Reformed Church in America as the benchmark for executive ranges each July; and further, to adopt 200%, 180%, 150% and 125% for the midpoints of Classifications I, II, IIIa and IIIb respectively, applied to the pastor’s average benchmark figure.

“Average salary” shall include cash salary plus housing allowance, or if a parsonage is provided instead, shall add a 40% value to the cash salary. The figure used as the benchmark shall be based on Long Term Disability Insurance report cards. (The average is already reported annually to the Church Pensions Conference.) The figure reported each December shall be used to set ranges for executive salaries each subsequent July (Minutes of Personnel and Evaluation Committee, February 3, 1994).

In April 1998 the Personnel and Evaluation Committee proposed to revise the salary ranges for Classification I, II, and IIIA to reflect the following percentages of the annual calculation of the average salaries of RCA pastors:

- Classification I: 250% (from 200%)
- Classification II: 200% (from 180%)
- Classification IIIA: 175% (from 150%)

Ranges IV-VI are not tied to clergy compensation but are related to the broader not-for-profit marketplace. They are adjusted annually to reflect cost-of-living increases.

Based on the benchmark (average salary*) figure ($44,570), the new ranges to go into effect July 1, 2000, would be as follows (current ranges which were effective July 1, 1999, through July 1, 2000, are shown in parentheses for comparison purposes):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLASSIFICATION</th>
<th>Low-Point (80%)</th>
<th>Mid-Point (100%)</th>
<th>High-Point (120%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Executive Staff I</td>
<td>$89,140 ($93,900)</td>
<td>$111,430 ($117,380)</td>
<td>$133,720 ($140,860)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>$71,310 ($75,120)</td>
<td>$89,140 ($93,900)</td>
<td>$106,970 ($112,680)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IIIa</td>
<td>$62,400 ($65,730)</td>
<td>$78,000 ($82,160)</td>
<td>$93,600 ($98,590)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IIIb</td>
<td>$44,570 ($46,950)</td>
<td>$55,710 ($58,690)</td>
<td>$66,850 ($70,430)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CLASSIFICATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Low-Point 85%</th>
<th>Mid-Point 100%</th>
<th>High-Point 115%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Associates</td>
<td>$31,560</td>
<td>$37,130</td>
<td>$42,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>($30,790)</td>
<td>($36,200)</td>
<td>($41,650)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V*</td>
<td>$25,360</td>
<td>$29,830</td>
<td>$34,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>($24,740)</td>
<td>($29,100)</td>
<td>($33,470)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIa*</td>
<td>$21,850</td>
<td>$25,700</td>
<td>$29,560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>($21,310)</td>
<td>($25,070)</td>
<td>($28,830)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIb*</td>
<td>$18,750</td>
<td>$22,060</td>
<td>$25,370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>($18,290)</td>
<td>($21,520)</td>
<td>($24,750)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figures have been adjusted to reflect a 2.5 percent cost-of-living increase.

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

OTHER

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 was held June 6-8, 2000, at Hofstra University. Clerks presented information and led discussions on issues of judicial business and church order, specialized interim ministers, the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency, and General Synod 2000. Denominational staff presented 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.

1999 Statistical Report of the RCA

PRELIMINARY SUMMARY OF THE STATISTICAL REPORT OF THE REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA FOR THE YEAR ENDING 12/31/1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>1997</th>
<th>1998</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>Increase or Decrease</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Churches</td>
<td>952</td>
<td>946</td>
<td>945</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Church Households</td>
<td>116,921</td>
<td>115,047</td>
<td>114,762</td>
<td>(285)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Confessing Members</td>
<td>185,074</td>
<td>183,252</td>
<td>182,337</td>
<td>(915)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Inactive Members</td>
<td>41,065</td>
<td>40,174</td>
<td>40,040</td>
<td>(134)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Baptized Members</td>
<td>79,337</td>
<td>78,838</td>
<td>77,438</td>
<td>(1,400)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Total Membership</td>
<td>305,476</td>
<td>302,264</td>
<td>299,815</td>
<td>(2,449)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Adherents</td>
<td>43,725</td>
<td>44,764</td>
<td>45,251</td>
<td>487</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Average Worship Attendance</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Received on Confession</td>
<td>8,445</td>
<td>7,876</td>
<td>8,128</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Received on Certificate</td>
<td>4,514</td>
<td>4,187</td>
<td>4,215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Transferred</td>
<td>3,886</td>
<td>3,541</td>
<td>3,665</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Deceased</td>
<td>2,980</td>
<td>3,065</td>
<td>2,975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Other Removals from Roll</td>
<td>5,653</td>
<td>5,627</td>
<td>5,468</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Infants Baptized</td>
<td>4,497</td>
<td>4,332</td>
<td>4,423</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Adults Baptized</td>
<td>1,301</td>
<td>1,193</td>
<td>1,264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Sunday Church School</td>
<td>95,555</td>
<td>93,703</td>
<td>92,546</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>New Membership Classes</td>
<td>11,902</td>
<td>11,008</td>
<td>11,787</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Other Educational Programs</td>
<td>96,759</td>
<td>98,524</td>
<td>96,151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19a</td>
<td>RCA Assessments</td>
<td>9,323,211</td>
<td>9,627,952</td>
<td>9,927,068</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19b</td>
<td>RCA Contributions</td>
<td>13,404,833</td>
<td>14,099,457</td>
<td>14,336,046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19c</td>
<td>Other Contributions</td>
<td>10,546,972</td>
<td>11,326,415</td>
<td>12,628,878</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Congregational Purposes</td>
<td>197,242,829</td>
<td>194,710,130</td>
<td>210,347,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>$230,517,845</td>
<td>$229,763,954</td>
<td>$247,239,492</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Organized**

Good News Community Church, Okoboji, Iowa (7/99) Classis of East Sioux  
Sunrise Community Church, Tulare, California (12/99) Classis of Central California

**Disbanded/Released**

New Salem Reformed Church, Voorheesville, New York (1/99) Classis of Albany  
Randall Community Church, Fultonville, New York (3/99) Classis of Schoharie  
Church of the Savior, Niles, Michigan (4/99) Classis of Southwest Michigan

**FOR THE YEAR 2000**

**Organized/Received**

Providence Reformed Church, Ada, Michigan (1/00) Classis of South Grand Rapids  
New Life Community Church, Coralville, Iowa (1/00) Classis of Pleasant Prairie

**Disbanded/Released**

Christ Community Church, Blue Springs, Missouri (2/00) Classis of Central Plains

**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-7**  
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:

**R-8**
To appoint the Rev. Kenneth Bradsell assistant secretary of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America. (ADOPTED)

Report of the Board of Directors

(The section of the General Synod Board of Directors titled "Budget" can be found in the Financial Support section (see pp. 393-400).)

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STATEMENT OF MISSION AND VISION

Three years ago, in response to the work of the General Synod Council (GSC), the General Synod adopted a Statement of Mission and Vision for the Reformed Church in America (MGS 1997, pp.78-80). At that time, the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, in his report to General Synod, emphasized the importance of going beyond adoption of such a statement, to implementation:

"Statements of vision are compelling only when we covenant to go where the words send us—to claim the challenge and to accept the risks— to pray for and with each other along the way—to sacrifice ourselves and our resources. We don’t need just words. We need clear direction. We need to mobilize ourselves for faithful action (MGS 1997, p. 47)."

The General Synod Council, in fulfillment of its responsibility “to initiate studies and evaluations of policy, strategy, and long-range planning within the denomination” (BCO, Chapter 3, Part 1, Article 3, Section 6b), has endeavored to assist in making the vision a reality. It has done this, first, by adopting three goal statements to guide its assessment of present and future programs and commitments. Then in April 1999 the GSC adopted twelve priorities to provide the framework for allocation of financial resources and personnel. It is these twelve priorities that have guided the work of the GSC in its decision-making over the past year. The various staff units and agencies have been working toward implementing the priorities. Furthermore, in order to make the priorities more concrete, a staff leadership team is now developing a unified plan for implementation, including specific measurable objectives for each of the priorities. These objectives, along with work priorities set by each director, have influenced the development of the 2001 budget. Indeed, the Statement of Mission and Vision has guided the GSC and its staff as it seeks to “mobilize… for faithful action.”

General Synod/Mission 2000

The administrative, operations, production, and program staff of the General Synod and General Synod Council have worked side by side with the Mission 2000 planning team and its sub-teams for the last twenty-four months to plan, organize, coordinate, administer, and oversee all aspects of the Mission 2000 convocation set for June 9-12, 2000 in the midst of General Synod. Staff typically function under tremendous pressure from January through mid-May to oversee preparations, delegate registration, reporting, and site planning for the annual meeting of the General Synod as well as coordinating and supporting the spring meeting of the GSC and the annual production of the RCA Directory and statistical reports. In addition to these responsibilities, the staff handled the increased complexity of providing administrative support for the mission convocation with tremendous grace, effectiveness, and efficiency.

Near full-time volunteer support from Barbara Neveel (event and synod registrar) and Mary Clark (site coordination team chair), and the ongoing work of Arthur Hessinger (site
team member and Regional Synod of New York liaison) and the Rev. Jon Norton (Regional Synod of New York executive) have been invaluable. Planning Committee leaders the Rev. Charles VanEngen and Lynn Zwaggerman, along with the Rev. Bruce Menning, the Rev. Richard Welscott, and Larryl Humme from the Mission Services, Evangelism and Church Development Services, and Foundation staff have given hours and days to the event. Lastly, Kim Baker and the Communication and Production Services staff have worked long hours, often under tremendous pressure, to draft, edit, design, print, and send the event materials along with the usual pressure of producing the reports for General Synod. The regular staff of the church has been enhanced by contractual support from Jane Richardson (RCA Foundation) and Mary Burns (professional services for event planning) to assure that all aspects of the convocation operate smoothly. The General Synod Council extends its thanks to the planning teams, the RCA staff, the many volunteers, and to the additional contracted personnel who have given so much of themselves in their support for the mission of the Reformed Church in America.

Organizational Audit

At its April 1999 meeting the GSC requested that a plan be developed to accomplish an “organizational audit of the existing structure of the RCA.” In October the GSC expanded this directive to “examine the issues surrounding the roles and relationships of the General Synod and GSC and the role of the general secretary in relationship to both of these bodies.” The GSC further instructed that the process include “a consultant with expertise in the area of mission and church structure.” In response to this request the following persons agreed to serve on the Organizational Audit Working Group: Carol Mutch, the Rev. Renee House, the Rev. David Melvin, Bruce Neckers, the Rev. John Hiemstra, Paul Karssen, the Rev. Kenneth Bradsell, and the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson. One additional member from within the Synod of the Far West remains to be appointed. The Rev. Dr. Craig Van Gelder, co-chair of the Gospel and Our Culture Network and a member of the faculty of Luther Seminary in Minneapolis, Minnesota, was invited, and has agreed to serve, as the consultant to the working group.

A subcommittee of the working group reviewed actions of the GSC related to assignments dating back to 1998. The subcommittee also reviewed the report prepared for the GSC’s Policy, Planning, and Administration Services by Wesley Granberg-Michaelson that led to the proposal to form the working group last October. The subcommittee entered into an extensive discussion of the purpose of an audit and what the hoped-for result of an organizational audit would be. The subcommittee reported its conclusions to the GSC in April 2000. They are:

- An organizational audit of the RCA needs to consider the current organizational and operational systems in place within the GSC and the related corporations and agencies of the General Synod that oversee the program, mission, administration, planning and operational work of the RCA; and to provide leadership and direction for policy formation and adoption.

- Further, and in keeping with the directive of the GSC, the committee noted that the audit needs to examine the roles and relationship of the GSC with the General Synod and the role of the general secretary in relation to both of these bodies.

- The audit should provide clear and practical advise to the GSC on the appropriateness of the present systems to help the RCA accomplish its mission.

- The audit needs to be accomplished in a manner that values and takes into consideration the following: 1) a historic understanding of the structure and polity of the RCA, including the nature and purpose of its assemblies (consistory, classis, regional synod,
General Synod) and ordained offices (minister, elder, deacon, professor of theology); 2) the theological, doctrinal, and ecclesiastical perspectives of the RCA; and 3) the current missional, cultural, and sociological situation in which the church is called to carry out Christ’s mission.

- The organizational audit must be carried out thoroughly and promptly because there is significant concern about sustaining continued high levels of ownership of and support for a unified mission and program in the RCA; and because of questions about the efficiency, effectiveness, and appropriate assignment of decision-making responsibilities within the present structures and organization of the General Synod and its corporations and agencies.

The subcommittee proposed the following process for consideration by the General Synod Council in April 2000. The implementation plan was approved and is now underway.

- Empower the committee, in consultation with the director of Policy, Planning, and Administration Services, to engage Dr. Craig Van Gelder or another suitable and comparably qualified person on a consultant contract for a period of up to four months beginning in May 2000 and ending in August 2000 for the purpose of carrying out an organizational audit of the Reformed Church in America.

- Request the director and the general secretary to make available to the consultant all documents, minutes, reports, records, research data etc. that he may require to carry out the assignment, and give Dr. Van Gelder access to employed and volunteer personnel (moderators, officers, etc.) throughout the church as may be necessary.

- Request the consultant to produce for the Organizational Audit Working Group a draft “management letter” not later than September 1, 2000; and following consultation with the working group, a final copy of a management letter for distribution and review by the GSC at its October 2000 meeting. The letter should provide a clear and practical analysis of the organization, structure, and relationships of General Synod agencies and corporations and the appropriateness of the organization and structure to help the RCA carry out its mission. The letter may provide the GSC with advice on ways it can modify its organization and structure so it can better serve the church.

- The Organizational Audit Working Group will provide the GSC at its October 2000 meeting with advice and recommendations for GSC action based on its study of the letter and its consultation with the consultant.

- The GSC will consider any and all recommendations for future/further action at the October 2000 meeting and will determine how best to carry out the recommendations it adopts (e.g. continue the working group, appoint a different team, instruct the general secretary or staff to take appropriate actions, etc.).

Racial and Ethnic Ministries

In June 1997 the general secretary, in his report to the General Synod, outlined a vision for a multicultural future for the Reformed Church in America. In his report he lifted up “the racial and ethnic diversity of the RCA as a gift of the Holy Spirit, intended to prepare us more fully to be the sign of Christ’s presence within a hurting and broken world” (MGS 1997, p. 52). The general secretary’s proposal to create a Commission on Multicultural Life was postponed until further study could be done (MGS 1997, p. 296). The 1997 General Synod went on to instruct the GSC’s Policy, Planning, and Administration Services, the racial/ethnic councils, and the general secretary to develop a comprehensive plan that would include the racial/ethnic councils in the process of focusing the church’s vision on the tasks of new church
development, church revitalization, evangelism, urban ministry, global ministry, and other priorities. The recommendation also requested that the racial/ethnic councils and staff be integrated within the work of the General Synod Council (MGS 1997, pp. 295-296).

In 1998 the General Synod received the report of the project team formed by the GSC to carry out the above assignment. The synod voted to create the Commission on Race and Ethnicity as part of a wider strategy to enhance the RCA’s commitment to becoming a fully diverse racial and ethnic church outlined in the project team’s report. The commission was formed in the fall of 1999 following the declarative action by the General Synod in June 1999, a requirement for amending the bylaws (MGS 1999, p. 98). The commission was given a mandate “to monitor the Reformed Church in America’s commitment to be a fully multicultural and multiethnic fellowship, united in Christ, and to be an advocate for institutional transformation toward this end” (MGS 1998, p. 318). The first report of the new commission is being presented to this meeting of the General Synod. The report begins on page 409 in the General Synod Workbook.

The 1998 General Synod also voted to incorporate the racial/ethnic councils and council executive staff fully within the GSC. This change was also fully implemented in the fall of 1999. At that time racial/ethnic council representatives became full voting members of the GSC and of its coordinating committee, and the racial/ethnic council executives were brought fully into the Policy, Planning, and Administration Services staff. Throughout the past year the GSC has worked in the following areas to carry out the General Synod’s commitment to become a fully racial and ethnically diverse church:

• Support of the new Commission on Race and Ethnicity has involved the staff of all four councils, the Policy, Planning, and Administration Services director, and the coordinator for urban ministries. The unit director appointed Ella Campbell to provide staff support for the commission for up to two years.

• The directors of Policy, Planning, and Administration Services, Mission Services, and Evangelism and Church Development Services, along with Mission Services personnel, met with representatives of the Native American Indian Ministries Council to begin developing a unified ministry with Native American peoples and congregations. A search process for a new part-time director for the council commenced after the fall meeting of the GSC.

• The Policy, Planning, and Administration Services director and the executives of the African-American, Hispanic, and Pacific and Asian American Councils met throughout the winter to develop a series of objectives for consideration by the GSC to implement the GSC priority to “Build a church that reflects the diversity around us.” These proposed objectives, along with implementation objectives for all of the GSC priorities, will be reported to the GSC in the fall 2000 meeting.

• The General Synod Council maintains a close working relationship with each of the racial/ethnic councils and their executive committees through the office of the director of Policy, Planning, and Administration Services. The director meets with the executive committees of the councils regularly. The director, the general secretary, and the officers of the General Synod also attend the annual meeting of each council. The director of Policy, Planning, and Administration Services, in collaboration with the various council executive committees, carries out staff supervision and support for the council executives.

Information Systems/Computer Technology

The information systems staff is in the second and final year of a comprehensive rebuilding
of the computer technology hardware and software that supports the administration, mission, program, and communication needs of the RCA. The project has been supported by individual gifts in excess of $330,000 and a special one-year (2000) assessment of $154,000. As of mid-March $385,000 of the fund has been used. The project has included the replacement of most of the desktop and laptop computers used by all staff and the replacement of the decade-old IBM AS/400 systems in Grand Rapids and Orange City with new (NT) server technology. The IBM AS/400 in New York is scheduled for shutdown later this year following the completion of software changeovers that will remove the RCA’s insurance programs, investment program, database of ministers, and statistical reporting from the old system. The project has also involved retraining the RCA’s four computer staff so they are able to operate new systems and support administrative, program, and mission personnel computer needs. Throughout the second half of 1999 and during the first six months of 2000 the computer staff has focused its work on the following projects:

- Continued program development and enhancement of the Raiser’s Edge software used to maintain and support the RCA’s name and address database and contribution management systems. Without this foundational software the RCA will be unable to communicate effectively with its members and will not be able to receive, process, receipt, and thank congregations and individuals for their financial gifts to support the church.

- Continued the enhancements to and installation of new systems to support the print production, distribution, and TRAVARCA operations in the RCA’s center in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

- Developed a comprehensive plan to upgrade the systems in Orange City, Iowa, in partnership with the Regional Synod of the Heartland, and to develop a plan to install wireless high-speed Internet technology in that office to support present and future operations from that location;

- With staff in Communication and Production Services, continued to implement the new RCA website.

- The last two large software projects planned within the comprehensive two-year systems rebuilding program have been initiated this winter with staff in the RCA’s finance and insurance offices. A full upgrade of the financial management and accounting software will begin this summer and is scheduled for completion before fall. A project plan to identify and install new human resources software that will support the benefits management needs of the insurance department and the pensions office has been developed and is under review by the director of Policy, Planning, and Administration Services. The project objective is to locate, modify, and install a system that will 1) support benefits management for the participants in the RCA pension and insurance programs and 2) handle record-keeping functions for RCA ministers of Word and sacrament, missionaries, other employees of congregations, and personnel employed by the General Synod and the General Synod Council.

It is important to note that implementation of the comprehensive technology rebuilding project included changes in the way the church will fund ongoing technology needs and in the management of information technology. Beginning in 2000 all staff offices are assessed $1,000 per desk for future technology replacement costs. The establishment of this fund will eliminate the need to borrow funds or request special gifts or assessments as technology needs continue to change and expand. The director of Policy, Planning, and Administration Services also established an Information Technology Strategy Group with representatives from all of the RCA’s units. The group meets monthly by conference call. It establishes the priorities and oversees implementation of priorities with the director and the New York
and Grand Rapids computer managers. It also serves as a staff team to hear and respond to concerns of staff about computer hardware, software, and training needs. The team provides guidance and advice on all systems needs and approves all future projects.

Revised Procedures for the Review of General Synod Commissions

In 1999, after receiving numerous concerns from recent General Synods, the GSC approved a plan to change the procedures for the annual review of the RCA’s various commissions. GSC members Margo Taylor and Irvin Boersen, working with staff, developed a new review and evaluation procedures and carried out a pilot test of the revised process with the gracious participation of the Commission on Christian Action. A report of the review of the commission begins on page 424.
Report of the Commission on Judicial Business

The Office of the General Synod received one appeal during the past year, which was referred to the Commission on Judicial Business (CJB) for review, recommendation, and report to the 2000 General Synod. That appeal was submitted by the Rev. Paul F. DeVries and elder James A. Miedema. (In the interest of brevity, the appeal shall be referred to in this report as the DeVries/Miedema appeal.)

The CJB met via telephone conference call on the following dates to consider the appeal: October 20, 1999; November 17, 1999; February 9, 2000; and February 28, 2000.

The parties to the appeal all elected to not appear at any oral hearing under the Book of Church Order (BCO), Chapter 2, Part III, Article 2, Section 5. (The CJB wishes to express its gratitude to the parties in their effort to conserve denominational resources in this manner.) Thus, the CJB determined that the oral hearing was waived, and none in fact was held.

THE DEVRIES/MIEDEMA APPEAL

A. The Parties to the Appeal

The appellants in this appeal are the Rev. Paul F. DeVries and elder James A. Miedema. (The name of the Rev. Michael Pitsenberger appeared as one of the original complainants and appellants; however, Pitsenberger notified the commission orally and in writing that he did not want to be involved with the appeal. The commission has complied with his request. During its deliberations the commission gave no consideration—positive or negative—to the fact that Pitsenberger elected not to be a party to the appeal.) The respondent is the Regional Synod of Mid-America. The Classis of Chicago was also considered a party respondent in light of BCO, Chapter 2, Part III, Article 2, Sections 4 and 5, which provide generally for all parties to be involved.

B. The Nature of the Appeal and Prior Related Case

This 1999 appeal arises out of certain circumstances concerning a ministry at O'Hare International Airport in Chicago, Illinois. Those circumstances were the subject of a 1997 appeal of a 1996 complaint filed by DeVries and Miedema that was heard by the 1998 General Synod (MGS 1998, pp. 83-86). The 1998 General Synod remanded the case to the Regional Synod of Mid-America with certain procedural instructions. In this 1999 appeal DeVries and Miedema appeal the Regional Synod of Mid-America’s denial of their 1996 complaint.

C. The Factual Background

1. The History of This Case

The essential facts and circumstances surrounding the basic dispute between the parties were summarized by the “Report of the Commission on Judicial Business” as contained in MGS 1998, pp. 83-86. Pertinent excerpts of those minutes are as follows, from pp. 83-84:

THE REV. PAUL DE VRIES APPEAL

INTRODUCTION

During the dates and times at issue here, the Rev. Paul De Vries, a member of the Classis of Chicago, served as Protestant chaplain of an outreach ministry at O’Hare Airport near Chicago, Illinois. A dispute arose between the Catholic and the
Protestant segments of the ministry, who had been operating side by side, including allegations that various individuals made efforts to thwart an investigation of fundraising practices within the ministry. This precipitated a request by De Vries for assistance from the Classis of Chicago in settling the dispute.

In the meantime, in 1995 the City of Chicago established a new corporation, the O’Hare Interfaith Chapel Corporation, to conduct the ministry of the chapel at the O’Hare Airport. The legal and procedural changes were communicated to the Classis of Chicago. One new procedure was “no one may conduct ministry at the chapel unless they have been appointed to do so by a sponsoring judicatory.” This change required the Classis of Chicago to act as a sponsoring judicatory of De Vries’s ministry at the O’Hare Airport. The classis declined to be a sponsoring judicatory.

It appears to the Commission on Judicial Business that De Vries assumed the ministry was an outreach ministry of the Classis of Chicago. The classis, on the other hand, considered the ministry to be an independent specialized ministry.

The Action of the Classis of Chicago

After De Vries requested assistance from the Classis of Chicago in settling this dispute, the classis notified him of its position that the classis was not a sponsoring judicatory of the O’Hare Airport ministry. A September 18, 1996, memo from the Classis of Chicago executive committee confirmed this position of classis. De Vries objected to this position.

In October 1996 De Vries found another sponsoring judicatory but pursued his dispute with the Classis of Chicago. De Vries filed a complaint with the Regional Synod of Mid-America. [Editor’s note: The intended sponsoring judicatory relationship did not materialize.]

The Complaint to the Regional Synod of Mid-America

The Regional Synod of Mid-America voted on April 23, 1997, to dismiss the complaint of De Vries against the Classis of Chicago and to thank him for his fourteen years of ministry at O’Hare Airport. The regional synod stated there was no legitimate complaint against the Classis of Chicago. At this same meeting, the Regional Synod of Mid-America had in its possession a response from De Vries to the various arguments and allegations before the regional synod. By vote of the regional synod, the response of De Vries was not read or distributed and considered by the Regional Synod of Mid-America.

The Nature of the Appeal

De Vries appealed the action of the Regional Synod of Mid-America on the following grounds: 1) an irregularity occurred in the procedure because the regional synod did not distribute to its delegates the response of De Vries with the regional synod’s Overtures and Judicial Business Committee report and recommendations as required by the BCO, Chapter 2, Part II, Article 3, Section 5; and 2) the Regional Synod of Mid-America’s decision was manifestly unjust.

2. 1998 General Synod Action:

In its report to the 1998 General Synod, the CJB found a clear violation by the Regional Synod of Mid-America of the BCO, Chapter 2, Part II, Article 3, Section 5 concerning the distribution of responses to the committee’s report. (Since then,
the *BCO* provision pertaining to such responses has been deleted, and no such responses are now allowed.)

The action of the 1998 General Synod was as follows:

To remand the case to the Regional Synod of Mid-America with the instruction to comply with the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 2, Part II, Article 3, Section 5, and distribute to the regional synod delegates the response of the Rev. Paul DeVries with the report of the Overtures and Judicial Business Committee of the Regional Synod of Mid-America before proceeding to a decision on the Overtures and Judicial Business Committee’s Report (*MGS 1998*, R-1, p. 85).

3. The Action of the 1999 Regional Synod of Mid-America

The Regional Synod of Mid-America, meeting on April 27, 1999, voted to adopt the recommendation of its Overtures and Judicial Business Committee to dismiss the 1996 complaint of DeVries and Miedema. (There were no dissenting votes, and neither the Chicago Classis delegates nor the classis stated clerk voted.) The recommendation of the Overtures and Judicial Business Committee provided as follows:

We recommend to dismiss the 1996 complaint by the Rev. Paul De Vries and elder James Miedema against the Classis of Chicago because we find no violation or failure to comply with the Constitution of the Reformed Church in America or other laws and regulations of the church on the part of the Classis of Chicago. We do so with apologies to Rev. De Vries for mishandling his complaint at the Regional Synod’s 1997 meeting. We also commend Rev. Paul De Vries for the ministry he had at the O’Hare Airport and pray that God would bless him as he continues to serve the Lord in other capacities.

Prior to taking this April 27, 1999, action, the Regional Synod of Mid-America noted that the response to the report of its Overtures and Judicial Business Committee by DeVries had been distributed by its clerk to the judicatory, as required by the *BCO* at that time (*BCO*, Chapter 2, Part II, Article 3, Section 5, 1997 edition). This fact was duly noted in the Regional Synod of Mid-America minutes of its meeting of April 27, 1999. This was in full compliance with the *BCO* as it was constituted at all relevant times and fulfilled the mandate of the 1998 General Synod action as reported above (*MSG 1998*, R-1, p. 85).

D. The Grounds of Appeal Cited in the DeVries/Miedema Appeal

DeVries and Miedema appeal the 1999 Regional Synod of Mid-America decision to dismiss the 1996 complaint to the General Synod. In this appeal, they cite no procedural irregularities; rather, they assert that the decision of the Regional Synod of Mid-America is manifestly unjust.

E. The Timeliness of the Appeal

This appeal of the action of the Regional Synod of Mid-America to the General Synod was filed on June 7, 1999. All papers and materials that form the record of this appeal were received in a timely fashion and were in order.

F. Hearing Waived
As stated above, the parties to this appeal waived a hearing in this case. Therefore, the CJB focused its review and analysis on the more than ample record submitted by the parties, approximately 316 pages. As the CJB did so it remained mindful of its responsibility to “give deference to the decision of the lower judicatory” and to “uphold the decision of the lower judicatory if it is supported by substantial evidence in the record when the record is viewed as a whole” (*BCO*, Chapter 2, Part III, Article 2, Section 10).

G. Discussion

After a careful review and thorough discussion of the record of the case, the commission has come to the conclusion that the Regional Synod of Mid-America’s decision to dismiss the 1996 complaint should be confirmed. A complaint is a “written statement alleging that an action or a decision of an assembly or officer of the church has violated or failed to comply with the Constitution of the Reformed Church in America or other laws and regulations of the church” (*BCO*, Chapter 2, Part II, Article 1, Section 1).

The 1996 complaint of appellants states as follows:

We had reason to believe Classis Chicago and the Chicago Airport Christian Ministry were married. Classis often told us they wanted to be. For some time it acted as a spouse. For having courted us and told us over and over again it wanted our hand, we will always be thankful. For memories sake we have what still looks to us like a marriage license. Now the Executive Committee declares Classis wants a separation. We cannot contest it. A lament may be more in order, but in all good conscience, and for the sake of the record, we register what we call in our Church a Complaint.

This Complaint, along with supporting documents, will show that the Classis of Chicago, RCA, has repeatedly expressed desire to be the sponsoring judicatory of the existing Protestant ministry at O’Hare Airport Chapel; did in fact become the sponsoring judicatory; has been acting in that capacity; therefore is, and until discontinued by act of Classis, continues to be the sponsoring judicatory of Protestant ministry at O’Hare Chapel.

Further, this statement will show that, as of the July 25, 1996 meeting of the Classis Executive Committee, that Committee now denies Classis is the sponsoring judicatory, and claims it does not wish to be.

If the Executive Committee of Classis is correct, and Classis is not, or is no longer the sponsoring judicatory, [w]e respectfully inquire:

1. When it was [that] the sponsoring judicatoryship was terminated, and by what body?

2. Why would anyone take this precipitous action without giving notice to the Protestant ministry so as to allow it time to locate an alternative sponsor? Instead, the Executive Committee’s questionable disposition, in effect, exposes the 30-year only O’Hare Protestant evangelical ministry to dissolution.

The complaint quoted above essentially deals with the sponsorship, continuation, and conduct of a ministry within the bounds of a classis, nothing else. *This is precisely*
what a classis is supposed to do. The BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 2, Section 1 pertaining to responsibilities of the classis provides as follows:

The classis shall exercise a general superintendence over its enrolled ministers and over the interests and concerns of the churches within its bounds, and shall enforce the requirements of the Government of the Reformed Church in America.

As stated above, a classis has a duty to “exercise a general superintendence over its enrolled ministers and over the interests and concerns of the churches within its bounds.” That is precisely what was in question with regard to the ministry at O’Hare Airport—whether to commence, change, or conclude sponsorship of a ministry within its bounds. The Classis of Chicago was fulfilling its duty as mandated by the BCO to exercise a general superintendence over its enrolled ministers and over the interests and concerns of the churches within its bounds.

The commission has carefully reviewed the extensive record of this case and is unable to find any evidence whatsoever of any violation or failure to comply with the Reformed Church in America’s Constitution or its other laws and regulations. At the very most, the voluminous record in this case only shows a disagreement or frustration concerning the sponsorship of a ministry. Of course, reasonable minds can differ when it comes to ministry. This disagreement and/or frustration, however, does not rise to the level of an actual complaint as defined in the BCO. Disappointment in the sponsorship or lack of sponsorship of a ministry does not rise to a level of a violation or failure to comply with the Reformed Church in America’s Constitution or its other laws and regulations.

The commission finds also that credibility of witnesses is not an issue and that the record is supported by more than substantial evidence when viewed as a whole. Although the BCO is clear that the appellant shall have the responsibility to establish that the lower judicatory erred in its decision, the appellants in this case clearly have not met such burden.

The commission also notes that the Classis of Chicago and the Regional Synod of Mid-America have conducted themselves admirably in dealing with this matter. Pastoral concern and expressions of Christian care and support have been extended repeatedly to the appellants.

H. Conclusion

The commission therefore concludes that the decision of the Regional Synod of Mid-America to dismiss the 1996 complaint was not manifestly unjust. Indeed, dismissal of the complaint was entirely appropriate. Accordingly, the commission makes the following recommendation to the 2000 General Synod:

R-9
To confirm the decision of the Regional Synod of Mid-America dismissing the 1996 complaint filed by the Rev. Paul De Vries and elder James Miedema against the Classis of Chicago. (ADOPTED)

(During his service on the Commission on Judicial Business the Rev. Samuel Hamstra, representing the Regional Synod of Mid-America, recused himself and did not participate in this appeal.)
REPORTS OF THE Racial/Ethnic COUNCILS

Report of the General Synod Council’s African-American Council

“I know your works. Look, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name” (Revelation 3:8).

The African-American Council (AAC) continues its work as one of the prophetic voices of the Reformed Church in America. This past year much was accomplished in building up God’s kingdom through this ministry.

The council is adjusting to the new structure, which involves reporting to, and having representation on, the General Synod Council rather than the General Synod. Many members are still skeptical of this arrangement but are willing to work within its parameters. The skepticism is in regard to the council losing direct contact with the broader church because it no longer addresses and sends recommendations to the General Synod. There is concern on the council that this new structure will increase bureaucracy.

Much was accomplished in the ongoing mission this past year. All recommendations to General Synod were passed with few modifications by committees.

The highlight of this past year was the annual caucus, held at the Newark Hilton Gateway Hotel, which had a record turnout. The theme was “God’s Spirit upon Us: Celebrating.” With the ambitious schedule and program, God’s Spirit was truly upon the caucus and the celebration. The caucus was delighted to have the Rev. Kenneth Bradsell, director of Policy, Planning, and Administration Services, explain the new structure under the General Synod Council. A healthy and productive discussion followed the presentation.

The guest speaker for the B. Moses James Colloquium was the Rev. Dr. Walter Fauntroy, former congressman and colleague of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Fauntroy electrified the colloquium with a historic speech. Before he spoke, the Rev. Dr. Gregg Mast, General Synod president, brought greetings from the RCA. He challenged the caucus to “become dangerous for Christ” in a chaotic world. Mast’s speech set the stage for Fauntroy’s presentation on the history of the civil rights movement in the United States. He addressed the issue of how the power structure works in the United States and around the globe, and he discussed what can be done in the twenty-first century to eliminate racism and discrimination from society and the world.

The caucus also offered workshops in the areas of worship, health, youth ministry, and proposal writing. One of the highlights was the annual banquet, which featured a caucus choir; AAC administrative assistant Leslie Gore in a liturgical dance performance; and Mel Holder, a well-known Christian recording musician. The mistresses of ceremony were Katie Turner and Sarah Campbell.

Dr. Oliver Patterson was honored for his work as the outgoing chairperson of the AAC. Elder Annie Phillips was elected as the new chairperson. Phillips is serving as the representative to the General Synod Council.

The Rev. Dr. Glen Missick, executive director, has been developing relationships in the RCA by serving on various committees and attending conferences and meetings. Missick conducted well-attended, successful workshops for ministers, men, and lay leaders. He has also been involved in actively recruiting pastors for many vacant pulpits, meeting with consistories, classes, and synods to discuss the problem. Missick has also been a pastor
to pastors in AAC churches and has been in dialogue with the United Church of Southern Africa. He also recently visited the United Church of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands and United Theological College of the West Indies. Many members of AAC churches are from the Caribbean. Missick attended a conference in Atlanta, Georgia, which dealt with the continuing burning of black churches in the South. The AAC will seek to work with the Rev. Paul Nulton and RCA work groups, which are already addressing this issue.

The AAC has worked with the Christian Action Commission and the other racial/ethnic councils in proposing objectives to the General Synod Council in response to the RCA Priority #1, which deals with diversity. In light of the increasing incidents of racism, the AAC urges the General Synod Council to act as promptly as possible on these objectives, especially those calling for anti-racism training.

The AAC has voted not to present any recommendations to the General Synod this year, but to urge the General Synod Council and the General Synod to encourage other boards and committees to act on referrals from past recommendations.

Report of the General Synod Council’s Council for Hispanic Ministries

DEVELOPMENT AND DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Ministries have a way of validating themselves. That is, either they are, or are not, effective. In the case of the twenty-six-year life of the Council for Hispanic Ministries, the council feels that ministry validation has been positive, productive, and fruitful for the Reformed Church in America. Like any other body, the council did have ups and downs, but the council has matured together with its audience.

What largely determined the council’s success has been the growth of the Hispanic population in the Reformed Church of America. Other contributions have been: 1) the translation of important Reformed Church in America documents and training materials; 2) the creation of ecumenical contacts between Mission Services and several new partners in the Caribbean, Central America, and South America; and 3) the amicable development of side-by-side ministries with Hispanics and Anglos, which has brought the Reformed Church in America’s understanding of a different culture to a higher level.

Demographic data points to greater opportunities ahead. For several years the council has been beating the drum, indicating that Hispanics constitute 35 percent of the nation’s population growth over the past two decades. The demographic shift will be widely felt in the coming two decades. This shift will impact labor, purchasing power, government, and business. The March issue of Hispanic Business states in an editorial that “in the coming decades the Hispanic teenage population will challenge long-held stereotypes about economics, culture, politics, and social structure. These youth are better acculturated and prepared for success than any previous generation of Hispanics.”

Harvard University reported that home ownership among Hispanics grew by 16 percent between 1993 and 1996. By way of comparison, increases among the African-American and
Anglo populations measured 7.5 and 4.5 percent over the same period. These are just two examples that suggest tremendous opportunities for RCA congregations that are seeking to expand multicultural and cross-cultural ministry.

**HISPANIC DEPARTMENT MODEL**

The Council for Hispanic Ministries has always placed a high priority on evangelism. This year the effort has expanded. Anglo congregations, with little or no help from the council, are becoming active in Hispanic ministry. A worthy testimony is the number of “Hispanic Departments” started in several English-speaking congregations throughout the denomination. There are two congregations with Hispanic Department models in the Classis of California, one in the Classis of Passaic Valley, one in the Classis of Brooklyn, one in Iowa, and one in Holland, Michigan. The Hispanic Department model can be an effective way for local congregations to respond to and become involved with Hispanics in their community. The model not only helps to establish a new program for the congregation, but also brings about a revival in the main English-speaking group.

The executive secretary of the Council for Hispanic Ministries is available to visit any consistory to discuss details on the start of a Hispanic Department in the congregation. A Hispanic Department model allows the formation of a worshiping community to begin a second language group within the existing structure. One consistory, one budget, one congregation is the benefit. Also, the congregation can begin this ministry using laypersons under the supervision of the local pastor and consistory.

R-10

To instruct Evangelism and Church Development Services, in consultation with the Council for Hispanic Ministries and congregations that are already involved with Hispanic Department models, to explore how best to support the development of Hispanic Department models; and further,

to move toward implementation of this model.

Upon recommendation by the Committee of Reference, R-10 was referred to the Advisory Committee on Evangelism and Church Development (see p. 316).

**COUNCIL’S ANNUAL MEETING**

The council’s annual meetings, held each October, are a welcome event in the lives of those attending. The new meeting style allows for greater time in personal development and training. Pastors, wives, elders, and deacons are responding positively to the new format. The theme of the last meeting was “Toward New Horizons: Church Growth in the New Millennium.” The main speaker was the Rev. Dr. Samuel Pagán, president of the Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico. He led the group through an inspirational discussion of issues concerning church growth in coming times. Other seminars included “Means of Communication” and “Leadership Development.”

**TEACHING CONGREGATIONS**

A concern of the Council for Hispanic Ministries has been the preparation of leaders who evidence strong Reformed theological roots. Two Hispanic congregations—in Toronto, Ontario, and Corona, California—have fully developed theological education programs with a Reformed perspective. A person can enroll in various certificate programs, receive an Associate of Art in Divinity degree (60 Credits), and continue work to receive a bachelor’s degree in Bible Studies (120 Credits). These credits are recognized by La Facultad Latinoamericana
de Estudios Teológicos (FLET), a member of the State of Florida Association of College and Universities and the State Board of Independent Colleges and Universities, and has other higher education affiliations. In Toronto there is also a group that is continuing toward a master’s degree in Biblical Studies under the care of the Rev. Dr. Cornelius Hegeman. Another congregation in the East is presently developing the program. The council praises the Lord for this blessing!

VISITS TO CUBA

The Council for Hispanic Ministries continues to maintain ties with the Christian Reformed Church in Cuba. Two pastors visited the Cuban churches this past November to help with what has become a two-week traditional evangelism event. Through the event many have come to know the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Two RCA non-Hispanic congregations have also visited Cuba for a learning experience and to understand ministry in a communist country.

Report of the General Synod Council’s Native American Indian Ministries Council

The Native American Indian Ministries Council (NAIMC) met September 10-11, 1999, in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, for its fall meeting. At this meeting delegates continued to bring to closure some remaining steps for the council’s transition from the former American Indian Council to the current NAIMC structure (MGS 1997, pp. 419-422; MGS 1998, pp. 299-307; MGS 1999, pp. 80-83) and also provided oversight for ministry initiatives of the council.

STAFF SEARCH

The most significant work of the council delegates was to approve for submission to the General Synod Council (GSC) a revised position description for the council’s executive secretary. After beginning work in the spring of 1999 and circulating the position description to the Native American Indian congregations for feedback, NAIMC submitted the revised position profile to GSC in October of 1999. It included the recommendation that the position be increased from a one-quarter-time contract position to a half-time contract. GSC responded by approving the position as a quarter-time contract and forming an ad hoc committee to review the future of RCA Native American Indian ministries, with the willingness to consider expanding the council’s executive secretary position based on the committee’s report. The council began immediately to advertise the position as approved by GSC.

MINISTRY INITIATIVES

Native American Indian Youth Camp

The most established of NAIMC’s ministries is the sponsorship of the annual Native American Indian Youth Camp. This past year it was hosted by Comanche Reformed Church in Lawton, Oklahoma, from July 7 to July 12. Held at nearby Camp Faith, in Faxon, Oklahoma, the theme of the camp was prayer and praise to God. Campers were challenged in their spiritual growth with a focus on prayer, which led them to “Praise, Repent, Ask God concerning others and Yourself.” Most days were filled with loud praise to God, singing and dancing
to God’s glory, along with teaching and witnessing through the use of Cokesbury’s Closer to God series for youth. Each camper had materials to study, and each had an individual prayer journal. Campers were taught how the Scriptures give permission to praise God in a loud way when desired, and were taught that God is close to us, for us, with us, in an active way through prayers, as our link to God through Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Sports and recreation, abundant snacks, and various trips rounded out the week. It was another positive experience of ministry. Plans are taking shape for this summer’s camp to be hosted by Jicarilla Apache Reformed Church in Dulce, New Mexico.

Leadership Conference

NAIMC’s bylaws call for the council to host an annual leadership conference. Given the transitional work of the council in finding staff, the council has not yet been able to host its first conference. However, additional work was done at the September meeting on developing a conference schedule and theme. The council delegates approach designing this conference with enthusiasm, looking forward to bringing quality discipleship and leadership training events to members of NAIMC congregations.

Scholarships

In addition to the RCA Ethnic Scholarship Fund, three scholarship funds relate to the RCA Native American Indian congregations in unique ways. The Aalberts Scholarship Fund is named in honor of the ministry of the Rev. Gradus and Auriel Aalberts, who served at Winnebago Reformed Church for more than thirty years. This fund provides scholarships to those who are pursuing education toward Christian service and ministry. The fund is administered by the consistory of Winnebago Reformed Church.

The Robert P. Chaat, Sr. Memorial Scholarship, named in honor of the Rev. Robert Chaat for his more than forty years of ministry at Comanche Reformed Church in Lawton, Oklahoma, is a scholarship for RCA students attending Cook College and Theological School in Tempe, Arizona. This fund is administered by the school’s financial aid office.

The Harvey M. Calsbeek Memorial Scholarship Fund is named in honor of the forty-three years of the Rev. Harvey Calsbeek’s ministry, many of those years with RCA Native American congregations. This scholarship opportunity is for post–high school students pursuing education to prepare for Christian service and/or ministry in RCA Native American congregations. This fund is administered by the RCA Office of Gift Planning, while NAIMC selects the recipients.

While there have been recipients of the Aalberts and Chaat scholarship funds over the years, the Calsbeek scholarship has not yet been awarded. This year special attention was paid to publicizing all of these scholarship opportunities to NAIMC congregations.

Report of the General Synod Council’s Council for Pacific and Asian American Ministries
In the twentieth year of the Council for Pacific and Asian American Ministries (CPAAM), its executive committee adopted new goals and objectives based on the RCA's Statement of Mission and Vision. The acronym RENEWAL suggests the priorities for CPAAM:

- 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.

**Revitalize congregations**

The denomination’s program for revitalization using the Church Resource Ministry (CRM) model involves a pastor in New Jersey. Many Korean pastors are meeting together using the Korean version of the Natural Church Development seminar materials to effect revitalization. The Natural Church Development model emphasizes basic values and principles for holistic church ministry.

**Establish new churches**

Several new Korean ministries were invited into the Reformed Church in 1999. Conversations continue in southern California with several pastors and their congregations about joining the RCA. In northern New Jersey the Classis of Greater Palisades has received requests from several pastors to join the RCA, and one new Korean church start is being developed. As Koreans move into the area of Bergen County, there is good opportunity to expand ministry among this group in the next few years.

New Life Community Church in Artesia, California, has carried out a dynamic outreach program. Under the leadership of the new senior pastor, the Rev. Keith Tanis, the church has developed a Korean ministry, and the Rev. David Hartono intends to develop a Chinese ministry in the future. Hartono, who joined the RCA at the fall 1999 meeting of the Classis of California, has been involved in a fruitful outreach ministry at New Life Church. In addition to a growing ministry with Indonesians, the church has developed new ministries with Chinese and Korean people.

In Flushing, New York, a Korean church hosts a Chinese ministry begun by the Rev. John Chang of Staten Island. When Chang saw that several Chinese-speaking young adults attending his church in Staten Island were from the Flushing area, he envisioned a new ministry in Flushing. After some consultation with CPAAM, he was encouraged to speak to the Siloam Church to discuss the possible use of their facilities for his fledging ministry. This intra-council cooperation is unique and may prove to be an innovative model for new ministry development.

Ten years ago a ministry among Asian Indians was begun in New Jersey. This year the Asian Indian Christian Church celebrated its tenth anniversary with a series of events commemorating this occasion.

**Nurture the gifts of the laity**

Discipleship training has been a focus for many churches. The Natural Church Development
seminars focus on the revitalization of congregations using a lay leader discipleship-training model. The Rev. Hak Kwon Lee has also developed a series of seminars on the development of small group leadership, and he has shared these seminars with several churches. The annual lay leader training of Koreans in the RCA was held in January 2000 at New Hope Reformed Church in Yonkers, New York.

In January 1999 CPAAM organized a youth and young adult leadership seminar and workshop in Bellflower, California. This seminar continues to impact the ministry of RCA Pacific and Asian American youth and young adults in California.

Engage the city

Because new immigrants generally move into urban areas when they first arrive in the U.S., the ministries of the council have been active in the city. A walking tour of Flushing, New York, reveals the multicultural nature of that part of the city in which a variety of pan-Asian groups have businesses and residences. The Reformed Church is there as well, ministering through several churches and serving the diverse population.

Although Fort Lee, New Jersey, was once a small town, today it is home to a large number of immigrants. With the George Washington Bridge within its bounds, it was the choice of Japanese businessmen a decade or two ago, and is now home to a growing number of Koreans. Fort Lee is increasingly becoming a target area for CPAAM ministry.

Welcome all people

Through the Indonesian Fellowship of New Life Community Church in Artesia, California, the RCA is working closely with a not-for-profit organization, Concerned Christians for Indonesia. This group is assisting many Chinese Indonesians who suffered oppression in their homeland as they seek to obtain asylum status. This action is in the spirit of the 1998 General Synod action “to instruct the general secretary to write to the President of the United States and appropriate members of Congress, and to instruct the executive of the Synod of Canada to write to the Prime Minister of Canada and appropriate members of Parliament, urging them (a) to secure refugee status for Indonesian Chinese with the United Nations Commissioner on refugees; and (b) to advocate for the practice of human rights in Indonesia” (MGS 1998, R-27, p. 152).

Through its various ministries, CPAAM is encouraging the growth and transition of the Reformed Church from a racially homogeneous church to one of diversity. In cooperation with the Commission on Race and Ethnicity, its ecumenical partners, and the denominational staff, CPAAM is active in welcoming all people into the Reformed Church in America.

Announce the good news

It was St. Francis of Assisi who said, “Preach the gospel at all times. If necessary, use words.” CPAAM is being faithful in preaching the gospel through more than fifty ministries. The preaching of the gospel through acts of love and mercy is a growing part of that ministry. Many of the churches are involved in mission trips that typically involve a work project, working with children, and worship services. In recent years Mexico has been a focus area for these trips.

It is the preaching of the gospel to the newcomers and unchurched that undergirds the emphasis on new church development. The gospel compels the church to reach out to those who are displaced, poor, and broken. Many of the Pacific and Asian American ministries find this reality in their own neighborhoods.

Young adults from Christ Church in the Bay Area in San Mateo, California, conduct park evangelism by holding preaching and singing services. Siloam Church in Flushing, New York, is engaged in an effort to keep clean a city park across the street from its church. The challenge to be engaged is there. The struggle is to be faithful.
Announcing the good news is foundational to the RCA’s mission program. Through the efforts of the supervisor of RCA mission programs in East Asia and the Pacific, Pacific and Asian American congregations are supporting mission work in China. Conversations continue regarding other mission opportunities in Asia that Pacific and Asian American congregations could potentially support.

During the past year Taiwan experienced a series of devastating earthquakes and after-shocks. As the country continues to struggle in its recovery efforts, Pacific and Asian American congregations have given generously in response to the disaster, and members and pastors have gone to Taiwan to help.

**Learn to call forth leaders**

In most of the RCA Pacific and Asian American congregations, leadership excludes those below the age of thirty. Therefore, young adults have become the new focus of leadership development. Taiwanese young adults meet annually at an ecumenical gathering for enrichment and support. Through these connections, new ministry is being explored.

Through the ecumenical group Pacific Asian American Canadian Christian Education, CPAAM is engaged in helping to identify, nurture, and support new leaders for ministry. This would include both pastoral and lay leaders.

**Indonesia**

As the year 2000 began, Indonesia was the scene of violent clashes that left hundreds of people dead and scores injured. After the first-ever democratic election in Indonesia, president Abdurrahman Wahid has been able to foster racial/ethnic and religious harmony. He tendered a sincere apology to the East Timorese people for the pain and suffering caused during the time of Indonesian rule.

Wahid is a moderate Islamic cleric, and in his effort to build a democratic and civil society he is facing a daunting challenge from certain elements of the Indonesian military.

**R-11**

To instruct the general secretary and the minister for social witness to write to Indonesia’s fourth president, Abdurrahman Wahid, to commend him in his effort to foster racial/ethnic and religious harmony, and to encourage him as he attempts to build a democratic society in Indonesia; and further,

...to call on the members of the Reformed Church in America to pray for the Indonesian government in its genuine effort to bring peace to its people under the leadership of president Abdurrahman Wahid.

Upon recommendation by the Committee of Reference, R-11 was referred to the Advisory Committee on Christian Action (see p. 456).

**RACIAL PREJUDICE**

The 1999 General Synod adopted the following recommendation (**MGS 1999, R-14, p.**)
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.

In this past year there have been many incidents in the national news that reveal racial intolerance and discrimination. Wen Ho Lee of the U.S. Department of Energy was dismissed and later imprisoned for mishandling U.S. weapons secrets while another high level government official was dismissed but not charged. Amadou Diallo, a West African street vendor, was shot nineteen times in the doorway of his Bronx, New York, apartment building by four white undercover police officers. Bill Lan Lee, acting attorney general for civil rights at the U.S. Justice Department, has yet to be confirmed in the position. Two minority officers of the Immigration and Naturalization Service in Los Angeles were beaten by white officers while they were on duty tracking down fraudulent green cards. These incidents and many more have taken place since the General Synod took the above action.

Even while members of the council’s executive committee monitor racial intolerance and discrimination cases making the news, the council is often unable to effectively communicate its concern to other members of the RCA. It has not been able to collect the voices of the church to bring support to those who are fighting social injustice and racial discrimination. The Reformed Church has not been heard, either collectively or individually, in voicing its opposition to racial profiling, racial intolerance, and discrimination. The RCA must find ways to go beyond making statements on paper by following up with action.

CONCLUSION

From its inception twenty years ago, the Council for Pacific and Asian American Ministries has been challenged with a variety of ministry needs. It was asked to be a prophetic voice and to advocate on behalf of Pacific and Asian Americans. CPAAM was also called to provide programs to nurture and support new ministries, and it has built partnerships within and outside of the Reformed Church in order to carry out its mandate. These have been challenging and enriching years for the council, with much numerical and spiritual growth for RCA Pacific and Asian American congregations.

The Council for Pacific and Asian American Ministries covets a more inclusive, welcoming Reformed Church. As it moves into a new decade of its ministry, CPAAM strives to be faithful to its calling within the context of the RCA. The Apostle Paul reminds the church, “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all” (Eph. 4:4). The Council for Pacific and Asian American Ministries hopes for, and works toward, the embodiment of that unity for the Reformed Church in America.
REPORTS ON CHRISTIAN UNITY

Report of the Commission on Christian Unity

INTRODUCTION

The Commission on Christian Unity (CCU) met twice since the last session of the General Synod: October 25-26, 1999, as guests of the Regional Synod of Mid-America in Chicago, Illinois; and February 28-29, 2000, as guests of the Grand Rapids Area Center for Ecumenism (GRACE). The commission met at GRACE because it afforded the opportunity to meet with the Ecumenical Council of the Christian Reformed Church at Calvin College, with the Rev. Richard L. van Houten, general secretary of the Reformed Ecumenical Council, with the Rev. Daniel Meeter regarding the Belhar Confession, and to attend (as guests of GRACE) the ecumenical breakfast and lecture by the Rev. Dr. Michael Kinnamon, professor of theology and ecumenical studies at Lexington Theological Seminary (Disciples of Christ).

The Constitution of the RCA gives responsibility for ecumenical relations to the General Synod (Book of Church Order (BCO) Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 2, Section 5). To be faithful to the ecumenical calling, General Synod needs a consultative body to oversee ecumenical commitments, to present an ecumenical agenda to the church, and to carry out ecumenical directives as given by the church through General Synod.

Since its creation in 1974 (MGS 1974, R-6, pp.201-202) and adoption in 1975 (MGS 1975, R-4, pp 101-02) by action of the General Synod, CCU has served General Synod by coordinating the whole range of ecumenical involvements at all levels throughout the RCA. CCU advises General Synod on matters of ecumenical import; it communicates with other denominations, ecumenical councils, and interdenominational agencies; it educates the whole denomination on ecumenical matters; and it advocates for actions and positions consistent with the RCA’s confessions and practice.

“An Ecumenical Mandate for the Reformed Church in America,” adopted by General Synod in 1996 (MGS 1996, R-1, p. 197) guides the work of CCU. By means of its ongoing ecumenical commitments both at home and abroad CCU keeps before the RCA the essential questions regarding the nature of Christian unity and suggests ways of giving visible expression to the unity all believers have in Jesus Christ. Conversely, through referrals, General Synod presents Christian unity matters to CCU for study and implementation and possible recommendations to General Synod.

To help summarize the scope of the ecumenical practice of the RCA, there are three groupings that give visible expression to the RCA ecumenism. These are general groupings, and they by no means exhaust the scope of the ecumenical life of the RCA.

Programmatic Ecumenism

Programmatic ecumenism refers to cooperative endeavors with other communions to create programs of ministry and mission. It may happen formally on the denominational level or more informally at the grassroots. It is usually prompted by a mutual desire to accomplish a specific ministry or mission goal. Examples (to cite just a few) of this visible expression of ecumenical activity are: cooperative curricula development, disaster relief response, vacation church schools, food distribution programs, youth events, and joint services of worship. On the denominational level, the RCA is currently involved in more than cooperative world mission partnerships and more than “ecumenical involvements.”
Conciliar Ecumenism

The various councils of churches (world, national, regional, state, and local) are expressions of this form of ecumenism. As communities of communions, the councils facilitate the collaboration of denominations in various programs of service and witness, recognizing and accepting the distinctive contributions of each corporate expression of the church catholic.

The RCA holds memberships in the World Council of Churches (WCC), the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA (NCC), the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC), and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC). In addition, one regional synod and several congregations hold membership in the National Association of Evangelicals (NEA).

Through conciliar fellowships, Christian traditions meet and work together with the purpose of representing the unity of the body of Christ as primary. In and through the practice of ecumenism, unity is demonstrated to a fragmented society while a greater understanding is gained for each other’s unique contribution to the whole body of Christ. Lively and passionate discussions demonstrate the depth of conviction that the various communion members bring to the table while remaining committed to unity and the principle of acting together with others in all matters except those in which differences of conviction compel communion members to act separately.

Conversational/Dialogue Ecumenism

Conversations and dialogue are expressions of ecumenical practice that take place between churches at the denominational level. These may be either “bilateral” (one to one), such as is taking place between the Reformed Church in America and the Christian Reformed Church, or “multilateral” (more than two) such as took place between the Formula of Agreement partners. Through WARC the RCA is represented in bilateral dialogues with the Roman Catholic Church. Dialogues seek to give faithful expression to what churches believe, identifying areas where there is commonality as well as areas that need further exploration because of historic differences of theology and practice. The goal is always to recognize and not to homogenize. The desired outcome is to discover whether or not a level of consensus can be reached that recognized sufficient agreement as a basis for substantial fellowship while admitting that continuing differences exist as a basis for ongoing mutual theological work.

ECUMENICAL OFFICER AND ASSOCIATE FOR ECUMENICAL RELATIONS

The general secretary of the RCA is its chief “ecumenical officer.” As such, the general secretary serves the denomination through various degrees of engagement with the leadership of other church bodies. Because of the vast scope of this engagement (both national and worldwide), the general secretary is enlisted as an ex-officio member of CCU. CCU is grateful for the wealth of experience—ecumenically, practically, and theologically—that the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson continues to bring to CCU.

CCU is also indebted to the Rev. Douglas Fromm, the RCA staff member who serves the denomination part-time as the associate for ecumenical relations and serves as the staff resource person for CCU. Fromm also serves as pastor of Upper Ridgewood Community Church, an RCA congregation in Ridgewood, New Jersey.

ECUMENICAL NETWORK WITH CLASSES

In 1993 CCU initiated an effort to establish an RCA network of ecumenism throughout the
denomination. The purpose for the network was to help CCU disseminate information to the classes and to receive information concerning ecumenism at the local level from the classes and congregations. The network is comprised of one individual from each classis who serves as an “ecumenical liaison” between CCU and the classis. Each classis ecumenical liaison is contacted by a member of CCU following each meeting of CCU and each mailing from the office of the associate for ecumenical relations. CCU has asked each classis to provide regular agenda time at stated meetings for a report from the liaison concerning updates on ecumenical matters and to receive the feedback from the member churches of the classes for referral to CCU.

RCA ECUMENICAL APPOINTEES

In 1989 CCU established a means of reporting and accountability for all ecumenical appointees representing the RCA in the ecumenical arena. A reporting form was developed which is still in use which affords a unified reporting system to CCU. The reports are reviewed by CCU at each of its meetings, which allows CCU to keep abreast of events in ecumenism and changes in programs, activities, and personnel. This year every effort is being made to have CCU members be the ecumenical appointees to other denomination’s synods, conferences, and ecumenical relations boards.

GENERAL SYNOD OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF KOREA

Upon invitation from the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK), the RCA sent a delegation of four persons to the September 14-22, 1999, General Synod meeting of the PCK.

Members of the delegation were:

- The Rev. Bruce Menning, director of Mission Services.
- Ella Campbell, secretary for the Council of Pacific and Asian Ministries.
- The Rev. John Jong-Pyo Lee, coordinator for mission stewardship and supervisor of RCA mission programs in East Asia and the Pacific.

Reflections by the Delegation:

Seoul, Korea, a place of millions—modern and crowded—seems like any large metropolis in the world. At times, driving through it, it feels like Los Angeles Koreatown. But there is a difference—it is an Asian society where being an Asian one does not stand out from the rest of the crowd. Here the tall Caucasians seem to stand out. But during the week we found that people did not gawk at the Caucasian members of the delegation.

We were clearly sightseers bent on connecting with the Christian Church in Seoul. We were taken to the mission houses, which most people would not ordinarily see. Also we went to the memorials of the martyrs and to houses of worship. We saw a different side of Korea, and in that way we were not typical tourists.

As we drove in at night from the airport to downtown Seoul, we could see countless red crosses in the skyscape. We were told that all the churches had red crosses that were illuminated at night. Korea is like the U.S. in the 1950s; people seem to be flocking to the churches, and growth happens with seemingly little effort. The truly large churches with membership in the thousands are the ones that are actively working at growing.

The visit to the memorial of the martyrs was poignant. After reading about the massacres,
one realizes that the fervor of the Korean Christians seems to be nurtured in the blood of the martyrs. Those who lived that part of Korean history will carry the story with them and will be strengthened in times of adversity. One wonders how the church will fare when the younger generation takes over. By a quick scanning of the street scene down College Boulevard, one would think the setting was Flushing, Queens, New York. MTV dictates the dress code for the teenagers. How different their life seems from that of their parents and grandparents!

Koreans are trying to recover and maintain their identity as Koreans. After too many years of oppression from the Chinese and Japanese, they want to be Korean. The folk village and the museum are a good way to keep the heritage before the young people. There were school children on class excursion trips at both places.

There appears to be an openness on the part of the PCK to explore ways in which the RCA can be joined in partnership. They seem particularly interested in learning about mission partnerships. Presently local congregations have been engaged in missions. The denomination has not had much control or involvement, and accountability was a concern for the denominational staff. It is an area where we have had a long history, and we can share our learnings with them.

In the area of evangelism, there has been amazing growth in Korean churches. I now see that part of the growth is due to the times (like the ’50s were for U.S. churches) but also because of some principles valued in ministry. Relational evangelism has enabled the churches to make contacts to people who are hungry for the good news.

Being in another country is always a good experience. This was no exception. As the weeks past, we continued to reflect and gain more insights from the Korean experience. It was a very valuable trip and will help as we continue to work with Koreans here in the U.S. Learning about the character and emotions of the Korean people, we can see how they are different from the Chinese and Japanese. Asians are not all alike. This experience opened the window of awareness a little wider.

THE WORLD ALLIANCE OF REFORMED CHURCHES

The World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) maintains a number of dialogues with other historic communions and world confessional bodies. Currently the RCA is involved through WARC in two bilateral dialogues with the Coptic Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches.

Background

In 1997 The Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church signed the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification:

The present Joint Declaration has this intention: namely, to show that on the basis of their dialogue the subscribing Lutheran churches and the Roman Catholic Church are now able to articulate a common understanding of our justification by God’s grace through faith in Christ. It does not cover all that either church teaches about justification; it does encompass a consensus on basic truths of the doctrine of justification and shows that the remaining differences in its explication are no longer the occasion for doctrinal condemnations. The word “church” is used in this declaration to reflect the self-understandings of the participating churches, without intending to resolve all the ecclesiological issues related to this term (Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification).
The Official Common Statement by the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church states:

1. On the basis of the agreements reached in the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JD) the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church declare together: “The understanding of the doctrine of justification set forth in this Declaration shows that a consensus in basic truths of the doctrine of justification exists between Lutheran and Catholics” (JD 40). On the basis of this consensus the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church declare together, “The teaching of the Lutheran churches presented in this Declaration does not fall under the condemnations from the Council of Trent. The condemnations in the Lutheran Confession do not apply to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church presented in this Declaration” (JD 41).

In a World Council of Churches press release of February 2, 2000, it was stated:

Bishop Walter Kasper, the Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, visited the WCC’s Geneva headquarters on February 1-2, 2000. Bishop Kasper said of his visit, “The ecumenical movement is one of the bright spots of the past century.” Kasper mentioned justification as (one of the) ecumenical challenge(s) for the future. This was a fundamental question not only for Lutherans, but for the Reformation churches. It would now be a case of examining how far the differentiated consensus worked out with the Lutherans could be extended to other Reformation churches and so broaden the basis of consensus.

R-12
To instruct the general secretary to petition the Executive Committee of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches to give consideration to becoming cosigners on the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification and that the document be made available to the church for study; and further,

to direct the Commission on Christian Unity to seek out ways by which bilateral or multilateral dialogue(s) could take place with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Lutheran World Federation, and the Secretary of the (the Vatican’s) Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity for the purpose determining how the RCA can become a co-signatory of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification.

Reasons:

1. The RCA is currently in conversation with the Roman Catholic Church through World Alliance of Reformed Churches.

2. Since the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) is one of the Formula of Agreement partners and is a member of the Lutheran World Federation, CCU believes that becoming one of the signatories of the declaration would strengthen the RCA’s ecumenical ties with the ELCA.

3. Doing so would support the “Ecumenical Mandate for the Reformed Church in America,” which states (Ecumenical Mandate III, A,1):

   Christian unity is central to our faith, and so these goals are put forward for review
by the General Synod.

4. That the Reformed Church in America continue the prayer of our Lord by regularly praying for the unity of the church universal. Further, that this prayer be lived out by humbly confessing the pride and hostility that divide us from the other members of Christ’s body and by diligently seeking and claiming the reconciliation that Christ has accomplished by his death on the cross and the oneness that the Holy Spirit extended at Pentecost.

kThe advisory committee recommended a substitute motion for R-12.

R-12 (substitute)
To instruct the general secretary to petition the Executive Committee of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches to initiate a study on the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification from a Reformed perspective; and further,

to direct the Commission on Christian Unity to seek out ways by which bilateral or multilateral dialogue(s) could take place with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Lutheran World Federation, and the Secretary of the (Vatican’s) Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity for the purpose of studying the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification and to report the progress to General Synod 2001. (ADOPTED)

Reason: References to cosigning the joint declaration on the Doctrine of Justification appear to predetermine the outcome of a lengthy process of ecumenical dialogue.

ORDINATION OF HOMOSEXUALS AND MEMBERSHIP IN ECUMENICAL COUNCILS

Background

At the 1997 meeting of General Synod the Commission on Christian Unity was directed to respond to the concerns of the Regional Synod of Canada, expressed as follows in Overture 13:

The Regional Synod of Canada overtures General Synod to instruct the General Secretary and the Commission on Christian Unity to request the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), the World Council of Churches (WCC), the National Council of Churches (NCC), and the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC) to declare that the ordination of practicing homosexuals is contrary to the authoritative teaching of Scriptures; and further,

to request WARC, WCC, NCC, and CCC to ask any member denomination that endorses such ordination of practicing homosexuals to repent of this position or be removed from membership in the WARC, WCC, NCC, and/or CCC (MGS 1997, p. 228).

In response to this overture synod adopted R-17:

To refer Overture 13 to the Commission on Christian Unity, for study within the context of the moral dimensions of human sexuality, for report to the 1999 General Synod (MGS 1997, p. 228).

CCU took up this recommendation in 1998 and again in the spring of 1999 but was unable to complete the assignment prior to the synod meeting of that year. At the 1999 session of General Synod CCU was instructed to bring this report in 2000 (MGS 1999, R-37, p. 185). CCU presents the following for synod’s information and consideration.
ECUMENICAL COUNCILS’ POLICIES

CCU sent correspondence to each of the four ecumenical bodies in which the RCA holds membership, requesting information on what their respective positions are toward member communions who sanction the ordination of homosexual persons.

National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.

The newly elected general secretary of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. (NCC), the Rev. Robert Edgar, expressed his positive regard that the RCA is studying the issue of the ordination of practicing homosexuals within the context of the moral dimensions of human sexuality. In terms of NCC’s stance on this question he wrote, “The NCC is a ‘communion of communions.’ As such, [NCC members] respect each other’s polity and internal struggles while we seek unity. The National Council of Churches does not take an independent position on this matter. We do encourage dialogue among communions with differing views and policies. The NCC struggles with the same concerns and issues facing member communions. This is part of our shared commitment to one another.”

The World Council of Churches

Similarly to the NCC, the World Council of Churches “has no position on this question.” A letter from the office of the general secretary went on to say, “We are aware that some of our member churches are studying this matter closely, and some of them may decide to sanction such ordination while others will finally refuse to do so. In either case, there is nothing in the Constitution and Rules of the WCC on this question which would affect the membership status of these churches at this time.” The WCC, from the Harare Assembly, has been mandated to undertake “a study of human sexuality in all its diversity, to be made available to the member churches.”

World Alliance of Reformed Churches

Dr. Milan Opocensky, general secretary of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), on the question of sexual orientation wrote, “WARC is at the beginning of discussion on this matter. I doubt WARC would adopt a position by which we would measure and judge member churches. It is an issue which varies from one culture to another culture. It needs to be discussed in a particular national or regional context.”

Canadian Council of Churches

Following suit with the other councils, the Canadian Council of Churches has no official position on the question of ordaining practicing homosexuals. As Janet Somerville, general secretary expressed it, “the question has never officially arrived on our agenda. No member church has referred the question to the Governing Board, on which all member churches are represented. Since no church has chosen to raise the question for official discussion in the ‘forum of churches’ which this council is, it has not been placed on the agenda either of our Commission for Faith and Witness, nor of our Commission for Justice and Peace.”

Membership Criteria in the Ecumenical Councils

The Preamble to the NCC Constitution expresses its membership criteria as such:

The National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. is a community of communions which, in response to the gospel as revealed in the Scriptures, confess
Jesus Christ, the incarnate word of God, as Savior and Lord. The communions covenant with one another to manifest ever more fully the unity of the Church. Relying upon the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, the Council brings these communions into common mission, serving in all creation to the glory of God.

The other ecumenical councils, as referenced above, have similar statements regarding their criteria for membership. Common to them all is a confession of adherence to Jesus Christ as Lord.

Response of the Commission on Christian Unity

The Commission on Christian Unity agrees that a common confession of Jesus Christ as Lord is the tie that binds the Reformed Church together with other Christian communions. Because this confession—not the RCA’s distinctive beliefs—is central to ecumenical relationships, CCU receives the policy statements (expressed above) as instructive for our life and work as a denomination. Collectively these four statements, on the matter of homosexuality, mirror the commitment of CCU: to live out an ecumenical vision that aspires to maintain unity in Christ in the midst of diversity.

Furthermore, CCU is guided by the RCA’s General Synod on this matter. In 1999 General Synod said, “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” (MGS 1999, R-38, p. 186). CCU is also guided by “An Ecumenical Mandate for the Reformed Church in America” on this matter. Enumerating various operating guidelines for ecumenical practice, the “Ecumenical Mandate” prescribes this important principal: “Practice humility in judging and admonishing others. Respect with charity what another communion or denomination says about itself in the expectation that our relationship with others will be mutually enriching” (page 20 # 6).

CCU is aware of how painfully divisive the issue of homosexuality is within society at large, the church catholic, and within the RCA. However, CCU does not believe that breaking fellowship over this matter will yield a situation that honors Christ. Nor will it settle the matter for the RCA, which has its own internal debate (now in moratorium) on the issue.

HUMAN SEXUALITY

To address R-17, 1997 (and R-37, 1999) more specifically, CCU believes that a study of the “moral dimensions of human sexuality” is beyond the scope of CCU’s life and work. CCU respectfully commends such studies to either the Commission on Theology or the Commission on Christian Action. Or perhaps, the RCA could name a task force to undertake a major study on the moral dimensions of human sexuality for the benefit of the denomination and the whole church. CCU believes that such a study could best be done in partnership with other communions with similar views as the RCA, such as that now being undertaken by the World Council of Churches.

CCU continues to urge the Reformed Church in America to look at alternatives to severing ties with sister communions over differences in how Scripture is interpreted. CCU believes that working together in mission with those whom we have sharp differences is a sign of the power of the gospel in a broken world for which Christ died.

MEMBERSHIP IN THE WORLD ALLIANCE OF REFORMED CHURCHES

At the 1998 session of General Synod CCU was directed “to ask the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) to clarify what membership in WARC means beyond mere recognition of Reformed heritage and Presbyterian church order; and further to ask WARC to state under which circumstances members of WARC might lose their membership” (MGS 1998, R-10, p. 257).
In a letter from the Rev. Dr. Milan Opocensky, general secretary of WARC, the following was stated about membership in WARC:

A WARC member church does agree with the principles expressed in the first paragraphs of the WARC Constitution ... the church is in the Reformed (Presbyterian or Congregationalist) tradition and accepts one or several classic confessions of faith (Belgie, Helvetic, Westminster, Heidelberg Catechism). When a church asks for membership we send a letter describing the features of church life, the benefits and responsibilities of membership. The Executive Committee establishes a Membership Committee which examines each application for membership and makes recommendations to the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee then takes the final decision. The member churches in the country concerned are approached and asked whether they know the new church and whether they are ready to recommend the application for membership.

On the question concerning revocation of a church’s standing within WARC, Opocensky indicated that membership in WARC is not to be taken lightly, but it is unlikely that WARC would adopt a position by which a member church would be judged according to a particular stance it has taken on an issue (such as homosexuality).

CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH RELATIONS

In 1995 an overture from the Classis of North Grand Rapids, to effect full programmatic and organizational union with the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) and the RCA by June 2000 (MGS 1995, p. 187), resulted in the following recommendation from the General Synod (MGS 1995, R-5, p. 189):

To encourage agencies of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America as well as the Commission on Christian Unity to maintain regular correspondence with the Christian Reformed Church in North America and its Inter-Church Relations Committee; and further,

to explore avenues of reconciliation between the Reformed Church in America and the Christian Reformed Church in North America for additional programmatic cooperation.

In its continuing response to R-5, CCU met with the Inter-Church Relations Committee of the CRC at it February 28-29, 2000, meeting. The committee expressed strong interest in working with CCU. There was mutual agreement regarding the advantages of joint theological study in several areas, including the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa’s Belhar Confession and the Roman Catholic/Lutheran Joint Declaration of Justification. The CCU will continue its discussion on these matters and will work toward inviting the CRC to join these studies/discussions.

There was mutual agreement and intention that the CCU and the ICRC meet as often as once a year (possibly in the fall) in concurrent sessions that would allow for continuing joint discussions and mutual projects.

THE UNITING REFORMED CHURCH OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

Historically, CCU has been a participant in the long-term relationship the RCA has enjoyed with the members of the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa. The 1995 General Synod voted (MGS 1995, R-1, p. 405):

To request the Commission on Christian Unity to consult with the appropriate offices
of the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa (URCSA), with the input of the African-American Council, to develop a plan for correspondence and continuing relationships between the respective assemblies and congregations of the RCA and the URCSA.

At the General Synod of 1996, CCU reported (MGS 1996, p. 180):

In light of R-1 and in conformance with similar actions and recommendations adopted in Mission Services, a delegation of RCA representatives traveled to South Africa, February 26, 1996–March 6, 1996 to meet with URCSA representatives.

The Minutes of General Synod from 1996 state (MGS 1996, p.182):

If one were to ask each member of the RCA delegation to give a summary of its task, there would be concurrence on the following:

2. The relationship of the RCA and the URCSA must be in parity. There must be a posture of equality and openness to sharing and learning from each other, both in support of each other when in agreement and in support of each other through critical dialogue.

On March 7, 1998, an URCSA delegation arrived in the United States for meetings with various RCA groups, which included the faculty of New Brunswick and Western Theological Seminaries, RCA program staff, GSC directors, and the general secretary. The delegation worshiped with RCA African-American congregations and had conversations with representatives from the Christian Reformed Church.

As a result of the conversations, the following points of agreement were reached:

1. Co-drafting of a basic document establishing the principles of the joint relationship between the URCSA and the RCA.

2. The mutual sharing of information about the government and programmatic structures of the URCSA and the RCA, along with areas of staff responsibilities for each denomination.

3. Connections between the component parts of the RCA and the URCSA will be explored, especially in the following areas: urban ministries, theological exchange, stewardship, Christian education, the Children and Worship program, and youth exchange programs.

4. The RCA will continue to monitor the decision of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) regarding the “Proposed Joint Resolution” between the WARC and the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK, the white Dutch Reformed Church), in light of the failed attempt toward church union between the URCSA and the NGK.

5. Discussion and possible cooperation focusing on the issues of religion in public life, a major initiative of URCSA.

6. Continued cooperation in the development and implementation of the partnership on diaconal work initiated by Mission Services, Christ Memorial Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan, and offices within the Christian Reformed Church.

The Belhar Confession

The Belhar Confession, drafted in 1982, later became one of the standards of unity (along with the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dordt, and the Heidelberg Catechism) for the
new URCSA. CCU has placed on its agenda a study of the Belhar Confession, which has come to have significance far beyond the church in South Africa (MGS 1998, pp. 247-48).

At CCU’s February 2000, meeting a study of the Belhar Confession was led by the Rev. Daniel Meeter.

In its continuing response to R-1 (MGS 1995, p. 405), to its report to the 1998 General Synod, and to R-14 (MGS 1999, p. 115), “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,” CCU recommends:

R-13
To instruct the Commission on Christian Unity to put the Belhar Confession before the whole denomination over the next decade as a means of deepening the RCA commitment to dealing with racism and strengthening its ecumenical commitment to the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa and other Reformed bodies.

Reasons:

1. This recommendation is one of CCU’s responses to R-14 (MGS 1999, p. 115).

2. Racism is a sin that the Belhar Confession confronts.

3. The RCA needs to take a look at racism within the RCA.

4. This recommendation honors the RCA’s relationship with the URCSA and previous agreements.

kThe advisory committee recommended to amend R-13 as follows (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken out):

R-13 (amendment)
To instruct the Commission on Christian Unity to put commend the Belhar Confession before to the whole denomination church over the next decade for reflection, study, and response, as a means of deepening the RCA commitment to dealing with racism and strengthening its ecumenical commitment to the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa and other Reformed bodies. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

Reason: The amendment strengthens the original recommendation by defining a more specific method of putting the Belhar Confession before the church.

THE BELHAR CONFESSION

The Belhar Confession is one of the standards of unity (along with the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dordt, and the Heidelberg Catechism) for the new Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa. Belhar has significance and influence well beyond the church in South Africa. As one member of the Uniting Church expressed it: “We carry this confession on behalf of all the Reformed churches. We do not think of it as ours alone.” This is a translation
of the original Afrikaans text of the Belhar Confession.

1. We believe in the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who gathers, protects and cares for his Church by his Word and his Spirit, as He has done since the beginning of the world and will do to the end.

2. We believe in one holy, universal Christian Church, the communion of saints called from the entire human family.

We believe

that Christ’s work of reconciliation is made manifest in the Church as the community of believers who have been reconciled with God and with one another;

that unity is, therefore, both a gift and an obligation for the Church of Jesus Christ; that through the working of God’s Spirit it is a binding force, yet simultaneously a reality which must be earnestly pursued and sought: one which the people of God must continually be built up to attain;

that this unity must become visible so that the world may believe that separation, enmity and hatred between people and groups is sin which Christ has already conquered, and accordingly that anything which threatens this unity may have no place in the Church and must be resisted;

that this unity of the people of God must be manifested and be active in a variety of ways: in that we love one another; that we experience, practice and pursue community with one another; that we are obligated to give ourselves willingly and joyfully to be of benefit and blessing to one another; that we share one faith, one calling, are of one soul and one mind; have one God and Father, are filled with one Spirit, are baptised with one baptism, eat of one bread and drink of one cup, confess one Name, are obedient to one Lord, work for one cause, and share one hope; together come to know the height and the breadth and the depth of the love of Christ; together are built up to the stature of Christ, to the new humanity; together know and bear one another’s burdens, thereby fulfilling the law of Christ that we need one another and upbuild one another, admonishing and comforting one another; that we suffer with one another for the sake of righteousness; pray together; together serve God in this world; and together fight against all which may threaten or hinder this unity;

that this unity can be established only in freedom and not under constraint; that the variety of spiritual gifts, opportunities, backgrounds, convictions, as well as the various languages and cultures, are by virtue of the reconciliation in Christ, opportunities for mutual service and enrichment within the one visible people of God;

that true faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition for membership of this Church;

*Therefore, we reject any doctrine*

which absolutises either natural diversity or the sinful separation of people in such a way that this absolutisation hinders or breaks the visible and active unity of the church, or even leads to the establishment of a separate church formation;

which professes that this spiritual unity is truly being maintained in the bond of peace whilst believers of the same confession are in effect alienated from one another for the sake of diversity and in despair of reconciliation;

which denies that a refusal earnestly to pursue this visible unity as a priceless gift is
which explicitly or implicitly maintains that descent or any other human or social factor should be a consideration in determining membership of the Church.

3. We believe that God has entrusted to his Church the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ; that the Church is called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, that the Church is called blessed because it is a peacemaker, that the Church is witness both by word and by deed to the new heaven and the new earth in which righteousness dwells.

that God by his lifegiving Word and Spirit has conquered the powers of sin and death, and therefore also of irreconciliation and hatred, bitterness and enmity, that God, by his lifegiving Word and Spirit will enable His people to live in a new obedience which can open new possibilities of life for society and the world;

that the credibility of this message is seriously affected and its beneficial work obstructed when it is proclaimed in a land which professes to be Christian, but in which the enforced separation of people on a racial basis promotes and perpetuates alienation, hatred and enmity;

that any teaching which attempts to legitimate such forced separation by appeal to the gospel, and is not prepared to venture on the road of obedience and reconciliation, but rather, out of prejudice, fear, selfishness and unbelief, denies in advance the reconciling power of the gospel, must be considered ideology and false doctrine.

Therefore, we reject any doctrine which, in such a situation sanctions in the name of the gospel or of the will of God the forced separation of people on the grounds of race and colour and thereby in advance obstructs and weakens the ministry and experience of reconciliation in Christ.

4. We believe that God has revealed himself as the One who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among men; that in a world full of injustice and enmity He is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged and that He calls his Church to follow Him in this; that He brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry; that He frees the prisoner and restores sight to the blind; that He supports the downtrodden, protects the stranger, helps orphans and widows and blocks the path of the ungodly; that for Him pure and undefiled religion is to visit the orphans and the widows in their suffering; that He wishes to teach His people to do what is good and to seek the right;

that the Church must therefore stand by people in any form of suffering and need, which implies, among other things, that the Church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice, so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream;

that the Church as the possession of God must stand where He stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged; that in following Christ the Church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others.

Therefore, we reject any ideology which would legitimate forms of injustice and any doctrine which is unwilling to resist such an ideology in the name of the gospel.

5. We believe that, in obedience to Jesus Christ, its only Head, the Church is called to confess and to do all these things, even though the authorities and human laws might
forbid them and punishment and suffering be the consequence.

Jesus is Lord.

To the one and only God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be the honour and the glory for ever and ever.

**REFORMED ECUMENICAL COUNCIL**

Founded in 1946, the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC) was first known as the Reformed Ecumenical Synod. REC is an international organization whose members are Reformed churches. It has thirty-four denominations in twenty-three countries, joining in fellowship about seven million Christians. The churches have joined together for expressing and promoting unity, for mutual support, and to share the love of Christ in the world.

Submission to biblical truths and confessional integrity are essential to the REC’s calling and purpose. The council meets in an assembly every four years, to which each member church sends delegates.

The general secretary of REC, the Rev. Richard L. van Houten, met with CCU at its February 2000 meeting in Grand Rapids, Michigan, to share with the commission the history behind the founding of REC and its work through the years as well as the agenda for REC’s upcoming quadrennial Assembly.

The RCA has received an invitation from the general secretary of REC to send an observer or observers to REC’s 2000 Assembly in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, July 14-28, 2000.

It was voted by CCU to ask the RCA’s general secretary, the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, to accept the invitation from REC. It is the intention of CCU that the observer be a member of the commission.

**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF EVANGELICALS**

**Background**

The CCU held its spring 1998 meeting in conjunction with the annual meeting of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) in response to a new receptivity from NAE toward RCA initiatives aimed at closer cooperation between the two bodies. Because the RCA holds membership in the World and National Councils of Churches, the RCA has been unable to hold membership in the NAE because the latter’s constitution prohibits dual membership.


> To permit the Commission on Christian Unity to explore the possibility of, and issues related to, the RCA holding membership in the National Association of Evangelicals, for report to the 1999 General Synod.

In response to this directive, CCU reported to the 1999 General Synod (*MGS 1999*, p. 184):

> CCU has sent correspondence to 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.”
CCU invited the Rev. Kevin Mannoia, president of NAE, to meet with CCU at its February 2000 meeting for the purpose of exploring further the possibility of NAE changing its constitution to allow joint membership in WCC, NCC, and NAE. Because of prior commitments, Mannoia was unable to attend the meeting. However, in his response, Mannoia stated:

Our (NAE) Executive Committee met two days ago and took action to recommend to our Board of Directors that this rule be changed to allow for full membership providing that such denominations meet the membership expectations of the NAE.

On March 6, in Washington D.C. our Board will meet and make a final determination on this proposed bylaw change.

The CCU is confident that the NAE’s Board of Directors will change its bylaws and allow dual membership at its March 6, 2000 meeting.

**R-14**

To instruct the general secretary, as the ecumenical officer of the RCA, to write to the president of the National Association of Evangelicals, making application for denominational membership of the RCA in the National Association of Evangelicals. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. This completes the conversation of the last several years between the CCU and the officers of the NAE.

2. The CCU has been encouraged to pursue this by other RCA judicatories over a number of years.

3. Membership in the NAE supports the “Ecumenical Mandate” statement that the RCA is both ecumenical and evangelical.

**THE MORAVIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA**

The Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, general secretary of the RCA, was copied in a letter to the Rev. Robert Sawyer, president of the Moravian Church in America, Southern Conference, from Eugene Turner, associate stated clerk and director, Department of Ecumenical and Agency Relationships, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The letter was in reference to the possibility “of starting a church-to-church dialogue exploring the possibility of entering into full communion.”

Turner further stated that “While in Atlanta, I conferred with the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson of the Reformed Church in America and the Rev. John Thomas of the United Church of Christ. As you know, the RCA, UCC, and the PCUSA are the three Reformed partners who in 1998 entered full communion with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America through *A Formula of Agreement*. Both John Thomas and Wesley Granberg-Michaelson indicated to me that they were interested in participating in a Moravian-Reformed dialogue.”

**R-15**

To join with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the United Church of Christ in initiating a Moravian-Reformed Dialogue.

Reasons:

2. This recommendation is in keeping with the RCA’s “Affirmation of Christian Unity”:

We believe that there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all . . . We pledge to seek unity of the church through communing with other Christians in worship and work, cooperating with other Christians in councils of churches, and uniting with other Christians in faith and order (MGS 1981, R-5, p.147).

The advisory committee recommended a substitute motion for R-15:

**R-15 (substitute)**

To instruct the general secretary to accept the invitation of the Moravian Church to enter into Moravian-Reformed dialogue, with the understanding that any proposal for a fuller expression of Christian unity with the Moravian Church be accomplished as a church-to-church relationship, and that during the course of dialogue the term “full communion” be understood to mean “the recognition in other churches that the gospel of Jesus Christ is preached and the sacraments are administered according to the Word of God; and that we as a denomination make provision for the orderly exchange of ministers in accordance with the authority of the classes; and further, that we share a common commitment to evangelism, mission, and service” (The Ecumenical Mandate, MGS 1995, p. 183). (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. We wish to enter into dialogue in a way that establishes the freedom of the RCA to establish a church-to-church relationship with the Moravian Church.
2. The recommendation presents a clear understanding of how the RCA interprets the term “full communion” in relationships with churches with whom we do not already have a relationship of full communion either by right of common Reformed heritage or common membership in the World Alliance of Reformed Churches.

**THE FORMULA OF AGREEMENT BETWEEN LUTHERAN AND REFORMED CHURCHES**

In 1997 the General Synod of the RCA, by a substantial margin, approved the proposal declaring that “it is in full communion with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.” The exact language of the resolution is as follows (MGS 1997, p. 186):

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Reformed Church in America adopt *A Formula of Agreement* on the basis of *A Common Calling*, and in full communion with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the United Church of Christ, declare that it is in full communion with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this full communion agreement will take effect when all four churches act affirmatively on this resolution in accordance with their respective governing procedures.

This action was the result of a dialogue between the Lutheran and Reformed churches that had its genesis in 1962. The last round of conversations began in 1990 and concluded in 1992, issuing a dialogue report, “A Common Calling: The Witness of Our Reformed Churches in
North America Today.”

Intent

As was stated to the General Synod of 1997, the meaning and intent of the Formula of Agreement must be clear. To say that the Reformed Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and the United Church of Christ are in full communion is not to say anything new. As part of their common heritage these three Reformed churches are already in partnership in the way that Reformed polity understands full communion. For the RCA each local board of elders governs admittance to the Lord’s Table, and each classis governs admittance to the pulpit, in keeping with the RCA doctrinal standards, the RCA liturgy, and the RCA Book of Church Order. The intent of the Formula of Agreement is to make explicit the implicit relationship of the Reformed churches to each other, while at the same time declaring a completely new relationship between these Reformed churches and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

The Formula of Agreement sets forth a fundamental doctrinal consensus among the four churches that is based on, and presumes, the theological agreements of earlier Lutheran-Reformed dialogues, including the 1983 statement that “Our unity in Christ compels us to claim our strong affinities in doctrine and practice” (MGS 1997, p. 180). Both Lutheran and Reformed traditions:

a. Affirm themselves a living part of the church catholic.

b. Confess the Nicene and Apostles’ Creeds.

c. Affirm the doctrine of justification by faith as fundamental.

d. Affirm the unique and final authority of Holy Scriptures in the church.

e. Affirm the real presence of Christ in the Lord’s Supper.

f. Affirm the priesthood of all believers and have interpreted this as their servanthood to God and their service to the world.

g. Affirm the vocation of all the baptized, which is service (ministry) in every aspect of their lives in their care of God’s world.

h. Affirm that they are in faithful succession in the apostolic Tradition and that faithful succession in this Tradition is all that is necessary for mutual recognition as part of the church catholic.

i. Share a common definition of a church in the apostolic Tradition: a community where the word is rightly preached and the sacraments rightly administered.

j. Identify a ministry of Word and sacrament as instituted by God.

k. Ordain once to a ministry of Word and sacrament, and the functions of such persons are identical.

l. Understand that ordination is to the ministry of the church catholic. Such ordinations in both traditions have usually been by presbyters.

m. Have granted the appropriateness under some circumstances of one ordained person exercising episkope, oversight (under a variety of titles, including that of bishop), but both traditions have ordinarily exercised the function of episkope collegially through
such structures as presbyteries and synods.

n. Affirm that the church always must be open to further growth and reformation. Both traditions have been willing to be self-critical. Both traditions have become increasingly open to a historical-critical understanding of the history of the church and of their respective traditions within the apostolic Tradition.

Accomplishments: The Congregational Level

The question is raised as to the effect and capacity of such formal agreements as the Formula of Agreement. Do official formulae have any real impact on the church other than a brief moment of celebratory events? CCU is pleased to report than since the passage of the Formula of Agreement in 1997 much has happened at all levels of church life. There have been a number of joint worship services of celebration at the national, regional, and local levels from California to New York and from Texas to Michigan. Pastors have reported that clergy of Formula churches have established weekly study groups focusing on the lectionary readings for the week. Pulpit exchanges as well as joint celebrations of Holy Communion by Lutheran and Reformed congregations have taken place. Such have been new to both churches and are reported to be welcomed and enlightening. Cooperative mission projects are being discussed and implemented between Formula churches. At local levels meetings of pastors are being convened to discern ways to support congregations in ministry, especially in urban and rural locales where challenges are great and human and financial resources are stretched. As one pastor has said in summation of all that is taking place, “the passage of the Formula of Agreement has given us permission to work together and even prods us to do so. It has been a wonderful gift to the churches.”

Accomplishments: The National Coordinating Committee

At the national level a Lutheran-Reformed Coordinating Committee has been established with three representatives from each of the four churches. Membership consists of one lay and clergy person from each church, along with a member of the ecumenical staff. Representing the RCA are the Rev. Dr. Louis Lotz, elder Carol Wagner, and the Rev. Douglas Fromm, associate for ecumenical relations. The coordinating committee ensures that commitments made are carried out, refers matters that require internal legislative decision-making to appropriate decision-making bodies of the participating churches, refers matters related to programs to the appropriate units of the participating churches, monitors the reception of the full communion agreement by the partner churches, and reports to the appropriate ecumenical committee or commission that has responsibility for ecumenical relations in the partner churches.

The Orderly Exchange of Clergy

With regard to the orderly exchange of clergy among the Formula churches, a working group was established and given the mandate to develop principles that would guide the churches. The RCA was represented by the Revs. Howard Moths and Allan Janssen. RCA staff from Ministry and Personnel Services met with the working group as consultants. The results of this working group are published in a manual entitled The Orderly Exchange of Ordained Ministers of Word and Sacrament: Principles, Policies and Procedures. The manual contains a summary of the various practices of each church with regard to clergy calls, installations, contracts, and ecclesial oversight. Among the topics addressed in the principles are categories of service, nature of calls and contracts, the approval process, supervision of congregations, services of installation, accountability of pastoral care, and benefits such as pension, medical insurance, and life insurance. Published in a user-friendly format, the manual contains a question and answer section comprised of the most frequently asked questions with regard to the topic of clergy exchange among the four Formula churches. The CCU is pleased to report that the manual has been mailed to all stated clerks of classes and regional synods.
Partnership Appointments

As a result of the passage of the *Formula of Agreement* in 1997, the RCA has received invitations from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to name a permanent member to its Committee on Ecumenical Relations. CCU has appointed the Rev. Liala Beukema to serve. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has invited the RCA to name a permanent member to its Church Council, comparable to the RCA General Synod Council. CCU has named the Rev. Richard Brihn to serve. The United Church of Christ has extended an invitation to the RCA to have a permanent representative on its Executive Council. CCU has named the Rev. David Baak to serve. In reciprocation the CCU has requested that the General Synod Council make allowance for representatives from the *Formula* churches to serve as observers on the council.

Theological Consultation

A committee convened in 1999 has been working on two theological consultations to be held for theological faculty. In June of 2001 a consultation will be held in Geneva, Switzerland, for faculty of the more than twenty seminaries of the *Formula* churches. The consultation will examine the full communion agreement in North America vis-a-vis the Leuenberg Statement of Concord between the Lutheran and Reformed churches of Europe which was approved in 1973. In addition to a reflection on the ecumenical works of 1973 and 1997 in Europe and North America respectively, the consultation will focus on theological education from an ecumenical perspective, courses taught by teams of faculty from different schools, cross registration for students, faculty exchange programs, and joint education offerings for laity.

Joint Consultation of Racial/Ethnic Councils

Most recently the RCA’s racial/ethnic councils have met with their counterparts in the *Formula* churches on several occasions. CARE (Communion Agreement Racial Ethnic) Partners continues to explore networking, shared mission, participation in multicultural events sponsored by the *Formula* churches, sharing resources, development of resources on multicultural sensitivity, and sponsoring a joint training event targeted for 2001. A strategy for new church development in racial/ethnic communities is being considered for recommendation to each of the four partner churches with a clear desire that such work be done cooperatively.

Common Mission

In addition to the above, staff members of the partner churches have met to review areas of common mission in education, congregation life and ministry, human resources, policy planning and administration, and mission services. In the brief time since the fall of 1997 when the last of the *Formula* churches voted for full communion between Lutheran and Reformed churches, much has been accomplished in bringing the intent of written and signed ecumenical documents into the mainstream of the life and ministry of the RCA and its *Formula* partners. CCU rejoices in this manifestation of God’s gift of unity that offers witness to the power and purpose of God who reconciles a broken and divided world.

Concerns

The CCU is aware that the *Formula of Agreement* has raised concern over the presence of the United Church of Christ as a partner church in full communion with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and the Reformed Church in America. The issue is that the United Church of Christ and the Reformed Church in America have different positions with regard to the presence of gay and lesbian Christians in the life and ministry of the church.
The concern is raised by the language of the *Formula of Agreement* in which it states that in declaring full communion, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Reformed Church in America, and the United Church of Christ “recognize each other as churches in which the Gospel is rightly preached and the sacraments rightly administered according to the Word of God” (*MGS* 1997, p. 179).

It must be made clear that such language has a very specific meaning and usage. It is the formal language that refers to the basic, defining marks, which are part of the heritage, theology, confessions, and standards embraced by churches. The defining parameters of the historic confessions and creedal affirmations of each church, the RCA and the UCC alike, identify what is said to be a “true church in which the Gospel is rightly preached and the sacraments rightly administered.” These marks provide the foundation for the recognition of “true churches.”

Constituted in 1957, the UCC merged two confessional and covenantal traditions bringing together the North American Congregational Christian Churches and the Evangelical and Reformed Church of continental background. It is Calvinist on both sides of its lineage. The UCC is a confessional church affirming 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. In the preamble to its *Constitution* the UCC claims as its own the faith of the historic church expressed in the ancient creeds, the Apostles’ and Nicene, and reclaimed in the basic insights of the Protestant reformers. Based on the public declaration of its confessions, creedal affirmations, and Trinitarian foundation, the UCC is said to be, and recognized by, the wider church as a “true church.”


The 1996 General Synod took no action to postpone the proposed vote of 1997 for adoption of the *Formula of Agreement* as was proposed in an overture concerned with the differing positions on homosexuality held by the RCA and the UCC. No conditions were implied or stated by the General Synod that would have affected the 1997 vote on the *Formula of Agreement*. In response to the expressed concern over the differing positions of the RCA and the UCC, General Synod voted to engage the UCC in a dialogue on the issue of homosexuality (*MGS* 1996, R-4, p. 211). The dialogue continued for two years and reported its results to the General Synod of 1999 (*MGS* 1999, pp. 170-182).

In 1999 the General Synod denied an overture that it had received pertaining to the UCC. The overture dealt with the issue of gay and lesbian Christians in the life and ministry of the UCC and called for the RCA to sever all ecumenical ties with the UCC until it repented of its affirmation of the homosexual lifestyle as appropriate for Christians.

In maintaining ties with the UCC, the General Synod declared that “despite differences with the UCC, the RCA recognizes the UCC as a Christian communion.” Furthermore, “the RCA should avoid the precedent of severing ecumenical ties with other Christian denominations over differences regarding interpretation of Scripture on social and ethical matters” (*MGS* 1999, p. 186).

The issue was clearly framed in the genesis of the RCA-UCC dialogue. Both the RCA and the UCC are churches in which Scripture is honored; however, they differ in their hermeneutical approach to Scripture. The differing hermeneutical approaches are what allow
for the divergent conclusions with regard to the participation of gay and lesbian Christians in the life and ministry of the church (MGS 1999, p.174). The question then becomes whether or not the UCC’s hermeneutic and resultant position on homosexuality rises to the level of status confessionis, a state of confession. In other words, is this an issue that goes right to the heart of the gospel, thus becoming the basis for severing ties with the UCC? The CCU concurs with the decision of the 1999 General Synod that this issue did not rise to that of church-dividing status.

**Internal Discussion**

The CCU raises before the General Synod of 2000 a deeply held concern with regard to the unity of the church. In spite of past General Synod decisions not to sever ties with the UCC and to maintain relationship, the issue of severing ties continues to be raised through overtures to the General Synod. It seems to the CCU that the focus has changed from the relationship between the RCA and the UCC and now becomes an internal issue for the unity of the RCA.

With implied and openly stated ultimatums that a congregation, classis, or regional synod may leave the RCA if ties with the UCC are not severed or the Formula of Agreement nullified, a new issue is introduced, that of schismatic behavior within our own denomination. It raises the question of how one lives with the decisions of one’s own church when those decisions are not to one’s liking. While this is a question of church unity, it seems to the CCU to move from one of ecumenical concern to that of church order and theology within the RCA.

For the CCU it is particularly disheartening to hear of and read circulated documents declaring that the RCA has ceased to be a true church because it did not raise the position of the UCC to that of church-dividing status. To read circulated documents that declare the RCA to be a dead and apostate church because it did not sever ties with the UCC is a disturbing statement to the CCU. When such a statement is then raised as a clarion call to action giving justification to schismatic behavior on the part of congregations, classes, or regional synods, the CCU is especially alarmed. To hear calls for the formation of a new and separate church seems to the CCU to warrant behavior that has gone beyond the boundary of what is acceptable churchmanship and Christian character worthy of RCA heritage of being a faithful agent of God’s work of reconciliation in the world and in the church.

With deep concern for denominational integrity and the integrity of ecumenical relationships, the CCU recommends that the General Synod consider the schismatic voice and influence being put forward by those not in agreement with the actions of General Synods. The CCU recommends that the General Synod refer this concern to the appropriate commissions for consideration and review with the heartfelt need to conserve the integrity of church order and theological heritage.

**Overtures**

*Relationships with Denominations Showing Strong Growth*

1. The Classis of Central California overtures the 2000 General Synod of the Reformed Church in America to instruct the Commission on Christian Unity and appropriate RCA staff to search out and establish closer kingdom relationships with denominations demonstrating strong evangelistic growth and church planting success, such as the Assemblies of God and Evangelical Free, for the purpose of mutual learning and encouragement.
CHRISTIAN UNITY

Reasons:

1. For the past several years our denominational Christian unity efforts have been colored by negative and divisive issues instead of mission.

2. The Reformed Church in America has a demonstrated need to learn from others under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, nationally and internationally, in view of the thirty-plus years of declining membership.

3. Some positive working relationships with more healthy church communions would shape the average member’s view of ecumenical relations constructively.

In response to overture 1, the advisory committee recommended:

R-16
To instruct the General Synod Council’s Office of Evangelism and Church Development Services to explore effective evangelistic strategies with denominations who demonstrate strong evangelistic growth and church planting success for the purpose of mutual learning and encouragement. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The intention of the overture can be more effectively accomplished by the GSC’s Office of Evangelism and Church Development Services than by the Commission on Christian Unity.

Separation from the United Church of Christ

2. The Classes of California, Canadian Prairies, Central California, Central Iowa, Illiana, South Grand Rapids, Rocky Mountains, and Zeeland overture the General Synod to direct the general secretary and the associate for ecumenical relations to begin immediately a process whereby the Reformed Church in America separates itself from formal ecumenical relationships with the United Church of Christ, including the declared relationship in the Formula of Agreement, at the national and regional levels, and report back to the General Synod of 2001.

The Classes of Ontario overtures the General Synod to direct the general secretary and the associate for ecumenical relations to begin immediately a process whereby the Reformed Church in America separates itself from formal ecumenical relationships with the United Church of Christ, including the declared relationship in the Formula of Agreement, at the national and regional levels, and to be in effect by the General Synod of 2002.

Reasons:

1. The United Church of Christ (UCC) ordains practicing homosexuals, lesbians, and bisexuals as ministers of the Word, which the RCA 1990 General Synod affirmed as being contrary to Scripture (MGS 1990, p. 461). In 1998 the General Synod assigned a committee to admonish the UCC for this unbiblical practice.

2. After the 1999 General Synod and the “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” (MGS1999, pp. 170-182), it became clear that the UCC is not open to changing its position on affirming homosexual behavior and relationships within the church membership and leadership. UCC congregational
polity is such that the RCA cannot admonish the UCC in any meaningful way because each congregation is independent of the national structure. Therefore, the Formula of Agreement, which states that living in full communion implies an ongoing process of mutual affirmation and admonition, cannot be implemented in any realistic sense.

3. After the 1999 General Synod and the report of the dialogue group it has become clear that the UCC has no control mechanism to insure biblically sound preaching and teaching. An obvious example is the inclusion of seventeen congregations in the UCC who are aligned with the Universalist Unitarian Church.

4. After the dialogue process with the UCC we not only failed to produce a change in their position (as was our express intention; see 1998 overture), but our meetings actually served to reinforce their erroneous position. The UCC response to two and a half years of dialogue was: 1) to chastise the RCA for our position; 2) to express in a formal declaration that it is the UCC’s desire to impact the RCA in such a way that we will one day adopt an “open and affirming” position toward practicing homosexuals, just as the UCC does; and 3) the UCC itself states that it will not return to the RCA position, which we believe is biblically based.

5. As one of the reasons, in asking the UCC to reconsider its position on gay/lesbian relationships, the RCA delegation submitted in its written report the following: “The fact that the UCC official stance threatens to divide the worldwide church of Jesus Christ [and that] 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.” (MGS 1999, p. 176).

The UCC position is one that is dividing the church of Jesus Christ, and the RCA separating itself from the UCC is to be seen as an act of unifying the church worldwide. The UCC delegation itself states that they will not return to the RCA position: “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 at 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’” (MGS 1999, p. 180).

6. It is our purpose to be true to our own members and not alienate those within the RCA family such as the churches in the Regional Synod of Canada. A number of the RCA churches in Canada come out of a painful separation from the United Church in Canada over the issue of active homosexuals, Scripture, and the church’s role. Many Canadian churches have made it clear that if the RCA does not remain true to the biblical perspective on this matter they will seek separation from the RCA. The Canadian position on this is not exclusive to Canada and there are many more segments of the RCA, including a number of RCA congregations and classes, such our own, which would be seriously concerned if the General Synod does not withdraw from its relationship with the UCC.

7. The RCA cannot be in full communion with the UCC if, at the General Synod level, the UCC ignores the fact that 1) Scripture declares homosexual behavior as sinful, and that 2) the redemptive intervention of God’s healing love through the Holy Spirit is to be brought to those who continue in sin.

The Rev. Paul H. Sherry, president of the UCC, states the UCC position when he wrote the following in October 1999:
I believe our voice among the churches and within society is urgently needed, bearing witness to the belief that God cherishes all and dignifies all, and to our experience of gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons as gifts of God, called with us by their baptism into the fullest participation in God’s mission of reconciliation in the world (UCC website, November 1999).

8. The dialogue clearly identified the different approaches to Scripture between the RCA and UCC. “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 set aside certain texts as culturally conditioned or irrelevant. One of the UCC’s participants said, ‘There are just some texts we need to leave behind’” (MGS 1999, p. 174). In summation, in the RCA, we let the Bible speak to our experience, unlike the UCC which lets experience define the Bible and how it is interpreted.

In response to overture 2, the advisory committee recommended:

R-17
To affirm the following statement and circulate it to all assemblies and congregations of the Reformed Church in America:

For years the issue of homosexuality has been a painful issue for the church. This has been particularly true regarding the manner in which the issue plays out in ecumenical relationships. In recent years the issue has come into focus following the landmark signing of the Formula of Agreement between the Reformed Church in America, the United Church of Christ (UCC), the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (PCUSA), and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

In an attempt to clarify the position of the Reformed Church in America regarding its evangelical and ecumenical witness, we offer the following as clarifications to the church:

1. The Formula of Agreement, approved at the 1997 General Synod, while developed in cooperation with the PCUSA and the UCC, altered only the RCA’s relationship with the ELCA (MGS 1997, pp. 183-192).

2. The RCA declares that the stated position taken by the UCC representatives in the dialogue with the RCA concerning homosexuality, as reported to the 1999 General Synod (MGS 1999, pp. 170-182), is contrary to the RCA’s interpretation of Scripture as expressed by past actions of the General Synod.

3. Given the fact that the RCA in 1999 admonished the UCC for its position regarding ordination of practicing gays and lesbians (MGS 1999, p. 176), the RCA will not intentionally pursue a closer ecumenical relationship with the UCC beyond that which exists through a common membership in councils of churches (World Council of Churches, National Council of Churches, and World Alliance of Reformed Churches) and currently existing cooperative engagements between the RCA and the UCC for the purposes of ministry and mission. We therefore recognize that there currently exists a limit to “responsible and continual
engagement and interaction at the levels of the General Synod and denominational program” (cf., Ecumenical Mandate, II.A.3.; p. 15, MGS 1995, p. 181).

4. The polity and the structure of the UCC do not provide the means for consistent theological accountability throughout its structure and membership. Therefore, following the RCA’s understanding of pulpit fellowship as related to the classis, and table fellowship as related to the elders, cooperation between RCA pastors and churches and UCC pastors and churches is a local matter. We reaffirm that for the RCA “full communion” means full ‘pulpit and table fellowship’ and the recognition of each other’s ministries, in keeping with the authority and responsibilities of the classes and the consistories” (cf., Ecumenical Mandate, II.A.3.; p. 15, MGS 1995, p. 181). (ADOPTED)

Reason: We believe that it is in the interest of both the unity and faithfulness of the RCA to respond to this overture in a manner that speaks both clearly and pastorally, reaffirming the already stated positions of the General Synod while setting out the limit of further relationships with the UCC.

At the request of the president, a prayer of gratitude was offered by the Rev. Charles Morris, moderator of the Advisory Committee on Christian Unity.

**Partnership with Local Christian Congregations**

3. The Classes of California, Canadian Prairies, Central California, Central Iowa, East Sioux, Illiana, and South Grand Rapids overture the General Synod to instruct the Commission on Christian Unity to call every RCA congregation to prayer and partnership with local Christian congregations and ministries to help lost people come into a saving, redeeming, and transforming relationship with Jesus Christ for the sake of individuals, families, and communities.

Reasons:

1. Ecumenical activity is best done at the local level where life’s issues can be dealt with in the context of relationship. There are dynamic and exemplary models of ecumenical, evangelical movements in local communities led by RCA ministers and ministries that are changing lives and communities, apart from any denominational influence or contribution.

2. We believe ecumenical efforts and investments, above all, need to be rooted in the ministry of the local church, where the ministry of the RCA is actually centered. The RCA vision and mission statement emphasizes a thousand congregations in a million different ways.

3. This will encourage ecumenical activity in every local congregation at the broadest grassroots level.

4. As we look back at the past ecumenical efforts of the RCA (which have been predominantly based on a General Synod level), 1) we have seen division grow within our own denomination, and 2) we have failed to see local congregations move into meaningful ecumenical ministry as a result of the efforts of the General Synod and its counterparts of other denominations.

5. We are seeing a visible contrast between the divisive and ineffective efforts of
denominational leaders (getting leaders with leaders and writing papers) and the fruit-bearing, life-changing alliances being forged by local church pastors and congregations nationally and internationally as they gather to pray and build effective ministries.

6. We have a sincere desire to embrace and work with local UCC congregations that share our biblical, interpretive positions on the issues of homosexual practice and lifestyle even though we wish to separate ourselves at the General Synod level.

7. In light of this, we need to lift up models of ecumenical ministry and relations that are effective and fruitful, such as:
   - “Lighthouses of Prayer;” touching three million individuals in the U.S.
   - Modesto Miracle, where seventy local churches changed a community together.
   - “I’ll Be There,” where thousands of people were led to Christ by a combined effort of differing evangelical churches, representing many denominations.
   - “What If It’s True,” over two hundred churches in Michigan and over twenty in California combining outreach programs.

In response to overture 3, the advisory committee recommended:

R-18
To instruct the Commission on Christian Unity to call every RCA congregation to prayer and partnership with local Christian congregations and ministries to help people come into a saving, redeeming, and transforming relationship with Jesus Christ for the sake of individuals, families, and communities. (ADOPTED)

Reason: This will encourage ecumenical activity in every local congregation at the broadest grassroots level.

Membership in the National Association of Evangelicals

4. The Classis of Illiana overtures the General Synod to begin whatever steps are necessary to become a full member denomination of the National Association of Evangelicals.

Reasons:

1. Recent changes in the bylaws of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) now allows for membership of denominations in the NAE while still holding membership in other organizations of a comparable ecclesiastical level (e.g. National Council of Churches).

2. Membership will be an encouragement for the evangelical churches.

3. Membership will give stronger connections to other evangelical denominations and ministries.

4. Membership will give better identification to our communities as an evangelical denomination.

5. The statements of faith of the NAE will encourage the evangelical spirit within our midst.

6. The RCA will have access to NAE resources.
7. Membership in the NAE and National Council of Churches (NCC) will give us the best of both and give the local church a choice as to who they wish to support.

8. Membership will give a means of expressing the evangelical voice to Washington and Hollywood.

9. Through membership, the RCA will be supporting World Relief, the service arm of the NAE, which only provides relief through the local evangelical churches, which is a more effective witness for the gospel. Presently the RCA works through Church World Service, which sometimes provides relief without the gospel.

10. A previous General Synod has permitted the Commission on Christian Unity (CCU) to explore the possibilities of membership. The CCU stated that it “believes the timing is right for the RCA to more directly pursue a mutually beneficial relationship with the NAE” (*MGS 1998*, p. 250).

11. In the CCU report to the 1999 General Synod it stated that a letter had been sent to the NAE expressing “the interest of the RCA in joining the NAE as a member denomination” (*MGS 1999*, p. 184).

kThe advisory committee recommended:

R-19
To deny overture 4. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The substance of overture 4 was already dealt with in R-14.

Apology regarding Formula of Agreement

5. The Classes of Canadian Prairies and Ontario overture the General Synod to instruct the general secretary and the associate for ecumenical relations to send a letter to the United Church of Christ and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, apologizing for the misrepresentation of the Reformed Church in America’s position on the *Formula of Agreement* at the celebration of full communion (Oct 4, 1998, University of Chicago), where the RCA representative stated:

“We gather to recognize each other as churches in which the gospel is rightly preached and the sacraments are rightly administered according to the Word of God” (*Order of Worship, Declaration of Purpose, MGS 1998*, p. 276, footnote # 1);

and further,

that this letter be distributed widely in the Reformed Church in America.

Reasons:

1. The understanding of the two different definitions of the term “full communion” on which the RCA’s approval of the *Formula of Agreement* depended (General Synod 1997) was publicly contradicted at the “Celebration of Full Communion” (October 4, 1998), therefore leading the three partner denominations and their churches to believe that the RCA’s position is other than what it really is (see reasons 1 and 2 in the footnote below).

2. The distribution of this letter of apology within the RCA would provide needed clarification to our congregations as they seek to respond to the decision of the 1998
General Synod “to encourage congregations to make occasional use of the order of worship and guidelines prepared by the Lutheran-Reformed Subcommittee on Worship” (*MGS 1998*, p. 275) wherein the RCA representative statement is found.

Footnote:

General Synod 1997 approved the *Formula of Agreement* on the basis of the following interpretive resolution (*MGS 1997*, p. 185):

To resolve that in adopting the *Formula of Agreement* (if adopted), the Reformed Church in America declares that its relationship with the United Church in Christ (UCC) and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) remains in accord with the definition of full communion as it is stated in “An Ecumenical Mandate for the Reformed Church in America” (*MGS 1996*, pp. 184-197):

- For the Reformed Church in America “full communion” means “full table and pulpit fellowship” and the recognition of each other’s ministries, in keeping with the authority and responsibilities of the classes and consistorys (*MGS 1996*, p. 192);
- Which the RCA already has with the UCC and Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) by virtue of Reformed polity and the fellowship shared through membership in the World Alliance of Reformed Churches; and further,
- Specifically, this means for the Reformed Church in America that admittance to the pulpit is governed by the classis and admittance to the Lord’s Table is governed by the board of elders. This understanding is in keeping with the RCA doctrinal standards, the RCA *Liturgy*, and the RCA *Book of Church Order*.

Reasons:

1. The intent of the *Formula of Agreement* is that the RCA will have a different kind of full communion relationship with the Reformed partner denominations than it will with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The language of the *Formula of Agreement* does not make this clear.

2. [This resolution] makes clear what might otherwise be open to ambiguity of interpretation.

kThe advisory committee recommended:

**R-20**

To deny overture 5. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. The language used by the RCA representative at the October 4, 1998, celebration of full communion between the Lutheran and Reformed churches did not intend to alter the historic relationship of full communion between the RCA and its Reformed partners.

2. The language regarding “full communion” in the *Formula of Agreement* was chosen with the particular needs of the ELCA in mind.

United Church of Christ to Repent
6. The Classis of Ontario overtures the General Synod to direct the general secretary of the RCA, the associate for ecumenical relations, and the Commission on Christian Unity to ask the RCA's Formula of Agreement partners, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. (PCUSA), to join with the RCA in humbly requesting the United Church of Christ (UCC) to repent of its official denominational position of sanctioning the ordination of practicing homosexuals to the ministry of Word and sacrament.

It is understood that this request would be processed through the ELCA and PCUSA's appropriate channels of ecumenical relations and that they would report back their intent and procedure to the RCA's General Synod of 2001 through its Commission on Christian Unity.

It is also understood that should the UCC refuse to repent of their position on this matter, they would be asked by the RCA, ELCA, and PCUSA to withdraw from their partnership in the Formula of Agreement.

Reasons:

1. This overture is in keeping with the spirit of our Lord's commands in Matthew 18:15-17. In those verses Jesus outlines a process for dealing with sin within the fellowship of a covenanted community. The Formula of Agreement is such a covenanted relationship, the first principle of which is “mutual affirmation and admonition” (p. 4, Formula of Agreement).

2. The RCA has taken the first step in this commanded process by speaking directly with the UCC about this issue. (See “Final Report of the Dialogue Between the RCA and the UCC on the Membership and Ministry of Lesbian and Gay Persons in the Church,” MGS 1999, p. 70-182.)

3. From this report it is clear that this first step did not “win our brother over” (cf. Matt. 18:15). The UCC clearly stated that it is not changing its position on affirming homosexual behavior and relationships within the church membership and leadership.

4. Therefore the next step in this situation is to “take one or two others along” (Matt. 18:16) in order to again seek a change of heart and position with the UCC. In the context of the Formula of Agreement this would obviously involve our partner denominations, the ELCA and the PCUSA.

5. Should neither the ELCA nor the PCUSA express the will and commitment to join in this process of addressing this matter with the UCC, then there is clearly a significant difference in biblical understanding and spiritual fellowship between them and the RCA. The RCA should then withdraw its membership in the Formula of Agreement in conviction and humility.

6. This process of discipline prescribed by our Lord gives the Spirit of God time to work within the fellowships of all denominations in the Formula of Agreement.

kThe advisory committee recommended:

R-21
To deny overture 6. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The substance of overture 6 was already dealt with in the response to overture 2.1

Admonishing the United Church of Christ
7. The Classis of Southwest Michigan overtures the General Synod to instruct the general secretary of the Reformed Church in America to dispatch, within the confines of Christian love, to the General Council of the United Church of Christ, a letter affirming the admonishment regarding the United Church of Christ’s unrepentant acceptance of active, practicing homosexual lifestyles within its membership, as said admonition was reported on page 176 of the June 1999 Minutes of General Synod.

Reasons:

1. Page 176 of the Minutes of General Synod for June 1999 reports “Admonitions” in accord with the Formula of Agreement stated above. To our knowledge, the admonitions have not been acted upon.

2. The UCC, contrary to the Scriptures, affirms active homosexuality and has announced this position as an appropriate Christian position.

3. The UCC has been implored by a committee of the RCA to repent of this affirmation but has failed to do so.

4. The RCA’s ecumenical principal is to “be guided by the principal of ‘mutual affirmation and admonition’ to live in obedience to Christ.”

5. This overture is advanced with Christian love and prayer that the UCC will repent of its affirmation of active, practicing homosexuality as an acceptable Christian lifestyle.

kThe advisory committee recommended:

R-22
To deny overture 7. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The correspondence initiated by the 1996 General Synod was communicated by letter to the appropriate office of the UCC (MGS 1997, pp. 173-74).

Dialogue with the United Church of Christ

8. The Classis of Wisconsin overtures the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, in the spirit of the Formula of Agreement, to seek both a real unity with the United Church of Christ and genuine purity in the church by continuing the process which was begun with the dialogue on homosexuality with the United Church of Christ. Believing the initial dialogue with the United Church of Christ fulfills the call of Matthew 18:15 with regard to church discipline, we urge the General Synod to move to the next step of discipline outlined in Matthew 18:16 by:

- Communicating to the UCC the concern of the larger church with regard to their policies condoning homosexual behavior.

- Repeating and strengthening the admonishments to the UCC which resulted from the dialogue process (see MGS 1999, p. 176), and calling those in the leadership, General Synod, agencies, and regional and local judicatures of the UCC who support the ordination of homosexuals to the offices of the church to repent and honor the teaching of Scripture on this issue.
• And further to urge the UCC to demonstrate the fruit of repentance by suspending the ordinations of all ministers, elders, and deacons who practice, approve, and condone the practice of homosexuality as an acceptable lifestyle in God’s church.

Should they remain unrepentant, we would then be faced with the painful prospect of breaking fellowship with the UCC with hope and in prayer that this would lead to their repentance.

Reasons:

1. Scripture teaches and official statements of the Reformed Church in America have affirmed the biblical teaching that homosexual behavior is contrary to Scripture. The Commission on Theology wrote in their 1978 paper “Homosexuality: A Biblical and Theological Appraisal” that “heterosexuality is not only normal; it is normative. Homosexual acts are contrary to the will of God for human sexuality” (MGS 1978, p. 235). Subsequent statements of the General Synod have affirmed this position (see MGS 1979, pp. 126-135; MGS 1990, pp. 460-62; MGS 1994, pp. 369-77; MGS 1995, pp. 381-88; MGS 1996, p. 214).

2. The RCA’s dialogue with the United Church of Christ (UCC) on this issue has apparently had little if any effect on the position of the UCC. While, as humbly acknowledged in General Synod statements related to this issue, we as a denomination and as individuals acknowledge our own struggles with sin, our love for our brothers and sister in the UCC calls us to continue to urge them to repent of their policies and practices of affirming the homosexual lifestyle as acceptable in God’s sight (see Galatians 5:22–6:1).

3. Our concern for both the unity and purity of the church moves us to urge the UCC to repent of its policy of condoning homosexual practices. As Christians we are called to seek both the unity and the purity of the church. We are not to seek one without the other. In his prayer for the church in John 17, Jesus prays for both the purity and unity of his church (John 17:15-23). In addition, the procedure for church discipline, of seeking purity, is to enjoy continued fellowship with one’s brother or sister (Matthew 18:15-17). Furthermore, the letters of the New Testament urge us to seek both the unity and the purity of the church (see 1 Corinthians 5; Ephesians 4:1-6; Philippians 2:1-4). To seek unity at the expense of purity or purity without regard for the importance of unity demonstrates a sub-biblical concern for both the unity and purity of the church and is ultimately harmful to the church’s witness to the world.

4. We are concerned about the witness and testimony of the RCA and the UCC to the people around us. When those who proclaim the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ also approve of behavior that is detestable to God, it creates significant confusion and a quandary for all, especially new believers in Christ and unbelievers. We agree with our brothers and sisters in the Classis of Passaic Valley, who wrote in their 1996 overture to the General Synod of the RCA, “Denominational ambivalence furthers confusion as to whether or not homosexual activity is consistent with Christ-like behavior. The RCA witness must be clear and straightforward so that with tireless love, gentleness, and compassion, the RCA will be more effective in helping homosexuals win freedom from their bondage” (MGS 1996, p. 213). To fail to address the spiritual error of our brothers and sisters in the UCC clouds our own witness, because it appears to the world as if we approve of their error. (Such is the impression that was given in many brief newspaper reports and a report appearing in “The Pastor’s Family Bulletin” in Focus on the Family magazine, October 1999, following the 1999 RCA General Synod).

5. From the report of the UCC participants in the dialogue with the RCA, it appears that at least some in the UCC believe that to love a homosexual person requires acceptance
and approval of a homosexual lifestyle. We would assert that one can love a person without condoning their sin. Further, while they would urge us 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,” we would urge them to consider that in openly embracing, accepting and approving of homosexual practice, that they may be keeping homosexuals within the UCC from experiencing the freedom, love, and joy of obedience to Christ which God desires them to experience.

6. Finally, we are concerned for the vitality and future witness of the UCC to the world around us. Failing to repent and continuing in deliberate sin coupled with a hermeneutic that places a strong emphasis on human experience (see MGS 1999, pp. 174-75) may start them on a slippery slope leading to further sin, with the result that they may come to abide less and less in Christ. It grieves us to think that Christ might remove their lampstand from its place (see Revelation 1:19-28; John 15:1-8).

kThe advisory committee recommended:

R-23  
To deny overture 8. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The substance of overture 8 was already dealt with in the response to overture 2.

Rebuke of United Church of Christ

9. The Classis of Florida overtures the Synod of 2000 to publicly rebuke the General Council of the United Church of Christ for its toleration of Unitarian clergy and congregations.

Reasons:

1. The General Secretary of the UCC clarified that there are fifteen congregations in the UCC which are union congregations with the Unitarian Universalist denomination, as well as many other Unitarian ministers serving in UCC congregations.

2. Unitarianism, in its denial of the Trinity and the deity of Christ, is explicitly condemned as the spirit of antichrist in 1 John 4:1-4 and 2 John 7. John, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, makes equally clear that we may not take them into our house or welcome them or we share their wicked work (2 John 8-9). Clearly maintaining a denomination with such wicked teachers involves sharing in their wicked work.

3. Congregational polity does not prevent separation from antichrist congregations. Indeed, congregations may be disfellowshipped from a congregational body, as has happened in the congregational polity of the Southern Baptist Convention.

4. Since the joint declaration of the Formula of Agreement speaks of seeing “the Gospel rightly preached,” we must clarify that we do not see the Gospel rightly preached in the Unitarian element which is a welcomed part of the UCC.

kThe advisory committee recommended:

R-24  
To refer Overture 9 to the Commission on Christian Unity for study and report to the General Synod of 2001. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. Sufficient information was not available to recommend action at this time.

2. In order that General Synod 2001 can make an informed decision, the Commission on Christian Unity should gather the necessary information.

Membership in the National Association of Evangelicals

10. The Regional Synod of Mid-America overtures the General Synod to begin whatever steps are necessary to become a full member denomination of the National Association of Evangelicals.

Reasons:

1. Recent changes in the bylaws of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) now allow for membership of denominations in the NAE while still holding membership in other organizations of a comparable ecclesiastical level (e.g., National Council of Churches).

2. Membership will give stronger connections to other evangelical denominations and ministries.

3. Membership will be an encouragement to the RCA and will give better identification to our communities as an evangelical denomination.

4. The RCA will have access to NAE resources and provide a means for influencing government and media.

5. A previous General Synod has permitted the Commission on Christian Unity (CCU) to explore the possibilities of membership. The CCU stated that it “believes the timing is right for the RCA to more directly pursue a mutually beneficial relationship with the NAE” (MGS 1998, p. 250). The CCU report to the 1999 General Synod stated that a letter had been sent to the NAE expressing “the interest of the RCA in joining the NAE as a member denomination” (MGS 1999, p. 184).

kThe advisory committee recommended:

R-25
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The substance of Overture 10 has been addressed in R-14.

Communication to UCC on Congregations Opposing Homosexual Ordination

11. The Regional Synod of Mid-America overtures the General Synod to officially communicate to the United Church of Christ (UCC) our agreement with the UCC congregations who oppose the ordination of active homosexuals.

Reasons:

1. We wish to express our support of the vast majority of the UCC congregations who oppose their denomination’s viewpoint on this issue.

2. This overture will give us an opportunity to continue our dialogue with the UCC denomination and is a better alternative at this point to breaking all ecumenical ties with the UCC.

3. We wish to communicate to our own members that we are still engaged in this issue.
and together may be able to persuade the UCC leadership to change their position.

The advisory committee recommended:

**R-26**
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The substance of Overture 11 has been addressed in the response to Overture 2.
Report of the Commission on Theology

The Commission on Theology met on three occasions during the past year. It met briefly at Augustana College in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, following the General Synod of 1999 to review the actions of the synod relating to the work of the commission. It met again October 1 and 2, 1999, in Chicago and February 4 and 5, 2000, at Trinity Community Church in Kent, Washington. The commission invited area pastors at both the Chicago and Kent meetings to discuss “A Brief Declaration of Faith,” a document the commission has been working on since 1996 (MGS 1996, pp. 32-34) and about which the commission has been seeking evaluations and recommendations for revisions. The commission is planning to schedule future meetings in several other regions of the church so as to continue meeting with pastors to discuss and evaluate “A Brief Declaration of Faith.”

CHRISTIAN WITNESS TO THE UNIQUENESS OF CHRIST

The 1996 General Synod directed the Commission on Theology to prepare a study on “Christian Witness to the Uniqueness of Christ among People of Other Faiths,” which would “both interpret the nature and character of Christian claims regarding the uniqueness of Christ and also guide Christians in understanding and assessing the religious experience and claims of those outside the Christian faith” (MGS 1996, R-3, p. 403). In response to this directive the commission presented the paper, “The Crucified One Is Lord: Confessing the Uniqueness of Christ in a Pluralist Society,” to the General Synod of 1998. The synod directed that this paper be sent to congregations, classes, regional synods, commissions, agencies, and institutions of the Reformed Church in America for provisional use for instruction and study and asked that responses to this paper be sent to the Commission on Theology. The commission received many responses from pastors, consistories, and classes, as well as two overtures to the synod of 1999 calling for revisions.

The commission gathered these responses and discussed revisions in the light of these responses at the October meeting. The commission then reviewed a revised draft of the paper at the February meeting and now presents this revised draft of the paper for the General Synod’s consideration.

“THE CRUCIFIED ONE IS LORD”:
CONFESSIONING THE UNIQUENESS OF CHRIST IN A PLURALIST SOCIETY
Commission on Theology, Reformed Church in America

In 1996 the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America addressed several overtures dealing with the question of salvation through Christ alone. In response to these overtures, the synod adopted the following resolution:

BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninetieth regular session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Orange City, Iowa, on the thirteenth day of June, 1996, joyfully and gladly reaffirms its confession that God’s unique, unrepeatable, and decisive activity in Jesus Christ is the only sure hope for this world. God’s work in Christ alone reveals the deepest truths about God, our life, and our world. God’s work in Christ alone saves all who believe. Indeed, there is salvation in no one else, as the Old and New Testaments themselves teach.

Further, this position marks not the end, but the beginning of the church’s attempts faithfully to witness to the gospel. In our culture, there is an increasing tendency to view religious issues merely as matters of personal preference. Such an attitude renders the
church’s confession more difficult for many to understand and to embrace. Increasing contact with adherents of other religious traditions and those outside the Christian faith also stretches the boundaries of Christian understanding, as Christians recognize truth and value in religions and perspectives other than their own, even while challenging them with Christ’s unique claims about himself.

Therefore, in light of these changes in our world, the Reformed Church in America seeks fresh guidance on how to interpret and to live out its faith in the uniqueness of Christ in the midst of a pluralistic world with diverse religious perspectives; and further,

The 1996 General Synod directs the Commission on Theology to engage in a study on “Christian Witness to the Uniqueness of Christ among People of Other Faiths” which will both interpret the nature and character of Christian claims regarding the uniqueness of Christ and also guide Christians in understanding and assessing the religious experience and claims of those outside the Christian faith.\footnote{In response to this directive from the General Synod, the Commission on Theology presents this paper. In accordance with the directive from General Synod, this paper attempts to address three basic concerns: What do we believe about Jesus Christ? How do we interpret and live out these beliefs in a pluralistic world? How are we to understand the implications of these beliefs for adherents of other religions? In response to all three of these questions, this paper can only touch broadly upon the most major concerns, since comprehensiveness is impossible.}

What Do We Believe About Jesus Christ?

The earliest and most basic of all Christian confessions is the acclamation, “Jesus is Lord” (e.g., Rom. 10:9; Phil. 2:11; 1 Cor. 12:3; 2 Cor. 4:5). To confess “Jesus is Lord” expresses a number of important understandings and commitments. It is first of all a recognition of God’s unique activity and presence in Jesus of Nazareth. The term Lord, although it is used in many different ways in the Bible, is used throughout the Bible in distinctive ways to refer to God’s own being. The Hebrew equivalent \textit{adon}, “Lord,” is the regular word used in normal speech to speak of God in the Old Testament. When the full scope of New Testament usages are carefully analyzed, it becomes clear that to say that Jesus is Lord is to attribute to Jesus the same sovereign power and authority that we attribute to God.\footnote{But to say that Jesus is Lord is not merely to affirm his deity; it is also to make the claim that every human authority is finally subject to Jesus. Even though the world may not acknowledge it yet, every governing official, every religious leader, indeed every human claim to authority must finally acknowledge the authority of Christ (Phil. 2:10-11; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 11:15, 19:16). This confession has throughout the ages been the backbone of Christian resistance to evil and the hope that has sustained the church through its darkest hours.}

Therefore to say “Jesus is Lord” is to point to what we believe about who Jesus is, that he is not only “fully human,” but also that he is “true God from true God,” to use the more developed language of the Nicene Creed.

This means that the statement “Jesus is Lord” not only conveys certain information about Jesus; it also expresses a whole range of commitments, values, and intentions of the community that gathers under this confession. To make this statement is like reciting a pledge of allegiance. It acknowledges Jesus as our Lord, and expresses the hope that Christians will see Jesus’ lordship extend and be acknowledged over the whole earth.

Moreover, the confession “Jesus is Lord” is the response evoked from us when we experience the power of God made available to us in the name of Jesus. As we experience healing, forgiveness, release from the power of evil, and new life breaking into our lives, our hearts
cry out in praise and adoration, “Jesus is Lord!” For Christians, the confession “Jesus is Lord” is an expression of the Spirit’s work in our lives, as the power of God awakens in us the awareness of where our help really comes from. This is why the Bible declares that no one can say “Jesus is Lord” apart from the work of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3).

This confession of the lordship of Christ is thus a response to the saving work that Christ accomplished on our behalf. We acclaim Jesus as Lord not only because of who he is, but also because of what he has done. Indeed, we discover fully who he is only when we realize all that he has done: he has revealed God’s love and purpose for humanity in his life and teachings; he has redeemed us through his sacrificial death; he has triumphed over the power of sin and death in the resurrection; he has ascended to the right hand of the Father, where he continues to enliven the church through the Holy Spirit given in his name; and he will come again in judgment to blot out evil and restore the whole creation. Revelation 5:9 points powerfully to this celebration of Christ’s work:

You are worthy to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God
saints from every tribe and language and people and nation.

Jesus is Lord because it is his life, death, resurrection, ascension, and final return that restores creation, providing salvation for all those whom God has chosen to redeem.

Moreover, the churches of the Reformation have consistently emphasized that Christ is both necessary and entirely sufficient for salvation. The Reformed emphasis on solus Christus (“Christ alone”) reminds us that there is no other mediator between God and humankind. This focus upon Christ alone is closely related to Reformed emphases on sola gratiae (“grace alone”) and sola fide (“faith alone”), which underscore the necessity and sufficiency of Christ’s sacrifice on our behalf and the necessity and sufficiency of faith in Christ, without reliance on human works. Even the doctrine of sola scriptura (“Scripture alone”) draws its basic rationale from the unique role of Scripture in its witness to Christ.

How Do We Interpret and Live Out These Beliefs in a Pluralistic World?

While almost all Christians continue to celebrate this confession as their personal belief, some Christians have become uncomfortable asserting it in the “public square.” Some are not so sure any more whether this confession can be held as true, not just for oneself, but with the whole world in view. There are a variety of reasons for this unease. Changes in our culture have called into question whether anyone can claim to know any truth that transcends one’s own context and experience. Past abuses committed by the church ostensibly in the name of the lordship of Jesus—from the crusades to the Inquisition to slavery to a silent acquiescence in the Holocaust—have given some Christians pause about the way this confession should be used in the public arena. In addition, we find ourselves encountering adherents of other religions with increasing frequency in North America. Such contacts often raise questions about the uniqueness of Jesus and the exclusive claims made by Christians. It is important to explore these reasons for discomfort, and to discern how the church can constructively address them. How can we open up fresh perspectives on this ancient confession, which may enable the church to confess it with new conviction, sensitivity, and clarity? In our exploration, we shall pay particular attention to the function of confessing “Jesus is Lord” in addition to the content of that confession. That is, we shall be concerned with those assumptions and practices that surround our confession and bring its implications into engagement with the world around us. We want to concern ourselves with the concrete differences it makes in our lives and in our culture when we rightly confess that Jesus is Lord.

Fears about the Use and Abuse of Authority

To speak about Christ’s lordship is to speak about authority. In our culture, however, this is a subject of great controversy. People from a variety of theological perspectives have questioned the language of lordship and authority in its application to God or to Christ.
It has been argued that such terms are outmoded, reflecting a patriarchal and hierarchical society very different from the democratic egalitarianism of contemporary life. When the church honestly examines itself, it must acknowledge that this language has at times been used, even in the church, to condone oppressive relationships that reflect nothing of the Spirit of Christ.

Yet to reject this language entirely on the basis of these abuses is to confuse a distorted reflection with the true reality. It is also a failure to understand the distinctive way in which the confession of the lordship of Jesus functioned in the ancient church. Far from being used to legitimate human hierarchies and patriarchies, the confession of Jesus’ lordship was used to relativize and critique all such human structures of authority. For example, Matthew 23:9 states, “call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father—the one in heaven.” In Acts 5:29, when the disciples are ordered by the religious authorities to be silent, Peter responds, “We must obey God rather than any human authority.” In both these examples, God’s authority supersedes and relativizes all human authority. The same is true in the book of Revelation, where the lordship of Jesus is the starting point for resistance to a cruel and oppressive Roman Empire claiming power and lordship for itself. To confess that Jesus is Lord is not to give sanction to human authority, but to subject it to a penetrating critique that challenges any claim to authority apart from or different from the authority of the Christ who gave himself for the life of the world. All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted (Matt. 23:11-12). To confess the lordship of Jesus is radically to redefine what lordship and authority mean in the first place! It is to embrace as our rule and guide the distinctive way in which Jesus embodies authority.

At the core of the Bible’s understanding of authority is its affirmation of divine grace. Even the creation itself is expressive of God’s gracious authority; God speaks, and the things that are not must respond and come into existence (Rom. 4:17). The world is sustained by the gracious decrees that proceed from the throne of God (Is. 55:10-11). Yet this authority never expresses itself in domination, but rather in service (Luke 22:25-27). It is difficult to underestimate the significance of the graciousness of divine authority. God’s authority gives life, it forgives and renews, it encourages diversity while binding people to each other.

Throughout human history, authority and power have usually been won by shedding the blood of others. But Jesus is acclaimed as Lord precisely because he has shed his own blood on behalf of the world. To say that Jesus is Lord without recognizing this distinctive understanding of gracious divine lordship is gravely to misunderstand the Christian confession.

This combination of authority, power, and self-giving is seen most clearly at those points where Jesus’ claim to authority appears strongest. Consider John 14:6, where Jesus states, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” One can scarcely imagine a more exclusive claim to authority. Yet the “way” of which Jesus speaks in this text is precisely the “way” of suffering and death (cf. 13:36, 14:3). It is because Jesus establishes and models this “way” of self-offering that he is also “truth” and “life.” In other words, Jesus’ claim to be the sole mediator of salvation derives from the uniqueness of his self-offering in death. Self-offering, power, and authority always come wrapped up in each other.

This is not to say that divine authority never challenges, confronts, or judges. The same Jesus who gave himself for his enemies also challenged them, rebuked them, and warned them of God’s judgment. But the judgment that Scripture speaks of is always in the service of grace. It is carried out by a God who loves this world more deeply than we can imagine, and whose wrath therefore will not allow anything in all creation finally to deny, demean, or destroy the love of God revealed in Christ, the love that energizes the whole creation and holds the universe together.
When we recognize this distinctive function of the confession “Jesus is Lord” in the early church, it raises some important issues surrounding how we make our confession of the lordship of Jesus. It is possible for us today to be entirely “orthodox,” saying all the right words, but to do so in a way that attempts to establish the privilege and superiority of the church rather than to call the church and the world to discipleship in Jesus’ way. It is not enough to be clear on what we should say; we need also to be clear on how we should make use of that confession in the life of the church.

The Challenge of Religious Pluralism in a Post-Christian Context

This leads to another challenge that is often heard today to the confession “Jesus is Lord.” Some have argued that to confess that Jesus is Lord is arrogantly to presume that Christians have a monopoly on the truth. Here the complaint centers not on the notion of lordship or authority; it focuses upon the way in which Christians attribute final authority only to Jesus of Nazareth, not just for themselves, but for the whole world. The same complaint is heard in many variations: “It’s OK for you to believe in Jesus, but you have no right to impose your beliefs upon others.” “It doesn’t matter what you believe, as long as you are sincere.” “Every religion has important truth in it, and you can’t say one is better than another.” “There are many paths up the same mountain, but they all reach the same top. There are many religions, but they all are saying basically the same thing.” “How can you claim to know more about God than anyone else?”

All these comments, diverse as they are, share a common resistance to the confession “Jesus is Lord.” In each case, the final and public allegiance to Jesus’ lordship grates against the pluralism and individualism so deeply embedded in North American religious consciousness. Most people prefer that religion be kept private—out of the public sphere—and that it be kept humble and subservient, never claiming access to any truth or authority that might impinge upon others.

In one sense, the resistance of the dominant culture to the confession “Jesus is Lord” is as old as Christian faith itself. The early Christian martyrs were not put to death simply for believing in Jesus; they were put to death because they would not take part in the imperial cult of Rome. That is, they were not willing to regard their own religious beliefs and practices as part of an eclectic smorgasbord in the way most religions did. Rome was remarkably tolerant of a wide range of religions, as long as they made no claims to ultimate authority nor demanded final allegiance. But the early Christians wouldn’t go along with that. For them, to say that Jesus is Lord was to say that Jesus represented both the rule by which all other religions should be assessed (including the imperial cult), and the allegiance that superseded every other loyalty (including loyalty to the emperor). That allegiance cost many of them their lives.

Although resistance to the claim that Jesus is Lord is not new, our own culture has distinctive reasons for resisting this confession—reasons that we must try to understand. To do so, we must first go back to the period following the Reformation, when the so-called “wars of religion” tore Europe apart in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. By the time the Peace of Westphalia was concluded and these wars brought to a close in 1648, much of Europe was physically, economically, and culturally devastated. This anguish over religious conflict paved the way in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for approaches to the relationship between religion and public life which increasingly moved religion out of the public sphere and into the realm of subjectivity and private life. The implicit assumption driving much of this change was the belief that religion, when it acquires too much power, becomes explosive and divisive. Europe had come to that conclusion through the hard knocks of experience.

This disenchantment with a public role for religion was furthered by developments in the
Enlightenment during the eighteenth century. Not only did political thought during the Enlightenment increasingly separate the role of church and state, but the empiricism and rationalism of the Enlightenment drew an increasingly sharp opposition between religion and science. Empiricism stated that our only access to truth is through the five senses; rationalism insisted that truth must be based upon reason alone, rather than faith. Because religion could not be empirically or rationally proven, it was relegated even more decisively to the realm of private opinion and feeling rather than to public truth. In this context, to say that Jesus is Lord might be meaningful as an expression of one’s own feeling or belief. Yet since such a statement could not be empirically or rationally proven, it would be meaningless as an affirmation of public, objective truth that might make a claim on others or on the world as a whole. Ironically, the intensely inward and subjective character of the pietistic heritage of much American Christianity has often played directly into the hands of this public-private split in the function of religion.

The twentieth century, however, brought about a weakening in the Enlightenment’s confidence in empiricism and rationality. The most scientifically advanced societies in the world almost brought themselves to extinction in two world wars, horrible beyond belief. In the late twentieth century our own postmodern context is suspicious, not only of religion, but of reason as well. More and more our culture is coming to the belief that all knowledge, both religious and scientific, is partial and provisional. We have come to recognize the ways in which reason itself is often merely a tool driven by the deeper and darker forces of ethnocentrism, greed, and the will to power.

And so in our own culture we are beginning to extend the same suspicions toward other social institutions that have long been directed toward the church. Our culture increasingly is suspicious of all claims to objective truth and all final allegiances. On almost any subject, people are encouraged to keep their opinions to themselves and to avoid the mortal sin of imposing their beliefs on anyone else. We are a deeply suspicious people.

This emphasis on the provisional and tentative character of our knowledge is further intensified by our increasingly pluralistic society. Economic developments, immigration, and changes in communications and travel technologies cause us to be exposed to many different kinds of people, more so than ever before. We work and go to school with Muslims, Buddhists, Jews, and adherents of many other religions. We are confronted almost daily by people who believe differently from us, and these people are often decent and respectable. Sometimes they may even strike us as admirable, embracing societal values we share or even religious ideals to which we may also aspire.

This loss of a public role for the church, combined with increasing contact with adherents of other religions, places the church in a new social position that often feels uncomfortable for us. In the past, Christian faith appeared to have influence in the society as a whole. We still have long-established memories of a European Christendom where the church played a central role in society. Now North American Christians ironically are finding themselves increasingly in the same position as Christians in many other parts of the world: they are a minority faith, often with little respect or status in the dominant culture, competing in a wide-open marketplace of diverse religions. Christendom—that mutually reinforcing alliance of religious institutions and public, secular power—is dead.

These changes in our world and in our own experience pose fresh challenges to the church. The deepest challenge, however, is not from outside, but from within. These social and cultural changes have affected us as Christians. We are not always as confident as we once were. Our privileged place in society as religious leaders is increasingly questioned. Our own patterns of thinking have been deeply influenced by the culture around us. There are many who are willing to acknowledge Jesus as their “personal Lord and Savior” but are not sure whether this confession has public significance for their neighbors and the world as a whole as well. They are hesitant to “impose” their beliefs on others. They are reluctant to suggest that their own beliefs might be superior to or more true than the beliefs of others, especially when they suspect that their own moral behavior and that of their fellow Christians is not
always superior to the morality of adherents of other religions.

Public Witness in a Pluralistic World

How then do we bear witness to the lordship of Christ from this new social location? We are increasingly a minority faith, relegated to the sidelines of many public debates. Our confession of the universal lordship of Christ seems to many quaint at best, and at worst a threat to the pluralistic fabric of our society. Some Christians, particularly in the United States, respond to this situation by longing for and working for a reassertion of Christendom, where the church works hand-in-hand with government to influence public life. If we can only again seize the reins of power, they argue, we can reassert our nation’s historic Christian identity and reestablish the credibility of the church’s witness to the lordship of Christ.

Yet thoughtful Christians are increasingly questioning this approach. The rise of religious pluralism and the peripheral position of the church in our culture as a whole need not be seen only as a failure and a loss. In many respects, it can be seen as a fresh opportunity for the church. We may be in a situation today that is closer to that of the New Testament church than ever before. As we are freed from the false security of being an established religion and forced to compete in a wide-open marketplace of ideas and perspectives, the Holy Spirit may be opening an opportunity for renewal and transformation in the church, leading us into a fresh and deeper witness to the world, a witness undergirded not by the status and prestige of the institutional church, not by smarter politics, better marketing, or more money, but by the quality and character of our lives. Christians all over the world have been living and thriving as minority faiths in such pluralistic contexts, and they have much to teach us.

Even in a pluralistic world, the reality that no one can deny is the transformation of human lives into the image of Christ. Perhaps more than ever before, the church is called to witness to the gracious and transforming lordship of Christ through a blended witness of word and deed. If our faith does not transform our lives to reflect Jesus Christ, no one will listen to us. If we do not find creative ways both to point to and to exhibit the radical, shocking, and subversive love of Christ, no one will pay any attention to us at all. But once we gain their attention, if we do not tell them the story of Jesus and challenge them to faith and discipleship, our witness will not bear fruit.

In the middle of this century, when the church still had a certain measure of public prestige, the style of evangelism was built around large crusades and the invitation to “come and listen.” In our day the challenge must be “come, see, and learn.” In our pluralistic world, people must often first see the transforming power of Jesus’ lordship, and then they will learn the way of faith—often not in a one-time decision, but gradually, over a period of time. This process of conversion is no less a work of the Holy Spirit. It is the same Spirit who energizes our witness in word and deed. It is the same Spirit who speaks both through the words of the preacher and through the life of the church.

This means as well that the church must pay very careful attention to the formation of Christian identity and maturity in its members. We live in a society where the supports for Christian faith and life are crumbling. To choose to live as a Christian requires intentional commitment. We must learn to recognize the powers in our world that continually undermine and subvert Christian faith and commitment. We must find fresh ways of encouraging each other to stand as lights in a dark world, of picking each other up when we fall, of supporting each other in the radical and subversive act of confessing Jesus as Lord.

How Are We to Understand the Implications of the Lordship of Christ for Adherents of Other Religions?

The challenges of pluralism come to a particular focus when the question of salvation is
raised, particularly with reference to adherents of other religions. In the context of a pluralistic culture in which the provisionality of all knowledge is assumed, it becomes harder for many Christians to affirm that Jesus is Lord of the whole world and that salvation is found in Jesus alone. In our time it is becoming increasingly popular to adopt a general approval of all religions, a view that assumes that all religions are expressions of the same basic human quest for God. By this view, all religions that are sincerely followed are capable of mediating salvation to their adherents.

Yet such a perspective, as gracious and magnanimous as it may appear, is both highly questionable on its own grounds and incompatible with the central affirmations of Christian faith. It must first be asked, “How do we know that all religions are capable of mediating salvation to their adherents? What kind of evidence or arguments might be advanced to support such a position?” When pressed, it becomes clear that this position is in reality little more than wishful assertion, and it has little if any clear evidence or argumentation to support it.

When examined closely, it is not at all clear that all religions are trying to achieve the same sort of salvation. Indeed, many careful scholars of comparative religion have emphasized the degree to which different religions conceive of salvation itself in very different ways. Only by the most reductionistic and simplistic analysis can it be said that all religions express the same quest for God or offer the same salvation. It is by no means certain that all religions are even attempting to mediate salvation in the way that Christians think of the concept.

But from a Christian perspective, there is an even deeper problem. Such a general approval of all religions cannot be reconciled with the message of Jesus. Jesus came proclaiming, “the Reign (or Kingdom) of God is at hand.” In so doing, Jesus was not simply stating that something interesting or unusual was in the offing. That phrase “the Reign of God” evokes all the hopes and dreams of the people of God for God’s final redemption of Israel and the whole world. When Jesus declared that the Reign of God was coming in his ministry, he meant that all of God’s saving purposes for the whole world were coming to their climax and fruition in his ministry. Jesus never claimed to be opening one new path to God amidst many others; he claimed that in his ministry, God’s saving purpose for the whole world was coming to its culmination (cf. Matt. 24:14).

This emphasis on the Reign of God points to an even more fundamental challenge to the assumption that all religions lead to the same goal. The most basic metaphor for the popular view of religions is the image of paths up the mountain. This view assumes that there are many paths to God and that each of us must find the path that is best for us. But note two important features of this metaphor. First, God is passive, waiting to be found at the top of the mountain. Secondly, human beings are the active ones, climbing up the mountain, struggling as best they can to find God, in an enterprise that requires a great expenditure of effort. The great drama of history, in this view, is this: how and when will humans ever make it to the top of the mountain to find God?

The biblical view, summarized in the message of Jesus, is quite the opposite. The great drama of history is not how humans will find God; it is rather when and how an active, seeking God will finally get through to a resistant humanity. When Jesus declared that the Reign of God was at hand, he was not claiming to open a new path to God; he was claiming that God was blazing a new path to us in Jesus. Christian faith is, in the final analysis, not about our going to God, but about God’s coming to us in Christ. Christian faith is not about discovering God; it is the experience of having been found, despite our resistance and rebellion, by a God in search of us: “The Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). Christian faith is incompatible with a general affirmation of all religions because of a fundamental difference in understanding what religion is. For Christians, it is not our quest for God, but
our response to God’s quest for us in Christ.

Nowhere is this more clearly seen than in the cross of Christ. Here is the moment where God meets us in all our rebellion, resistance, idolatry, and violence. At precisely the point where humanity is most resistant to God, the love of God shines most brightly, overcoming our rebellion, forgiving our violence, and inviting us into a new way of living. Christianity’s distinguishing mark is not that we are seekers who have found God; we are sinners—enemies of God whom God has loved and forgiven. Christianity is about grace, from beginning to end.

Consequently, Christians do not so much claim to have discovered the truth as to have been apprehended by the truth. Their great joy comes not so much from what they have found, but from the fact that they have been found by God. Their concern is not so much with the wisdom they have acquired, but with the Wise One who has drawn them to himself. If all Christians had to offer was another spirituality, another ethic, another path to fulfillment, Christianity would indeed be just one of many religions. But this is not the heart of the gospel. The gospel affirms that at the center of reality is the living, resurrected Jesus Christ, at work in the world through the Holy Spirit; everything else flows from this living person who has gripped the hearts and minds of those who call themselves Christian.

Can Christians Learn from Other Religions?

Because the gospel is centrally concerned with God’s grace in the midst of human failure, Christian faith manifests a distinctive combination of confidence and humility. True faith is confident enough of God’s gift in Christ to commend Jesus Christ to the whole world and to risk all in trusting Jesus. But Christian confidence is based, not on our grasp upon God, but on God’s grasp upon us. We don’t understand or know everything—far from it! But we are known by the One who does. Our only comfort (and confidence) is that “we are not our own.” This combination of humility and confidence means that Christians expect humbly to learn from others, even non-Christians. Christians acknowledge every week their own sinfulness, limitations, and shortcomings before God and the world in the confession of their sins in public worship. But everything that Christians learn is set in the context of the central confidence that defines Christian life at its core: We are not our own, but belong, body and soul, in life and in death, to our faithful savior, Jesus Christ.

Christians look at other religions from this dual perspective. Because other religions do not recognize the unique way in which God has come to us in Christ, they participate in the bondage of all humanity that can only be broken through God’s mercy revealed in Christ. Paul speaks of those apart from God’s gracious covenant as “having no hope and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12). These words are in keeping with a long biblical tradition that exposes the futility of idolatry and the diverse ways in which human religious activity is not so much a seeking after God as an avoidance of the true God who comes to us in promise and judgment (e.g., Isa. 44:6-20). Insofar as other religions do not recognize who Jesus is and what he has done, they lack the joyful assurance of reconciliation with God that stands at the heart of the gospel. This they need to hear, and all the church’s evangelistic efforts are rightly directed to that end. Without this discovery, no other form of religious life can bring assurance of salvation. We have something vitally important to share with other religions.

But that does not mean that other religions have nothing to share with us. There is another perspective that Scripture and the Reformed tradition provide as well. Reformed theology has always acknowledged that something of God’s truth can be known through the natural world. Article II of the Belgic Confession states:

We know [God] by two means: First, by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe; which is before our eyes as a most elegant book, wherein all creatures, great and small, are as so many characters leading us to see clearly the invisible things
Reformed theology denies that God’s self-revelation available in creation and culture is sufficient to bring us to salvation because it takes seriously the depths of human resistance to God. We do not respond appropriately to God’s self-revelation in the world around us. We twist and distort it to our own idolatrous purposes. But the knowledge of God is nonetheless available in the natural world and is reflected in many religious traditions, partial and distorted though it may be.

A good example of this is found in Acts 17:16ff., where Paul identifies the altar “to an unknown god” as a groping after God, and says, “What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you” (vs. 23). Paul goes on to cite several Greek poets as pointers to the truth found in the gospel. Of course, Paul never suggested that the religious perspectives he found in Athens were sufficient to bring about the true and complete knowledge of God. They are pointers to the truth, not the truth itself. Their value for Paul lies in their capacity to point people to the gospel of Christ. Yet in this capacity, they have real value. Paul’s sermon illustrates a broad theme found throughout Scripture. Melchizedek and Jethro, the father of Moses, stand outside the covenant community and yet are channels through whom God instructs his people. Much of the wisdom in Proverbs 22:17 to 24:34 bears close affinities to Egyptian wisdom documented from other sources. Isaiah declares that Cyrus of Persia is God’s anointed who has been raised up to do God’s will (Isa. 45:1).

The same understanding has repeated itself frequently in the history of the church. Many of our cherished Christian practices were originally borrowed and adapted from non-Christian religions. Christmas trees find their origin in northern European pagan practice. Even the date of Christmas coincides closely with a pagan Roman festival devoted to the sun god. Rather than denying any truth or value in such practices, the church saw them as early pointers to the gospel and incorporated them under the banner of the lordship of Christ, always making sure that they pointed clearly to Christ. Christians don’t deny that there is truth or value in other religions or that God works through other cultures. Rather, Christian faith simply declares that all religions (including the Christian church in a continual way) must respond to what God has done, in sending his Son into the world and in calling all to respond in faith to him.

This means that Christians should always expect, not only to teach, but also to learn in their encounters with adherents of other religions. Yet we often find it very difficult both to teach and to learn. Sometimes we become so driven to challenge people with the gospel and to call them to repentance that we fail to see the remarkable ways in which the Holy Spirit is already at work in their lives and even in aspects of their religious heritage. The result is a self-righteous posture that does little to commend the gospel winsomely. Others become so captivated by the pluralist spirit of the age that they lose sight of the transforming power of Christ and the urgency and necessity of challenging people with the gospel at all. The result is a veneer of tolerance that conceals a calloused indifference to the suffering and spiritual confusion of many. Neither extreme is faithful to Scripture. We have a wonderful gift to offer in the life-giving power of the gospel. But we can also learn from other religions. The artistry of faithful witness is to learn how to do both together.

What does it mean for Christians to learn from other religions? There are several ways in which that learning takes place. Sometimes other religions challenge us to embrace more deeply the implications of our own faith. The regularity of the prayer life of our Muslim neighbors may confront us with the infrequency of prayer in our own lives. The interest in the spiritual world among Native Americans may confront us with our own materialism and indifference to the Spirit of God. The celebrative affirmation of the law in Judaism may
challenge our own cheap grace that fails to see God’s law as a gracious gift. In all these ways and many others, dialogue with other religions may help us to become more truly and deeply Christian.

Other religions may also teach us fresh wisdom that is entirely in keeping with the gospel of Christ. In acknowledging this, the church must also acknowledge the danger of diluting or distorting Christian faith with practices or beliefs incompatible with the gospel. All things must be tested by the Scriptures and by the Spirit at work in the Christian community. Yet Christians around the world are finding architectural forms, meditative techniques, rituals, and patterns of worship in other religious and cultural traditions that are not only compatible with the gospel of Christ, but enable the gospel to be expressed more beautifully and powerfully in the lives of people.

There is also a third way—perhaps the most important of all—in which Christians can learn from adherents of other religions. This is not a learning of concepts, or beliefs, or practices, or values. It is rather the learning of persons, motivated by the love of God. We rarely encounter religions in the abstract. We encounter people, with their own culture, history, relationships, and values. We encounter people deeply loved by God, whom God also calls us to love. And love is always hospitable and open to the other. Love not only gives the gift of the gospel, but receives the gift of the other in turn, with care and gratitude. In the mystery of the work of the gospel, our capacity deeply to listen to and to learn from others will be directly related to their capacity to hear from us and accept the truth of Christ.

Learning from other religions and witnessing to the uniqueness of Christ are therefore not competing or incompatible options. Rather, they must be understood as complementary and mutually reinforcing activities. Christians who will not learn from other religions will easily become arrogant and will find it increasingly difficult to gain a hearing with adherents of other religions. Christians who fail to witness to Christ’s uniqueness will easily become indifferent to the plight of those “having no hope and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12). But those who can listen as well as teach, who can affirm as well as challenge in their encounters with other religions, are often used by God in remarkable ways to heal religious strife, to bring some justice and wholeness to a pluralist world, and to lead many people to the good news of God’s remarkable love in Jesus Christ.

Salvation and Other Religions

But what of salvation? Should Christians claim that there is no salvation apart from those who explicitly confess Jesus as Lord and Savior? In order fully to answer that question, a number of preliminary comments are necessary. First, Reformed theology has always taught that salvation is ultimately in God’s hands, beyond the pale of human understanding. Calvin states, “We must leave to God alone the knowledge of his church, whose foundation is his secret election” (*Institutes*, IV.1.2).

A basic posture of humility should characterize all discussions of the scope of salvation. Christians claim not to have mastered the truth, but to have been mastered by it, and thus should be cautious about claiming to know too much of God’s saving ways. God is greater than we, and we ought not to claim to know all of God’s saving plan. While the Scriptures call us to discern between good and evil and between truth and falsehood, they also repeatedly caution against judging—that is, against attempting to determine the ultimate destiny of any person (Matt. 7:1; Luke 6:37; Rom. 2:1, 14:10; 1 Cor. 4:5; James 4:12). It is sufficient for us to be guided by the Scriptures which led us to Christ, affirming what seems clear and remaining silent where Scripture itself speaks with less clarity or finality. To probe too deeply into these matters is to subject oneself to grave spiritual danger, assuming knowledge and authority that rightly belong to God alone.
Secondly, it is important that we think of salvation in the broad biblical sense and not simply as a ticket to heaven. According to the Bible, salvation is, in the deepest sense, our covenantal response to God’s initiative. God comes to us to restore our relationship with God and with the creation, beginning here and now and extending into eternity (2 Cor. 5:18-19). Hence, for Christians it is meaningless to suggest that people will be saved unless this salvation actually begins to be experienced concretely in their lives in the present. To speak of salvation without also speaking of repentance, the freedom of the Spirit, the forgiveness of sins, participation in the redeemed community, and the transformation toward a new and holy life is to speak of a meaningless salvation, abstract and devoid of content. To claim that salvation is present where these realities are not experienced is for Christians to strip salvation of most of its content. If Christians’ discussions of salvation tend to become otherworldly at times, it may reflect the loss of a firm grip on what it means to be a redeemed community in the here and now.

Thirdly, we must remember that salvation has to do ultimately not only with individuals, but with the restoration of the whole creation. The salvation won in Christ comes to its culmination at the judgment seat of Christ, when there will be a new heaven and a new earth, when swords will be beaten into plowshares, when the wolf will lie down with the lamb, and when justice will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. Hence when we think about the salvation for which we hope, we must not only consider how individuals will stand at that great and terrible day. We must also consider how and where the Spirit of God is already bringing to light the seeds of justice and peace that will come to flower when Jesus Christ restores all of creation to God’s intention.

Finally, it is important to remember that the Bible always links salvation (in its full scope, present and future, personal and corporate) with faith in God’s gift and promise. Without faith there is no knowledge of God and no salvation (Heb. 11:6; Eph. 2:8). But faith must not be construed as a “work,” as something we do that wins God’s favor. Faith is not a precondition for God’s grace; it is a work of God’s grace. The whole process by which faith emerges is under God’s gracious providence. Faith is the other side of the coin of salvation. It is not only the grateful receiving of God’s salvation, but also the fruit of that salvation. To discover God’s surprising mercy in Christ and to place one’s trust in that mercy that reconciles us to God and to one another, in itself, the experience of salvation (cf. Luke 19:9). Christians say that there is no salvation apart from faith because faith is itself our grateful receiving of salvation and our joyful entry into the redeemed community. A salvation that is not so received is no salvation at all.

Salvation in the Name of Jesus

With these preliminary considerations, we turn to the question of the place of Jesus Christ in the salvation of persons. Is explicit faith in Jesus as Lord necessary for salvation, or is it possible that adherents of other religions will also be saved? What does the Bible say about this, and can the Bible’s perspective make sense for us today?

The Bible makes some very strong statements about the centrality of faith in Christ for salvation. Jesus declares in John 14:6, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” In Acts 4:12, Peter says, “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.” In Romans 10:9, Paul affirms, “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.”

Clearly, the central affirmation of the New Testament is that God extends his salvation to the world through Christ. The Bible does not say that God comes to us in many ways to save; it affirms that God’s salvation has come to us “in the fullness of time” in Christ. Hebrews 1:1-2 speaks of how God long ago spoke “in many and various ways,” but that “in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds.” One can scarcely imagine a more central role for Jesus in God’s
saving purpose for the world. Christian faith is absolutely clear: Jesus is God’s definitive word—the only savior.

But what if the name of Jesus is not known? Must Jesus be explicitly named in order for salvation to be experienced? On this subject, the Bible speaks with a clear central message. The central message and emphasis of Scripture falls upon the centrality and significance of the name of Jesus and the hearing of the gospel. Paul summarizes this theme in Romans 10:14:

But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?

Paul bears witness here to the passion that drives the whole New Testament church: the passion to make Christ known. Such passion is incomprehensible apart from the conviction that the name of Jesus is critical to the experience of salvation. Paul believed that God intends people to find salvation through the name of Jesus. He believed that Jesus was God’s Messiah, the one appointed to bring salvation to the world. Along with the entire New Testament church, Paul believed that the means by which God has chosen to bring salvation to the world is the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This is the mandate given to the church, to be the agents through whom God extends his salvation to the world, through witness to Jesus Christ in word and deed. There is no assurance of salvation revealed to us apart from confessing Christ and trusting in him alone. Yet the church also must confess that it does not know the limits of God’s grace. We cannot be certain that God will not impart saving faith in Christ, even perhaps where his name is not explicitly known. Throughout Christian history the great confessions of the church have affirmed with clarity that our salvation is found in Christ alone, while at the same time exercising restraint in determining too sharply the extent of that salvation or how God may bring people to a saving relationship with Christ.

The Second Helvetic Confession of 1566, an important and widely used Reformed confession, allows that God can save in ways other than through the preaching of the Word. After arguing that “the preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God” (no low doctrine of preaching here), the confession goes on to state, “We know, in the meantime, that God can illuminate whom and when he will, even without the external ministry, which is a thing appertaining to his power; but we speak of the usual way of instructing men, delivered unto us from God, both by commandment and examples.”

In an analogous move, the Westminster Confession states, “Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who worketh when, and where, and how he pleaseth. So also are all other elect persons, who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word.” The confession goes on immediately to rule out the notion that such a belief might be used to argue for the salvation of all non-Christians: “much less can men, not professing the Christian religion, be saved in any other way whatsoever, be they never so diligent to frame their lives according to the light of nature and the law of that religion they do profess.” The Westminster Confession thus walks a middle road, rejecting both the idea that other religions can mediate salvation and the notion that only those who are “capable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word” can be elect. It is also worth noting that the confession walks this middle road specifically out of a desire to preserve both the necessity of the gospel of Christ for salvation, and also the freedom of God to work “when, where, and how he pleaseth.”

Calvin emphasizes primarily the necessity for explicit faith in Christ and rejects any idea that salvation is mediated through means other than the gospel of Christ. Yet even Calvin held
that though preaching is the “normal mode which the Lord has appointed for imparting His Word,” God’s saving ways cannot be restricted only to preaching. Commenting on Romans 10:14, Calvin writes,

If it is contended from this that God can instill a knowledge of Himself among men only by means of preaching, we shall deny that this was the meaning of the apostle. Paul was referring only to the ordinary dispensation of God, and had no desire to prescribe a law to His grace.13

At the same time, Calvin observes, “It is enough to bear this fact alone in mind, that the Gospel does not fall from the clouds like rain, by accident, but is brought by the hands of men to where God has sent it.”14

These two streams that flow from the Reformation are both important. We must never lose sight of the centrality and necessity of the preaching of the gospel of Christ. On the other hand, the affirmation of divine freedom in passages like that found in the Second Helvetic Confession rightly cautions the church against arrogating to itself human control or complete knowledge of God’s saving work. In the face of a corrupt Roman church that had insisted on its own mastery over the mediation of salvation, the reformers insisted on the freedom of God and the freedom of the Word of God. The Reformed emphasis on the freedom of God provides an important caution, lest the church again be tempted to claim for itself control over God’s saving ways or too deep a knowledge of the extent of God’s salvation.

The relationship between divine freedom and God’s use of human agency is a mystery. It is wise for us to confess with conviction what God has revealed—that the only assurance of salvation revealed to us is found through explicit faith in Jesus Christ. At the same time it is also wise for us to avoid saying what we do not know—exactly how God will deal with all those who have not heard or responded to the gospel. We do know that God is both completely gracious and completely just. That is enough for us. With Abraham we confess in hope, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?” (Gen. 18:25).

When the church confesses that it does not know the limits of God’s grace, however, this in no way weakens the urgency of its mandate to evangelism, its joyful responsibility to be heralds of the gospel to all the nations. The church can never smugly sit back and declare “God will somehow make it all right” when billions of people live and die in hopelessness, poverty, oppression, and despair, without the transforming and life-giving power of the gospel of Christ. We live in the hope that God will finally set all things right, but we also believe that the means God has chosen for this end is the preaching of the gospel of Christ in word and deed.

To be a Christian is to be entrusted with the gospel, with the commission of bringing God’s light to the whole world. And yet it is finally God’s gospel and God’s mission, not ours. As a saint once quipped, we are to preach as if everything depended on our proclamation, and to pray as if everything depended upon God. To follow that advice is to preserve the Bible’s emphasis on the necessity and centrality of the proclamation of the name of Jesus, while also recognizing that salvation is finally in God’s hands and not in ours. And in any case, it is always Jesus who is the savior. He is God’s Messiah; it is his sacrifice that has atoned for the sins of the world and reconciled believers to God.

The Ongoing Challenge

But simply knowing this truth and believing it is not enough. In our society the Christian claims regarding the uniqueness of Christ and the necessity of salvation in Christ will immediately raise suspicions of arrogance and a fear of domination. In other parts of the world they raise painful memories of colonialism, forced conversion, and oppression. The
church’s history of confessing the lordship of Christ has not been without its failures. In subtle and powerful ways the church can be tempted to want to reign with Christ without following the path of Christ, the path of humble service. There is simply no place for self-congratulatory superiority in our pointing to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. At the same time there is no place for hesitancy, lack of confidence, or lack of conviction as the church points to Christ’s uniqueness. If Christians really believe that the love of God revealed in Christ is the only hope for this world, if they really believe that Jesus is “King of kings and Lord of lords,” then they cannot be silent about the claim of the gospel on the life of every person, every community, every culture. Christians who claim to have been transformed by the surprising love of Christ cannot and must not keep that love to themselves. If Jesus really is Lord, then his gracious lordship must be made known to all. No task is more central to the church’s mission.

But there is a world of difference between efforts to impose or coerce Christian faith and the gracious commending of Christian faith by words and lives that are empowered by the Spirit. The church will be able to point credibly to Jesus as the only savior of the whole world only if it makes that claim as a community that assumes a posture of humble service, if it seeks out the lowest places of service, and loves where no one else is willing to love. Only then will Christians be able to persuade the world that Jesus comes, not to destroy our cultures, but to renew them; not to reinforce patterns of domination, but to give life to all; not to negate our religious searching, but to show us the reality for which we have been longing; not to impose uniformity, but to bring many diverse gifts to full expression. If this is the Savior whom we have come to follow, we will indeed have good news not just for ourselves but for the whole world.


2 For example, Phil. 2:10-11 states, “at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” When compared with Isaiah 45:23, where God is speaking, the similarity of the language is striking: “By myself I have sworn, from my mouth has gone forth in righteousness a word that shall not return: ‘To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.’”


4 It is striking how many of the “I am” sayings of Jesus in the Gospel according to John combine an exclusive claim about Jesus’ status and authority with a pointer to his gracious self-offering. Jesus is the bread of life (6:35), and that bread is his flesh, offered up in death (6:51). When he claims to be the light of the world (9:5), he demonstrates that claim by giving sight to the blind man. When he claims to be the gate (10:9), and the good shepherd (10:11), he goes on to speak of laying his life down for the sheep. When he identifies himself as the vine in whom the disciples must abide (15:1), he goes on in that same context to call them to lay down their lives for each other, just as he did for them (15:12-14).


6 Biblical scholars have recognized for some time that the Kingdom of God is not conceived in the New Testament primarily in spatial terms, but in terms of divine activity. The Kingdom of God is preeminently associated with God’s royal action to save and to restore. Hence the translation “Reign of God.”
Cf. the technical discussion of the idea that different religions envision the nature of religion in dramatically different terms in S. Mark Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion*, (Orbis: Maryknoll, NY, 1995).

The *Heidelberg Catechism* Q&A 1.

The *Heidelberg Catechism* Q&A 61 states, “It is not because of any value my faith has that God is pleased with me. Only Christ’s satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness make me right with God.” Q&A 65 goes on to state, “Where does faith come from? The Holy Spirit produces it in our hearts by the preaching of the holy gospel, and confirms it through the use of the holy sacraments.” Eph. 2:8 makes it clear that the entire process of being saved by grace through faith is *all* “the gift of God.”


Chapter 10, section 3 (italics added).

Chapter 10, section 4.


Ibid.

R-27
That the paper “The Crucified One Is Lord” be approved and distributed to congregations, classes, regional synods, agencies, and institutions of the Reformed Church in America for study and use in the church. (ADOPTED)

A motion from the floor recommended:

R-28 (new)
To instruct the Commission on Theology to prepare a brief study guide, with particular attention to:

- the application of the paper in our witness to adherents of other religious traditions and world views, both secular and religious;
- the concerns expressed by many in the church about the nature and limitations of what Christians can learn from other religions; and
- concerns about the possibility of saving faith in Christ outside of explicit faith in Jesus as Lord. (ADOPTED)

**MORAL STANDARDS FOR HOLDERS OF CHURCH OFFICE**

The paper, “Moral Standards for Holders of Church Office,” was presented to the General Synod of 1998, which directed that it be distributed to the church for study and comment to the Commission on Theology by April 1, 1999. The synod then directed the commission to present a final report with recommendations to the General Synod of 1999. The commission had received only a handful of responses by the time the report was due for the 1999 synod
workbook, so it decided to delay a final recommendation until the General Synod of 2000. As of the February 5, 2000, meeting of the commission, only a few more responses had been received. The commission reviewed the responses to the paper and noted the concerns that had been raised. The points raised were not sufficiently persuasive to warrant a rewriting of this paper, so the commission agreed to send it to the General Synod of 2000 for a vote on the recommendations that the paper contains for changes to the Book of Church Order (BCO).

MORAL STANDARDS FOR HOLDERS OF CHURCH OFFICE

Introduction and Background

The 1997 General Synod instructed the Commission on Theology, in consultation with the Commission on Church Order, to prepare revisions to the Book of Church Order that address moral behavior, including sexual purity as it relates to qualifications for all four offices of the church, for report to the 1998 General Synod (MGS 1997, R-5, p. 405).

The commission believes there is merit in R-5. Currently, the Liturgy and the Book of Church Order say a great deal about theological faithfulness and commitment to the good order of the church for officeholders (professors of theology, ministers of Word and sacrament, elders, and deacons). But they say much less about faithfulness in behavior. In a time and context where the esteem with which church leaders are regarded continues to decline in the culture as a whole, and when confusion over moral standards is pervasive, the commission believes the church’s life and witness may be strengthened by a greater attentiveness to these issues.

It is interesting that the 1987 “Order for Ordination and Installation of a Minister of the Word” makes no references to behavior, apart from ministerial and ecclesiastical functions, in its interrogation of the candidate prior to ordination. Currently, however, the Commission on Christian Worship is proposing a new order for ordination that includes the question, “Will you pray for God’s people and lead them by your own example in faithful service and holy living?” The Commission on Christian Worship notes in its comments on this section, “This question contains important personal disciplines (adapted from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America) and recovers the attention to godly/holy living found in the Liturgy of 1968, 1908, and 1882.”

It is certainly true that the liturgical tradition of the Reformed Church in America includes a concern with godly or holy living on the part of officeholders. The 1968 form for ordination inquired of the candidate, “Do you promise to discharge your office faithfully according to this doctrine and to adorn it with a godly life?” The 1908 form used similar language, as did the 1882 Liturgy. Moreover the 1882 form, in the charge to the minister, urged the candidate to exercise ministry “not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind” and offered the following exhortation: “Be an example of believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.” The concern for moral behavior and sexual purity has a long history in the Reformed Church in America, a history that should not be forgotten or lost.

At least some of the concern behind the above R-5, however, arises from the perception that the Reformed Church in America needs to be more explicit in the moral standards it establishes for officeholders in the church. In a time of moral relativism and confusion, officeholders in the church need to have a clear standard to which they may aspire and by which their behavior can be measured.

Christ the Standard

At the most basic and important level, this standard is Jesus Christ himself. Officeholders
represent the various ministries of Christ to and for the church, and in so doing they must live lives in conformity with Jesus Christ. Conformity with Christ involves receiving Christ’s righteousness, a righteousness imputed by faith and expressed in our lives through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. As recipients of Christ’s righteousness, Christians are called to live out their identity in Christ through lives patterned after Jesus’ example. This focus on Christ as the center and standard must never be forgotten or eclipsed. Nor should the church ever fall into the trap of believing that Christ alone is insufficient as the standard to govern life and ministry. Paul declares that no foundation can be laid other than the foundation of Christ (1 Cor. 3:11). Any attempt to make more explicit the ethical norms of behavior that should guide and govern officeholders in the Reformed Church in America should begin and end with Jesus Christ, the living Lord whom we are called to follow.

This is the pattern of Scripture itself. Paul, for example, frequently offers explicit and focused ethical exhortation to his readers, but these exhortations are always grounded in the believer’s relationship to Jesus Christ. In the same way, while it is appropriate for the church to spell out more specific ethical norms for officeholders, such norms should always be guided by Scripture that is drawn from Christ’s life and leads us into deeper union with Christ. This is entirely in keeping with the distinctively Calvinist emphasis on a positive role for the law of God: the law is a guide for how we are to live out our new life in Christ.

Money, Sex, and Power

But it is not enough merely to assert that Christ is our standard; we also must describe how that standard actually shapes the way we live. What difference does it make for us, in our everyday lives, when our lives are grounded in Christ? The commission believes that both our present context and the ancient history of the church point to three central areas of life where we need to describe the moral implications of our life in Christ. Those areas are money, sex, and power.

In the early periods of the church’s history, the church spelled out the ethical implications of the gospel—especially its approach to money, sex, and power—under three headings: poverty, chastity, and obedience. Thomas Aquinas describes these as the three virtues intended to counteract the threefold description of the world found in 1 John 2:16: “the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches.” The same threefold concern appears repeatedly throughout the history of the church. Calvin speaks in similar terms of the danger of the longing for money, sex, and power:

Now our blockishness arises from the fact that our minds, stunned by the empty dazzlement of riches, power, and honors, become so deadened that they can see no farther. The heart also, occupied with avarice, ambition, and lust, is so weighed down that it cannot rise up higher.

The ancient virtues of poverty, chastity, and obedience focused attention on the need to control three driving appetites that can dominate our lives and lead us away from faithfulness to Christ: the love of money, which Scripture places at the root of all evil (1 Tim. 6:10, c.f. Luke 16:13-15); the drive for sexual satisfaction, which if left out of submission to God can result in terrible pain and impurity (c.f. the extensive instruction on sexual ethics throughout Scripture), and the hunger for power, status, and prestige (e.g., Matt. 18:1-4). Scripture repeats in countless ways the basic warning that our longings for money, sex, and power can be our undoing as we seek to follow Jesus Christ.

Between Asceticism and Laxity

This is not to say that there is anything inherently wrong with money, sex, and power. These are good gifts of God, and they are unavoidably part of our lives; everything we do and
are is touched by them. They enrich all our joy, health, and strength. Too often in the past, the church pursued an impossible attempt to flee from these realities entirely, resulting in the formation of reclusive and repressive enclaves rather than active mission. The churches of the Reformation resisted the tendency of earlier times to emphasize asceticism—the complete abstinence from money, sex, and worldly power. Rather, Calvin emphasized the importance of moderation, gratitude for God’s gifts, generous stewardship, and trust in God. But Calvin also points out that mistaken strictness is not the only danger. We can also fail through mistaken laxity. Precisely because money, sexuality, and power are so deeply woven into our lives, and because our longings for money, sex, and power can be so strong, the pursuit of these desires can all too easily displace the lordship of Jesus Christ and dominate our lives, to our own destruction. That is why the church has always called Christians to special vigilance in these areas.

The challenge for church leaders to handle responsibly the desire for money, sex, and power is no less formidable today. Faithfulness to Christ demands of us today, not that we seek to avoid these realities altogether, but that we cultivate a vigilance and discipline over our hearts in these areas, with a deep awareness of our frailty and of the powerful ways in which our culture tries to persuade us to turn these good aspects of creation into false gods that dominate and control our lives. The commission believes that explicit attention to these challenges, and the cultivation of specific virtues to counteract the seductive allure of money, sex, and power, is essential to healthy leadership in our time and place.

Of course, it is not only officeholders in the church who need to be vigilant over the temptations of money, sex, and power. These are concerns to which all Christians must attend. Yet it is particularly incumbent upon officeholders to live as “examples to the flock” (1 Pet. 5:3). Effective leadership in the church is primarily a matter of actions and behavior, and only secondarily a matter of words. Therefore, it is particularly appropriate to invite leaders to consider the moral standards that should guide their behavior—behavior which, in turn, will help to guide the church as a whole.

A Proposal for the Reformed Church in America

How can such goals be attained within the context of the polity of the Reformed Church in America? The commission suggests that a sentence be added to the declarations for licensed candidates, ministers, and professors of theology that are part of the formularies of the Book of Church Order: The commission is also proposing that a similar promise be added to the orders for the ordination for elders and deacons. In all these cases, the sentence would read, “I promise to live a holy and exemplary life, guided by the Holy Scriptures as interpreted by the Standards of the Reformed Church in America, in generosity, chastity, and humility.”

Each of the words or phrases in this promise needs at least a brief commentary.

The promise to live a “holy and exemplary life” recalls first of all the consistent summons of all of Scripture to holiness. While many people think of holiness only as purity, the biblical meaning originates with the notion of being “set apart” to God. The purity associated with holiness flows first from a Christian’s special relatedness to God in Christ that stands at the center of holiness. All Christians share in this holiness because of their union with Christ by faith. Church leaders are called not to greater holiness than other Christians, but rather to live out the holiness that is theirs in Christ and to base their ministries on the power of God that accompanies such holiness. The reference to an “exemplary” life arises from the fact that church offices are at their very heart offices of leadership. The pastoral epistles urge that church leaders live their lives as examples to the flock, “in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12). Ordained officeholders in the RCA should aspire to nothing less.

The next phrase, “guided by the Holy Scriptures as interpreted by the Standards of the Reformed Church in America,” identifies the Bible as our only rule of faith and practice.
At the same time, it affirms that the interpretation of Scripture is not a private matter but an exercise of discernment in which the church engages corporately (2 Pet. 1:20). In this phrase, the candidate promises to be guided by the whole church in interpreting the Scriptures and applying them to his or her life.

The next three words, “generosity, chastity, and humility,” attempt to give positive expression to the need for vigilance and restraint over the fundamental appetites that so often threaten to lead us away from discipleship to Christ. The central thrust here is not the attempt to avoid money, sex, or power. This is not a new asceticism. Rather, it is the voluntary commitment to moderation, self-restraint, and faithfulness in these areas, so that they will not dominate or control our lives.

“Generosity” entails a basic posture in which giving to others, rather than acquiring for oneself, is the goal of life. As such, it is a posture of resistance to consumerism and the pursuit of affluence that is so intoxicating and pervasive in our culture. It turns the acquisitiveness of our culture on its head and seeks to imitate, in the handling of money and resources, the very graciousness of God. A commitment of officeholders to generosity is a commitment to a lifestyle of contentment, simplicity, compassion, and service.

“Chastity” is not merely, or even primarily, the avoidance of sex. The first definition of the word in all the major English dictionaries refers to abstention from unlawful or religiously proscribed sexual intercourse. For Christians, chastity is the commitment to place one’s sexuality under the authority of Scripture and to direct one’s sexuality toward faithful, committed, love and toward the good of the other. At the most basic level, it is the exercise of restraint over one’s impulses in order to give space for love, commitment, and concern for the other to grow. Chastity is thus just as important in marriage as it is in singleness. For leaders in the church, the cultivation of chastity is a necessary antidote to the pervasiveness of sexual misconduct and sexual impurity in our culture.

“Humility” means neither excessive deference nor low self-esteem. It is rather the exercise of restraint on our natural desire for power, control, and prestige. In Matthew 11:28-29, Jesus bases his invitation, “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens,” on the fact that he is “gentle and humble in heart.” Paul speaks of boasting only in his weaknesses. Moses is described as “very humble, more so than anyone else on the face of the earth” (Num. 12:3). Officeholders need humility, both to submit to the discipline and guidance of their peers and to avoid the tendencies toward the abuse of power that are rampant in our culture.

By including this promise in the ordination vows, the Reformed Church in America affirms an explicit moral framework for officeholders while avoiding the problems of legalistic interpretation that might accompany definitional language placed elsewhere in the Book of Church Order.

R-29
To adopt the following revisions to the Book of Church Order, Formularies of the Reformed Church in America, for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined):

1. Declaration for Licensed Candidates

I, __________________, in becoming a licensed candidate for the ministry in the Reformed Church in America sincerely and gladly declare before God and with you that I believe the gospel of the grace of God in Jesus Christ as revealed in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and as expressed in
the Standards of the Reformed Church in America. I accept the Scriptures as the only rule of faith and life. I accept the Standards as historic and faithful witnesses to the Word of God.

I promise to walk in the Spirit of Christ, in love and fellowship within the church, seeking the things that make for unity, purity, and peace. I promise to live a holy and exemplary life, guided by the Holy Scriptures as interpreted by the Standards of the Reformed Church in America, in generosity, chastity, and humility. I will submit myself to the counsel and admonition of the classis, always ready, with gentleness and reverence, to give an account of my understanding of the Christian faith. I will conduct the work of the church in an orderly way and according to the Liturgy and the Book of Church Order.

3. Declaration for Ministers of Word and Sacrament

I, __________________, in becoming a minister of the Word of God in the Reformed Church in America sincerely and gladly declare before God and with you that I believe the gospel of the grace of God in Jesus Christ as revealed in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and as expressed in the Standards of the Reformed Church in America. I accept the Scriptures as the only rule of faith and life. I accept the Standards as historic and faithful witnesses to the Word of God.

I promise to walk in the Spirit of Christ, in love and fellowship within the church, seeking the things that make for unity, purity, and peace. I promise to live a holy and exemplary life, guided by the Holy Scriptures as interpreted by the Standards of the Reformed Church in America, in generosity, chastity, and humility. I will submit myself to the counsel and admonition of the classis, always ready, with gentleness and reverence, to give an account of my understanding of the Christian faith. I will conduct the work of the church in an orderly way and according to the Liturgy and the Book of Church Order.

Trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for strength, I pledge my life to preach and teach the good news of salvation in Christ, to build up and equip the church for mission in the world, to free the enslaved, to relieve the oppressed, to comfort the afflicted, and to walk humbly with God.

I ask God, and you His servants, to help me so to live until that glorious day when, with joy and gratitude, we stand before our great God and King.

7. Declaration for General Synod Professors of Theology

I, __________________, in becoming a Professor of Theology of the Reformed Church in America sincerely and gladly declare before God and with you that I believe the gospel of the grace of God in Jesus Christ as revealed in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and as expressed in the Standards of the Reformed Church in America. I accept the Scriptures as the
only rule of faith and life. I accept the Standards as historic and faithful witnesses to the Word of God.

I promise to walk in the Spirit of Christ, in love and fellowship within the church, seeking the things that make for unity, purity, and peace. I promise to live a holy and exemplary life, guided by the Holy Scriptures as interpreted by the Standards of the Reformed Church in America, in generosity, chastity, and humility. I will submit myself to the counsel and admonition of the General Synod, always ready, with gentleness and reverence, to give an account of my understanding of the Christian faith. I will conduct the work of the church in an orderly way and according to the Liturgy and the Book of Church Order.

Trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for strength, I pledge my life to preach and teach the good news of salvation in Christ, to build up and equip the church for mission in the world, to free the enslaved, to relieve the oppressed, to comfort the afflicted, and to walk humbly with God.

I ask God, and you His servants, to help me so to live until that glorious day when, with joy and gratitude, we stand before our great God and King. (ADOPTED)

kThe advisory committee brought the following new recommendation:

R-30 (new)
To instruct the Commission on Theology, in consultation with the Commission on Church Order, to prepare appropriate defining footnotes for inclusion in the Book of Church Order to the words “generosity,” “chastity,” and “humility,” using the content of the Commission on Theology’s paper on p. 152 of the 2000 General Synod Workbook. (NOT ADOPTED)

Reason: Providing footnotes would provide clarity of meaning of the words “generosity,” “chastity,” and “humility.”

CONSTITUTIONAL INQUIRY QUESTIONS

In a 1998 overture to General Synod the Classis of Illinois requested the Commission on Theology to study and prepare recommendations concerning the purpose, appropriateness, and wording of the “constitutional inquiry” questions in the Book of Church Order (BCO) for report to the General Synod (MGS 1998, R-6, p. 477). The reasons given in the overture had to do with the purpose of the questions, recent controversy over proposed additions to the questions, and a concern about the type of questions that belong in the list. Other concerns were the lack of uniformity in how the questions are asked and what course of action should be taken if any of these questions is answered in the negative.

A Brief History of the Constitutional Inquiry Questions

The constitutional inquiry questions have their origin in the Articles of the Synod of Dort, 1619, Article 44. E. T. Corwin described Article 44 as instructing classes to authorize two of their most experienced and best-qualified members to make annual visits to each of the churches within the classis boundaries. It was their business:
to inquire whether the ministers, consistories and schoolmasters do faithfully discharge their offices; whether they adhere to sound doctrine; whether they observe in all things the received discipline, and promote, as much as possible by Word and deed, the edification of the congregation in general and of the youth in particular, so they may in a reasonable...manner admonish those who...may be found negligent; and...assist in directing all things to edification and the prosperity of the churches.¹

The practice of the classis sending visitors to local congregations was in place in the Reformed churches of the Netherlands from the time of the Synod of Dort in 1619. This practice was continued in the classes of the Reformed Church in America, but Corwin noted that this practice of visitation was not very effectively carried out in America.²

The constitutional inquiry questions were first introduced in the Constitution of 1833, replacing the visitation system of the classes.³

The Constitution of 1833 listed six questions that were to be sent from the classis to local congregations. Answers to these questions were to be sent from the churches to the classis. The influence of Dort can be seen in the emphasis on sound doctrine, the faithful discharge of the offices of the church, discipline in the church, and care for young people.

1. Are the doctrines of the gospel preached in your congregation in their purity agreeably to the Word of God, the Confession of Faith, and the Catechism of our church?

2. Is the Heidelberg Catechism regularly explained, agreeably to the Constitution of the Reformed Dutch Church?

3. Are the catechizing of the children and the instruction of the youth faithfully performed?

4. Is family visitation faithfully performed?

5. Is the Fifth Section, Second Article, Second chapter in the Constitution of our church carefully obeyed? (This refers to the moral inquiry of the members of congregation prior to the celebration of the Lord’s Supper.)

6. Is the temporal contract between Ministers and people fulfilled in your congregation?

A seventh question was added in 1874.⁴

7. Is a contribution made annually by your congregation to each of the Benevolent Boards and Funds of the Church?

Some editorial changes have been made to these seven questions over the years, but their essential content has remained the same for over 150 years. Recently three additional questions have been added, bringing the total number of questions in the current Book of Church Order to ten.

In 1986 the question about the performance review of ministers was added. This was subsequently amended to include all three offices in the local congregation. The next question, emphasizing evangelism, was added in 1989. It was amended in 1991, and the current question reads, “Is your church engaged in significant regular activities which faithfully witness the gospel and which challenge others to respond to God’s Spirit in a faith commitment to Jesus Christ as personal Savior and Lord?” The last question to be added came in 1995. It asks, “Has the consistory prayerfully considered persons within the congregation, especially the young people, in order to identify with them their gifts for pastoral ministry, to encourage the development of these gifts, and to pray for those individuals on a regular basis?”
THE PURPOSE OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL QUESTIONS

Historically, the purpose of the constitutional questions has been two-fold. The questions have provided a means by which classes can exercise pastoral authority over their congregations and a means by which individual congregations can live in responsibility to the greater church.5

The primary concern reflected in the questions has been for the spiritual well-being of congregations. Spiritual well-being is developed through the faithful preaching of the Word of God, sound teaching based upon the confessional standards of the church, the exercise of spiritual discipline, the nurture of young people, and the responsible exercise of office. In asking congregations to respond to these questions, classes are providing pastoral oversight of congregations. The questions provide guidelines for congregations in the development and maintenance of their well-being, both spiritually and materially.

The three questions most recently added to the *BCO* are consistent with the original purpose of the constitutional questions. While “performance review” is a concept that comes from the corporate business world and is not altogether compatible with a theological process of evaluation, officeholders need to be accountable for the responsible discharge of their duties. Evaluation of the exercise of office contributes to the spiritual and material well-being of the congregation.

The question that asks congregations about their faithful witness to the gospel and their evangelism efforts directs congregations to look beyond their internal concerns so as to give consideration to the larger mission of the church. In so doing, this question links spiritual well-being with a vital engagement of the church in mission.

The question that asks congregations to assist persons in discerning their gifts for pastoral ministry reflects a concern for the future well-being of the church and suggests a process whereby individuals can be encouraged to develop their gifts for ministry and thus contribute to the ongoing work of the church.

RECENT CONCERNS REGARDING THE CONSTITUTIONAL QUESTIONS

In 1996 the General Synod considered an overture that proposed adding confessional language to the first constitutional question (*MGS 1996*, p. 399). This resulted in the adoption of a recommendation that subsection iii be added to the first question (*MGS 1996*, R-2, p. 401):

a. Are the doctrines of the gospel preached in your church in their purity in conformity with
   i. the Word of God?
   ii. the *Standards of the Reformed Church in America*?
   iii. the truth that divine redemption from sin is only by grace through faith in the perfect work of the Lord Jesus Christ alone, the only mediator between God and humankind?

When this proposed change in the *BCO* was sent to the classes for approval, it failed to receive the required two-thirds vote. It was discovered, however, that the words “by grace” had been inadvertently omitted from the text as circulated to the classes for approval, so the synod of 1997 sent the proposed change a second time to the classes (*MGS 1997*, p. 63). The recommendation again failed to receive the necessary approval.

Attempts to add confessional language to the constitutional questions confuse the purpose of the questions and run the risk of suggesting that they may take the place of the church’s
existing confessional standards. The confessional faith of the RCA is expressed in the Reformed Church standards (the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of the Synod of Dort and the Belgic Confession). The purpose of the constitutional questions is to provide for pastoral oversight of congregations by classes and to foster spiritual growth and well-being. Confessional statements do not belong in the constitutional questions. The 1998 overture from the Classis of Illinois asked, in effect, “What type of questions belong in the constitutional questions?” The historical response to this is: questions that have to do with classes’ spiritual and pastoral oversight of local congregations. Each of the ten questions currently in the BCO concerns itself with the spiritual well-being of the local congregation. The asking of the questions by classes reflects their pastoral responsibility for fostering and maintaining the spiritual well-being of their congregations.

The overture also raised concerns about how the questions are asked and about the lack of a course of action if any of these questions are answered in the negative. These are matters of church order. The Commission on Theology believes that these matters are more appropriately addressed by the Commission on Church Order.

Endnotes

2. Ibid., pp. 724-5.
3. Ibid., p. 725.
4. Ibid., p. lv.
5. This understanding has been developed by the Rev. Allan Janssen in an unpublished paper.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

The 1999 General Synod requested that the Commission on Theology work with Ministry and Personnel Services in reviewing financial support for theological education (MGS 1999, R-97, p. 323). The commission received a report from Ministry and Personnel Services with recommendations for developing a plan for funding theological education.

The commission reviewed this report and has sent a response to Ministry and Personnel Services.

WORK IN PROGRESS

The 1998 General Synod requested a study of the theological issues surrounding the media. The commission has continued work on this paper throughout the year. Last year a list of resources for use in the church was provided in the commission’s report (MGS 1999, pp. 327-28).

In response to a request from the World Alliance of Reformed Churches that its member churches study global environmental and economic issues, the commission has begun to outline a process by which such a study might proceed. The commission anticipates working
on this project over the course of the next three years.

Plans for producing *The Church Speaks: Volume II* have been moving forward. The Rev. Dr. James I. Cook has agreed to serve as editor for this project and has submitted a proposal to the commission outlining the contents of the volume. The commission reviewed this proposal at its February 2000 meeting and will work with Cook on this project in the coming year.

**Overtures**

*Doctrine of Sovereign Grace*

1. The Classis of Central California overtures the 2000 General Synod of the Reformed Church in America to request that the Commission on Theology help RCA churches articulate the doctrine of God’s sovereign grace in salvation, particularly as it can motivate our people to winsome and bold evangelism.

Reasons:

1. Historically this doctrine has often been distorted by active-confessing members into a conscious or unconscious fatalism, undercutting evangelistic urgency and turning the biblical truths of election and predestination on their head. Acts 18:9-11 provides an excellent example of how the Lord Jesus positively motivated Paul with this doctrine.

2. Very little reference can be found in the RCA Standards that articulates directly the call to mission and evangelism, since the cultural context for these historical confessions has changed dramatically away from “Christendom” at the center of society, even government, toward the church on the margins of society’s worldview, if at all.

3. RCA churches in general have shown a lack of conversion growth with youth and adults from secular America. Since “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks,” we need our hearts aflame with these great truths to fulfill our mission during the first two decades of the new millennium in North America.

kThe advisory committee recommended:

**R-31**

To request that the Commission on Theology help RCA churches articulate the doctrine of God’s sovereign grace in salvation, particularly as it can motivate our people to winsome and bold evangelism, for report to the General Synod of 2002. (ADOPTED)

Reason: This action would be an appropriate response to the Pentecost letter presented to General Synod by Mission 2000.

**Amendment of “The Crucified One Is Lord: Confessing the Uniqueness of Christ in a Pluralist Society”**

2. The Classis of South Grand Rapids overtures the General Synod to make significant changes to strengthen the 1998 paper, “The Crucified One Is Lord: Confessing the Uniqueness of Christ in a Pluralist Society,” by incorporating the amendments suggested in this overture.

Preliminary Observations:
1. This particular document originated from the Commission on Theology of the RCA and is found in the 1998 minutes of the General Synod on pages 453-464. The footnotes to the paper, eight in all, are found on page 475. However, the footnotes are not included in the booklet that was distributed to the churches. The footnotes are explanatory, with the most deficient being number three, which explains why the paper uses the term Reign of God instead of Kingdom of God: “Biblical scholars have recognized for some time that the Kingdom of God is not conceived in the New Testament primarily in spatial terms, but in terms of divine activity. The Kingdom of God is preeminently associated with God’s royal action to save and to restore. Hence the translation ‘Reign of God.’” This is an unfortunate change, in light of the fact that “Kingdom of God” is used over a hundred times in the gospels alone. The change is arbitrary, without necessity, and, it is to be feared, motivated in part by the desire to eliminate any male association implied by “kingdom.”

2. The paper includes many clear statements about the unique and exclusive Lordship of Christ. Though the brown booklet has no page numbers, if the first page with text after the cover is numbered as page one it continues through to page ten. Strong, clear statements about the uniqueness of Christ are found in paragraphs one and two of page one, paragraph two of page two, most of page five, the first and sixth paragraphs of page six, the last two paragraphs of page seven, and the first four paragraphs of page eight.

3. The paper also includes a helpful review of how uncertainty and deviation from the uniqueness of Christ occur within the church and through various influences in the culture. See especially the section beginning at the bottom of page two to the bottom of page four.

4. It is possible to suggest additional Scripture passages to support the clearer sections about the uniqueness of Christ. The paper has a few such passages, but would have been strengthened by additional citations.

Needed Changes:

1. Restore the biblical language of “Kingdom of God.”

2. Further strengthen and expand the biblical references in observation two above.

3. The final sections begin on page seven of this ten-page paper: “Salvation and Other Religions: Preliminary Comments.” This section begins with the following: “But what of salvation? Should Christians find that there is no salvation apart from those who explicitly confess Jesus as Lord and Savior? In order fully to answer that question a number of preliminary comments are necessary. First, Reformed theology has always taught that salvation is ultimately in God’s hands, beyond the pale of human understanding. Calvin states, ‘We must leave to God alone the knowledge of his church, whose foundation is his secret election’ (Institutes, IV.1.2).” Unfortunately, this quotation from Calvin may give the impression that he had no further insights about the nature of the church, thus leaving the above questions more open. In fact, Calvin states, in the paragraph following the above quotation “But all the elect are so united in Christ [cf. Eph. 1:22-23] that as they are dependent on one Head, they also grow together into one body, being joined and knit together [cf. Eph. 4:16] as are the limbs of a body [Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 10:17; 12:12, 27]. They are made truly one since they live together in one faith, hope, and love, and in the same Spirit of God. For they have been called not only into the same inheritance of eternal life but also to participate in one God and Christ [Eph. 5:30].” It would be misleading to imply that
Calvin supports an uncertain answer to the questions with which this closing section of the paper begins.

4. In the section beginning on page eight, entitled “Salvation in the Name of Jesus,” the fourth paragraph states: “But what if the name of Jesus is not known? Must Jesus be explicitly named in order for salvation to be experienced? On this subject the Bible speaks the clear central message but also with a significant qualifier.” The rest of the paragraph leads into a quotation from Romans 10:14: “But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?” The next paragraph expands on the implications of Romans 10:14 and seems to reflect the “clear central message.” (The “significant qualifier” must yet be coming.)

a. The last paragraph on page eight states “and yet there is good reason to believe that the New Testament church did not claim to have a monopoly on the dispensing of God’s salvation.” Unfortunately, the examples which are used in the rest of this paragraph have to do with Old Testament saints, who were saved through the future sacrifice of Christ, and with the salvation of children of believers who die in infancy, linked with the statement in Article 17 of the Canons of Dort concerning the salvation of such children. All these are worthwhile points. The third paragraph on page nine acknowledges “in both these cases, recipients of salvation were part of the covenant community.” So we still need to find a “significant qualifier” in the New Testament.

b. The fourth paragraph of page nine uses Romans 2:14-16 as an example which “further stretches our understanding of the scope of salvation. Paul considers a case of Gentiles who have never heard the gospel, yet who without possessing the law, ‘do instinctively what the law requires’ and who thereby show ‘that what the law requires is written on their hearts.’ He goes on to speak of how their consciences will ‘accuse, or perhaps excuse them’ on the Day of Judgment. While Paul certainly expresses no clear confidence that they will be saved, neither does he categorically rule out the possibility that God might ‘write the law on the heart’ of one who has not yet heard the gospel or the law.” This paragraph should be removed because 1) it would prove too much if it is used to imply that there are Gentiles who have the law in their hearts and who have a clear conscience before the law, thus, presumably being saved by their righteousness, without any knowledge of Christ; 2) the passage is used as an “argument from silence,” suggesting that Paul does not say they will not be saved, which would ignore Romans 3:9-24; 3) Calvin (this does not result in salvation) and Cranfield (they are Gentile Christians) and others do not seem to agree that “accused, or perhaps excused” (or NIV, “their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them”) should be interpreted as leaving open the possibility of salvation for Gentiles apart from the gospel.

c. Paragraph five on page nine also includes an attempt to gain some kind of foothold for ambiguity: “the reference to having the law ‘written on their hearts’ recalls the great promise of Jeremiah 31:33, which looks forward to a new covenant when the law will be ‘written on their hearts.’ Paul seems to envision the possibility of God’s direct action to save here, within the context of the new covenant, even before the preaching of Christ is heard. The cryptic reference to Christ’s ‘proclamation to the spirits in prison’ in 1 Peter 3:18-20 may also point to Christ’s direct action to save, apart from the preaching of the church, though this text is not easy to interpret (cf. also Ephesians 4:9, 10). Paul’s language is allusive, suggestive, and somewhat speculative at this point and Peter’s lacks sufficient context to interpret with confidence. Paul goes on in Romans chapter three to affirm the complete sinfulness of the entire human race and the radical need for the grace of God given us in Christ. There is no basis in these texts for the development of a theology in
which the proclamation of Christ is unnecessary.” This is a frustrating paragraph which should be deleted: 1) The last sentence seems to close the door to that to which the first part of the paragraph is desperately open—to some kind of salvation which does not require the preaching of the gospel, or even, in the case of those who have the law written on their hearts, any knowledge of the gospel. 2) Romans chapter three does clearly require what Romans chapter two is supposedly hinting is not required. As the discussion of Romans chapter two above suggested (see 4b), there are ample reasons for not accepting that interpretation. 3) Concerning the 1 Peter passage—it is amazing that a “significant qualifier” would be suggested from a passage about which Martin Luther wrote: “A wonderful text is this, and a more obscure passage perhaps than any other in the New Testament, so that I do not know for certainty just what Peter means.” As John Murray suggested: “Study of the passage may have progressed since Luther’s day, but his confession still warns us against over-confidence!” 4) If Ephesians chapter four were referring to the same events as 1 Peter chapter three, it would be of some value to the discussion, but it seems really to be making a contrast between Christ lowering himself to human status and then ascending on high to glory.

d. The timidity and tentativeness in paragraphs on pages eight and nine of the booklet are swept away in the sixth paragraph on page nine, which begins: “Yet these examples in Scripture where salvation is given apart from the explicit naming of Jesus suggest to us that though Jesus is the only Savior, and though God’s means for saving the world is a proclamation of the name of Jesus, God’s action to save at times precedes the witness of the church and at times may go beyond its proclamation.” Here is the mistake of confidently asserting what was tentatively conjectured in preceding paragraphs. The statement should be deleted.

e. The paragraph continues by citing Jesus’ words in John 10:16: “I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.” The text, in its context in John, along with other passages, speaks of taking the gospel to all the nations, and does not support the effort to find “a significant qualifier.” But the next paragraph (seventh) on page nine implies that this has happened by suggesting: “Wrapped up in these qualifying examples is the mystery of divine sovereignty and human responsibility in God’s saving purpose for the world.” There are not “qualifying examples” which support the direction which was desired.

5. The last paragraph on page nine asserts, “Paul’s recognition of God’s freedom to save in no way diminishes his passion for the absolute urgency of the proclamation of the gospel. We would do well to imitate his example. And in any case, whether salvation comes through the proclamation of the name of Jesus, or through God’s mysterious direct working, it is always Jesus who is the Savior.” It is simply not true that the urgency for the proclamation of the gospel would be unaffected by the possibility that the proclamation of the gospel occurs apart from the name of Jesus through God’s mysterious direct working. If it does occur by God’s direct working and not just through the proclamation of the name of Jesus, the urgency for proclamation is affected. To say that it is Jesus who is the Savior, when people will come to faith without hearing the name of Jesus by any human means, is to mislead Christians, allowing them to believe that the same gospel through which they and millions of others have been saved is the one by which an undetermined number of people are being saved, though without the proclamation of Christ crucified.

6. Page six, paragraph seven: It is perplexing that the last sentence of paragraph six seems to deny syncretism, but the next paragraph can make the claim of Christ seem ambiguous. It has the tone of something written for a “World Religions” text: “We have a wonderful gift to offer in the life-giving power of the gospel. But we can also
learn from the serenity of the Buddhist, the moral rigor of the devout Muslim, the
celebrative affirmation of the law in Judaism, and the sensitivity of Native American
religions to the spiritual world." On a superficial level these statements can be made.
But the sentence could be abused if taken from its context. It may not be suggesting
joint worship, unfaithfulness to biblical evangelism or to the uniqueness of Christ.
But the paper would not be hurt without the sentence.

7. In the subsection “Do all religions lead to the same goal?” the statement is made (page
five): “It is almost impossible to reconcile such a general approval of all religions with
the message of Jesus.” The context offers no comfort to those who endorse the idea
that all religions are teaching the same thing and heading in the same direction. But
the sentence could be stated more clearly.

8. The sentence “Does this mean that Christians regard other religions as entirely false?”
gives the answer “Not at all” (page six). Looking at the context of the paper, and the
quotation from the Belgic Confession, it should be clear that this question and answer
are based on the fact that God has provided a general revelation to all people of truth
concerning himself, so that it is practically impossible for everything taught and
practiced in any religion to be false. Clarification would strengthen the paper.

9. Page two: “The world is sustained by the gracious decrees that proceed from the throne
of God (Isaiah 55:10-11). Yet this authority never expresses itself in domination, but
rather in service (Luke 22:25-27).” While “domination” might be a word we wish to
avoid, it is unbalanced to describe the authority of God as being expressed only in
service. There is real, awesome, holy authority, which can and should be affirmed.

10. Page five: “The last sentence is stated weakly, “It is by no means certain that all
religions are even attempting to mediate salvation in the way that Christians think
of the concept.” Would it not be clearer to say “Other religions are not attempting to
mediate salvation in the way that Christians think of the concept.”?

11. Page six: The first paragraph ends with the statement that Christians claim the uniqueness
of Jesus because “this is the claim that Jesus makes for himself in announcing the
Reign of God and identifying his own ministry decisively with the coming of that
Reign.” This is an important opportunity to support that conclusion with additional
Scripture references and references from the RCA doctrinal standards and to restore
the more biblical terminology of “Kingdom of God.”

Reasons:

We affirm the reasons of the Classis of Columbia-Greene (Synod of Albany) stated in its
ouverture to the 1999 General Synod (quoted in part):

1. “The paper, ‘The Crucified One Is Lord,’ states that ‘our culture increasingly is
suspect 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.

2. “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 other world religions. Salvation is in Jesus Christ alone, and that is the primary, solitary, absolute that has carried Christianity through the ages.

3. “With Scripture being such a crucial part of our faith affirmation and our creedoal 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 Crucified One Is Lord.’

4. “The Heidelberg Catechism focuses on the central and solitary place of Jesus for salvation in questions 29-41.”

The advisory committee recommended:

R-32
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. The overture is in response to a paper that has already been revised.
2. A majority of the concerns of the overture have been addressed in the revised paper.

Affirmation of Convictions

3. The Classis of East Sioux overtures the General Synod to take constructive actions to reduce tensions and divisions in the RCA and promote unity and confession of biblical truth in relation to areas of controversy that have developed concerning the United Church of Christ since the approval in 1997 of the Formula of Agreement. Specifically, we ask the General Synod to approve the following “Affirmation of Convictions”:

1. It is a long-standing convictions of the Reformed Church in America, expressed through many pronouncements of the General Synod, that heterosexual practices outside of the marriage of a man and a woman, bisexual practices, and homosexual practices are contrary to Scripture and the will of God, and that this standard obviously applies to:

a. Office bearers and members in the church of Jesus Christ.

b. A man and a woman engaging in such practices who are unmarried, even if attempting to justify their sexual activity on the grounds that they are living in a “committed” relationship.

c. Two men or two women seeking to justify such practices on the grounds that they are in a “committed” relationship.

2. The classes of the Reformed Church in America are reminded that the Book of Church Order gives them responsibility to be sufficiently informed about
ministers from any denomination seeking to transfer into the Reformed Church in America, so that the classis can be satisfied that they can uphold the Standards of the Reformed Church both in doctrine and in personal life.

3. The RCA-UCC dialogue on relations with gay and lesbian persons has increased our awareness of issues which may arise in contacts with the UCC, and calls for denominational officials and others involved in such contact to properly review situations of cooperation so that the RCA is intentionally endorsing policies and practices which we are on record as consistent with Scripture. Our concern to be sensitive is not for the purpose of prolonging the already extensive dialogue with the UCC (which has now been completed). Rather, our pastoral concern is that we not cause any of Christ’s “little ones” to stumble by implied endorsement of unbiblical policies and practices.

4. Recognizing that in fact the UCC is a congregational denomination, we see no further purpose in continued dialogue at the General Synod level, though we call on our members and denominational representatives to be faithful to the Reformed Church in America’s position in personal and local contacts.

Reasons:

1. It is necessary to reaffirm the RCA’s historic position regarding Scripture’s teaching of moral and immoral sexual behavior given the confusion that exists among some of our own members as well as members of denominations with whom we are in fellowship.

2. It is necessary to reaffirm the RCA’s historic position regarding Scripture’s teaching of moral and immoral sexual behavior given the deep concern of our brothers and sisters in Canada to the RCA’s relationship with UCC. Many of them came out of the United Church of Canada and were forced to leave their church property behind, having faithfully borne witness against the repeated endorsement of that denomination of the ordination of practicing homosexuals. For these Canadian Christians who have suffered for their witness to biblical standards of morality, there is naturally a fear that the RCA will waver in the clear pronouncement it has made on a number of occasions, or that it will not stand firmly enough for those positions when challenged.

3. The classis and its executive committee are to exercise care to determine whether ministers under call or contract have at the time of the offering of the call or the contract a sound theology and an upright life, whether they come from another RCA church or a Christian denomination other than the RCA.

4. Although there remain significant areas of disagreement after dialogue with the UCC, the RCA continues cooperation in worship, work, and mission with this Christian denomination. However, in all ecumenical interchanges, it is absolutely essential that denominational officials and ministers of the RCA faithfully uphold the RCA’s historic position regarding Scripture’s teaching of moral and immoral sexual behavior. This is necessary so that the RCA can speak with integrity, biblical faithfulness, and compassion to the watching world, and so that our members, both adults and children alike, will be aware of our convictions and protected from confusion.

5. We anticipate that we will discover many pastors and church members of other denominations with whom we can worship, work, and witness in our local communities and regions.

kThe advisory committee recommended:

R-33
To refer Overture 3 to the Commission on Christian Unity, in consultation with the Commission on Theology, for discussion with
REPORTS ON WORLD MISSION

Report of the General Synod Council’s Mission Services Committee

REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF MISSION SERVICES

In the midst of a lost and broken world so loved by God, the RCA seeks to passionately follow Christ in mission to both neighbors and nations. In this ministry of reconciliation members of the Reformed Church have been called to be ambassadors for Christ, proclaiming and demonstrating the message of hope and salvation. The activities of Mission Services will be reported under the following headings: resources, partners, reciprocal flow mission, personnel retirement, volunteers, categories of mission personnel, Reformed Church World Service and hunger education, urban ministries, planning, and funding.

RESOURCES

In recent months the Mission Services staff has been working hard to upgrade current resources and develop new ones that will be helpful to local congregations. In the first category is an updated mission placemat, a resource that gets extensive use in a variety of contexts, and an expanded version of the *Reformed Church in Mission 2000* booklet. This resource now provides an overview of the RCA’s mission philosophy, background on all RCA missionaries (including volunteers), and a directory of current and former missionaries. Two copies of this resource were sent to each church.

Two major resources have also been developed that will educate and empower local churches. The first is a planning resource entitled *Building a Mission-Minded Church*. It is a workbook that in six sessions helps local church leaders understand the biblical foundations of mission, the RCA’s philosophy of mission, the implications of planning for mission in a changing world, and some practical keys to building a healthy, mission-minded church. The workbook will be supplemented by a video intended to inspire and bring the RCA’s biblical principles to life. This resource is now available from the RCA Distribution Center.

The second major resource is a collaboration among the RCA’s three program units and is a concrete example of the belief that mission is one. It’s entitled *Living in Mission Everywhere* (LIME). When complete, this curriculum will provide an outstanding unit of study on each of the RCA’s mission fields around the world (following the Mission of the Month format) and will include a unit on Evangelism and Church Development. Willa Brown of Congregational Services is serving as editor for the project. The first unit on Native American Indian Ministries is now complete and available.

PARTNERS IN MISSION

One of the RCA’s primary mission principles is partnership. Mission Services always engages in mission with an indigenous partner, preferably an evangelical and ecumenical church in the Reformed tradition. In the past year, four new partnerships were established that will lead to new mission personnel appointments and programs.

Yanbian University of Science and Technology in Yanji City, Jilin Province, China, was established in 1992 by leaders of two major Presbyterian denominations in South Korea. The university employs Christian professors from around the world who, in addition to teaching classes, share the good news of Jesus Christ in informal settings. The university is well respected, graduating well-trained and often newly-discipled Christians to positions of leadership in China’s work force and churches.
Northeast Theological Seminary in Shenyang in the province of Liaoning is related to the China Christian Council. Northeast trains much-needed leadership for the burgeoning church in China, which grew in spite of communist oppression and now flourishes in a more relaxed atmosphere with the ready availability of Bibles. The key need of the church in China now is trained leadership. The RCA will seek to undergird the mission of Northeast Seminary with support for teaching personnel, scholarships for students, and outreach to the churches.

In 1999 the RCA established a partnership with the Anglican Diocese of The Gambia, which is located in West Africa. The Gambia is basically Islamic; only 3.7 percent of its population is Christian. Though the Anglican Church in The Gambia consists of only six congregations (thirteen hundred members), its ministry is both in the areas of evangelism and community development. The church’s major projects include the Anglican Training Center and Farm at Farafini, a primary and secondary school in Banjul, and a refugee camp for Sierra Leoneans in Basse. Greg and Ruth De Haan left for The Gambia in April 2000. They will assist the partners with agriculture and Christian education/evangelism programs. In July 2000 Rowland Jr. and Jane Van Es joined the De Haans. They will provide theological education and education for community development and assist the refugee program as well.

Niger, in West Africa, is one of the poorest countries in the world. Overwhelmingly Islamic, only one half of one percent of Niger is Christian. The RCA’s new partner is the Evangelical Church of the Republic of Niger, which is a vibrant denomination of one hundred churches and four thousand members. The church is evangelical and ecumenical, working with Church World Service, Dutch Protestant Development Agency, Swiss Churches Development Agency, and Bread for the World. It is a member of the World Association of Reformed Churches. In 2000 an RCA missionary will be assigned to Niger to assist in teaching theology, Bible, and tentmaking skills for pastors.

In addition to new partnerships, previous relationships have also been strengthened. The RCA has had a church-to-church relationship with the Presbyterian Church of Korea (Tong Hap) since 1988, which involved the exchange of visitors to each other’s synods. However, the relationship took on new depth and strength in September 1999 when a delegation of RCA staff not only attended the Presbyterian Church of Korea’s annual assembly but also observed urban ministry and new church developments, preached in key churches, and visited with the denomination’s counterparts. The delegation included the Rev. John Lee, supervisor of RCA mission in East Asia and the Pacific, and his wife, Yung; Ella Campbell, executive director of the Council for Pacific and Asian-American Ministries; the Rev. Dick Welscott, director of Evangelism and Church Development Services; and the Rev. Bruce Menning, director of Mission Services.

In January 2000 the historical relationship between the RCA and the Church of South India, (CSI), which in recent times had become somewhat distant, was revived through the visit of the Rev. Roger Schrock, supervisor of RCA mission in the Middle East and South Asia, and the Rev. Gregg Mast, president of the General Synod. Their itinerary included visits to the General Synod of the CSI in Hyderbad, institutions of healing and education in the dioceses of Rayalaseema and Vellore, and the headquarters of the CSI in Chennai. The visit has laid the groundwork for the renewal of mutual participation in mission by the CSI and the RCA.

**RECI PROCAL FLOW MISSION**

One of the signs of a healthy, vibrant church is the readiness to both send and receive missionaries. Maturing churches benefit greatly when they look beyond themselves and serve others in mission. Likewise, every church benefits from the presence and perspectives of Christians from other cultures.
The RCA’s missionaries in Hungary, David and Joy Zomer, have been particularly creative and proactive in encouraging and helping the Hungarian churches (Reformed and Lutheran) see themselves as both sending and receiving churches. This past year Andras and Angelica Jo, a young Hungarian couple, accepted the call of God and the church to teach at Kodaikanal International School in India. This past summer Judit Arday-Janka, a young Hungarian Christian, worked on staff at Jackson County Ministries. During her time there she made a significant contribution to the work in Appalachia. Since her return to Budapest she has inspired others with her vision and passion for the global church. This summer the Rev. Akos Miklos, a young Hungarian, will serve as pastor of a Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in Appalachia.

The Presbyterian Church of East Africa, which is based in Kenya, is a vibrant denomination with about three million members. The church has a passion for evangelism, resulting in steady church growth, and is also very active in social justice issues, being a strong advocate for constitutional reform. The denomination has done mission work within East Africa, the United States, and Britain, but not beyond these areas. Officials of this growing denomination have invited the RCA to become a mission partner. Mission Services welcomed this invitation to work together with this church from whom much can be learned about how to be on the cutting edge of social justice issues while maintaining a high commitment to evangelism. Yet at the same time Mission Services knows that a partnership with this strong church, located in a largely Christian country, should have a different face than partnerships in areas where the church is a minority.

On a survey trip to West Africa for potential new mission partners and sites, Deb Braaksma, supervisor of RCA mission programs in Africa, became aware of a small but active Reformed denomination, the Protestant Church of Senegal, which is trying to do mission outreach and service in this country, which is 90 percent Islamic. The church is requesting missionaries to do evangelism and community development in the city of St. Louis, Senegal. Viewing this as an excellent opportunity to facilitate a South-South partnership, the RCA invited the Presbyterian Church of East Africa to join in the outreach with the Protestant Church of Senegal. The East African church has responded enthusiastically to the challenge.

Representatives of all three denominations met in Senegal in November 1999, and the Presbyterian Church of East Africa welcomed this opportunity to be involved in what for them is a new era of mission outreach: sending a missionary to a French-speaking Islamic country whose culture is very different from their own. That church is recruiting and providing financial support for a missionary couple from a long list of enthusiastic candidates. The RCA is contributing project funding, and the Protestant Church of Senegal is providing housing. It has been an exciting task to help the Presbyterian Church of East Africa move into new areas of mission service.

Seventy-five years ago the Reformed Church in America began a mission partnership with the National Presbyterian Church in Chiapas, Mexico. In this short time the church in Chiapas has grown to more than 165,000 believers. Two years ago, when long-term Chiapas missionaries the Rev. Vern and Carla Sterk were asked to teach missiology at Western Theological Seminary, the church leaders in Chiapas said, “You haven’t taught us about mission yet; you have to teach us about mission too.” This June Sterk will teach the third of four planned courses on missiology to church leaders in Chiapas. In their annual Mission Conjunta meeting in March of 2000, leaders began talking and praying for the first time about the possibility of sending a missionary from Chiapas to Nicaragua, Cuba, Brazil, Africa, or even the United States. The RCA’s partner church in Chiapas is coming full circle.

Such reciprocal flow experiences not only enrich all the Christian communities involved, they also help break down stereotypes that sometimes corrupt the perceptions of both sending and receiving churches. Especially in today’s world, every church needs to be a sending church and every church needs to be a receiving church. Each plays an essential role in helping Christians understand what it means to be a part of the whole body of Christ.
PERSONNEL RETIREMENT

In the 1950s and ’60s the RCA was called afresh to the mission of God by the Spirit and by the need of a world physically and spiritually devastated by the conflagration of World War II. Missionaries returned to former posts. Others were relocated. And a new wave of young women and men responded to the call of Christ and the church. They became long-term missionaries, spending their lives in the service of the people and partners to whom they were assigned. They served with perseverance and courage, creativity and innovation, faith and hope. And in the process their lives were forever changed as they brought the life-changing gospel to new friends and neighbors across cultures and creeds. Last year and this year several well-known and highly respected missionaries have retired or will soon retire: the Rev. Charles and Rieneke Ausherman, Dr. Harvey and Margaret Doorenbos, the Rev. Sam and Helen Hoffman, the Rev. Wendell and Renske Karsen, and the Rev. Harold Vogelaar. These veterans have served the mission of God in Oman, Ethiopia, Mexico, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Indonesia, China, Jordan, Nepal, Russia, and the Ukraine for a combined total of 320 years!

The Rev. Charles and Rieneke Ausherman. Charles Ausherman graduated from New Brunswick Theological Seminary in 1957 and was ordained by the Classis of New York. He and Rieneke VanderGoot were married in August 1964. After serving the Church of the Master in Bronx, New York City, and the Reformed Church at South Branch, New Jersey, Charles served at Church World Service as a consultant to Reformed Church World Service. He has served since 1981 as an RCA missionary secunded to the Institute for Development Training (IDT). This organization has tirelessly, and often with great courage, provided highly respected resources for women’s health concerns and both female and male birth control. A long list of IDT publications includes the Training Course in Women’s Health, translated into multiple languages; a video and study guide entitled Population and People of Faith: It’s About Time, and Silent Weapon: The Embargo Against Iraq. Charles and Rieneke Ausherman will retire on June 30, 2000, and reside in Trenton, Maine.

Dr. Harvey and Margaret Doorenbos. Harvey Doorenbos and Margaret Hospers were married in June 1956. Harvey graduated from Northwestern University Medical School and completed his general surgery training at Butterworth Hospital in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Harvey and Margaret were first assigned to the American Mission Hospital in Muscat, Oman. The RCA mission board then reassigned them in 1975 to Aira, Ethiopia, where a partnership was developed with the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus. This church operates both the Aira Hospital and the Lalo Aira Secondary School. Harvey served the seventy-five bed hospital for twenty-five years as a surgeon, general practitioner, administrator, and teacher. Margaret taught English to upper classes at the school. More than half of the present teaching staff were former students of Margaret. The Doorenboses retired in September 1999 to Holland, Michigan. They returned recently from a short-term volunteer assignment in Kenya and Sudan.

The Rev. Samuel and Helen Hofman. Samuel Hofman graduated from Western Theological Seminary in 1958 and was ordained by the Classis of Cascades. On August 15, 1958, Sam Hofman and Helen Taylor were married. In the same year they began their missionary service to Chiapas, Mexico, where they worked as teachers, Bible translators, counselors, health care trainers, writers of Sunday school curricula and encouragers of the emerging and persecuted evangelical church. The crowning achievement of their translation work includes the revision of the Oxchuc/Tenejapan Bible, the revision of the Amatenango Tzeltal New Testament, two levels of Sunday school lessons entitled “El Gran Libro,” and the second editions of the History of the Church (Tzeltal) and the Tojolabal hymnal. Sam and Helen retired in March 2000. They reside in Holland, Michigan.

The Rev. Wendell and Renske Karsen. Wendell Karsen and Joyce Hughes were married
in 1960. Wendell graduated from Fuller Theological Seminary in 1962 and was ordained by the Classis of North Grand Rapids in 1963. After serving Bethany Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and Lakeland Reformed Church in Vicksburg, Michigan, Wendell and Joyce served as RCA missionaries in Taiwan and Hong Kong. In 1985 they returned to Michigan where, after a year of teaching at Western Theological Seminary, Wendell became the RCA’s coordinator for mission communication and secretary for Appalachia. Joyce died in 1989 after battling cancer. Wendell returned to Hong Kong the following year to serve the Hong Kong Christian Council, and in 1991 he married Renske Greve. Since that time the Karsens have served the Hong Kong Christian Council, Union Church Hong Kong, and have undertaken several short-term assignments in Indonesia and elsewhere. Wendell and Renske will retire in September 2000 and will reside in Holland, Michigan.

The Rev. Harold Vogelaar. Harold Vogelaar and Neva Douglas were married in 1959. Harold graduated from New Brunswick Theological Seminary in 1962 and was ordained by the Classis of East Sioux in 1963. From 1963 to 1972 the Vogelaars served as RCA missionaries in Bahrain and Oman. From 1972, under joint sponsorship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Vogelaars served in Cairo, Egypt. There Harold served as professor of world religions at the Coptic Evangelical Seminary and as pastor of an expatriate church, and Neva taught English at the American University. In 1988 they returned to the United States to serve New Brunswick Theological Seminary, and in 1990 Harold began teaching missions and world religions at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago, Illinois. Neva became ill with Alzheimer’s Disease and died in May 1998. Harold married Pisamai Hasanine in December 1998 and concluded his work as an RCA missionary in December 1999. He continues to teach at the Lutheran School of Theology.

With gratitude to God, and with great respect and affection, the following recommendation is presented.

R-34
WHEREAS the Rev. Charles and Rieneke Ausherman, Dr. Harvey and Margaret Doorenbos, the Rev. Samuel and Helen Hofman, the Rev. Wendell and Renske Karsen, and the Rev. Harold and the late Neva Vogelaar responded with heart, mind, soul, and strength to God’s call to become cross-cultural missionaries; and,

WHEREAS they served the needs of all God’s people and the emerging global church through medicine, education, Scripture translation, leadership development and resource development, pastoral presence, teaching, and church administration; and,

WHEREAS they stood in solidarity with the people they served in the midst of disease, droughts, floods, earthquakes, war, and political and religious persecutions, and marshaled the prayers and gifts of the RCA to join in the cause of compassion and justice; and,

WHEREAS in the best tradition of the RCA they joined hands and hearts in mission with the evangelical and ecumenical global church to build and nurture contextually indigenous churches; and,

WHEREAS they not only enriched the life of the RCA with stories of faith and courage from those they served, but also sensitized the RCA to the realities challenging the societies and churches of the two-thirds world;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the 194th Session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting June
9-15, 2000, at Hofstra University in Hempstead, Long Island, New York, with gratitude to God for their lives and witness, honors the Rev. Charles and Rieneke Ausherman, Dr. Harvey and Margaret Doorenbos, the Rev. Samuel and Helen Hofman, the Rev. Wendell and Renske Karsen, and the Rev. Harold and the late Neva Vogelaar with a prayer of thanksgiving, a token of our esteem, and a reception in their honor. (ADOPTED)

VOLUNTEERS

The RCA continues to experience growth in the numbers of volunteers. Volunteers serve in a variety of capacities in an increasing number of national and international sites in short-term (under six months), long-term (six months to two years), and work group assignments.

In 1999 twenty-four college and seminary students served in summer assignments through the RCA volunteer office. Young people were sent to work at community kitchens in Staten Island, New York, as camp counselors at Jackson County Ministries, and with inner-city youth at The Way Out Ministries in Los Angeles, California.

For the first time the Reformed Church sent two premedical students from Northwestern College to work with RCA missionaries Drs. Gerard and Norvelle Rudy at the Moravian medical mission hospital in Ahuas, Honduras. Two other students worked with the Moravian Church in Nicaragua at a patient clinic and youth ministry.

The Church of South India requested that the RCA send two elementary education teachers to teach at a school for tribal children in the remote hills of southern India. Tribal people are the lowest caste in India, receiving no assistance for education from the government. Two RCA elementary education students spent seven weeks at the school, training teachers how to incorporate arts and crafts into the school curriculum, and providing an arts and crafts class for the children.

In 1999 fifty-three volunteers served in short-term assignments ranging from two weeks to six months. Many of them had retired from their careers but wanted to be active and use their skills. Ralph and Wini Fuller spent three months in Khartoum, Sudan, at Nile Theological College, where Wini classified and computerized the library. Wini, a retired librarian, seventy years old, had never traveled outside the United States. The Fullers responded to the call of service in Sudan and loved it! Many volunteers spend three months at Cook College and Theological School in Tempe, Arizona, working at the conference center in meal preparation, maintenance, and other jobs. The Revs. Carl and Mary Ann Wierks and their family served in Nicaragua for two weeks with the Moravian Church, leading a vacation Bible school for community children. Physician assistants served rotations in Honduras with Dr. Gerard Rudy.

The Office of RCA Volunteer Services and Disaster Response has contracted three hundred work groups in the last year and a half. Nearly all the groups have been from the Reformed Church, but volunteers have also come from the Christian Reformed Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and the United Church of Christ, and Northwestern and Yale Universities.

The development of the RCA international work camping program has been a priority. Reconstruction following Hurricane Mitch in Central America has created opportunities for twenty work groups to serve with ecumenical partners in that region since June 1999. There has also been a great increase in work groups in Chiapas, Mexico. A Footsteps group from Reformed Church Women’s Ministries will be going to a site in Toronto, Ontario, in July 2000. RCA work groups continue to relate with the Coalition of Appalachian Ministries through RCA missionary John MacLean in Richmond, Kentucky.
Concerning reconstruction work following disasters, RCA work groups provided more than 50 percent of the seventy thousand work hours at the Grand Forks, North Dakota, site operated by the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee. Currently six work groups are contracted to assist United Methodist Disaster Reconstruction in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in North Carolina.

Two special projects were developed this past year. The first is the Siksayari, Nicaragua, disaster reconstruction project, which has received overwhelming support following the devastation caused by Hurricane Mitch. The second is the burned African-American church project in Mullins, South Carolina, developed in partnership with the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee. Unfortunately, the project in Siksayari has been suspended due to low levels of water on the Rio Coco River, which provides local transportation, and unforeseen conflicts with the RCA’s partner. The Mullins project has been terminated because of irregularities and missed deadlines by contractors.

The tremendous response of three groups who worked at the Rosemont Community Church in Tucson, Arizona, needs to be acknowledged. Last fall an arsonist set fire to the office building of the church as well as to a garage belonging to the church. In one week a work group from First Reformed Church of Maurice, Iowa, and RCA members from Sioux Center, Iowa, built a garage, restored the office building, and framed in the overflow rooms to the sanctuary to provide new centralized office space for the church. Upper Ridgewood Community Reformed Church of Ridgewood, New Jersey, sent a team of teens and skilled persons to install drywall. A Footsteps group from Reformed Church Women’s Ministries painted the work done by the groups from Maurice and Ridgewood. This response included various areas of the RCA uniting to assist a church in great need.

Work groups in the RCA are also taking on a multicultural dimension. Shin Kwang Korean Church of Bayside, Queens, New York, will send a group of teens to Apache Reformed Church in Apache, Oklahoma, July 16-22, 2000. This Korean-American student work group will primarily focus on programs to children and teens at Apache. The assistant pastor of Shin Kang Church, the Rev. Hung-Yong Song, will lead three evening evangelistic services at Apache. These services will present the gospel in a rich diversity of Korean, Native American, and Anglo cultural expressions. The Korean-American teens will receive a full orientation into the culture of Native Americans. The pastor of Apache Reformed, the Rev. George Montanari, also hopes he will be able to schedule a day of fellowship with the Shin Kwang work group and a new Korean-American RCA congregation in the classis of Red River.

**CATEGORIES OF MISSION PERSONNEL**

RCA missionaries are appointed by Mission Services for a specific ministry. Mission Services establishes salary and benefits and supervises the missionary. World Mission Program Associates (WMPAs) are employed by partner organizations. They are under the supervision of the partner who also establishes and regulates 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.

**NUMBER OF MISSION PERSONNEL BY CATEGORY, 1990-2000**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Missionaries</th>
<th>WMPAs</th>
<th>Volunteers</th>
<th>Affiliates</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This has been another year filled with disasters. Just as the enormity of the task of rehabilitation and reconstruction after Hurricane Mitch was beginning to be understood, another catastrophe struck. Kosovo refugees began to stream into Albania and other nearby countries, overpowering social systems that were already strained by poverty and weak government. Tornadoes in the Oklahoma City area and a severe drought in the mid-Atlantic and southern United States left people homeless and livestock without hay. These disasters were followed by earthquakes in Taiwan and Turkey, flooding in Mexico and Venezuela, and Hurricane Floyd, which hit New Jersey and North Carolina particularly hard. War in Chechnya and violence in East Timor left refugees without food or shelter.

The RCA has been able to respond to these disasters and ongoing hunger and refugee crises, thanks to the members of the Reformed Church in America who heeded these words found in Deuteronomy 15:7-8: “Do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbor. You should rather open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be.”

Outpouring of Gifts to Reformed Church World Service

RCA members did open their hands and hearts, giving liberally of their gifts. Between October 1998 and December 1999, they gave more than $1.2 million to help alleviate suffering caused primarily by these disasters.

These gifts have enabled RCWS to rebuild clinics and houses and secure additional health care workers in Honduras and Nicaragua, to help restart agriculture and assist with trauma counseling in Kosovo and Albania, to offer immediate assistance in the form of tents and blankets in Turkey and pastoral counseling in Taiwan, and to begin cleanup and rehabilitation in New Jersey and North Carolina. Most of these projects require a number of years to complete. Thanks be to God that the generosity of RCA members has enabled RCWS to make a significant contribution to recovery and rehabilitation for people in these and many other areas.

In addition to the above-mentioned disasters, RCWS has also responded with assistance to a diaconal project in South Africa, micro-enterprise work in Los Angeles, refurbishing the Tzeltal Bible Center in Chiapas, food pantry grants in Canada and the United States, relief for victims of a cyclone in India and refugees in Cairo, the peace process in Sudan, the Moscow Soup Kitchen, and famine relief for people in Alale, Kenya. An ambitious goat restocking project has also been established for the Orma people in Kenya with the assistance of RCA missionaries Roger and Sue Scheenstra and other mission partners.

New Education Resources

A new video, Reformed Church World Service, A Ministry of Compassion and Hope, has been produced. This video details how RCWS responds during, after, and even before a disaster strikes. A study guide is being completed to accompany the video.
A Fast That Lasts, a twenty-four hour retreat for junior high and senior high youth groups, has been redesigned. A study unit on Reformed Church World Service has been completed for inclusion in the new curriculum for children, Living in Mission Everyday (LIME). Both of these resources are available from the RCA Distribution Center.

Offering of Letters

Congregations are encouraged to conduct an offering of letters in support of the Hunger Relief Act, H.R. 3192 and S. 1805, which would strengthen the food stamp program and increase funding for emergency food providers. This legislation is a part of Bread for the World’s 2000 Offering of Letters theme, “A Fair Share: Working to End Hunger.” In addition to the Hunger Relief Act, “A Fair Share” is supporting an increase in the federal minimum wage to enable working families to be able to feed themselves adequately.

URBAN MINISTRY

Commitment to Urban Ministries

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 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 400 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 200 churches worshipping 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 we must provide vital ministries in 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, places, partners, and prophecy. Progress toward implementing the goals is reported below.

People: developing effective leaders

Working with urban pastors, laypeople, and the RCA’s Urban Ministries Team, the Rev. Stan Perea, RCA coordinator for urban ministry, has developed a curriculum for an Urban Ministries training center. The curriculum has been reviewed by the RCA’s seminaries and by AUTEM (Associates for Urban Educators in Ministry of the Academy of Religion). The curriculum has two tracks. Track I is a five-day residency intensive training program for pastors currently involved in urban ministry. Track II is a twenty-four-credit certificate program in urban ministry. The classes will receive bachelor’s degree credit. Both New Brunswick and Western seminaries have shown interest in offering the certificate program.

Perea’s office is also distributing information on clergy renewal. This program provides funding for urban pastors to take sabbatical leaves. It funds the pastor’s time off and assists the local church during sabbatical leave.
Places: revitalizing congregational life and witness

The success of the Urban Ministry Fund Drive will allow grants to be made to urban congregations with plans for revitalization. Fifteen grants of $30,000 each will be distributed through a request-for-proposal process that will involve consistories, classes, and regional synods in the planning process. The process has been prepared and sent to the RCA’s urban congregations.

The work of beginning new churches within the RCA resides in large part with the classes and regional synods. Perea has begun working with the Council of Field Secretaries of the regional synods and the GSC to dovetail plans for urban and racial/ethnic new church developments. The Urban Ministries Fund Drive goal is to commit $700,000 to these developing plans for a variety of new church development models in the city.

Partners: establishing partnerships between urban and nonurban churches

The Office of Urban Ministry is developing a “partnership agreement” that will define the benefits and responsibilities of churches involved in church-to-church partnerships. Very important background work between the churches will ensure that the relationship will be a true partnership, with gifts, learning, and resources flowing in both directions. Three models are developing: 1) church-to-church relationships, 2) a cluster of urban and nonurban churches together with a city municipality working for neighborhood revitalization, and 3) a church-parachurch partnership.

Prophecy: challenging social injustice

The Office of Urban Ministry is seeking to work in cooperation with other RCA initiatives committed to combating racism at both denominational and local levels. The General Synod Council’s highest priority is for the RCA to reflect the growing diversity of the U.S. and Canada. To that end, goals and objectives are being recommended to address racism. The 1999 General Synod established a Commission on Race and Ethnicity that just began its work within the last year. These efforts are welcomed and timely. Perea’s office will commit time and resources to developing a denomination-wide approach to challenge racism and other aspects of social injustice.

Urban Ministry Fund Drive

The RCA will celebrate the completion of the first $2.5 million phase of the Urban Ministry Fund Drive. The generosity of the people of God is evident in the following progress report of pledges.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Pledges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April 1999</td>
<td>$ 487,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 1999</td>
<td>1,197,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2000</td>
<td>1,940,094</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2000 (estimate)</td>
<td>2,300,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The fund drive has been experiencing a very gratifying 63 percent “gift-to-ask” ratio. The difference between the April and June 2000 balances above was estimated at a very conservative 35 percent gift-to-ask ratio. Given the track record of response to the urban ministries’ “case,” actual pledges may indeed push the total above $2,400,000.

Phase I of the fund drive has been targeted toward individuals whose generous response confirms the RCA’s commitment to urban ministries in the new millennium. The breakdown of actual and estimated pledges reveals the following generosity. An update of actual pledges will be reported at General Synod by the Rev. Dr. Edwin Mulder, chairperson of the fund drive’s steering committee.
Phase II, seeking an additional $2.5 million for long-term program and administration, will be targeted to a selected number of congregations and additional major donors. It is anticipated that the second phase of the campaign will be completed by the end of the year.

In thankfulness to God and in celebration of the generosity of Christ’s people, the following resolution and recommendation is presented.

R-35
WHEREAS the Reformed Church in America in discerning the Spirit’s call was led to refocus its resources in the city; and

WHEREAS the strategic importance of urban ministries was given voice and vision in a fundraising strategy and implementation plan prophetically entitled “Our Future Depends on the City”; and

WHEREAS countless hours have been given to the development of program plans and the fundraising effort by the steering committee, staff, and volunteers; and

WHEREAS the RCA urban focus has spawned and supported many new and creative initiatives in urban ministry on the congregational, classical, and synodical levels; and

WHEREAS the first phase ($2.5 million) of the campaign will soon be completed;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the 194th session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting June 9-15, 2000, at Hofstra University in Hempstead, Long Island, New York, heartily thanks the donors whose pledges make an urban focus possible and commends to the churches their participation in the successful completion of the second phase of the fund drive, to the glory of God, the continued revitalization of RCA witness in the city, and the edification of the whole church following Christ in mission to a lost and broken world so loved by God. (ADOPTED)

PLANNING

Mission Services has begun a process of strategic planning for the future. Two drafts of an overall strategy paper entitled “Discipling All Nations” have been completed. Input for the first draft was provided by the Mission Services staff. The paper was critiqued by the Mission Services staff, pastors, missionaries, and partners. The second draft has been circulated to the missionaries and partners who will be attending Mission 2000. The paper will be shaped again by the planning sessions that will follow the close of Mission 2000—sessions that involve the RCA’s partners and missionaries. When the final copy is approved by GSC in October 2000, it will be used as the basis of regional planning meetings. In each region of RCA mission
work, all the partners and missionaries will be brought together to develop regional plans for the next six years. It is anticipated that the final planning report will be presented at the October 2001 GSC meeting and to the 2002 meeting of the General Synod.

In outline form, “Discipling All Nations” is organized as follows: 1) the world and church contexts of change in which mission is being carried out; 2) the RCA definition of mission; 3) mission in the way of Christ (leadership, lifestyle, and spirituality); 4) RCA mission principles; and, 5) five crucial challenges which the RCA must meet in order to be effective in mission in the next decade.

**FUNDING**

Mission giving by RCA congregations and individuals continues to match the budgeted needs of the RCA’s mission personnel and program. In 1999 revenue from all sources totaled $7,945,000, while expenses amounted to $7,753,000. Seventy-six percent of total support is generated by Partnership-in-Mission (PIM) shares. The value of a PIM share in 2000 is $4,200.

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.

![Graph showing the changing value of PIM shares over time. Source: The pre-1975 data are the Consumer Price Index statistics from the Historical Statistics of the United States (USGPO, 1975). All data since then are from the annual Statistical Abstracts of the United States. Email address: http://www.westegg.com/inflation.](image)

Two historically reliable sources of income for RCA missions will decrease substantially in 2001. Investment income has been reallocated by the GSC. In 1998 investment income amounted to $547,000 for Mission Services; in 2001 that amount will be reduced to $233,000, a net reduction of $314,000 over four years. And, as Reformed Church Women’s Ministries is disbanded at the end of the year 2001, more than $100,000 annually from this traditionally strong source of support for RCA missions may well be in jeopardy.

Therefore, in order to maintain the value of PIM shares in real dollars as costs rise 5 percent annually, and to continue to assure the fiscal foundation of the RCA’s mission program, the General Synod Council, at its April 2000 meeting, approved raising the PIM share to $4,400 for the year 2001.

R-36

To encourage all churches and individuals who fund Partnership-in-Mission (PIM) shares to increase their level of giving in the year 2001
to $4,400 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)

CONCLUSION

This report has focused on the business end of the RCA’s mission program. What makes it all worthwhile, however, is the result of all this effort. Countless precious lives of children, women, and men have been touched by the love and grace of Jesus Christ: abandoned street children in Ecuador, hurricane victims in Nicaragua and Honduras; survivors of ethnic cleansing in Albania and Kosovo; earthquake survivors in Turkey, Mexico, and Taiwan; flood survivors in Venezuela, Kenya, and Mexico; cattle herders in Kenya; young people on Native American reservations; recent immigrants to North America; spiritual seekers in Canada; abused and battered women; hungry families in Alale, Kenya; children in after-school programs in New York City; homeless people seeking food at pantries in each of the RCA’s regional synods; aspiring pastors and emerging leaders for the global church; malnourished babushkas in Moscow; the diseased and ill in Ethiopia, India, and Madagascar; the persecuted in Chiapas; refugees in Cairo; lonely expatriates in Oman and Bahrain; urban churches reaching out to rapidly changing multicultural neighborhoods; brothers and sisters of ancient and faithful Christian traditions in the Middle East; children in Ukraine learning the stories of Jesus for the first time; church planters in Estonia. The list of those touched by RCA missions—including ourselves—continues and grows.

In the faces of all these we see the very presence of Christ, and by their touch our hearts have been changed. The church of Jesus Christ continues to grow from a mustard seed into the tree in which the nations of the world find a resting place. As the kingdom of God comes on earth as it is in heaven, we look forward to the fulfillment of the heavenly vision of the people of God. To God be the glory.

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!” (Rev. 7:9-10).

CHANGES IN MISSIONARY AND MISSION SERVICES STAFF

Appointments

The Rev. Rowland Jr. and Jane Van Es have been appointed as RCA missionaries. They will serve in The Gambia in western Africa, where Rowland will be assisting the Anglican Diocese of The Gambia.

Ana Gan has been appointed as a world mission program associate. Ana works with Agape in Action, a mission agency in Monterey, Mexico. She trains church leaders for evangelism, pastoral care, and Christian education in the town of Galeana.

Greg and Ruth De Haan have been appointed as missionaries to serve in an agricultural and Christian education ministry with the Anglican Diocese of The Gambia.

The Rev. Janine Dekker has been appointed as a ministry associate at Apache Reformed Church in Apache, Oklahoma.

Ina (Ramon) Montoya was appointed as a world mission program associate. She serves as youth pastor at Jicarilla Reformed Church in Dulce, New Mexico, where she conducts the congregation’s youth and children’s ministry.
Steve Hillis was appointed as a world mission program associate. He serves as director of the Theological Education by Extension Program at Cook College and Theological School in Tempe, Arizona.

Jeff and Deb Feenstra were appointed as missionaries to Chiapas, Mexico. They coordinate study groups for mission education (nationals and RCA) at the mission house in San Cristobal de Las Casas.

Bethany Graves is serving as a ministry associate at Mescalero Reformed Church in Mescalero, New Mexico. She is working with the youth and children’s programs and assists with the management of the office.

The Rev. Robert and Lavina Block were appointed for a two-year assignment as missionaries in Oman. They will assist with the Majils, a dialogue program between Christians and Muslims in Oman and offer pastoral and teaching skills to persons using the outreach program of the Al Amana Center.

Mitch and Susan Sorenson have been appointed as missionaries to serve in Aira, Ethiopia. Susan will be serving as public health coordinator, and Mitch will be overseeing the maintenance program at the Aira Hospital.

Rudolph Seahmer is serving as a ministry associate at Umoho Reformed Church in Macy, Nebraska. He works with youth and assists in the worship and educational ministry of the congregation.

**Resignations and Completions of Service**

The Rev. Dr. Martin Wang was appointed as a world mission program associate in 1990. He served in Taiwan from 1990 until 1999.

The Rev. J. Samuel and Helen Hofman were appointed as missionaries in June 1958. They served in Chiapas, Mexico until February 2000.

Dr. Harvey and Margaret Doorenbos were appointed as missionaries in 1965. They served in Bahrain from 1965 to 1975 and in Ethiopia from 1975 to September 1999.

The Rev. Harold Vogelaar was appointed as an RCA missionary in 1963. He served in Oman; Cairo, Egypt; and Chicago from 1963 to 1999.

Debra Wilson was appointed as a world mission program associate in 1996. She served in Cambodia and in Lao People’s Democratic Republic from 1996 to July 31, 1999.

John Smith, who served as director of Jackson County Ministries in Annville, Kentucky, since 1990, resigned his position January 2000 to take a position at the Jackson County Schools.

**Changes of Assignment**

Frank and Darlene Van Hoeve, who served in Livingston, Kentucky, since 1997, have been appointed by the Jackson County Ministries board to provide an in-depth study of the properties, resources, area needs, and opportunities of Jackson County Ministries.

Dr. Bernardeth Kelly is presently on a leave of absence. Bernardeth’s husband, Adrian, is studying at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan. Dr. Victoria Williams is working in public health in the Bluefields and Rio Grande areas in eastern Nicaragua during
Dr. Kelly’s absence.

Gail Beran, who serves in Tokyo, Japan, has accepted a position with the Korean Christian Church in Japan doing translation and editorial work to help the church communicate with its mission partners. She will continue to work part-time for the Council for Cooperative Mission.

**Volunteer Service Assignments**

- China: Kim TerAvest
- Guayaquil, Ecuador: David Gomez
- Estonia: Gretchen Kaup
- Ethiopia: Carol Rasmussen
- Honduras: Cora Hunse
- India: Andra and Angelika Jo
- Japan: Ken and Erinn Bentley, Susan Victor, Ruth Bavin, Wynette Terpstra, Jana Marvel, Judith White
- Kenya: Greg Grylls
- Mexico: Susan Kingma
- Slovakia: Sarah Kuipers
- Taiwan: Mary Oyer
- United States
  - Oklahoma: Jill Floyd
  - Colorado and Kentucky: Sonja Rawie
  - Kentucky: Angie Hoover, Jeff Trytko
  - New York: Amanda Meulenberg

**Deaths**

Mary Geegh died January 30, 1999. She served as an RCA missionary to India for thirty-eight years.

Kenneth Young died June 7, 1999. He served as director of Southern Normal School in Brewton, Alabama.

Robert Swart died January 21, 2000. He and his wife, Morrie, were the first RCA missionaries to serve on the African continent, where they served from 1948 to 1988.
Jessie Platz died January 23, 2000. She served as an RCA missionary in China.

Harriet de Velder died March 26, 2000. With her husband, Walter, she served in China, the Philippines, Hong Kong, and Taiwan.

From the Report of the President

In response to P-1 of the Report of the President (p. 35), the advisory committee recommended:

R-37
To direct the General Synod Council, through Mission Services and the Office of the General Secretary, to encourage and assist every congregation and classis to establish a covenantal relationship with a global and/or ecumenical partner, in order to more clearly hear the voice of God and share prayers and programs of ministry. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. The RCA is committed to mutual and reciprocal mission that enriches each partner in the relationship.

2. This recommendation provides RCA Christians and congregations with further opportunities to develop relationships with Christians from other cultures and thus to grow in our own maturity through an increased understanding and appreciation of the richness of the body of Christ.

3. Our beliefs and understanding of God’s world are most significantly shaped not by theories, philosophies, or programs but by our personal encounters with others.

Report of Words of Hope

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 1999 and early 2000 indicate significant impact in a number of mission fields.

Albanian Radio Outreach. The 1999 Kosovo crisis involved the abrupt exodus of approximately eight hundred thousand ethnic Albanians from their shattered homeland. For three months Words of Hope produced a special series of daily Albanian broadcasts that featured on-location interviews with Kosovar families in a variety of Albanian and Macedonian refugee camps, as well as in Kosovo itself. Desperate for hope and news about missing loved ones, many Kosovars expressed appreciation for this special outreach. This effort required innovative procedures as Words of Hope’s Albanian broadcaster Andrew Opari...
taped his interviews on a portable MiniDisc recorder, edited them on a laptop computer, and then uploaded them via the Internet to Words of Hope’s web site (http://woh.org). From there Trans World Radio (TWR) downloaded each broadcast-quality program to its satellite uplink center in Bratislava, Slovakia. Each program was then relayed to TWR’s million-watt AM transmitter in Monte Carlo. Each broadcast immediately preceded Words of Hope’s regular Albanian program and was also heard three times each day via local FM over Radio Illyria in Tirana, Albania.

**Arabic Partnership.** For more than a decade Words of Hope has enjoyed a fruitful Arabic broadcasting partnership with the indigenous Middle East Reformed Fellowship (MERF). As a result of recent meetings, the Back to God Hour, Words of Hope, and MERF completed a detailed agreement that unifies their Arabic broadcasting efforts. This facilitates a major expansion, as production will increase from three to seven new programs per week to be used on as many stations as the Lord enables. To accomplish this goal, MERF will set up two adjunct radio ministry centers in Cairo and Beirut. These new centers will work closely with MERF’s existing broadcasting team in Larnaca, Cyprus, to not only produce gospel broadcasts but also to ensure adequate follow-up. These centers will efficiently utilize the gifts of believers from Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Jordan, Iraq, and Sudan.

**Sudan’s Listening Audience Growing.** Since 1997 Words of Hope and FEBA Radio have teamed up to broadcast in the southern Sudanese languages of Nuer and Dinka. Through the generous sponsorship of several congregations in northwest Iowa, the scheduled frequency for these first-ever gospel programs increased from four per week to every day. FEBA Radio broadcasts the Nuer and Dinka programs every night from its shortwave station in Seychelles, effectively blanketing all of East Africa. “The radio is very common,” reports a Nuer listener. “A very high percentage [of people in South Sudan’s Upper Nile region] are listening. The program is very encouraging to the people.”

**Specialized English.** In addition to Words of Hope’s weekly English language preaching program, a new broadcast targets more than half a billion people worldwide who speak English as a second language. Developed in partnership with FEBA Radio, Specialized English uses a magazine format to present biblical teaching along with a variety of stories and short subjects. This is a style of broadcasting developed by the Voice of America. The essential features are: slow speed (about ninety words per minute), limited vocabulary (about 1,500 core words), and simple sentences. An international team of writers and voicers convey the sense that neither the English language nor the Christian faith is exclusively American. A special website facilitates listener interaction: http://www.radio.english.net.

**World by Radio.** Since 1985 the cooperative World by 2000 initiative has led to the launching of gospel broadcasts in the languages of 104 large people groups that had been previously unreached by missionary radio. This partnership effort began on September 10, 1985, when the presidents of HCJB World Radio, Trans World Radio, and Far East Broadcasting Company covenanted to begin working together. “We are committed,” they said, “to provide every man, woman, and child on earth the opportunity to turn on their radios and hear the gospel of Jesus Christ in a language they can understand so they can become followers of Christ and responsible members of his church. We plan to complete this task by the year 2000.” Shortly thereafter, other Christian broadcasters began participating, including SIM and FEBA Radio as well as international program producers IBRA Radio, Back to the Bible, and Words of Hope. Now with the year 2000 upon us, the World by 2000 partners have agreed to continue working together as “World by Radio” in pursuit of the original goal to extend the reach of gospel radio to every major language group in the world. Eighty-four megalanguages still need to be reached. Words of Hope has been involved in launching one quarter of all new broadcasts started, and it plans to continue in its efforts.
New Video. *Light to the World by Radio* is a new video produced by Words of Hope for the World by 2000 partnership. This fast-moving eleven-minute presentation spotlights the remarkable extension of missionary radio broadcasting into over one hundred languages previously unreached by gospel broadcasts. Contact Words of Hope to receive a free copy.

Sermon Series. Broadcast minister David Bast conducted an in-depth study of the book of Acts in a year-long series of radio messages entitled “The Story of the First Christians.” These will subsequently be adapted into over forty languages for broadcast around the world.

Staff. Joining the Words of Hope development staff as director of church relations is Susan Hulst. A graduate of Northwestern College in Orange City, Iowa, Susan’s specialty is presenting up-to-date information about Words of Hope’s ministry to Reformed Church in America congregations.

Internet Worldwide Website. Access to Words of Hope’s worldwide website has averaged over three hundred thousand “hits” per month. RealAudio, one of the enhanced features of the Words of Hope website, includes weekly radio programs and each day’s devotional meditation with a related Scripture passage.

Grateful Thanks. Words of Hope is very grateful to RCA regional synods, classes, congregations, and members who have faithfully supported this ministry through their prayers and gifts. During 1999, RCA congregations contributed a total of $907,280, including $726,285 in regular giving and $180,995 in designated gifts. We thank God for his faithfulness!
REPORTS ON CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Report of the Commission on Christian Worship

The Commission on Christian Worship met in two stated sessions, October 4-5, 1999, and February 7-8, 2000, at the Cenacle, a retreat center of Loyola University in Chicago, Illinois.

LITURGICAL WORK

Introduction

An extraordinary passage from Ephesians demonstrates what can happen when worship is truthful, faithful, and delightful:

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Eph. 3:14-19).

The centrality of worship in the life of the Reformed Church in America is reflected in the inclusion of the Liturgy in its constitution. The role of the Commission on Christian Worship in the church is to advise 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 a Liturgy that is consistent, “so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”

The principles that guide the commission in the development and revision of liturgy 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. The commission uses a consistent process in the development of liturgical orders:

- Commission discussion, consensus on liturgical need, guidance to author
- Author’s draft
- Review at commission meeting
- Second draft
- Review at commission meeting
- Third and subsequent drafts (circulated to commissioners or reviewed at meetings)
- Outside editing, selective testing, and review
- Review at commission meeting
- Provisional status
- Denominational distribution and comment
- Commission review
- Approved status

The commission brings to this General Synod four orders for approval and recommendation to the classes, and one for provisional use.
Profession of Faith

The General Synod of 1999 approved the “Proposed Order for Profession of Faith” for a one-year period of study and provisional use (MGS 1999, R-41, p. 196). The order resulted 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, making reaffirmation of faith, and transferring from another Christian church—along with the baptism of the children of these various confessors. 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. The 1993 liturgy never moved beyond provisional use, however. The 1999 order carefully considers these various issues and integrates all the varied means by which persons are received into a congregation, without cumbersome repetition.

Congregational input during the period of study, provisional use, and comment has expressed appreciation for the unified liturgy. Suggestions offered by those who commented on the order have resulted in improved rubrics and greater clarity in the presentation of the various candidates for profession of faith.

The Commission on Christian Worship recommends this order for approval and recommendation to the classes.

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, Sec. 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, Sec. 2.b).

The “Order for Profession of Faith” is anchored in and builds upon the RCA “Order for the Sacrament of Baptism.” The order integrates the varied components of receiving confessing members into a congregation: those persons seeking adult baptism, those making initial profession of faith, those reaffirming faith, and those transferring from another Christian church. The order also provides for the baptism of their children.

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.¹

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.²

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.³

The following questions are written for unison response. If individual responses are desired, the minister or presiding elder may ask all questions, then address each person, “What is your response?”

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?⁴

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?⁵
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 which 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
Ns (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.

Naming all candidates for baptism and initial profession of faith:

NN/s (using full names) come before us to make public this profession of faith and to receive the sacrament of baptism;

Naming all baptized persons, including those making initial profession of faith, those reaffirming faith, and those transferring membership from another congregation:

NN/s (using full names) have been baptized into the body of Christ. In making public this profession of faith they affirm the meaning of their baptism.

If it is the congregation’s desire to note the congregations from which transferring members are being received, there may be an additional statement, “NN/s __________ are received from (church name and location).”

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? 

I will, and I ask God to help me.

*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?

I will, and I ask God to help me.

*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? 

I do.

*The congregation and the candidates shall join in confessing the faith in the words of the Apostles’ Creed.* 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,
though 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 all those being received,
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.

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.\textsuperscript{19}

Welcome our \textit{brothers and sisters} in Christ.

\textbf{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.
\textit{Alleluia.}

\textit{The following blessing may be said or sung by the congregation while the elders greet
the new confessing members:}

\begin{quote}
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 upon you,
and give you peace. Amen.
\end{quote}

\textit{Numbers 6:24-26}

\textsuperscript{1} “Remembering Baptism and Professing Faith,” provisional order, 1993
\textsuperscript{2} “Remembering Baptism and Professing Faith,” provisional order, 1993
\textsuperscript{3} “Remembering Baptism and Professing Faith,” provisional order, 1993; \textit{Liturgy}, 1987, 1968
\textsuperscript{5} “Remembering Baptism and Professing Faith,” provisional order, 1993; \textit{Liturgy}, 1968
\textsuperscript{6} “Remembering Baptism and Professing Faith,” provisional order, 1993; \textit{Liturgy}, 1987
\textsuperscript{7} “Remembering Baptism and Professing Faith,” provisional order, 1993; \textit{Liturgy}, 1987, 1968
\textsuperscript{8} “Remembering Baptism and Professing Faith,” provisional order, 1993; \textit{Liturgy}, 1908, 1968
\textsuperscript{9} The Lord’s Prayer was included in the order for meeting befoe the elders, \textit{Liturgy}, 1987, 1968. The English translation of the Lord’s Prayer prepared by the English Language Liturgical Consultation (ELLC), 1988. This text was commended for use in the Reformed Church in America by the 1997 General Synod.
\textsuperscript{10} This order is grounded in the “Sacrament of Baptism,” which was adopted in 1994. The preparation, baptismal covenant, blessing and welcome portions of that order are included in this order.
\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Liturgy}, 1987

13 “Remembering Baptism and Professing Faith,” provisional order, 1993; see also Liturgy, 1908, 1882. These renunciations and affirmations are drawn from the “Sacrament of Baptism,” 1994, and echo the earliest Christian confessions. They parallel the extended questions before the congregation in the 1968 order for “Admission to the Lord’s Table,” including, “Do you acknowledge that you are delivered from all your sins and miseries only to be the saving work of Jesus Christ...”

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 Faith,” provisional order, 1993. The English translation of the Apostles’ Creed prepared by the English Language Liturgical Consultation (ELLC), 1988. This text was commended for use in the Reformed Church in America by the 1997 General Synod.

16 This text for the Sursum Corda is from Praying Together, the English Language Liturgical Consultation, 1988; the same text is used in the “Sacrament of Baptism,” 1994.

17 Belgic Confession, Articles 33 and 34.

18 Liturgy, 1987, 1968

19 From the “Provisional Order for the Ordination of a Minister of Word and Sacrament,” 1998.

THE ORDER OF WORSHIP FOR THE LORD’S DAY
WITH PROFESSION OF FAITH

THE APPROACH TO GOD
VOTUM
SENTENCES
SALUTATION
HYMN
PRAYER OF CONFESSION
ASSURANCE OF PARDON
THE LAW OF GOD

THE WORD OF GOD
PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION
LESSON(S)
SERMON
PRAYER FOR BLESSING ON THE WORD

THE RESPONSE TO GOD
ORDER FOR PROFESSION OF FAITH
PREPARATION AND PRESENTATION
THE BAPTISMAL COVENANT
BLESSING AND WELCOME
THE PEACE
PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION WITH THE LORD’S PRAYER
OFFERING
HYMN
BENEDICTION

R-38
To approve the “Order for Profession of Faith” and to recommend
Ordination and Installation to the Offices of the Church

The General Synod of 1998 approved the distribution of the “Order for 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” for a two-year period of study and use (MGS 1998, R-1, p. 272). The General Synod of 1999 approved the distribution of the “Order for Ordination and Installation of Deacons and Elders” for a one-year period of study and provisional use (MGS 1999, R-40, p. 196). These revisions were prepared with concern for 1) grounding all office and ministry in baptism, 2) recovering a clear statement of the moral responsibilities of office holders, 3) accenting the unity of office in the church, and 4) clarifying rubrication for ease of use.

The orders for ordination and for installation of ministers are two separate liturgies because ordination normally takes place in a candidate’s home church and classis, with installation following later at the place of call, which is usually in another classis. Having two separate orders avoids confusing alternates within a single order. Because of the increasing practice of ministers accepting new calls within the classis of membership, the installation order clarifies use for installation without reception into the classis.

The order for deacons and elders expresses a fuller understanding of the offices, an understanding that is drawn from Scripture and the historic expression of these offices in the RCA’s tradition. The church, in responses shared with the commission, has found this helpful.

During the period of provisional use and comment the church expressed appreciation for these revisions, particularly the language for moral responsibility, the recovery of the charges in the installation of ministers, and the exposition of the offices for elder and deacon. In response to comment from the Task Force on Consistories, the interdependence of the three offices was made more explicit. The commission appreciates those who commented on these orders; such feedback strengthens its work.

The Commission on Christian Worship recommends these orders for approval and recommendation to the classes.

ORDER FOR ORDINATION TO THE OFFICE OF MINISTER OF WORD AND SACRAMENT

The Book of Church Order (Chapter 1, Part II, Article 11, Section 5), directs the classis to appoint a time for the ordination service of candidates for the ministry and to conduct the service with proper solemnity. A brief sermon suitable to the occasion shall be preached. The presiding officer of the classis shall begin following the proclamation of the Word.

PRESENTATION

Beloved in the Lord,
we have come to ordain a minister of Word and sacrament
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.\(^2\)

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 his resurrection and ascension,
Christ gave gifts to the church.
These gifts 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.”\(^3\)

We stand within a tradition
where God calls and empowers
deacons, elders, and ministers of Word and sacrament
to enable the whole mission of the church.

Therefore let us welcome \(NN\text{(using full name)}\),
who comes to be ordained to the ministry of Word and sacrament.

\(A\ \text{minister and elder of the classis student supervision committee, together with a representative of the congregation or other ministry requesting the ordination, present the candidate. The classis presenter/s shall say:}\)

We present \(N\text{(use Christian name only)}\),
whom we have examined and
found to be a person
of sound learning and Christian character.

On behalf of the Classis of \(N\text{______________}\),
we affirm that s/he is ready to be ordained
to the Office of Minister of Word and Sacrament.

\(The\ \text{candidate shall remain standing, facing the presiding officer. The presenters return to their places. The presiding officer continues:}\)

Ministers are called to build up Christ’s church.

They are to proclaim God’s Word,
to declare forgiveness through Jesus Christ,
to call publicly on the name of the Lord
on behalf of the whole congregation,
to celebrate Christ’s holy sacraments,
  baptizing and presiding at the Lord’s Supper.

They are to be pastors and teachers,
  sharing people’s joys and sorrows,
  encouraging the faithful, recalling those who fall away,
  helping the sick and the dying.\(^4\)

\(N\text{______________},\) before almighty God,
and in the presence of this congregation,
the classis asks you to answer sincerely these questions:\(^5\)
Do you confess together with us and the church throughout all ages your faith in one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? 

Yes, truly, with all my heart.

*The presiding officer shall invite the congregation to stand:*

Let us all stand with N___________________, confessing our Christian 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 candidate shall remain standing.*

Do you believe in your heart that you are called by Christ’s church, and therefore by God, to this ministry of Word and sacrament?

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 proclaim the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; upholding the witness of Holy Scripture against all schisms and heresies?

I will, and I ask God to help me.

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 church’s order and governance, submitting to ecclesiastical discipline should you become delinquent in either life or doctrine?¹⁴

**I will, and I ask God to help me.**

Will you be loyal to the witness and work¹⁵ of the Reformed Church in America, using all your abilities to further its Christian mission here and throughout the world?

**I will, and I ask God to help me.**

Will you strive to fulfill faithfully, diligently, and cheerfully, all the duties of a minister of Christ:
  - to preach the Word of God in sincerity,
  - to administer the sacraments in purity,
  - to maintain proper discipline in the household of God, and
  - to shepherd the flock faithfully?¹⁶

**I will, and I ask God to help me.**

**ORDINATION**

The candidate shall kneel. The presiding officer shall call the elders and ministers of the classis to come forward (all will stay through the welcome). Those the classis shall invite may join in the laying on of hands during the prayer. The presiding officer shall continue:

Let us pray.

God of grace, pour out your Holy Spirit, gentle as a dove, burning as fire, upon N________________ and fill her/him with grace and power for this ministry of Word and sacrament; in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

At the conclusion of the prayer with the laying on of hands, the candidate shall stand, the classis remains in front, and the presiding officer continues:

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the only head of the church, I now declare that NN________________ is ordained to the Office of Minister of Word and Sacrament.

**RESPONSE TO ORDINATION**

N________________, will you publicly declare your commitment to Christian ministry among us?

The Candidate shall respond by reading aloud the Form of the Declaration for Ministers. The congregation will stand for the reading and signing of the formulary.
In the name of our Lord, welcome to Classis.
We pledge our support, affection, and prayers while you live and work among us as a servant and minister of God’s Word.

Classis members and delegates extend the right hand of fellowship to the new member before returning to their places.

Robing may occur at this time.

The person designated by the classis shall deliver the charge. The charge which follows shall be read. Additional brief counsel, if authorized by the classis, may be made before it.

Beloved servant in Christ, be attentive to yourself and to all the flock given to your care by the Holy Spirit. Love Christ: feed his lambs, tend his sheep. Be an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Attend to reading, prayer, study, preaching, and teaching. Do not neglect the gift that is in you. Put these things into practice, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress. Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; continue in these things, for in doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers.

N________________, guard what has been entrusted to you. And when the chief shepherd appears, you will win the crown of glory that never fades away.

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 N____________, keep her/him strong and faithful, may s/he herald the joy of your kingdom, serving rather than being served.

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; 
that 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. 39

The peace of Christ be with you. 
And also with you.

The The Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper should be celebrated; an officer of the classis shall preside. The communion elements may be presented at this time. Following the sacrament, a Hymn of Thanksgiving after Communion may be sung, after which the newly-ordained minister shall deliver the Benediction.

THE ORDER OF WORSHIP FOR 
ORDINATION TO THE OFFICE OF 
MINISTER OF WORD AND SACRAMENT

THE APPROACH TO GOD

VOTUM
SENTENCES
SALUTATION
HYMN
PRAYER OF CONFESSION
ASSURANCE OF PARDON
THE LAW OF GOD
GLORIA PATRI OR ANOTHER APPROPRIATE HYMN
THE WORD OF GOD

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION
LESSON/S
SERMON
PRAYER FOR BLESSING ON THE WORD
ORDER FOR ORDINATION TO THE OFFICE OF MINISTER OF WORD AND SACRAMENT*
PRESENTATION
ORDINATION
RESPONSE TO ORDINATION
PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION WITH THE LORD’S PRAYER
THE PEACE
THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD’S SUPPER

THE RESPONSE TO GOD

HYMN OF THANKSGIVING AFTER COMMUNION
BENEDICTION

*If THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD’S SUPPER is not to be celebrated, the ORDER FOR ORDNATION TO THE OFFICE OF MINISTER OF WORD AND SACRAMENT and the PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION WITH THE LORD’S PRAYER are to be placed in THE RESPONSE TO GOD.

1 Each Christian is to be engaged in ministry, see BCO Preamble, “there is only one ministry and that ministry is shared by all Christians.” This common ministry of all Christians, including the ministries of office, is grounded in Christian baptism and is receiving growing ecumenical liturgical emphasis.

2 See BCO Preamble, “The purpose of the Reformed Church in America . . . is to minister to the total life of all people by preaching, teaching, and proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ . . . and by all Christian good works.”

3 Ephesians 4:11-12

4 Luke 9:2

5 The 1987 order had six questions; this has eight. Some are shortened and two concerned with living a holy life are restored from the 1968, 1908, 1882, and earlier liturgy.

6 See 1987 order.

7 This wording is used in the Liturgy of 1968, 1908, and 1882.

8 The English translation of the Apostles’ Creed prepared by the English Language Liturgical Consultation (ELLC), 1988. This text was commended for use in the Reformed Church in America by the 1997 General Synod.

9 See Liturgy of 1987 and 1968.


11 See 1987 Liturgy.

12 This response makes it clear that the candidate is to be active in seeking God’s help.

13 This question contains important personal disciplines and recovers the attention to Godly/holy living found in the Liturgy of 1968, 1908, and 1882.
GENERAL SYNOD/JUNE 2000

14 See Liturgy of 1968, 1908, 1882.


16 See 1968 Liturgy.

17 Galatians 2:9

18 Adapted from John 21:15-17; 1 Timothy 4:13-16; 6:20,21; and 1 Peter 5:4.

19 The English translation of the Lord’s Prayer prepared by the English Language Liturgical Consultation (ELLC), 1988. This text was commended for use in the Reformed Church in America by the 1997 General Synod.

ORDER FOR RECEPTION INTO THE CLASSIS AND INSTALLATION OF A MINISTER OF WORD AND SACRAMENT

The Book of Church Order (Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 2), directs that after a call to a minister of Word and sacrament to the pastorate of a church has been approved by the classis and accepted by the minister (BCO Chapter 1, Part II, Article 13, Section 7) the name of the person so called “shall be published in the church on three successive Sundays, so that opportunity may be afforded for the raising of lawful objections.” There being none, the classis shall install the minister of Word and sacrament according to the order for installation in the Liturgy. The classis shall appoint a time for the installation service and conduct the service with proper solemnity. A brief sermon suitable to the occasion shall be preached. The presiding officer of the classis shall begin following the proclamation of the Word.

PRESENTATION

Beloved in the Lord,
we have come to install a minister of Word and sacrament 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\(^1\) to witness to Jesus as Savior and Lord, and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>to love and serve those with whom they live and work.(^2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 his resurrection and ascension,
Christ gave gifts to the church.
These gifts 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.”\(^3\)
We stand within a tradition where God calls and empowers deacons, elders, and ministers of Word and sacrament. As these three offices are united in Christ, so also in the church, one office is not separate from the others. The minister of Word and sacrament does not serve without the elder and neither without the deacon. Together they enable the whole mission of the church.

*A representative of the congregation says:*

_N_________________ Church of the Reformed Church in America, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, has called NN____________________ (using full name) to be its pastor and teacher._

_The presiding officer continues:_

_The Classis of N___________________, has approved the call to NN____________________ to be pastor and teacher of this church._

_We invite you to come forward, N____________________ (using Christian name only), as a sign that you accept this call._

_The candidate comes before the classis and congregation and stands facing the presiding officer. The presiding officer continues:_

_Ministers are called to build up Christ’s church._

_They are to proclaim God’s Word, to declare forgiveness through Jesus Christ, to call publicly on the name of the Lord on behalf of the whole congregation, to celebrate Christ’s holy sacraments, baptizing and presiding at the Lord’s Supper._

_They are to be pastors and teachers, sharing people’s joys and sorrows, encouraging the faithful, recalling those who fall away, helping the sick and the dying._

_N____________________, you are here to be received into this classis and installed as pastor and teacher of this congregation._

_So all may know you are both willing and able to accept this call to ministry in Christ’s church, the classis asks you to reaffirm the vows you made at your ordination as a minister of Word and sacrament:_

_Do you confess together with us and the church throughout all ages your faith in one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?*

_Yes, truly, with all my heart._

_The presiding officer shall invite the congregation to stand:_

---

4. As these three offices are united in Christ, so also in the church, one office is not separate from the others.

5. The minister of Word and sacrament does not serve without the elder and neither without the deacon.

6. They are to be pastors and teachers, sharing people’s joys and sorrows, encouraging the faithful, recalling those who fall away, helping the sick and the dying.

7. Do you confess together with us and the church throughout all ages your faith in one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

8. Yes, truly, with all my heart.
Let us all stand with N________________, confessing our Christian 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 candidate shall remain standing.

Do you believe in your heart that you are called by Christ’s church, and therefore by God, to this ministry of Word and sacrament?

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 proclaim the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; upholding the witness of Holy Scripture against all schisms and heresies?

I will, and I ask God to help me.

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 church’s order and governance, submitting to ecclesiastical discipline should you become delinquent in either life or doctrine?

I will, and I ask God to help me.
Will you be loyal to the witness and work\textsuperscript{16} of the Reformed Church in America, using all your abilities to further its Christian mission here and throughout the world?

I will, and I ask God to help me.

Will you strive to fulfill faithfully, diligently, and cheerfully, all the duties of a minister of Christ:
- to preach the Word of God in sincerity,
- to administer the sacraments in purity,
- to maintain proper discipline in the household of God, and
- to shepherd the flock faithfully?\textsuperscript{17}

I will, and I ask God to help me.

If the minister being installed is already a member of the classis, proceed to the Installation.

RECEPTION INTO CLASSIS

N___________________, will you publicly declare your commitment to Christian ministry among us?

The candidate shall respond by reading aloud the Form of the Declaration for Ministers. The congregation will stand for the reading and signing of the formulary.

In the name of our Lord, welcome to N____________ Classis. We pledge our support, affection, and prayers while you live and work among us as a servant and minister of the Word of God.

The congregation may be seated while classis members and delegates extend the right hand of fellowship\textsuperscript{18} to the new member, then return to their places.

INSTALLATION

The person designated by the classis shall deliver the charge to the minister. The charge that follows shall be read. Additional brief counsel, if authorized by the classis, may be made before it.

Beloved servant in Christ, be attentive to yourself and to all the flock given to your care by the Holy Spirit.
Love Christ: feed his lambs, tend his sheep.
Be an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.
Attend to reading, prayer, study, preaching, and teaching.
Do not neglect the gift that is in you.
Put these things into practice, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress.
Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; continue in these things, for in doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers.

\[N\____________________,\ guard what has been entrusted to you.\]
And when the chief shepherd appears, you will win the crown of glory that never fades away.\[19\]

_The presiding officer shall continue._

Will all the members of \[N\____________________\] Church rise to affirm their covenant with the minister whom God has given them?

Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ, do you receive in the name of the Lord, this servant \[N\____________________\] to be your pastor and teacher?\[20\]

_We do._

Do you promise to receive with meekness and love the word of truth \(s/he\) proclaims?

_We do._

Do you promise to honor \(her/his\) authority, welcome \(her/his\) pastoral care, and follow as \(s/he\) guides you in serving Jesus Christ, the only head of the church?\[21\]

_We do._

Do you promise to encourage and pray for \(him/her\); to labor together in obedience to the Gospel for the honor of our Lord Jesus Christ, the unity, purity, and peace of the church, and the welfare of the whole world?\[22\]

_We do._

Do you promise \(him/her\) such financial and personal support\[23\] that \(s/he\) shall serve among you with joy and not with grief\[24\] as long as you covenant together?

_We do._

_The person designated by the classis shall deliver the charge to the congregation. The charge which follows shall be read. Additional brief counsel, if authorized by the classis, may be made before it._

Beloved people of God,
receive with joy your minister in the Lord.  
Remember God speaks to you through him/her.  
Receive the word s/he shall preach to you  
as it is in truth, the Word of God.  
Respect those who labor among you,  
esteem them highly in love  
because of their work.  
Let those who preach the gospel of peace,  
bringing good news and announcing salvation,  
be beautiful and pleasant to you.  

The presiding officer shall continue

In the name and by the authority of the Classis of N_________________,  
I now declare that the pastoral relationship  
between the Reverend NN___________________  
and the N_________________ Church  
is fully constituted, and that  
the Reverend NN___________________  
is a duly installed pastor and teacher of this church.  

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 N_________________,  
keep her/him strong and faithful,  
may s/he herald the joy of your kingdom,  
serving rather than being served.  

Give your grace to this congregation:  
strengthen them as they labor together,  
preserve them in peace,  
enlighten them through your Word.  

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;  
that 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 Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper should be celebrated; the newly-installed minister shall preside. The communion elements may be presented at this time. The service will conclude with a Hymn of Thanksgiving after Communion and the Benediction given by the newly-installed minister.

THE ORDER OF WORSHIP
FOR RECEPTION INTO THE CLASSIS
AND INSTALLATION
OF A
MINISTER OF WORD AND SACRAMENT

THE APPROACH TO GOD
VOTUM
SENTENCES
SALUTATION
HYMN
PRAYER OF CONFESSION
ASSURANCE OF PARDON
THE LAW OF GOD
GLORIA PATRI or another appropriate hymn

THE WORD OF GOD
PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION
LESSON/S
SERMON
PRAYER FOR BLESSING ON THE WORD
ORDER FOR RECEPTION INTO CLASSIS AND INSTALLATION OF A MINISTER OF WORD AND SACRAMENT*
    PRESENTATION
    RECEPTION INTO CLASSIS
CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

INSTALLATION
PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION WITH THE LORD’S PRAYER
THE PEACE
THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD’S SUPPER

THE RESPONSE TO GOD
HYMN OF THANKSGIVING AFTER COMMUNION
BENEDICTION

*If the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper is not to be celebrated, the Order for Reception into the Classis and Installation of a Minister of Word and Sacrament and the Prayers of Intercession with the Lord’s Prayer are to be placed in The Response to God.

1 Each Christian is to be engaged in ministry, see BCO Preamble, “there is only one ministry and that ministry is shared by all Christians.” This common ministry of all Christians, including the ministries of office, is grounded in Christian baptism and is receiving growing ecumenical liturgical emphasis.

2 See BCO Preamble, “The purpose of the Reformed Church in America . . . is to minister to the total life of all people by preaching, teaching, and proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ . . . and by all Christian good works.”

3 Ephesians 4:11-12


5 See BCO Preamble, “The particular ministries of those who hold office arise out of this common ministry [to announce the good news of his Saviorhood and extend his Lordship throughout the world] in order to serve it.”

6 Luke 9:2

7 See 1987 order.

8 This wording is used in the Liturgy of 1968, 1908, and 1882.

9 The English translation of the Apostles’ Creed prepared by the English Language Liturgical Consultation (ELLC), 1988. This text was commended for use in the Reformed Church in America by the 1997 General Synod.

10 See Liturgy of 1987 and 1968.


12 See 1987 Liturgy.

13 This response makes it clear that the candidate is to be active in seeking God’s help.

14 This question contains important personal disciplines and recovers the attention to Godly/holy living found in the Liturgy of 1968, 1908, and 1882.

15 See Liturgy of 1968, 1908, 1882.

See 1968 Liturgy.

Galatians 2:9

Adapted from John 21:15-17; 1 Timothy 4:13-16; 6:20,21; and 1 Peter 5:4.

See Liturgy and Psalms, 1968, also 1908, and 1882.

See Presbyterian Worshipbook.

See Liturgy and Psalms, 1968, also 1908, and 1882.

See Worship the Lord, 1987

Liturgy 1882

See Liturgy and Psalms, 1968 and earlier.

1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13

See Isaiah 52:7 and Liturgy, 1882.


See Worship the Lord, 1987.

The English translation of the Lord’s Prayer prepared by the English Language Liturgical Consultation (ELLC), 1988. This text was commended for use in the Reformed Church in America by the 1997 General Synod.

R-39

To approve the “Order for Ordination to the Office of Minister of Word and Sacrament” and the “Order for Reception into the Classis and Installation of a Minister of Word and Sacrament” and to recommend them to the classes for approval. (ADOPTED)

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 (Chapter 1, Part I, Article 1, Sections 8 and 10). These shall be made known to the congregation prior to election to office and these office holders shall acquaint themselves therewith.

The BCO (Chapter 1, Part I, 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 used as an installation.

After the sermon and the prayer for blessing on the Word, as part of the Response to God, 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 
where God calls and empowers 
deacons, elders, and ministers of Word and sacrament.

*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),
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, the presiding minister 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.

Deacons are set apart 
for a ministry of mercy, service, and outreach. 
They gather gifts and offerings, 
care for them faithfully, and 
distribute them with wisdom and compassion 
to persons in need and 
for purposes that advance God’s kingdom on earth. 
Deacons visit and comfort the distressed; 
provide for whatever necessities may arise, and 
assist the congregation at services of worship.
Elders are set apart
for a ministry of watchful and responsible care
for the welfare and order of the church.\textsuperscript{7}
They have oversight of all members,
including one another, the deacons, and the ministers,\textsuperscript{8}
equipping everyone to live in harmony with God’s Word.\textsuperscript{9}
They ensure the Word of God
is rightly proclaimed and taught, and
the sacraments faithfully administered.\textsuperscript{10}
Elders assist the minister/s with their good counsel; and
serve all Christians
with advice, consolation, and encouragement.\textsuperscript{11}

Elders and deacons, together with the minister/s,
form the consistory\textsuperscript{12}
to lead God’s people in proclaiming
good news to the poor,
righteousness to the nations, and
peace among all.\textsuperscript{13}
The consistory provides for the welfare of the church,
stewardship of property and finance,\textsuperscript{14} and
the spiritual benefit and growth of all Christ’s people.

As the three offices of deacon, elder, and minister of Word and sacrament,
are united in Christ,
so also in the church one office is not separate from the others.
The minister of Word and sacrament does not serve without the elder
and neither without the deacon.\textsuperscript{15}
Together they enable the whole mission of the church.

Everything in the church will be done decently and in order\textsuperscript{16}
when faithful persons are called to office,\textsuperscript{17} and
responsibly fulfill their charge.\textsuperscript{18}

\textit{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, 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 church’s order and governance, submitting to ecclesiastical discipline should you become delinquent in either life or doctrine?  

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?  

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
strive to advance God’s reign of justice and peace?\textsuperscript{26}

I will, and I ask God to help me.

\textit{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?\textsuperscript{27}

I will, and I ask God to help me.

ORDINATION

\textit{Those who are to be ordained shall kneel individually before the presiding minister for prayer with the laying on of hands. The great consistory may join in the laying on of hands during the prayer. When all have come forward and are in place, the presiding minister shall say:}

Let us pray.

God of grace,
pour out your Holy Spirit,
gentle as a dove, burning as fire,
upon \textit{N (using Christian name only)}
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. \textbf{Amen.}

\textit{When all ordinands have received prayer with 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 \textit{NNs (using full names)}
are ordained to the Office of Deacon and
\textit{NNs} are ordained to the Office of Elder.

INSTALLATION

\textit{Elders and deacons of the great consistory extend the right hand of fellowship to the new elders and deacons before returning to their places. All elders and deacons being installed face the congregation. The presiding minister addresses them:}

Elders \textit{N/s (using Christian names)},
and deacons \textit{N/s}
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.

The presiding minister addresses the congregation:

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 ordained servants of Christ?^{32}

We do.

Do you promise to respect them
for the sake of the offices
for which they have been chosen and ordained?^{33}

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?^{34}

We do.

Beloved people of God,
receive these deacons and elders as Christ’s own servants.^{35}
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 duly installed deacons and elders in this church.

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,^{16}
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.37

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.38

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.

THE ORDER OF WORSHIP FOR THE LORD’S DAY WITH ORDINATION AND INSTALLATION OF DEACONS AND ELDERS

THE APPROACH TO GOD
VOTUM
SENTENCES
SALUTATION
HYMN
PRAYER OF CONFESSION
ASSURANCE OF PARDON
THE LAW OF GOD
GLORIA PATRI OR ANOTHER APPROPRIATE HYMN

THE WORD OF GOD
PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION
LESSON/S
SERMON
PRAYER FOR BLESSING ON THE WORD

THE RESPONSE TO GOD
ORDER FOR ORDINATION AND INSTALLATION OF DEACONS AND ELDERS
PRESENTATION
ORDINATION
INSTALLATION
PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION WITH THE LORD’S PRAYER
THE PEACE
OFFERING
HYMN
Benediction

1 This order follows the same pattern as the orders 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; Chap. 1, Part I, Article 1, Sec. 10; 1 Timothy 3:2-13

4 Book of Church Order, Chap. 1, Part I, Article 1, Sec. 10

5 Liturgy. 1968, 1908, 1882

6 Liturgy, 1968

7 Book of Church Order, Preamble; Chap. 1, Part I, Article 1, Sec. 8; Liturgy, 1968, 1908

8 “[Elders] exercise an oversight over the conduct of one another, and of the deacons, and of the minister/s,” Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 1, Sec. 8.

9 Book of Church Order, Chap. 1, Part I, Article 1, Sec. 8; Liturgy, 1968, 1908, 1882

10 Belgic Confession, Article 30; Book of Church Order, Chap. 1, Part I, Article 1, Sec. 8; Liturgy, 1968, 1908, 1882

11 Book of Church Order, Chap. 1, Part I, Article 1, Sec. 8; Liturgy, 1968, 1908, 1882

12 Book of Church Order, Chap. 1, Part I, Article 1, Sec. 2; Liturgy, 1968

13 Our Song of Hope, VI. 16
14 *Book of Church Order*, Chap. 1, Part I, Article 2, Sec. 9; *Liturgy*, 1968

15 *Liturgy* 1968

16 1 Corinthians 14:40

17 *Belgic Confession*, Article 30

18 *Liturgy* 1987; 1968

19 The English translation of the Apostles’ Creed prepared by the English Language Liturgical Consultation (ELLC), 1988. This text was commended for use in the Reformed Church in America by the 1997 General Synod.

20 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.


22 *Liturgy* 1987, 1968

23 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.

24 *Liturgy* 1968


26 *Liturgy* 1987

27 *Liturgy*, 1987, 1968, 1908, 1882

28 *Liturgy*, 1987, 1968, 1908


30 Titus 1:8

31 1 Timothy 3:9; *Liturgy*, 1908, 1882

32 *Liturgy*, 1968

33 *Liturgy*, 1987, 1968

34 *Liturgy* 1968, 1908, 1882.

35 *Liturgy*, 1908

36 *Liturgy*, 1882

37 Galatians 6:9; 1 Thessalonians 3:13

38 The English translation of the Lord’s Prayer prepared by the English Language Liturgical
Consultation (ELLC), 1988. This text was commended for use in the Reformed Church in America by the 1997 General Synod.

**R-40**

To approve the “Order for the Ordination and Installation of Deacons and Elders” and to recommend it to the classes for approval.

A motion from the floor recommended to amend R-40 as follows (additions are underlined):

**R-40 (amendment)**

To approve the “Order for the Ordination and Installation of Deacons and Elders” with the understanding that the great consistory may be invited to participate in the laying on of hands and to recommend it to the classes for approval. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

**Organization of a New Church**

The need for a revised order for the organization of new churches first came to the commission in 1995. New church development pastors and classes expressed the desire to baptize and receive new members, ordain and install elders and deacons, and install a minister in one unified service. They did not want to baptize and receive members only (as provided for in the 1968 service); hold a congregational meeting to elect elders and deacons who would be ordained and installed at another service on another day; and then, at yet another time, install a minister into the new church. New church start ministers wanted to have a worship service that would celebrate all these things together. Classes, especially those spread over a large geographic area, did not want to come to organize the congregation and come back again several weeks later to install the minister.

The service of organization of a new church is complex, as many things are taking place. The commission did not work at this challenge in isolation. Church order questions were raised about how to do all of these things in ways that are both practical and honor the RCA’s polity. For guidance in resolving these questions the commission consulted with the Commission on Church Order and also with the director of Evangelism and Church Development Services.

As all of the constituent parts of this order were undergoing revision (the orders for Profession of Faith, Ordination and Installation of Deacons and Elders, and Installation of a Minister of Word and Sacrament) the commission realized this order could not be developed until that work was complete. Those three orders are now before this synod for recommendation to the classes. The commission recommends the “Proposed Order for Organization of a New Church” to the church for a three-year period of provisional use and comment.

**PROPOSED ORDER FOR THE ORGANIZATION OF A NEW CHURCH**

*The organization of a church is described in the Book of Church Order (Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Sections 11 and 22) and shall follow the procedures therein stated. A meeting of the classis shall be duly called and the president or other officer shall preside.*

“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 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.” (Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 11).

Prior to the day of organization, the classis, acting as a board of elders, shall meet with all those seeking to form the congregation by making a profession of faith (those who come for baptism, those previously baptized making an initial profession, those reaffirming faith, and those with a satisfactory certificate from another Christian congregation) using the “Order for Profession of Faith,” Part 1: Before the Elders. All candidates will be publicly received in the service for organization.

This service includes the orders for Profession of Faith, Ordination and Installation of Deacons and Elders, and Installation a Minister of Word and Sacrament. The developing congregation will have elected persons to be ordained and installed as elders and deacons. This emerging consistory shall have ascertained the mind of the congregation prior to seeking classis approval for a call to a minister of Word and sacrament.

After the prayer for blessing on the Word, the presiding classis officer continues:

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Friends in Christ, the Son of God through Spirit and Word, gathers, protects and preserves the Church chosen for eternal life, united in true faith. Believers, one and all, together in community, share in Christ and in all God’s treasures and gifts.

We are gathered in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and under the authority of the Reformed Church in America to organize a new church. On the ______ day of ______________, the Classis of N________________ approved the petition of this worshiping congregation to establish a church in this place.

Will the members and delegates of the classis please rise?

Do you, the Classis of N________________, consent to the organization of this new church?

We do.

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the authority of the Classis of N________________, I declare that a church of the Reformed Church in America is now to be established in this place.

ORDER FOR PROFESSION OF FAITH

PREPARATION AND PRESENTATION

The classis minister who has been serving the developing congregation 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

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.

A representative of the classis shall present all the candidates for baptism and profession of faith (those making initial profession, those reaffirming, and those transferring from other Christian churches) who will constitute the new congregation, using the following statements as appropriate; candidates shall come forward as their names are read.

The Classis of N ________________ has welcomed these persons
who appeared before them and made profession of their Christian faith.

Naming all candidates for baptism and initial profession of faith:

NN/s (using full names) ____________ come before us
to make public this profession of faith
and to receive the sacrament of baptism;

Naming all baptized persons, including those making initial profession of faith, those reaffirming faith, and those transferring membership from another congregation:
NN/s (using full names) have been baptized into the body of Christ.

In making public this profession of faith they affirm the meaning of their baptism.

If it is the congregation's desire to note the congregations from which transferring members are being received, there may be an additional statement, "NN/s _________ are received from (church name and location)."

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.

The minister who has been serving the developing congregation addresses the candidates:

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?

I will, and I ask God to help me.

If children of those being received are also to be baptized, the minister asks the parents:

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?

I will, and I ask God to help me.

The minister continues, addressing all candidates:
Do you promise to love, encourage, and support one another
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.

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?

We do.

The congregation and the candidates shall join in confessing the faith in the words of
the Apostles’ Creed. 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. III

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.

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,
free 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,
though 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 servants until life’s end.

➤➤➤ BLESSING AND WELCOME

The minister and all classis representatives may continue by laying hands on the heads of all those being received, offering the prayer for blessing.

Defend, O Lord, these your servants, 
with your heavenly grace, 
that they may continue yours forever, and 
daily increase in your Spirit more and more, 
until they come to your eternal kingdom; 
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The classis remains standing, the presiding classis officer continues:

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.

Welcome our brothers and sisters in Christ.

The classis responds:

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 presiding classis officer continues:

In the name and by the authority of the Classis of N_______________,
I now declare that these persons, here present, 
are a duly organized church of Jesus Christ 
under the care of the Classis of N_______________ 
of the Reformed Church in America, 
in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Thanks be to God.

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 (Chapter 1, Part I, Article 1, Sections 8 and 10). These shall be made known to the congregation prior to election to office.

Elders and deacons may be reelected, but shall not be reordained. When reelected the following order shall be used as an installation.

Following a hymn, the minister of the developing congregation shall begin:

PRESENTATION

Friends in Christ,
we are here 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.

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
where God calls and empowers
deacons, elders, and ministers of Word and sacrament.
As these three offices are united in Christ,
so also in the church, one office is not separate from the others.
The minister of Word and sacrament does not serve without the elder
and neither without the deacon.7
Together they enable the whole mission of the church.8

The minister invites the candidates forward, saying:

This congregation has elected the following people
to the offices of deacon and elder:

\[NN/s \text{ (using full names)}\]

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, the presiding officer continues:

Do you, the members of the \(N \) Reformed Church,
confirm that these people shall be ordained and installed
to the offices of elder and of deacon in this church?

We do.

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.
Deacons are set apart
for a ministry of
mercy, service, and outreach.
They gather gifts and offerings,
care for them faithfully, and
distribute them with wisdom and compassion
to persons in need and
for purposes that advance God’s kingdom on earth.
Deacons visit and comfort the distressed,
provide for whatever necessities may arise, and
assist the congregation at services of worship.

Elders are set apart
for a ministry of watchful and responsible care
for the welfare and order of the church.
They have oversight of all members,
including one another, the deacons, and the ministers,
equipping everyone to live in harmony with God’s Word.
They ensure the Word of God
is rightly proclaimed and taught, and
the sacraments faithfully administered.
Elders assist the minister/s with their good counsel; and
serve all Christians
with advice, consolation, and encouragement.

Elders and deacons, together with the minister/s,
form the consistory
to lead God’s people in proclaiming
good news to the poor,
righteousness to the nations, and
peace among all.
The consistory provides for the welfare of the church,
stewardship of property and finance, and
the spiritual benefit and growth of all Christ’s people.

As the three offices of deacon, elder, and minister of Word and sacrament,
are united in Christ,
so also in the church one office is not separate from the others.
The minister of Word and sacrament does not serve without the elder
and neither without the deacon.\(^9\)
Together they enable the whole mission of the church.

Everything in the church will be done decently and in order
when faithful persons are called to office, and
responsibly fulfill their charge.

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.

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 church’s order and governance, submitting to ecclesiastical discipline should you become delinquent in either life or doctrine?

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?

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 strive to advance God’s reign of justice and peace?

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?

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 office may join in
the laying on of hands. When all have come forward and are in place, the presiding minister shall continue:

Let us pray.

God of grace,
pour out your Holy Spirit
gentle as a dove, burning as fire,
upon N (using Christian name only)__________________________
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 prayer with 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 NNs(fusing full names)__________________________
are ordained to the office of Deacon and
NNs____________________________________
are ordained to the office of Elder.

INSTALLATION

Those who participated in the laying on of hands extend the right hand of fellowship to the new elders and deacons before returning to their places. All elders and deacons being installed face the congregation, the presiding minister continues:

Elders N/s(using Christian names),
and deacons N/s__________________________,
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.

The presiding minister addresses the congregation:

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 ordained 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 duly installed deacons and elders in this church.

Thanks be to God.

ORDER FOR INSTALLATION OF A MINISTER OF WORD AND SACRAMENT

The Book of Church Order (Chapter 1, Part II, Article 2, Section 2) directs that after a call to a minister of Word and sacrament to the pastorate of a church has been approved by the classis and accepted by the minister, the classis shall install the minister of Word and sacrament according to the order for installation in the Liturgy.

A hymn may be sung. The classis presiding officer continues:

PRESENTATION

Friends in Christ, we are here to install a minister of Word and sacrament in Christ’s holy church.

A representative of the congregation says:

N__________ Church of the Reformed Church in America, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, has prepared to call NN (using full name) to be its pastor and teacher.

The presiding officer addresses the newly-installed elders and deacons:

Do you, the newly-installed consistory of N__________ Reformed Church, confirm this call?

We do.

The presiding officer continues:

The Classis of N__________, has approved the call to NN (using full name) to be pastor and teacher of this church.

We invite you to come forward, N (Christian name only).
as a sign that you accept this call.

*The candidate comes before the classis and congregation, standing in front of the presiding officer; the presiding officer continues:*

Ministers are called to build up Christ’s church.

They are to proclaim God’s Word, 
to declare forgiveness through Jesus Christ, 
to call publicly on the name of the Lord 
on behalf of the whole congregation, 
to celebrate Christ’s holy sacraments, 
baptizing and presiding at the Lord’s Supper.

They are to be pastors and teachers, 
sharing people’s joys and sorrows, 
encouraging the faithful, recalling those who fall away, 
helping the sick and the dying.

*____________________, you are here to be received into this classis and installed into the new ministry of this call.*

So all may know you are both willing and able to accept this call to ministry in Christ’s church, the classis asks you to reaffirm the vows you made at your ordination as a minister of Word and sacrament:

Do you confess together with us and the church throughout all ages your faith in one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

*Yes, truly, with all my heart.*

Do you believe in your heart that you are called by Christ’s church, and therefore by God, to this ministry of Word and sacrament?

*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 proclaim the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; upholding the witness of Holy Scripture against all schisms and heresies?

*I will, and I ask God to help me.*

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 church’s order and governance, submitting to ecclesiastical discipline should you become delinquent in either life or doctrine?

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?

I will, and I ask God to help me.

Will you strive to fulfill faithfully, diligently, and cheerfully, all the duties of a minister of Christ: to preach the Word of God in sincerity, to administer the sacraments in purity, to maintain proper discipline in the household of God, and to shepherd the flock faithfully?

I will, and I ask God to help me.

If the minister is already a member of the classis, continue at the INSTALLATION.

RECEPTION INTO CLASSIS

N_______________________, will you publicly declare your commitment to Christian ministry among us?

The candidate shall respond by reading aloud the Form of the Declaration for Ministers. The congregation will stand for the reading and signing of the formulary.

In the name of our Lord, welcome to N_______________________ Classis. We pledge our support, affection, and prayers while you live and work among us as a servant and minister of the Word of God.

The congregation may be seated while classis members and delegates extend the right hand of fellowship to the new member, then return to their places.

INSTALLATION

The person designated by the classis shall deliver the charge to the minister. The charge that follows shall be read. Additional brief counsel, if authorized by the classis, may be made before it.

Beloved servant in Christ, be attentive to yourself and to all the flock given to your care by the Holy Spirit. Love Christ: feed his lambs, tend his sheep. Be an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Attend to reading, prayer, study,
Do not neglect the gift that is in you. Put these things into practice, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress. Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; continue in these things, for in doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers.

N______________, guard what has been entrusted to you.
And when the chief shepherd appears, you will win the crown of glory that never fades away.

The presiding officer shall continue.

Will all the members of N_________________________ Church rise to affirm their covenant with the minister whom God has given them?
Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ, do you receive in the name of the Lord, this servant N___________________ to be your pastor and teacher?

We do.

Do you promise to receive with meekness and love the word of truth he/she proclaims?

We do.

Do you promise to honor her/his authority, welcome her/his pastoral care, and follow as s/he guides you in serving Jesus Christ, the only head of the church?

We do.

Do you promise to encourage and pray for him/her; to labor together in obedience to the gospel for the honor of our Lord Jesus Christ, the unity, purity, and peace of the church, and the welfare of the whole world?

We do.

Do you promise him/her such financial and personal support that he/she shall serve among you with joy and not with grief as long as you covenant together?

We do.
The person designated by the classis shall deliver the charge to the congregation. The charge that follows shall be read. Additional brief counsel, if authorized by the classis, may be made before it.

Beloved people of God,
receive with joy your minister in the Lord.
Remember God speaks to you through him/her.
Receive the word s/he shall preach to you
as it is in truth, the Word of God.
Respect those who labor among you,
estem them highly in love
because of their work.
Let those who preach the gospel of peace,
bringing good news and announcing salvation,
be beautiful and pleasant to you.

The presiding officer shall continue

In the name and by the authority
of the Classis of N________________,
I now declare that the pastoral relationship
between the Reverend NN (using full name)
and the N__________________ Church
is fully constituted, and that
the Reverend NN__________________________
is a duly installed pastor and teacher of this church.

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 N________________,
keep her/him strong and faithful,
may s/he herald the joy of your kingdom,
serving rather than being served.

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.

Give your grace to this congregation,
that they may support these deacons and elders
with prayer, cooperation, and encouragement,
to guard them from growing weary in doing what is right.\(^{11}\)

May your grace strengthen all your people
as they labor together;
preserve them in peace, and
enlighten them through your Word.

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;
that they be fair, maintain order,
support those in need, 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.\textsuperscript{12}

The peace of Christ be with you.
And also with you.

The Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper shall be celebrated; the newly-installed minister shall preside. The communion elements may be presented at this time with the offering. The service will conclude with a Hymn of Thanksgiving and the Benediction given by the newly-installed minister.

THE ORDER OF WORSHIP
FOR THE ORGANIZATION OF A NEW CHURCH

THE APPROACH TO GOD
VOTUM
SENTENCES
SALUTATION
GENERAL SYNOD/JUNE 2000

HYMN
PRAYER OF CONFESSION
ASSURANCE OF PARDON
THE LAW OF GOD
ACCLAMATION OF PRAISE

THE WORD OF GOD
PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION
LESSON
SERMON
PRAYER FOR BLESSING ON THE WORD
ORDER FOR THE ORGANIZATION OF A NEW CHURCH
STATEMENT OF PURPOSE
PREPARATION AND PRESENTATION
THE BAPTISMAL COVENANT
BLESSING AND WELCOME
HYMN OF THANKSGIVING
ORDER FOR THE ORDINATION AND INSTALLATION OF DEACONS AND ELDERS
PRESENTATION
ORDINATION
RESPONSE TO ORDINATION
HYMN OF THANKSGIVING
ORDER FOR INSTALLATION OF A MINISTER OF WORD AND SACRAMENT
PRESENTATION
RECEPTION INTO CLASSIS, if needed
INSTALLATION
PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION WITH THE LORD’S PRAYER
THE PEACE
OFFERING
THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD’S SUPPER

THE RESPONSE TO GOD
HYMN OF THANKSGIVING AFTER COMMUNION
BENEDICTION

1 Liturgy and Psalms, 1968, with adaptations.

2 Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 54-55

3 “Provisional Order for Profession of Faith,” 1999

4 The English translation of the Apostles’ Creed prepared by the English Language Liturgical Consultation (ELLC), 1988. This text was commended for use in the Reformed Church in America by the 1997 General Synod.

5 Belgic Confession, Articles 33 and 34.

6 “Provisional Order for the Ordination and Installation of Deacons and Elders,” 1999, with adaptations


8 See BCO Preamble, “The particular ministries of those who hold office arise out of this common ministry [to announce the good news of his Saviorhood and extend his Lordship throughout the world] in order to serve it.”

9 Liturgy 1968
CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

10 “Provisional Order for Installation and Reception into Classis of a Minister of Word and Sacrament,” 1998

11 Galatians 6:9; 1 Thessalonians 3:13

12 The English translation of the Lord’s Prayer prepared by the English Language Liturgical Consultation (ELLC), 1988. This text was commended for use in the Reformed Church in America by the 1997 General Synod.

R-41
To approve and distribute to RCA classes, congregations, and others involved with new church development, the “Proposed Order for the Organization of a New Church” for a three-year period of study and provisional use, with responses submitted to the Commission on Christian Worship by January 1, 2003.

A motion from the floor recommended to amend R-41 as follows (additions are underlined):

R-41 (amendment)
To approve and distribute to RCA classes, congregations, and others involved with new church development, the “Proposed Order for the Organization of a New Church,” with the understanding that the great consistory may be invited to participate in the laying on of hands, for a three-year period of study and provisional use, with responses submitted to the Commission on Christian Worship by January 1, 2003. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

Work in Progress

The commission has begun an initial review of an “Order for Installation into a Specialized Ministry of a Minister of Word and Sacrament,” based on the related orders for installation to the offices of the church. The order will be presented to chaplains for their input. Discussion also continues on orders for commissioning Christians to the ministries of the church. The commission has begun reviewing the orders for Christian marriage and for Christian burial.

Finally, the commission wishes to express the gratitude of the church to those who are completing their terms of service: the Rev. Dennis TeBeest, who has served as moderator, and Carol Myers, who has served as a consultant. For the past several years they have generously given of their time and energy to the work of the commission and the life of the church. Each has made invaluable contributions to the process of revising the current orders and preparing worship resources for the church. Their gifts and the care and commitment they brought to the task are deeply appreciated.

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.

Worship Resources and Education

Three liturgical orders: the Order of Worship for the Lord’s Day (including the Order for the Celebration of the Lord’s Supper, the Order for the Sacrament of Baptism, and the Order for Healing, are posted on the RCA website and can be downloaded for use. Two additional orders that were approved for provisional use by the 1999 General Synod, Profession of Faith and Ordination and Installation of Elders and Deacons, are also posted on the RCA website. Pending final approval of these latter two, these five orders 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 (CRC) 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 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 has 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.
- Responsive and metrical Psalms and canticles (which will include songs in all three of the above types).

The committee 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 hymnsings to provide RCA and CRC members the opportunity to sing some of the songs under consideration and to offer suggestions. The 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.

The committee is also working on a leader’s edition with musical helps, descants, instrumental parts, performance notes, and additional worship resources. Publication of Sing! A New Creation and the leader’s edition is expected in 2001.

Welcoming New Christians: The Congregation’s Ministry of Making Disciples

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 doing what it does, 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 a way of welcoming, nurturing, and supporting those who are new to the Christian faith. It is a ministry of the whole congregation that 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, has 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. In February representatives of eight RCA congregations who have attended training events met to share experiences and provide guidance for further development of catechumenal ministry in the Reformed Church. In May a three-day training event planned in cooperation with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) will be held in Grand Rapids, Michigan, hosted by the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship. Additional workshops and training events will be held in other regions of the church. The RCA Distribution Center/ TRA VARCA also carries a number of both print and video resources for catechumenal ministry.
From the Report of the President

In response to P-3 of the report of the president (p. 39), the advisory committee recommended:

**R-42**
To urge all of the classes of the Reformed Church in America to gather for worship and celebrate their common work in annual or biennial festivals of ministry and mission. (ADOPTED)

Reason: To provide an opportunity for the classes to enrich their own lives and nurture the lives of their congregations.

In response to P-4 of the report of the president (p. 40), the advisory committee recommended:

**R-43**
To strongly urge congregations to utilize their deacons as well as elders in offering prayers of intercession in corporate worship, and to direct the Office of Diaconal Ministries and the Office of Worship to distribute models of such prayers to all of the RCA's congregations and consistories. (ADOPTED)

Reason: To further recognize and develop the offices of deacon and elder together with minister of Word and sacrament in the full pastorate.
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 8, 1999, at Sage Library at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, where the RCA archives are located; and on March 13, 2000, at the denominational offices at 475 Riverside Drive in New York City.

Historical Directory 2000

At its October 1997 meeting the commission approved the publication of the *Historical Directory of the Reformed Church in America (1628-2000)*. This directory includes names of all RCA ordained ministers, career missionaries, and staff, as well as congregations from the birth of the denomination in 1628 through January 1 of this year. The directory will soon be available for all who would like to avail themselves of an invaluable historical resource.

New Publications in 2000

The commission is active in publishing the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America under the general editorship of the Rev. Dr. Donald Bruggink. Thirty-two volumes have appeared since the inception of the series in 1968. The commission is pleased to announce the publication of three additional volumes that are available for sale at this General Synod meeting. These volumes are: *Equipping the Saints, the Synod of New York 1800-2000*, edited by the Rev. James Brumm; *Constitutional Theology: a Commentary on the Book of Church Order*, by the Rev. Allan Janssen; and *Raising the Dead: Sermons by Howard Hageman*, which includes a reprinting of “We Call This Friday Good.”

Other volumes are either in the process of being written or in the process of publication. The commission encourages persons who are contemplating RCA research projects to contact the commission and ascertain how the commission may offer assistance.

Ongoing Concerns

The commission continues to be concerned with the lack of clarity in the church at large about the location and scope of the RCA archives. At its March meeting the commission requested the General Synod Council to communicate to the church that all pertinent records from the General Synod, regional synods, and classes be deposited in these denominational archives as per the *Book of Church Order* (Chapter I, Part II, Article 5, Section 2; Part III, Article 5, Section 4; Part IV, Article 5, Section 3.)
From the Report of the General Synod Council’s Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee

REPORT OF THE RCA ARCHIVES AND OFFICE OF HISTORICAL SERVICES

Introduction

“The church that really takes advantage of what it has lived through and accomplished in a past generation is a church that has a great future,” John W. Beardslee III expressed recently. The archival task in the Reformed Church in America is to preserve the essential documentation of the life and ministry of the church. The archives has the responsibility for the stewardship of the RCA’s heritage so that tomorrow has a yesterday.

This ministry of memory seeks to provide a collective memory for the denomination so that the RCA remembers its response to God’s call over the span of centuries. Such memory is preserved in the documentation preserved from congregations, classes, regional synods, and general synod staff and agencies. These materials represent the daily life and work of the whole church as witnessed to in letters, reports, minutes, agenda documents, video and audio tapes, printed resources, and other materials.

The most important task of the archives is to preserve those materials that are the most important part of the RCA’s memory and to dispose of those routine documents that do not significantly offer evidence about the daily life and ministry of the RCA. Not everything is saved, nor is everything worthy of permanent preservation. The archives must select those documents that adequately serve as the church’s long-term memory and that the church needs for its administrative, financial, legal, and historical purposes.

Responsibilities of the Office

The Office of Historical Services is responsible for the ministry of memory and the corresponding management of the archives of the Reformed Church in America. It is staffed solely by the RCA archivist and is a part of Policy, Planning, and Administrative Services. The RCA archives obtain space in the Gardner A. Sage Library at New Brunswick Theological Seminary. This location provides a rich resource for the seminary and easy access to books and other research material both for the archivist and for researchers who use the archives. As a staff function of the General Synod Council, the office provides many historical services to staff, agencies, and congregations throughout the denomination. In 1999 the archivist answered 334 research requests. These included assistance to 117 genealogists and family historians and 217 other researchers. In 1999 there were 158 visits to the archives on 94 days by individuals who used the materials for their own research needs.

The major responsibilities of the office include:

1. Collecting, arranging, preserving, and making available the records of the denomination. These include:
   a. Appraising and transporting records from congregations and denominational offices.
   b. Arranging, describing, and making available those records that are open to public research use.
   c. Working with and assisting a wide range of researchers who are engaged in historical study of either the RCA or its mission efforts.
   d. Assisting RCA staff and agencies 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 Synodical Legislation*.

4. Providing historical background studies for staff, agencies, and congregations, as needed.

5. Managing the RCA Historical Society and producing *Historical Highlights* and other resources.

6. Providing assistance and workshops for congregations in writing congregational histories, celebrating anniversaries, and preserving congregational records.

**Major Accomplishments in 1999**

The most significant project accomplished this past year was the successful start of the Gerald and Jeanne De Jong Internship in the RCA archives. This is an annual program in which a junior or senior student from Northwestern College spends the spring semester full-time in the RCA archives learning how to be an archivist. The program is a rigorous one with readings in Reformed church history, participation in a course on archival administration at Rutgers University’s School of Communication, Information, and Library Science, as well as full-time work processing records, handling research and reference requests, and engaging in other day-to-day tasks in the archives. The program has accepted its second intern for the year 2000, Christina Sweet, a junior at Northwestern. The archives will be seeking contributions from individuals to support the expenses of the internship.

During the summer of 1999 the first intern, Erica McLauglin, spent a month at the offices of the Regional Synod of Canada, training staff and assisting in the establishment of an archival center in that office. She has spent her time following graduation from Northwestern providing archival services for the Collegiate Church of New York, which has a significant collection of records dating back to the early 1600s as the first congregation in the RCA. The RCA archivist continues to provide assistance, resources, and training to congregations in the storage, retention, and use of their historical records.

In response to an action of General Synod encouraging congregations to preserve the RCA’s collective history by recording or videotaping the reminiscences of long-term members and individuals with special faith stories (*MGS 1999*, R-35, p. 167), the archivist began a pilot program with the United Reformed Church in Clifton, New Jersey, taping the stories of the oldest members of that congregation. The archivist spent several days videotaping interviews. This project will continue in order to produce resources and guidelines that will assist congregations that are beginning similar projects.

The archives produced its first compact disk of historical resources for use by a class in Reformed Church history at New Brunswick Theological Seminary. This project launched an effort to provide “electronic” archives to researchers and others interested in the history of the RCA. The current CD includes all of the Occasional Paper series of the RCA Historical Society, source material on the name of the Reformed Church, the 1992 edition of the *Historical Directory*, and documents relating to the RCA’s ecumenical work since 1968. Additional information is added as needed and requested.

The archivist has also continued to work on the update to the *Digest and Index of Synodical Legislation* and is intensively working on the next edition of the *Historical Directory of the Reformed Church in America, 1628-2000*. The Office of Historical Services engages in providing a variety of historical and resource materials that are available in print, on disk, via email, and on the RCA’s web site.
Denominational Records

The Office of Historical Services serves as the official archives for the Reformed Church in America and transfers records on a regular basis in accordance with the requirements of the *Book of Church Order* from congregations, classes, regional synods, and staff offices. Records continue to be appraised and transferred to the archives on a regular basis. Among the records processed during the last year were:

Boards, Agencies, and Missions

Arabian Mission Book Project. Records belonging first to Edwin Luidens and then to Lewis R. Scudder III. These records were created in the course of writing a history of the Arabian mission of the Reformed Church in America for publication in the RCA Historical Series. Records include correspondence, interviews with missionaries and staff, collected archival materials from individuals and other sources; the author’s notes, outlines, and plans for the book; and sources and publications.

General Synod

Office of the General Secretary. Correspondence and subject files of the general secretary covering the years 1994 to 1997. Files relate to the Statement of Mission and Vision, classis actions in the Classes of Muskegon and Southwest Michigan, and papers and logs of meetings.

General Synod Council

Adult Volunteer Services. Records of the coordinator for adult volunteer services, Richard Vander Voet, covering the period from 1995 through 1997. The records include correspondence with denominational staff regarding volunteer sites and opportunities, with the volunteers, and with site contacts.

RCA Mission Services: Middle East and Stewardship. Records of the coordinator for mission stewardship and supervisor of RCA mission programs in the Middle East from 1982 to 1996. Records include missionary correspondence and personnel files.

Classical Records

Classis of South Grand Rapids. Minutes of the Classis of South Grand Rapids covering the period from May 1, 1994, through March 16, 1999.

Montgomery Classis: Reformed Church Women. Records of the secretary of the Women’s Classical Union of Schenectady from 1959 to 1964. Records include minutes, newsletters, promotional materials, and information relating to the structure of the National Department of Women’s Work and the restructure into Reformed Church Women.

Local Church Records

Enid, Oklahoma. First Missionary Baptist Church. Plaque presented to the RCA by First Missionary Baptist Church. It reads: “Presented to Reformed Church of America with grateful appreciation for all of your dedication and commitment to the First Missionary Baptist Church 1998.” Church located in Enid, Oklahoma, was destroyed by arson. RCA provided financial support and assistance with rebuilding. The Rev. Alfred Baldwin visited and addressed synod in 1997 (*MGS 1997*, p. 24).

CHristian Heritage and Communications


Orlando, Florida. Hope Community Church. Records of Hope Community church, organized in 1962. Records include consistory minutes, elders’ and deacons’ minutes, women’s group records, financial reports, photographs, brochures, and bulletins.


The advisory committee brought the following new recommendation:

R-44 (new)
To instruct the archivist to urge all RCA congregations to preserve and maintain their vital church records; and further, to encourage RCA congregations to deposit their pertinent church records in the RCA Archives. (ADOPTED)

Reason: Some RCA congregations, including new church starts, may not be aware of the importance of these records and their value for the future.

From the Report of the General Synod Council’s Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee

NECROLOGY

Howard Bliss Scholten March 8, 1999 91
Thurman Cook April 2, 1999 61
Anita J. Welwood May 3, 1999 91
Charles Wissink May 13, 1999 91
Robert Clementz May 15, 1999 79
Clarence Van Heukelom August 23, 1999 73
Nelson Van Raalte August 28, 1999 93
Daniel H. Fylstra August 30, 1999 77
Charles Unger August 30, 1999 94
Harmon Wierenga October 1, 1999 82
Norman G. Van Heukelom October 14, 1999 73
Howard Bliss Scholten

Howard Bliss Scholten was born at Alton, Iowa, on December 31, 1907. He studied at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1930. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1933.

Howard was licensed by the Classis of Holland in 1933 and ordained by the Classis of Grand Rapids the same year. He pastored the church at Ada, Michigan, from 1933 to 1936 and Grace, San Francisco, California, from 1940 to 1942. He served as a missionary pastor for the Particular Synod of Chicago from 1936 to 1940 and as a chaplain in the United States Army from 1942 to 1949. He was ordained in the Episcopal Church in 1949, where he served for the remainder of his ministry.

Howard Scholten died on March 8, 1999, at Walnut Creek, California. He was ninety-one years old.

Thurman “Happy” Cook

Thurman Cook was a graduate of Cook College and Theological Omo ho School in Tempe, Arizona. He served as a world mission program associate, serving Umo ho Reformed Church in Macy, Nebraska, since 1987.

Thurman Cook died on April 2, 1999, at Macy, Nebraska. He was sixty-one years old.

Anita J. Welwood

Anita J. Welwood served as executive director of the Department of Women’s Work (now Reformed Church Women’s Ministries) from 1959 to 1972. She also served as an elder in Fair Street Reformed Church in Kingston, New York.

Anita Welwood died on May 3, 1999, in Ulster, New York. She was ninety-one years old.

Charles B. Wissink

Charles B. Wissink was born at Alton, Iowa, on November 4, 1907. He studied at Central College, from which he graduated in 1930. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1933.

Charles was licensed by the Classis of West Sioux in 1933 and ordained by the Classis of Kalamazoo the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Hopkins Community, Hopkins, Michigan, from 1933 to 1936; Central, Muskegon, Michigan, from 1936 to 1945; Fifth, Grand Rapids, Michigan, from 1945 to 1953; First, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, from 1953 to 1956; Richmond, Grand Rapids, Michigan, from 1956 to 1969; Ada, Michigan, from 1969 until his retirement in 1972. Charles also served as a senior pastor for the Board of Pensions and as minister of parish life at Fifth Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in 1973.

Charles Wissink died on May 13, 1999, at Grand Rapids, Michigan. He was ninety-one years old.
years old.

**Robert Clementz**

Robert Clementz was born at Hackensack, New Jersey, on July 28, 1919. He studied at Bloomfield College, from which he graduated in 1942. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1944.

Robert was licensed by the Classis of Palisades in 1944 and ordained by the Classis of Greene the same year. He pastored the following congregations: First, Coxsackie, New York, from 1944 to 1950; New Prospect, Pine Bush, New York, from 1950 to 1952; Newburgh, New York, from 1952 to 1959; Stone Ridge, New York, from 1959 to 1973; and Athenia, Clifton, New Jersey, from 1973 to 1983.

Robert Clementz died on May 15, 1999, at Old Bridge, New Jersey. He was seventy-nine years old.

**Clarence Van Heukelom**

Clarence Van Heukelom was born at Leighton, Iowa, on April 24, 1926. He studied at Central College, from which he graduated in 1949. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1952. He received certification in Clinical Pastoral Education in 1954.

Clarence was licensed and ordained by the Classis of Pella in 1953. He began his ministry as a chaplain at Bethesda Hospital in Denver, Colorado, in 1953. In 1957 he entered parish ministry and served as pastor at First Reformed Church in Willmar, Minnesota, until 1963. He then served the following pastorates: Church on the Hill, Norco, California, from 1963 to 1967; Platt Ranch Community, Los Angeles, California, from 1967 to 1971; Newkirk, Hospers, Iowa, from 1971 to 1981; Mescalero, New Mexico, from 1981 to 1984; and First, Sibley, Iowa, from 1984 to 1990. Upon his retirement he worked with Portable Recording Ministries as a representative.

Clarence Van Heukelom died on August 23, 1999, at Orange City, Iowa. He was seventy-three years old.

**Nelson Van Raalte**

Nelson Van Raalte was born at Holland, Michigan, on February 4, 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.

Nelson was licensed by the Classis of Holland in 1931 and ordained by the Classis of Saratoga the same year. He pastored the following congregations: First, Wynantskill, New York, from 1931 to 1945; Mount Pleasant, Schenectady, New York, from 1945 to 1946; and, Grace, Allen Park, New York, from 1956 until his retirement in 1968. He also served as the stated clerk of the Classis of Saratoga from 1936 to 1945.

Nelson Van Raalte died on August 28, 1999, at Holland, Michigan. He was ninety-three years old.

**Daniel H. Fylstra**

Daniel H. Fylstra was born at Little Falls, New Jersey, on October 18, 1921. 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.

Daniel was licensed by the Classis of Passaic in 1946 and ordained by the Classis of Grand Rapids the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Fairview, Grand Rapids, Michigan, from 1946 to 1952; First, Lansing, Illinois, from 1952 to 1957; Bellflower, California, from 1957 to 1964; Family, Claremont, California, from 1964 to 1970; and Longview, Phoenix, Arizona, from 1970 to 1983. He also served as president of the Particular Synod of the West in 1960.

Daniel Fylstra died on August 30, 1999, at Phoenix, Arizona. He was seventy-seven years old.

**Charles Frederick Unger**

Charles Unger was born at New York City on August 31, 1904. He studied at Central College, from which he graduated in 1932. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1935.

Charles was licensed by the Classis of New York in 1935 and ordained by the Classis of Schoharie the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Second, Howes Cave, New York, from 1935 to 1937; Readington, New Jersey, from 1938 to 1943; Netherwood, Plainfield, New Jersey, from 1943 to 1949; Athenia, Clifton, New Jersey, from 1949 to 1956; Pearl River, New York, from 1956 to 1958; and Oak Tree, Marconnier, New Jersey, from 1958 to 1966. He also served as president of the Particular Synod of New Jersey from 1952 to 1953.

Charles Unger died on August 30, 1999, at Old Bridge, New Jersey. He was ninety-four years old.

**Harmon Wierenga**

Harmon Wierenga was born at Grand Rapids, Michigan, on June 16, 1917. He studied at Calvin College, from which he graduated in 1944. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1947.

Harmon was licensed by the Classis of Grand Rapids in 1947 and ordained by the Classis of Muskegon the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Faith, Muskegon, Michigan, from 1947 to 1953; Mountain View, Denver, Colorado, from 1954 to 1963; Second, Pella, Iowa, from 1961 to 1968; and Faith Community, West Chicago, Illinois, from 1975 to 1985. He also served as field secretary of the Particular Synod of the West from 1968 to 1973.

Harmon Wierenga died on October 1, 1999, at Boise, Idaho. He was eighty-two years old.

**Norman G. Van Heukelom**

Norman G. Van Heukelom was born at Pella, Iowa, on May 18, 1926. He studied at Central College, from which he graduated in 1949. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1952.

Norman was licensed and ordained by the Classis of Pella in 1952. He pastored the following congregations: Bethany, Des Moines, Iowa, from 1952 to 1954; Hamilton, Michigan, from 1954 to 1960; Emmanuel, Morrison, Illinois, from 1960 to 1966; Hudsonville, Michigan, from 1966 to 1972; Third, Kalamazoo, Michigan, from 1972 to 1979; Faith, Wyoming, Michigan, from 1979 to 1987; and First, Rock Valley, Iowa, from 1987 to 1991. He also served as minister of calling in Hamilton, Michigan.

Norman Van Heukelom died on October 14, 1999, at Holland, Michigan. He was seventy-
three years old.

Carl George Regnerus

Carl George Regnerus was born at Evergreen Park, Illinois, on April 9, 1943. He studied at Central College, from which he graduated in 1967. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1970.

Carl was licensed and ordained by the Classis of Chicago in 1970. He pastored the following congregations: Archer, Iowa, from 1970 to 1972; Pleasant Valley, Holland, Iowa, from 1972 to 1984; and Rehoboth, McBain, Michigan, from 1984 to 1999.

Carl Regnerus died on November 23, 1999, at Lucas, Michigan. He was fifty-six years old.

James Warren Baar

James Warren Baar was born at Chicago, Illinois, on March 29, 1921. He studied at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1942. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1945.

James was licensed and ordained by the Classis of Chicago in 1945. He began his ministry by serving as a chaplain from 1945 to 1946 and then pastored the following congregations: Maplewood, Holland, Michigan, from 1947 to 1953; First, Denver, Colorado, from 1953 to 1961; Second, Wyckoff, New Jersey, from 1961 to 1968; Fellowship, Lombard, Illinois, from 1971 to 1976; assistant, Trinity, Grand Rapids, Michigan, from 1976 to 1979; interim, Aberdeen, Grand Rapids, Michigan, from 1979 to 1982; assistant, Garfield Park, Grand Rapids, Michigan, from 1982 to 1986; and assistant for adult ministry, Fellowship, Holland, Michigan, in 1987. He also served as administrator for promotion for the General Program Council of the RCA from 1968 to 1971.

James W. Baar died on November 28, 1999, at Holland, Michigan. He was seventy-eight years old.

Donald Paul Lohman

Donald Paul Lohman was born at Hamilton, Michigan, on September 14, 1920. He studied at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1959. He received his theological education at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1963.

Donald was licensed by the Grand Rapids Congregational Association in 1960 and ordained by the Classis of Illinois the same year. He pastored the following congregations: First Congregational, Hudsonville, Michigan, from 1960 to 1963; Baileyville, Illinois, from 1963 to 1965; Gibbstsville, Sheboygan Falls, Wisconsin, from 1966 to 1969; and Bethany, St. Petersburg, Florida, from 1969 to 1982.

Donald Lohman died on January 13, 2000, at Freeport, Illinois. He was seventy-nine years old.

John Robert Swart

John Robert Swart was born at Rockford, Illinois, on June 16, 1919. 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. He undertook additional graduate study at Cornell University from 1946 to 1947.
Robert was licensed by the Classis of Illiana in 1944 and ordained by the Classis of Wisconsin the same year. He pastored Grace Reformed Church in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, from 1944 to 1946 and then entered missionary service in 1948. He was among the first RCA missionaries to work in Africa, serving in Sudan from 1948 to 1962 and then in Ethiopia and Kenya from 1963 to 1988.

John Robert Swart died on January 21, 2000, at Canon City, Colorado. He was eighty years old.

**Russell Vande Bunte**

Russell Vande Bunte was born at Boyne City, Michigan, on February 25, 1916. He studied at Grand Rapids Junior College and then at Calvin College, from which he graduated in 1937. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1940.

Russell was licensed by the Classis of Grand Rapids in 1940 and ordained by the Classis of Chicago the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Bethel, Sterling, Illinois, from 1940 to 1945; Richmond, Grand Rapids, Michigan, from 1945 to 1950; Central, Muskegon, Michigan, from 1950 to 1956; Bethany, Kalamazoo, Michigan, from 1956 to 1959; Third, Holland, Michigan, from 1959 to 1969; and, First, Kalamazoo, Michigan, from 1970 to 1980. He also served as president of the Particular Synod of Michigan in 1975.

Russell Vande Bunte died on January 21, 2000, at Kalamazoo, Michigan. He was eighty-three years old.

**Neal J. Mol**

Neal J. Mol was born at Perkins, Illinois, on February 19, 1917. He studied at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1954. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1956.

Neal was licensed by the Classis of West Sioux in 1956 and ordained by the Classis of Wisconsin the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Grace, Fond-du-Lac, Wisconsin, from 1956 to 1961; Overisel, Holland, Michigan, from 1961 to 1967; and, Brunswick, Ohio, from 1967 to 1978.

Neal Mol died on January 24, 2000, at Fennville, Michigan. He was eighty-two years old.

**John Jacob Soeter**

John Jacob Soeter was born at Amsterdam, in the Netherlands, on August 11, 1904. He studied at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1927. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1930. Neal was awarded a Doctor of Divinity degree by Hope College in 1960.

John was licensed by the Classis of Illinois in 1930 and ordained by the Classis of Bergen the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Community, Teaneck, New Jersey, from 1930 to 35; First, Hackensack, New Jersey, from 1935 to 1944; Second, New Brunswick, New Jersey, from 1945 to 1957; and Old Bergen, Jersey City, New Jersey, from 1957 to 1969. Neal also served as president of the Particular Synod of New Jersey from 1945 to 1947.

John Soeter died on February 13, 2000, at Lakewood, New Jersey. He was ninety-five years old.
Douglas MacDonald was born at Flushing, New York, on April 5, 1917. He studied at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1941. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1946.

Douglas was licensed and ordained by the Classis of North Long Island in 1945. He began his ministry as pastor of the Glendale Church in Brooklyn, New York, which he served from 1945 to 1951. He then served as pastor of Parkway Community Church in Hicksville, New York, from 1951 until his death.

Douglas MacDonald died at Hicksville, New York, on March 4, 2000. He was eighty-two years old.

Harriet Evelyn Boot de Velder was born at Kulangsu, China, on October 21, 1911. She was the daughter of RCA missionaries Harry and Anna Boot. Harriet studied at Hope College, from which she graduated in 1934. She started nursing studies and received her degree as a registered nurse from Presbyterian Hospital in Chicago, Illinois, in 1937.

Harriet went to the mission field in China in 1937 and served there until the mission work ended in 1951. She went to the Philippines and served until 1955, then served in Hong Kong from 1955 to 1972 and in Taiwan from 1973 to 1975, and again in 1977.

Harriet de Velder died at Saratoga, New York, on March 26, 2000. She was eighty-eight years old.

Report of the Editorial Council of the Church Herald

The Church Herald exists as a part of the Reformed Church in America’s mission to serve Jesus Christ. The publication seeks to promote spiritual growth and to enable members to feel connected to Jesus Christ and the RCA community of believers.

Magazine Content

In 1999 the Church Herald strove to meet this goal by offering articles on the RCA’s mission and ministry worldwide as well as in North American congregations. Members of the denomination were educated about clergy sexual abuse and the principles of stewardship; it was from the magazine that many heard of the work of the General Synod and of the World Council of Churches’ assembly. Readers were encouraged in their own spirituality with articles on Bible study and spirituality, and they connected to each other as they read together the Christmas devotionals. In May of 1999 the Evangelical Press Association named the Church Herald as the best denominational publication for 1998, noting that the magazine offered a balance of “what readers want and what they need.”

The General Synod of 1999 urged the Church Herald to translate some of its writing into Spanish and to identify funding for the translation work. Staff members continue to pursue
these objectives, hoping to begin some translation before the close of the year 2000.

Readership Survey

Although recognition from those outside the denomination is always appreciated, the opinions of Church Herald readers are of primary importance. During 1999 the Church Herald commissioned a survey to determine the readership’s perspective on the magazine. During the telephone survey four hundred people answered questions on their reading patterns and opinions of the magazine. Response rates by synod were 78 percent for Heartland, 75 percent for Great Lakes, 73 percent for Mid-America, 70 percent for Canada, 69 percent for Albany, 67 percent for Mid-Atlantics, 59 percent for Far West, and 57 percent for New York. The sample was stratified by age, gender, and regional synod to reflect the composition of the Reformed Church in America.

The magazine is reaching nearly 90 percent of the denomination’s households; and of those receiving it, 93 percent read at least a portion of the magazine. The survey, conducted by the Frost Center at Hope College, also indicated that a majority of readers (61 percent) believe that the magazine reflects their theological views; 27 percent said they were “neutral.” “All kinds of different people,” the Frost Center reported, “are equally likely to believe that the Church Herald reflects their views. Theological conservatives and liberals; political conservatives and liberals; New Yorkers, Iowans, and Californians; old people and young; men and women alike all generally agree that their religious views can be found within the pages of the Church Herald.”

The survey also indicates that readership of the magazine has increased since the last readership survey, conducted in 1995. All sections of the magazine received ratings between “somewhat” and “very” interesting, with the exception of advertising. The majority of respondents enjoy receiving the magazine in their homes, and while many respondents offered suggestions for improvement, in general the survey supported the ministry of the magazine.

The Frost Center concluded, “Any concern that may have existed that the magazine would be thrown away unread by large numbers of people has proven to be unwarranted. The ‘experiment’ of mailing the Herald to every home has been a certified success.”

Finances

The magazine came in slightly under budget, ending the year with expenditures of $1,095,000 against income of $1,102,400 and a budget of $1,108,500, returning $13,000 to the denomination. Although postage increased beyond the rate of inflation and design costs increased sharply, the Church Herald stayed within budget, in part due to the production of fewer pages.

Staff Changes

The year saw a number of staff transitions. Administrative assistant Sheryl Meulenberg, business manager Sandra Smith, and subscription manager Pam Huyser all left the Church Herald during the first quarter of the year. Together they had nearly thirty years experience at the magazine, and the council expresses its appreciation for their work and ministry during those years. Brenda Addie, Cheryl Boose, and Sue Stevens have moved seamlessly into the organization, helping to maintain the quality of the magazine, its finances, and its subscriber list.

Continuing staff members include managing editor the Rev. Terry DeYoung, editorial assistant Kristi Naber, data entry assistant Nancy Graham, proofreader Linda Vanderhyde, and editor Christina Van Eyl. Although the staff is smaller than those of other denominational publications, teamwork allows for the production of a good product with minimum overhead. In addition, the support of the denomination’s members, who serve as authors, reporters, and financial
backers, provides the staff with plenty of good material to use on its pages.

From the Report of the Perspectives Board of Editors

The *Perspectives* Board of Editors appreciates this opportunity to report to the 2000 General Synod. The new year—indeed the new millennium—began with new editors for *Perspectives*. Roy Anker (Calvin College), Leanne Van Dyk (Western Theological Seminary), and David Timmer (Central College) assumed responsibility for publishing this “journal of Reformed thought.” Each editor is a recognized scholar in his or her field, each is an accomplished writer, and each is committed to the Reformed tradition. The readers can look forward to good things on the pages of *Perspectives* in the years to come.

The new editors and the board are dedicated more than ever to the mission of the magazine. A major problem for the Reformed community at the beginning of the twenty-first century is fragmentation. Divisions undermine both its witness and its ability to pass on its heritage. *Perspectives* hopes to help the church overcome these divisions and to promote the celebration of the Reformed tradition. The board brings together representatives of the Reformed Church in America, Christian Reformed Church, and Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), as well as representatives from their various educational institutions. The spirit is high on the board as its members learn from each other and experience the benefits of cooperation.

*Perspectives* also tries to reach as wide an audience as possible. The board wants to connect scholars, pastors, and lay people in a Reformed conversation. To do this it encourages *Perspectives*’ writers to be vulnerable and share not only the knowledge they have acquired but also something of the life context in which they have gained that knowledge; to share something of their spiritual formation. This type of theological reflection reaches a wide audience without any loss of theological profundity.

The challenges remain. *Perspectives* is a volunteer organization. While the staff produces ten issues a year very efficiently, it does not have the infrastructure to do the extra things it needs to promote the magazine. Like most volunteer organizations, money and time are issues. Yet this form of volunteerism is also a strength. Those who work on *Perspectives* do not take anything for granted and have formed close ties with one another. They are forced to be creative with resources, and this makes for a better magazine.

The board would like to thank the 2000 General Synod for its continued support. It feels that *Perspectives* makes a small but important contribution to the RCA and the Reformed tradition. It encourages churches and pastors who do not subscribe to consider doing so. A lot of work, concern for the church, and joy in writing are behind every issue.

Report of the Office of Communication and Production Services
In 1998 the General Synod Council (GSC) dissolved its Stewardship and Communication Services Committee. 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 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.

3. To assist GSC committees and staff in reaching their objectives by providing design, production, and distribution services at or below market rates, ensuring a high level of consistency and overall quality.

Kim Baker oversees Communication and Production Services, which employs twenty-three full-time individuals. Staff is organized into five functional teams, each with its own team leader.

Customer Service Team: Jane Schuyler
Distribution Team: Dorothy Schmidt
Print Product Team: Kim Baker
Video Product Team: John Grooters
Web Product Team: Phil Tanis

1999 Financial Results

In 1999 Communication and Production Services ended the year with a positive balance of $36,920 of income over expenses. Print production recorded $80,224 of excess income. The Internet office ended the year with $6,419 of excess income. Video production fell short $33,828. The RCA Distribution Center and TRA VARCA showed a small total deficit of $10,107.

The RCA Distribution Center and TRA VARCA

The RCA Distribution Center invoiced $766,906 in sales, and TRA VARCA recorded a record $163,467 in memberships and usage. The RCA Distribution Center (along with CRC Publications) capitalized the development of the LiFE curriculum. In 1999 the RCA Distribution Center made the final payment of $39,505 on its $256,000 loan from the denomination for this project.

TRAVARCA continues to be one of the best Christian video lending libraries in North America. Housing more than two thousand titles licensed for public performance, TRAVARCA distributed more than 10,125 resources during 1999. Each TRAVARCA video contains a study guide for use in educational settings.

TRAVARCA is supported through annual membership fees. Currently, TRAVARCA has a record 645 members, including 369 RCA congregations, 159 Christian Reformed Church congregations, 26 Evangelical Covenant Church congregations, 76 other congregations, 11 organizations/institutions, and 4 new church starts.

Both the RCA Distribution Center and TRAVARCA produce catalogs containing detailed descriptions of each resource. Jane Schuyler is available on the RCA Resource Helpline during business hours to answer questions about any resource or to suggest print, video, and electronic resources to support any Christian curriculum being used in the local congregation.

Communications

In 1998 the General Synod Council shifted all responsibilities for stewardship to the RCA Foundation. Responsibilities for communication, along with the denomination’s production and distribution capabilities, were consolidated into Communication and Production Services (CAPS) and placed under the umbrella of Congregational Services. Kim Baker, team leader of CAPS and the RCA’s publisher and distributor, and the Rev. Jeff Japinga, director of Congregational Services, were given the responsibility to carry out the various communication functions and to draft a comprehensive communication strategy.

Baker and Japinga convened a meeting on January 29, 1999, inviting individuals from within and outside the organization to think creatively about RCA efforts in communication. Attending were John Grooters, Phil Tanis, David Vanderwel (executive director of Geneva Camp and Retreat Center and a member of the 1989 Communications Philosophy Task Force), and Chris Van Eyl. Dierdre Johnston (professor of communication at Hope College) was invited but was unable to attend. The group’s report was accepted by GSC in April 1999.

Among the conclusions this staff group brought to the General Synod Council were the following:

1. The group affirmed the content of the 1989 statement but felt communication should revolve more around the RCA’s 1997 Statement of Mission and Vision. Thus it agreed upon the following purpose statement for communication in the RCA:
   The purpose of communication efforts in the RCA is to foster the understanding of, commitment to, and participation in the mission and vision of the Reformed Church in America.

2. The group noted that success in communication is enhanced by integrating and coordinating all communication efforts, establishing key relationships with secular and Christian media, and conducting ongoing evaluation.

3. The group concluded that the General Synod Council should:
   • Establish clear communication priorities based on the RCA’s Statement of Mission and Vision.
   • Coordinate the presentation of the RCA’s mission, ministry, message, and image among the various GSC units.
   • Develop an overall budget that adequately funds a coordinated communications
effort.
• Establish a team of individuals skilled in various aspects of communication and appoint a staff person to coordinate the various functions.
• Develop ways to listen to its various constituencies—seeking and publicizing information and ideas that will enhance the mission and ministry of the whole.
• Explore new ways to assist churches in their own communication and marketing efforts.

At its April 1999 meeting the GSC affirmed the above purpose statement, endorsed the conclusions of the staff group, and instructed the general secretary to appoint a person to convene a Communication Strategy Task Force. The purpose of this task force was to build upon the GSC April 1999 report, develop an overall communication strategy, and recommend a structure best-suited to carry out a coordinated communication effort.

At the general secretary’s request, Dave Vanderwel agreed to chair this task force and facilitate these discussions. Vanderwel invited two outside persons with marketing and communications expertise (Rob Pocock and Tom Renner), and six RCA staff (Kim Baker, the Rev. Shari Brink, the Rev. David Dethmers, the Rev. Jeff Japinga, Phil Tanis, and Chris Van Eyl) to participate. The group met on October 8, 1999, November 16, 1999, and January 5, 2000, and offers the following report.

In its meetings the Communication Strategy Task Force reviewed existing communication efforts within the denomination and affirmed the findings and conclusions of the April 1999 GSC report. After reviewing existing denominational communication vehicles, describing an ideal structure for denominational communication, and reviewing those things that presently prevent that vision from being realized, the task force agreed on the following perspectives:

1. **Denominational communication needs to be mission-focused.** We need to articulate a common message based on the RCA Statement of Mission and Vision. The leaders of the denomination need to determine and articulate that message, and our communication efforts need to support and reinforce it.

2. **Denominational communication needs coordination.** We need a structure and a strategy in which decisions about allocating human and financial resources can be made. With all the competition for the attention of denominational members, we need to have a coordinated way to set priorities in order to maximize our communication efforts. Some form of accountability and authority for focusing our resources on what is most important is also necessary.

3. **Denominational communication needs to be consistent and complementary.** Currently, communication vehicles are of inconsistent quality (often depending on the originator’s budget) and rarely complement each other. We need a strategy that links various communication vehicles together as distinct parts of a whole in a way that respects individual needs while building denominational identification.

4. **Denominational communication needs centralized funding.** Whatever strategy is developed, implementing it will demand the financial resources to accomplish it. Without adequate funding, it’s “every unit for itself,” with competing strategies. And, as technology changes, the denomination needs the ability to shift human and financial resources to meet specific communication needs.

To accomplish these principles, the task force recommended to GSC that it establish an Office of Communication to develop and implement a comprehensive and coordinated communication strategy to support the mission of the denomination.
Print Production

Nearly all printed materials produced by the Reformed Church in America are processed through the editorial and design work of Communication and Production Services. These services include editing, proofreading, graphic design, printing (in-house and contract), and distribution. Printed materials include ads, annual reports, brochures, the General Synod workbook and minutes, leader’s guides, missionary letters, mission packets, newsletters, news releases, reSOURCES mailings, and study books.

In addition, Communication and Production Services has primary writing responsibility for several educational and promotional materials produced by Mission Services. These include profiles in mission, mission brochures, and the components of the Mission of the Month program. The latter includes a resource sheet, poster, children’s page, offering envelopes, and Mission Today (110,000 copies sent each month to over six hundred churches).

Communication and Production Services also writes and produces several publications for the entire denomination. These include RCA Today (160,000 copies monthly to over eight hundred churches), Prayerline, and the RCA Plan Calendar. Additional responsibilities include coordinating and designing displays for General Synod and providing writing and editorial services for audiovisual productions and for the RCA website.

At the direction of the 1999 General Synod (MGS 1999, p.167), Communication and Production Services was “strongly urged” to make more RCA publications available in other languages. In 1999, in cooperation with the Office of Hispanic Ministries, the RCA Distribution Center made the “Are You Looking for a Church Home” (generic and customized versions) brochure and an updated Book of Church Order available in Spanish. The RCA Distribution Center is currently developing a comprehensive list of the many RCA resources available in other languages and in Braille. This list will be distributed to all congregations.

In addition, the RCA Distribution Center is exploring with Policy, Planning, and Administration Services the possibility of updating the Korean version of the Book of Church Order and also making the volume available in Chinese. The RCA Distribution Center markets and distributes various educational resources and church supplies produced by World Literature Ministries of CRC Publications (as listed in its Libros Desafio catalog), and distributes other multi-language products produced by partner publishers.

RCA Productions

RCA Productions produces video resources that help tell the story of RCA mission and ministry and that teach, inspire, and motivate people in their own faith journeys. RCA Productions also provides video production services, cameras, lighting, audio equipment, image magnification, and video duplication to other organizations and provides technical support for General Synod and other RCA events.

The past year was by far the busiest and most productive in the fifteen-year history of the office. Income received in 1999 totaled $445,548—an increase of over 25 percent over 1998. Last year was also an award-winning year for RCA Productions, as it received three Telly Awards and two Communicator Awards recognizing national excellence in video production.

RCA Productions videos are available for loan through TRAVARCA or for purchase through the RCA Distribution Center. Videos produced in 1999 by RCA Productions include:

- **RCA Today 1999.** A twenty-minute video magazine featuring stories of exciting RCA ministries in Budapest, Hungary; Bellflower, California; Red Hook, New York; and Reformed Church World Service disaster response in Honduras.

- **Reformed Church World Service—A Ministry of Compassion and Hope.** A nine-minute two-part video that highlights the ministry of Reformed Church World Service and tells
how that agency responds during, after, and even before disasters strike.


*The Basin and the Towel.* A four-minute video featuring the diaconal ministries of the RCA.

*The Refocusing Leaders Network.* An eleven-minute video featuring the Revs. Vicky Menning, Jay Sowers, Bruce Van Dusseldorp, and Bruce Laverman, and Barb Morphew that explains the benefits of the Refocusing Process within the RCA.

RCA Missionary Conversations. These five-minute, one-on-one interviews with RCA missionaries, illustrated with images from the field, are a quick and intimate way to meet missionaries and understand their work. Missionaries profiled in 1999 include: the Rev. Jim and Sharon Heneveld (Mexico), Gail Beran (Japan), the Rev. Dave and Joy Zomer (Hungary), the Rev. Andy and Emma Nakijima (Michigan), Tamar DeJong (India), the Rev. Appu and Lali Varghese (Oman), Deb Wilson (Cambodia), Deb Logtenberg (Canada), Judy Estell (Taiwan), John and Chickie Mac Lean (Appalachia), and the Rev. George and MaryAnne Montanari (Oklahoma).

Kids’ Missionary Conversations. Hosted by nine-year-old Jordyn Grooters, these videos are similar to the adult versions, but designed for children. Jordyn asks questions from a child’s perspective, and the pace and music are upbeat and contemporary. Videos produced in 1999 include: Tamar DeJong (India), the Rev. Appu and Lali Varghese (Oman), Deb Wilson (Cambodia), Judy Estell (Taiwan), and John and Chickie MacLean (Appalachia).

**Website**

The purpose of the RCA website is to provide a primary point of access to an online communication network that connects individual members to other members, elders, deacons, pastors, missionaries, and delegates and staff of assemblies, agencies, and institutions—building community, enhancing mutual understanding, and providing timely information and a variety of resources for ministry. The website also serves members of the global community, individuals looking for a Reformed church in their neighborhood, people seeking information about the Reformed Church in America, ecumenical partners, denominations, and others wishing to contact RCA congregations, clergy, missionaries, and staff.

Over the fall of last year, the RCA website was completely rebuilt (while the then-current site continued to be maintained). The reconstruction was made necessary by a number of factors, including the inability of that site to meet usage levels, the need to significantly reorganize the site for better access, and the desire to refresh the appearance of the site. Several features were also created during the process:

- **BWIDE (Basic Web Interface Design Environment).** This interface system allows for easy browser-based creation and editing of web pages. It is used by staff to administer the site and by church members to create free web pages for their churches within the RCA site.

- **Prayerline.** This expanded, regularly-updated Prayerline includes world-wide prayer concerns and a linked prayer forum, allowing anyone to post their prayer requests.

- **Forums.** These topic-specific bulletin boards are located throughout the site, giving
visitors the opportunity to engage in any number of discussions.

Church Search. A faster search engine allows visitors looking for an RCA church to search by keyword, state, and/or zip code. Basic information on the church is then presented, along with a link to a mapping website and any links for email or church websites.

The new site debuted on December 1, 1999. Since that time, further enhancements have been made, including expanding the resources available online and creating RCANet. This password-protected area, currently being developed, is designed for church leaders, clergy, GSC members, and staff. It contains information specifically for these constituencies as well as areas in which they can communicate more effectively.

The average number of visitors to the site has continued to increase and now averages nearly five hundred each day. The five most-visited areas of the site are churches, welcome, resources, Prayerline, and mission. The single most popular day was the final Thursday of General Synod 1999, reflecting interest in synod and also the ability of the website to deliver news in a timely manner.

Overtures

Study of Membership Statistics

1. The Classis of Central California overtures the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America to instruct the Commission on History, with the guidance of the Advisory Committee for Christian Heritage and Communication, to undertake a longitudinal study of the official membership statistics of the RCA over the past one hundred years to determine interesting and alarming trends regarding new church starts (classis by classis), adult baptisms, active-confessing members, and worship attendance, and publish the results of this study in the Church Herald.

Reasons:

1. Perhaps we can provoke one another to love and good deeds by the full disclosure of such facts to the members of the Reformed Church in America.

2. The Lord Jesus has historically spoken to his church with accurate assessments of its strengths and weaknesses and a resulting call to action in light of it (Revelation, chapters 2 and 3).

kThe advisory committee recommended:

R-45
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. The statistical information referred to in this overture is already recorded in the Minutes of General Synod with analysis available in published studies.

2. Conducting a new, comprehensive study of membership statistics would be costly.

Reduce Assessment for the Church Herald

2. The Classis of Central California overtures the 2000 General Synod of the Reformed Church in America to reduce the assessment for the Church Herald by 50 percent (from $4.00 to $2.00 per member) with the money redirected equally to support Western Theological Seminary, New Brunswick Theological Seminary, and the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency.

Reasons:

1. General Synod was unable in 1999 to raise/allocate sufficient financial support for seminary education while the Church Herald enjoys virtually full support. Are we willing to say the Church Herald deserves this kind of support when we can’t find funds for our seminaries and theological students?

2. To continue to provide the current level of financial support for the Church Herald remove the “edge” of responsibility and accountability for content, marketing for readership and financial support.

3. The cost to support the Church Herald in relationship to the total RCA operations budget is excessive.

kThe advisory committee recommended:

R-46
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. Funding for theological education, including the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency, is included in the 2001 assessment budget.

2. Providing the stability of assessment funding for the Church Herald is a cost-effective way to finance the production and distribution of this magazine.

3. The Church Herald achieves its primary goal of connecting RCA members with one another.

4. An independent readership survey in 1999 and a first place award from the Evangelical Press Association indicate that the Church Herald is well received by its readers and acknowledged by its peers.

Discontinue Assessment for the Church Herald

3. The Classis of Cascades overtures the General Synod to discontinue use of assessment funding for the Church Herald within two years, and to develop an integrated, cost-effective strategy for communication in the Reformed Church in America.
Reasons:

1. The Reformed Church in America currently spends over 25 percent of its budget on two items: $971,000 for the Church Herald, and $196,000 for “basic service costs: Communication and Production Services.” Many other portions of the budget also include significant amounts for publication and communication.

2. A recent study by the Church Herald (reported in RCA Today) indicates that only 22 percent of those who receive the magazine read all or most of it. (Despite the fact that it is “free,” only 89 percent of RCA members receive it, meaning less than 20 percent read all or most of it.) With increased postage costs being proposed again this year, it seems good stewardship that the magazine should go only to those who choose to read it.

3. As the denomination utilizes new methods of communication, an integrated strategy that is cost-effective needs to be developed. This strategy should include cooperation with the regional synods and classes.

The advisory committee recommended:

R-47
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reasons: See reasons 2-4 for denying overture 2.1

Remove Church Herald Assessment from General Synod Budget

4. The Regional Synod of the Far West overtures the General Synod to remove the assessment from the General Synod budget for the Church Herald, returning to the individual subscription and/or congregational every-family plan.

Reasons:

1. The emphasis on the local church and classical/regional news is being diminished with the discontinuation of the “Close to Home” section, which in turn minimizes the level of interest in the regional churches for the magazine.

2. An amount equal to the assessment for the magazine would enable the denomination to take much more seriously the recruitment, training, and continuing education of those in leadership and pastoral positions.

3. Several of the churches in the Regional Synod of the Far West struggle with the amount expected of them in relationship to the value received.

4. There are a limited number of churches distributing the magazine through 100 percent of their mailing list due to reasons of lack of interest, objection to the assessment, and uneasiness with its content.

5. Several new and effective communications tools, including the Internet, are being developed and offered to all members of the RCA.

The advisory committee recommended:

R-48
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

2. Print media continue to be an integral part of a comprehensive communication strategy.

3. See also reasons 2-4 for denying overture 2.1

**Deadlines for Responses to General Synod**

5. The Classis of South Grand Rapids overtures General Synod to adopt a policy which states that when referrals are made to classes or consistoryes which request a response, the deadline for responses will be no earlier than April 1 of the following calendar year.

**Reasons:**

1. Each year General Synod or its agencies refer matters to RCA consistoryes and classes with a deadline for response early in the following year. This is an unrealistic date since copies of the *General Synod Minutes* are not available until mid-September and many referrals do not reach the classes until after committees have met in preparation for the fall sessions of classis, which are usually held in September or October. Thirteen of the forty-six classes meet in September and don’t meet again until the new year. Setting a January 1 deadline (as was done in the past year with two proposed liturgical forms) is unrealistic if responses are desired from the classes.

2. Any referral deadline before April 1 disenfranchises twenty-seven classes which do not meet in January or February.

3. Although April meetings may be inconvenient for some commissions and agencies, they are not impossible. Revised reports can still be submitted in time for publication in the General Synod workbook, and, if not, they can be distributed to the delegates upon arrival at General Synod.

4. The responses of the classes to the proposed amendments to the *Book of Church Order* are not due before April 1. Overtures from classes may be submitted to the General Synod office or postmarked not later than March 31. A similar deadline for responses to other referrals makes sense.

5. Unreasonable early deadlines leave the impression that feedback from the church is not really expected.

The advisory committee recommended:

R-49

To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)
REPORTS ON CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AND DISCIPLESHIP

Report of Central College

Introduction

It has been eighty-five years now since Central College and the Reformed Church in America became partners in the effort to provide a top-notch liberal arts education in the Christian tradition to young men and women attracted to a supportive academic environment. The academic programs at Central have expanded greatly since 1915, and the Christian tradition remains strong as the college continues to cherish its relationship with the Reformed Church. It is a privilege, therefore, to report to the General Synod a few highlights from the past year at Central.

The Campaign for Central

In October of 1999 the Central College Board of Trustees approved the start of the largest campaign in Central College history. The Campaign for Central is seeking at least $50 million over the next five or six years to strengthen the college’s programs in a number of critical ways. Among the areas to emerge near the top of a list of priorities are endowed scholarships and student support, technology, faculty development, facility enhancement, and campus life programs. The campaign, which is in the “leadership gift phase” at present, received a boost in late January when an anonymous donor gave Central $2.5 million to establish an endowment for the school’s music programs and to lend support for scholarships and special projects. The gift represented the first time a single contribution to the school exceeded $1 million.

Central recorded another first in the area of fundraising. Private giving to the college topped $4 million for the first time during the 1998-1999 fiscal year, coming in at $4,048,643. Among the substantial gifts Central received in recent months was a $200,000 gift from the Starr Foundation of New York City to establish the C. V. Starr Scholarship Fund. Central also received a $42,500 gift from former Central professors Drs. Donald and Maxine Huffman to reestablish a visiting Chinese scholars program. Beginning in the fall of 2000, Central will bring professors from Zhejiang University to campus to teach Chinese language and culture. Central formerly operated an exchange program with Zhejiang, but the relationship ended in 1997.

Enrollment

An incoming freshman class of 404 brought enrollment at the beginning of the 1999-2000 academic year to 1,443 full-time and part-time students, the largest enrollment since 1995. Central began the spring 2000 semester with 1,440 full-time and part-time students, nearly 6 percent more students than a year ago and 15 percent more than were enrolled during the spring semester of 1998.

Central now has back-to-back incoming classes of more than 400 students and is moving steadily toward a goal of 425 new freshmen to start fall 2000 classes. To reach this mark, Central has implemented recruitment strategies that target minority communities and international markets. It also has strengthened its efforts to attract students interested in music, theater, and art with the addition of an admissions counselor who focuses primarily on the fine arts.
Central recently completed a series of weekend events for distinguished and outstanding scholars. More than 330 students attended and competed for academic scholarships. Nearly half of those in attendance reported they were involved in volunteer service projects within their communities.

**Academic Achievement**

In the fall of 1999 Central was recognized for leadership in the field of student character development by *The Templeton Guide: Colleges that Encourage Character Development*. Central received the honor in the area of civic education for its efforts to enable students to experience the diversity of cultures in the United States and the world. All Central students are required to complete a cultural awareness experiential component, which includes fifteen to thirty hours of direct involvement in a culture different from the one in which they were raised. Approximately 40 percent of Central’s students satisfy this requirement by studying in one of Central’s eight international programs. Students who don’t study abroad become involved in such initiatives as tutoring inner-city youth, assisting with English-as-a-second-language classes, and helping refugees resettle in Iowa. Central also has established study opportunities in Grand Isle, Louisiana, a Cajun community on an island off the Gulf Coast; and Santa Fe, New Mexico, where students work with Native American communities.

**The Changing Campus Landscape**

In October of 1999 Central dedicated the Weller Center for Business and International Studies. Named for Central’s former president, Dr. Kenneth Weller, and his wife, Shirley, the $3.8 million, 25,000-square-foot building opened at the start of fall semester classes. The two-story structure houses the departments of modern languages, economics, accounting, and business management.

Two other new facilities are in their first year of use at Central. The Ron Schipper Fitness Center officially opened in September of 1999. Named for Central’s former football coach, the $3.1 million facility is attached to the Kuyper Gymnasium. It features a 7,200-square-foot fitness room filled with free weights, strength-training machines, and cardiovascular equipment. The fitness center also includes a 2,000-square-foot multipurpose room, a recruiting lounge, a new lobby and entrance, and an enlarged indoor track.

The Graham Conference Center officially opened with a ribbon-cutting ceremony September 16. During the past year and a half, 6,480 square feet have been added to a building that once housed the dining hall at Central. The result is an 18,436-square-foot conference center that includes a lounge area, a banquet room capable of seating three hundred, and four conference rooms.

**Mission Trips**

Thirteen students from Central College spent a portion of their semester break remodeling apartment houses for low-income residents in Chicago. The students, accompanied by Central’s chaplain, the Rev. Thomas Trinidad, worked with an organization known as Kingdom Bridge, which is affiliated with Church of the Good News, a Reformed Church in America congregation in Chicago. The mission group spent a week making a rundown apartment in the Lathrop Homes housing development suitable for habitation.

In January another group of seven Central students traveled to Arizona to provide volunteer service at the Rosemont Community Church in an urban area of Tucson. They also volunteered for a day at Casia Maria Ministries, a service that includes a soup kitchen and shelter for the homeless.
Over the past year, Central students have taken mission trips to Colorado, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, and San Antonio, Texas. This will be the final year Chaplain Trinidad will accompany students on these humanitarian missions. He will be leaving Central at the end of the academic year to pursue graduate studies. Trinidad, a graduate of Princeton Seminary, has been at Central since 1996. A national search for his replacement has been launched.

Administrative News

Central’s provost, Thomas Iverson, suffered a serious head injury in August when he fell from a ladder at his home. The campus community held its collective breath as Iverson first regained consciousness and then labored to recover his speech and movement. He was warned the recovery could take months.

What a joyous surprise when, toward the middle of the first semester, Iverson began appearing on campus once again! By the end of the semester he was back in his office half-time and once again directing the academic affairs of the college. With the start of the spring semester, Iverson returned full-time to his role as provost and senior vice president.

The start of the spring term also brought a new member to the Central administration. Armeda Reitzel, a 1975 Central graduate who had been a professor of communication at Humboldt State University in Arcata, California, since 1981, is now dean of faculty. Reitzel most recently was named Outstanding Professor of the Year at Humboldt State. She earned the honor primarily for her work in the area of service learning.

Co-Curricular Success

The Central women’s volleyball team acquired its second consecutive national championship when it defeated Texas’s Trinity College in three straight games in December. With fifty-nine wins, the Dutch will head into the 2000 season tied for the all-time national record for consecutive match wins.

The Central football team made it to the second round of the Division III national playoffs before losing a heartbreaker to Minnesota’s St. John’s College, 10-9. The team finished the season with ten wins and two losses, the thirty-ninth consecutive year Central has completed a winning football season.

The Central men’s track team was crowned Iowa Conference indoor champions, while the Central mock trial team qualified for the national mock trial tournament for the sixteenth consecutive year. One member of the team received an Outstanding Attorney Award during regional competition, and another team member received an Outstanding Witness Award.

The Central Symphonic Wind Ensemble and the Central Jazz Band performed their spring tour in Cancun, Mexico, in May. The Central A Cappella Choir traveled to Chicago in April, with stops in Iowa and Illinois along the way.

The sold-out shows of Theatre Central’s production of Alice in Wonderland in October raised $3,662 for two charitable causes. The money went to the Ronald McDonald House in Des Moines, Iowa, a facility that provides housing for parents of seriously ill children, and On with Life in Ankeny, Iowa, a head-trauma center where Central’s Provost Iverson received treatment following his accident.

Faculty Achievements

A group from Central became only the second Witness for Peace delegation to spend two weeks in Cuba last summer. A meeting with Cuban and American officials was held to discuss
the impact of the U.S.-led economic embargo against Cuba. The group of fourteen, organized by the Central Faculty Benevolent Association, spent most of its time in Havana but also visited a rural area, Pinar del Rio, and a major tourist development, Varadero.

Jann Freed, professor of business management and chair of the division of behavioral sciences at Central, has coauthored a book aimed at enhancing student learning through different teaching techniques. In *Learner-Centered Assessment on College Campuses: Shifting the Focus from Teaching to Learning*, Freed and her coauthor, Mary Huba, a professor in the College of Education at Iowa State University, focus on an approach to education that encourages faculty and students to learn together.

Dr. David E. Timmer, associate professor of religion, was named coeditor of *Perspectives*, a journal published by the Reformed Church in America. His duties commenced on January 1, 2000.

Two members of the psychology faculty, Dr. Pamela Steinke and Dr. Marguerite Fitch, are working with psychology students at Central as well as with two colleagues from other Iowa colleges. They have been given a $25,000 grant from the Iowa College Foundation to explore the value of classroom service-learning projects.

**Conclusion**

Clearly, Central has been blessed during the past year with generous financial support, inspired faculty teaching, and student achievements that are most gratifying. With a strategic plan in place that emphasizes the development of mind, body, and spirit, Central is prepared to continue sending graduates into the world to live compassionate lives based around Christian principles. Central College is deeply grateful to the Reformed Church in America for its warm support.

---

**Report of Hope College**

**Introduction**

It is a pleasure to submit this report to the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America. Hope College treasures its historic covenantal relationship with the Reformed Church in America and pledges anew its desire to nurture and strengthen this bond between the college and its founding denomination.

Hope College recognizes its covenantal affiliation with the Reformed Church in America as detailed in the *Covenant of Mutual Responsibilities*, first written in 1975 and reaffirmed as recently as 1996. In sum, the college covenants with the church its intention to provide an exceptional academic experience in a caring, Christian environment. It is the colleges’ expectation that the church will fulfill its covenantal commitment by praying for its three colleges, encouraging young women and men from the church to attend Central, Hope, or Northwestern, and to support the colleges financially.

This is a fragile relationship. The record of history is that most institutions of higher education founded in the United States on Christian principles gradually but surely drift away from
their religious traditions and become secular institutions. We at Hope College are inextricably committed to maintaining this Christian dimension and trust that the church is, likewise, committed to maintaining this relationship with Hope.

Presidential Leadership

The summer of 1999 marked the close of the Dr. John Jacobson era at Hope College as the mantle of presidential leadership was passed to Dr. James Bultman, who served as president of Northwestern College from 1985 to 1999. The college is grateful for the service of Jacobson and the legacy he left at Hope during his twelve-year tenure as president. The college looks forward now with confidence and anticipation to the challenges and opportunities of this new century.

Core Values for the Twenty-First Century

As the college embarks on the twenty-first century, there is overwhelming consensus that the following core values comprise a Hope College education:

1. An exceptional academic experience.
2. A vibrant commitment to the Christian faith.
3. A caring environment.
4. A commitment to the development of the whole person—mind, body, and spirit.
5. A commitment to wise stewardship of available resources.

Admissions

The college began the 1999-2000 academic year with a record enrollment of 2,943 students. This included a record setting 755 first-time students. The student body is comprised of men and women from thirty-six states as well as from twenty-seven foreign countries. Twenty-three percent of Hope students are from the Reformed Church in America—a percentage that has increased each of the last six years. As the college seeks to maintain the traditional character of a Hope College education, the board of trustees has placed a cap of three thousand students on the college’s enrollment. Dr. James Bekkering has effectively served as vice president for admissions for the past twenty years.

Academics

Hope College has always been serious about the academic experience. Desired is a challenging, individualized curriculum that will assist young women and men to become all that God intends for them to be. The academic program is led by Dr. Jacob E. Nyenhuis, provost, who is currently in his sixteenth year as chief academic officer at the college.

In the Kaplan Newsweek College Catalog 2000, Hope was named to four lists from among more than eleven hundred colleges and universities. Those lists were:

1. “Schools That are Hidden Treasures.”
2. “Schools Offering the Maximum Amount of Individual Academic Attention.”
3. “Schools Providing a Good Liberal Arts Education.”
4. “Schools Representing the Best Value for Your Money.”

Hope continues to receive national recognition and foundation support for many of its academic programs. This past year Hope received more National Science Foundation awards than any other liberal arts college in the country. In addition, Hope was one of only four liberal arts colleges and one of only eighteen institutions nationwide to receive a Beckman Scholars Program institutional award for 2000-2001. This was the second consecutive two-
year Beckman award for Hope. The program is designed to enhance the education of the nation’s most talented and gifted undergraduates in chemistry and the biological sciences by providing sustained, in-depth laboratory research experience with faculty mentors. In the humanities, Hope received a Lilly Foundation grant to study the “theological implications of vocation.” The planning grant will result in a proposal for long-term foundation funding.

Spiritual Life

Hope continues to include a vibrant Christian dimension to the overall academic experience. Dimnent Chapel is filled to overflowing for voluntary services on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday and for the Gathering on Sunday evenings. Although this is the most visible of the college’s spiritual life programs, a variety of campus Bible study groups, service projects, mission trips, and prayer sessions mark the Hope College experience.

In the midst of these very popular programs, there has also been some publicized polarization of the campus community over religious issues. While some of this has been substantive, by far the most issues have been over style and relational ministry. The college community is vigorously addressing these issues in an attempt to bring about a more harmonious partnership by the entire campus community. The spiritual life program at the college is led by the Rev. J. Ben Patterson, dean of the chapel, who is in his sixth year at the college.

Hope College has once again been recognized for leadership in the field of student character development by the Templeton Foundation.

Student Affairs

In its attempt to address the whole person, Hope provides a variety of on-campus experiences designed to help students develop socially and physically. These activities range from a host of club experiences to intercollegiate sports, intramurals, theatre, dance, art, and music. Professional members of the Hope faculty and staff effectively coordinate all of these activities. For a record twenty-second time, Hope College won the Commissioner’s Cup, which is indicative of overall supremacy in intercollegiate sport in the Michigan Intercollegiate Athletic Association.

Two very traditional activities continue to thrive at Hope. The nationally acclaimed pull between freshmen and sophomores was held for the one hundred second time, with the sophomores winning. For women, the Nykerk Competition was held for the sixty-fifth consecutive year, with the sophomores victorious. These activities generate a considerable amount of on- and off-campus interest, especially among Hope College students and alumni.

The college was humbled by a series of highly publicized alcohol-related incidents with its Greek organizations this past fall. Substantive and burdensome sanctions have been levied against the fraternities and sororities involved and also against the individuals who participated. It is the college’s goal to work developmentally with the young women and men in this situation as together they strive for wholesome and productive campus lifestyles.

Richard Frost, vice president for student development, is completing his tenth year as the college’s chief student development officer.

College Advancement

Robert De Young, vice president for college advancement, has announced his retirement effective at the end of this fiscal year. He has served the college faithfully in a number of leadership capacities, including that of dean of students. De Young has performed his duties with great distinction since 1965 and will be sorely missed by all who recognize him as “Mr. Hope College.” A national search is being conducted for his successor.

Hope will set a new annual fund-raising record this year. Gifts given to Hope are gratefully
CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AND DISCIPLESHIP

acknowledged as they allow access and choice for talented and deserving students.

Financial

For the thirty-third consecutive year, Hope finished its fiscal year on June 30, 1999, in the black. This is a remarkable achievement made possible in large measure by the expertise of William Anderson, who has served the college for twenty-eight years as vice president for business and finance.

With an annual budget of over $50 million, Hope, out of necessity, must be run like a business. Hope’s endowment now is in excess of $100 million, which generates about $4 million per year for academic programs, student scholarships, and employee salaries. Still, when compared with colleges of similar stature, Hope remains surprisingly low in terms of total endowment, endowment per student, and net endowment relative to indebtedness. The college remains very tuition-driven.

Resources

The greatest resource at Hope College remains the human resource. Buoyed by talented and diligent students, a dedicated and productive faculty, and a highly qualified staff, the college faces the future with great hope and expectation. Indicative of the faculty’s strength is the recent receipt of three very competitive national awards. Dr. Maria Burnatowska-Hledin, professor of biology and chemistry, is the recipient of one of only six Henry Dreyfus Teacher-Scholar awards for professors in the chemical sciences. Dr. Joseph La Porte, assistant professor of philosophy, received one of 172 fellowships awarded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. Also, Dr. Heather Sellers, associate professor of English, received one of forty-one grants awarded by the National Endowment for the Arts.

Three Hope College students have also received national awards. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) has awarded Becky Schmidt of Holland, Michigan, and Becky Timmer of Pella, Iowa, prestigious NCAA post-graduate scholarships. Louis Canfield, a Hope junior from Whitehall, Michigan, has been named a finalist for the National Harry S. Truman Scholarship Program. Louis, who is student body president, will be competing for the eighty scholarships that award $30,000 each for graduate study.

It is likely that the college will embark on a major capital campaign in the rather immediate future as it intends to construct a new science facility, restore and renovate other campus facilities, and build its endowment. By God’s grace and the diligent efforts of all, Hope College will continue to achieve its mission with great distinction.

Report of Northwestern College

It is a pleasure to present the 1999-2000 report of Northwestern College to the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America. This has been a year of transition for Northwestern, as Dr. James Bultman left the presidency last summer to become president at Hope College.

In October 1999 the Board of Trustees appointed Dr. James Guy, dean of the Graduate School of Psychology at Fuller Theological Seminary, as Northwestern’s eighth president. He was to assume the presidency on July 1, 2000, but in April he notified the college that he had to break that agreement because of personal problems. The Presidential Search Committee has been reactivated to conduct another intensive, nationwide search. In the meantime, the
interim leadership provided by the Administrative Council and Wayne Kooiker as chief operating officer will continue. While the campus community was stunned and disappointed by this development, we are confident that the interim management team will continue to provide able guidance while God directs us to the right person for leading Northwestern to new levels of distinction.

Northwestern’s search for a vice president for academic affairs is proceeding on schedule. The two finalists were interviewed on campus in late March 2000. The Rev. Dr. Raymond Weiss has served the college admirably as acting dean during the past academic year.

The college is in the process of finalizing plans for a new theatre facility. A steering committee is in place and is meeting to assist Northwestern in fundraising efforts for this much-needed facility improvement. This is the first of several initiatives that were identified through a yearlong strategic thinking process designed to enable the college to fulfill its mission of integrating faith and learning with greater distinction than ever.

Northwestern’s strong tradition of emphasizing service opportunities has continued this past school year. In addition to several domestic spring service projects, Northwestern sent two groups to international sites. One group went to Amsterdam to work with Christian youth hostels, and a large group assisted churches, orphanages, and food distribution centers at three locations in Honduras. Domestic destinations included Belen, New Mexico; Fort Washington, Pennsylvania; Jackson, Mississippi; Jonesboro, Arkansas; Lindale, Texas; Los Angeles, California; New Orleans, Louisiana; New York City; and St. Petersburg, Florida. Students gave up their spring break and paid their own expenses in order to serve on these projects.

In addition, twenty-one students are preparing to be involved in summer of service mission experiences in more than fifteen countries. The Northwestern football team was involved in sports evangelism in the Czech Republic in May, and the Drama Ministries Ensemble will be touring nationwide throughout the summer, presenting a play that encourages Christians to minister to persons dealing with HIV/AIDS.

Renovation of the science wing of Van Peursem Hall was completed over the summer of 1999 in time to house classes for the fall semester. This $3 million project was a huge improvement to our facilities, particularly to the building infrastructure.

Northwestern’s academic program continues to grow. New majors in church music and health science will begin in the fall, joining a writing and rhetoric major that was offered for the first time this year. The social work program received reaffirmation for a full eight-year cycle from the Council on Social Work Education. Northwestern’s expanding study-abroad program is sending student and faculty teams to the Czech Republic, England, Ireland, Mexico, and Taiwan this summer.

Nationwide recognition for Northwestern this past school year included being listed among only five Iowa institutions as a “best college buy” by a national research firm and having the athletic training, education, history, music, religion, and theatre departments highlighted in Rugg’s Recommendations on the Colleges.

In the fall of 1999 the college set a new school record with a total enrollment of 1,219, representing a 45 percent increase in the last thirteen years. Enrollment statistics continue to look very strong for the fall of 2000.

In review, Northwestern continues to have a multitude of blessings for which to be grateful. Certainly one of them is our covenantal relationship with the Reformed Church in America. The college looks forward to maintaining and even enhancing this relationship in the future.
Report of Reformed Church Women’s Ministries

It’s a sobering thought that it is the beginning of a new, and possibly the last, triennium for Reformed Church Women’s Ministries (RCWM) as an organization. This organization (under various names and as far back as 1875) mobilized women for mission involvement, financial support of missionaries, and development as spiritual leaders. Bible studies and programs were published and shared. Every third year since 1962, Triennial—a denomination-wide gathering for women—provided opportunities for women to come together for renewal, growth, fellowship, inspiration, and worship. First held at Hope College and subsequently around the country, Triennial drew between 1,500 to 2,300 women. Led by a Scripture theme, Triennial leaders introduced a three-year focus that guided women’s biblical studies and often provided the denomination with its focus.

Entering this new triennium in 1999 with the theme “God’s Spirit upon Us: Proclaiming, Celebrating, Rebuilding,” RCWM realized the depth of the challenge before it. How does RCWM respond to God’s Spirit leading in new directions? To face death in order to experience rebirth is a painful process. As many RCWM groups became separate and insular from the greater church and failed to involve or attract younger women, it was necessary to ask difficult questions and search for new ways to minister to and with women. It was also important to name the strengths and successful ministries of women and learn from them.

In August 1999, women from various agencies of the church presented four recommendations to the General Synod Council (GSC) for the future of women’s ministries in the denomination.

In October 1999 GSC passed those recommendations, one of which required the formation of an interim advisory committee for the purpose of formulating more specific proposals and policy recommendations around the formation and ongoing work of the office or council. It also asked for a report from this committee to the April meeting of the General Synod Council.

In March 2000 the Commission for Women and RCWM received the General Synod Council Coordinating Committee’s support to appoint a working group of up to twelve persons, with four members representing the commission, four representing RCWM, and four to be appointed at-large, to develop a plan for the future of women’s ministry within the RCA. This working group then submitted to the GSC in April 2000 the following recommendations:

A. To create an Office for Women, at the unit level within the denominational structure of the RCA, to be functional no later than July 1, 2001, with responsibility for coordinating programming, services, and advocacy by and for the women in the RCA.

The long-term goal of the Office for Women will be to collaborate with others in the structure of the church in order to address issues of importance for women in the RCA. Specifically, the Office for Women will work to:

Identify, affirm, and share the gifts of women.
Nurture the community of women in the RCA.
Develop risk-taking leaders from among women of the church to serve at all levels.
Engage women in mission.
Give equal voice to women within the church structures.
Enhance women’s access to information and resources.
Assist women in developing a wholeness of spiritual life.
Create a sense of belonging, a sense of place for women in the RCA.
Further, the director of the unit will have primary responsibility for staffing the Commission for Women.

B. Initial funding for the Office for Women will be acquired through the proposed fund drive that will be initiated and conducted by Reformed Church Women’s Ministries and the Commission for Women, as currently structured, and to continue under the new structure by the Office for Women, enlisting assistance from the RCA Foundation. Ongoing support of the Office for Women will be determined as the discussions about the “Mission Is One” funding strategy evolves.

C. To approve a second meeting of the joint working group, to report back to GSC at its fall 2000 meeting, in order to:

1. Formulate a position description for the unit director.
2. Articulate shorter-term objectives and a working structure for the Office for Women.
3. Determine evaluative criteria for the working of the Office for Women.

On Wednesday, April 12, 2000, the GSC passed all three recommendations. RCWM praises God for the visionary men and women of the denomination and for all the women who have paved the way throughout the ages past, for those who give leadership now, and those who will continue to do so in years to come.

GOD’S SPIRIT UPON US: BIBLE STUDY


2001 TRIENNIAL COMMITTEE

Triennial, a denomination-wide gathering for women, will be held in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, July 27-30, 2001. The following women serve as the planning team for the fourteenth Triennial celebration: Nancy Matthews (chairwoman), Ellen Tanis Awad, Barbara Boss, Mary Hondorp, Kim Kimpel, Joanne Ligtenburg, Audrae Philips, Arthea Raak, Gladys Rivera, Nancy Vollers, Gerry Wakeland, Arlene Waldorf, and Naomi Wilterdink.

NEW RCWM CONSULTANT

RCWM welcomed Loretta Smith as the new women’s ministries consultant for the Synod of the Great Lakes. Loretta has conducted teacher training workshops in many Reformed churches as an education ministries consultant for the synod. In her new position, Smith will work with classes and regional gatherings and assist local church women in programming, organization, and problem-solving. She joins Alicia Hermance, Barbara Nevevel, Carol Babinsky, Melinda Wilsey, Ruth De Young, and Shirley Boertje as the regional consultant staff of RCWM. These women have been faithfully working with women in local churches, encouraging them in their ministries and helping them gather together for mission and fellowship. RCWM is grateful for their dedication to God’s work on behalf of women.

REGIONAL CONFERENCES
RCWM regional conferences continue to grow in attendance. Crossroads, the gathering of the Synod of the Mid-Atlantics, meets every April. The Synod of Albany has an annual event in October. Joy, the Synod of the Far West event, took place in Tucson in April 1999 and will be held in San Jose in October, 2000. The Synod of the Heartland held its Dimensions on 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 take place in Grand Rapids in October 2000. Information about these conferences and other RCWM news and articles are now published quarterly in the *Church Herald* and can be located on the RCA website, www.rca.org.

**ECUMENICAL PARTNERSHIPS**

RCWM has joined the RCA’s ecumenical partners of the *Formula of Agreement* in a Lenten Prayer Journey 2000. The entire prayer process can be accessed on the RCA website.

**FINANCES**

Women of the church are generous people. They give from the heart and help with their hands. RCWM was able to raise $84,000 for the RCW Mission Commitment program, “Walking with Women and Children in the Cities of the World.” This provided $10,000 for the Moscow Protestant Chaplaincy/Soup Kitchen; $20,000 for the Synod of New York’s urban after-school programs and summer day camps; $20,000 for the Prince of Peace Children’s Home in Guayaquil, Ecuador; $25,000 for Project Hospitality in Staten Island, New York; and $9,000 for special projects of RCA women. In 1999 RCWM sent a gift of over $18,000 to the Rottschafer Preschool in Brewton, Alabama.

**FOOTSTEPS: HANDS-ON MISSION TRIPS**

In cooperation with Mission Services, RCWM is planning a two-week trip to Egypt in May 2000. Other opportunities for hands-on participation in mission work for the year 2000 are: the Nicaraguan Moravian Church in Bluefields, Nicaragua; The Other Way Ministries in Grand Rapids, Michigan; the Florence Crittenton Agency in Knoxville, Tennessee; Community Reformed Church in Newton, Iowa; Christ the King Church in Toronto, Ontario; and Rosemont Community Church in Tucson, Arizona. Thanks to the wonderful work and enthusiasm of Harriet Lautenbach, RCWM’s mission coordinator, women have these opportunities to share their personal and financial resources and receive many gifts in return.

**CONCLUSION**

RCWM celebrates its past, present, and future as women in the Reformed Church in America. It shares a vision of women:

1. Working in partnership with all women and men within the structure of the Reformed Church in America.
2. Developing their spiritual gifts for ministry and mission within a church that welcomes their leadership and fully utilizes their gifts.
3. Living out the Reformed Church’s mission statement by bringing God’s love to a lost and broken world through hands-on mission work and financial support.
4. Standing against prejudice, exclusivity, abuse, violence, and hoarded power that victimizes and oppresses women and children.

Reformed Church Women’s Ministries is grateful for the opportunity to serve and pray for a hope-filled future for all of God’s people.
Report of the Office of Christian Education

Congregational Services (CS) of the RCA is called by God and empowered by the Holy Spirit to be the very presence of Jesus Christ in the world. Its shared task is to equip congregations for ministry...

In 1992 the then–Christian Discipleship Division of the RCA understood its call in the following way:

- To follow Jesus Christ without condition.
- To enter into, and live among, a community of believers.
- To study God’s Word and to pray without ceasing.
- To witness to the reign of God in the world.

The work of Christian discipleship, as it was named then, was “to support congregations and ministries of the Reformed Church in America in nurturing and equipping disciples for ministry.” It was, if you will, “our shared task” in 1992—the ministry work accomplished though offices of education, social witness, and worship.

Eight years later the call of Christ to the church to make disciples is just as urgent; but the words used to articulate it, the structures under which it is carried out, and the cultural contexts in which churches are living it out all have changed. Using the Statement of Mission and Vision and the Twelve Priorities approved by the General Synod Council (GSC), the staff related to Congregational Services, including but not limited to the Office of Christian Education, applied this call of God through the church to a reevaluation of its ministry work.

Congregational Services’ vision for ministry called it back to the historic mission of the church and forward to a new and creative means by which to structure what it does. It will eventually begin to form itself around three distinct and essential areas of ministry named by new words consistent with the Statement of Mission and Vision, yet guided distinctly by its historic calling as the RCA: church leadership development, Christian discipleship for all people, and becoming the whole people of God (diversity). It is work grounded in the vision for the church recorded in Ephesians 4:11-13:

> The gifts [God] gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers [church leadership development]; to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ [Christian discipleship for all people], until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ [the whole people of God].

In defining tasks in this way, however, Congregational Services and its staff understood theologically and observed practically that the life and practice of Christian discipleship is never so easily divided as it is by church structure. One cannot “go and make disciples,” as Christ instructed us in what we now know as the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20), by making but not going; by baptizing but not teaching; providing opportunities of faith formation for those within a congregation but not for those who had not been invited.

Similarly, Evangelism and Church Development Services (EVCD) was also articulating a clear vision for its work in evangelism, new church development, and revitalization. In 1998 General Synod approved a document called “Faithful Witnesses,” which focused on these three areas.

Here are two clear and compelling visions, yet each dependent in some way upon the other for a completed sense of discipleship. “Faithful Witnesses” focused specifically on new church development, evangelism, and revitalization, yet also acknowledged that a biblical understanding of a faithful witness to the gospel would also include areas like education, public witness, worship, and discipleship training for all age groups. Those ministries, it
said, were the responsibility of Congregational Services—responsibility CS had claimed in identifying the three key areas of its own work: discipleship, leadership development, and a commitment to diversity. Similarly, CS acknowledged what those in EVCD had already named: that a wholistic understanding of Christian calling as disciples includes evangelism and church development alongside education and public witness.

Generally, CS and EVCD have done their particular ministry work independently of each other, and within their own working groups, except for the general coordination offered all denominational work at various staff tables and committees. Would a closer working relationship between both units enhance the ministry of the whole church? Would it also more closely reflect the reality of ministry on the front lines, where congregations cannot fully embrace and live out the RCA’s Statement of Mission and Vision by keeping their understandings and practice of evangelism and new church development wholly separate from their understandings and practice of education, discipleship, and public witness? In short, could these two units accomplish more to fulfill the RCA’s Statement of Mission and Vision together as one unit than they could separately?

To those questions, EVCD and CS staff, along with the Leadership Advisory Team, said closer and more cooperative work is essential to the vitality of these two units. Moreover, it has expressed a willingness to explore, through voluntarily working as a single entity for the next six months, the merit of permanently combining the work of CS and EVCD into a single operating unit. During this time period, the Rev. Dick Welscott, director of EVCD, will serve as the acting director of the combined unit. The General Synod Council will be an active partner in this process of exploration. The directors of EVCD and CS suggest that no final decision be made regarding structure before the October 2000 meeting of GSC.

**Year for Education**

> The future does not come ballooning over the horizon, governed by strange, unpredictable forces.
> The future comes creeping over the carpets in our homes.

Paul Calvin Payne

Never mind the reality that hardwood and linoleum and sometimes even dirt is the flooring of our homes and churches. The concept is right. The future of the church, even in times of great change like these, ultimately depends less on great global forces and more on what happens to those who creep across our carpets: those who cross on their knees; those who take their first toddling steps and those who have learned the freedom of running; those who bear the weight of the family on their shoulders; those strangers who cross the RCA’s thresholds.

The RCA’s mission and vision statement has illumined this opportunity. The world and its yearnings have come to the doorsteps of its churches and homes. The Reformed Church’s life and witness is to a world grown small with connections but almost incomprehensively large with challenges. The living room carpets of affluence and the bare floors of poverty are the staging areas for the opportunities of a new millennium if we as the church choose to take on that challenge.

How might that happen? Earlier this decade a study by the Search Institute discovered that a planned and intentional emphasis on Christian education was the best indicator of vitality in a Christian congregation. The Reformed Church, long a supporter of education—be it for its ministers of Word and sacrament or its laypeople—stands well-prepared to answer the challenges and opportunities of a new millennium. But to do this, it needs to be reminded both of its heritage and its future in education: “to inform, form, and transform communities and persons in lived and living, whole and wholesome Christian faith for the reign of God,”
to use the poetic words of educator Thomas Groome. It must affirm again the power of telling the glorious deeds of God to the coming generation.

In October 1998 the General Synod Council approved the designation of the program year 2001-2002 as the Year for Education in the RCA. A number of planning teams have begun to define how this year will be lived out, both denominationally and congregationally. In addition, the minister for education has begun to seek financial support for these efforts.

Children’s Ministry

Throughout the Old Testament, the leaders of Israel built altars as reminders of what had happened to God’s people. If someone asked about the meaning of the stones, the response was clear: they were to tell the stories of God’s working. Today we are similarly reminded to tell God’s story to our children. The Office for Children’s Ministries is committed to offering the best resources to help make it happen.

LiFE (Living in Faith Everyday), a Bible-based curriculum for children in preschool through sixth grade jointly developed by the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC) and the Reformed Church in America, emphasizes 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 recently made important revisions to the curriculum and are now working on redesigned leader’s guides. (The redesigned leader’s guides will be available beginning with the winter quarter 2000-2001.) The revisions retain the essential core of the curriculum while making its content more useable for leaders.

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. Beginning in the fall of 2000, LiFE Support will be available exclusively on the RCA website.

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. The 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 RCA celebrations, history, sacraments, traditions, and missions. The handbook is available free each fall with a 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.

In addition to the core curricula, the RCA has begun participation in the development of the
Vacation Bible Experience series, a five-day Bible experience program published by Augsburg Fortress in partnership with the *Formula of Agreement* partners. “2000 Ark Avenue: God’s Great Get-Together” is available for summer 2000.

The General Synod Council assigned responsibility for children’s mission education to Congregational Services. Congregational Services, along with Mission Services, Stewardship and Communication Services, and Evangelism and Church Development Services, developed plans for a thirteen-session study, Living in Mission Everywhere (LIME), for children in kindergarten through sixth grade. Coordinated with the Mission of the Month focuses, the following sessions will be available at the 2000 General Synod: “Native American Indian Ministries,” “Central and South America,” “Reformed Church World Service,” and “Mexico.”

Leader training designs and workshops for denominationally supported curricula are available to support planners, leaders, and teachers. Regional synod education staff and a network of education consultants 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 Information Helpline, (800) 968-7221, and through the Office for Children’s Ministry, (800) 968-3943.

Catechism Instruction

Many adults who are part of the “silent generation” or the early “baby boomers” grew up on the Heidelberg Catechism, first published in 1563. Saturday or Wednesday evening catechism instruction classes were the norm for children and youth in many Reformed churches. That often meant memorizing the 129 questions and answers that made up the catechism. It was hard work, and as new methods of educational practice were developed, catechism instruction was often discontinued.

Some new research is now suggesting that, while we may not miss the instructional methods of those old catechism classes, the church has missed its impact. Robert Wuthnow, the Princeton University sociologist of religion, has said that the biggest reason why “mainline” Protestant churches in the United States are no longer retaining their young people is that they have failed to teach them a “clear, compelling set of religious beliefs” (“Social Witness in Generous Orthodoxy: The New Presbyterian Study Catechism,” in the *Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, Vol. XXI, No. 1, 2000, p. 42).

LiFE curriculum attempted to address this issue by including in every leader’s kit a booklet containing questions and answers—written at the fifth and sixth grade reading level—based on the Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession, Our Song of Hope, and Our World Belongs to God. The booklet is used in LiFE leader’s guides at all levels as backgrounds for leaders, and becomes an integral part of the instruction at the fifth/sixth grade level. Now a new catechism with new instructional methods is available. At their 210th General Assembly, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) approved *Belonging to God: A First Catechism*, with sixty questions and answers written at the third grade reading level, and *The Study Catechism*, with versions both for youth (intended for a confirmation class setting) and for adults.

These new catechisms could be excellent tools to help members of the RCA know what we as Reformed Christians believe and to nurture our faith. But because of the nature of this potential resource, as a stated catechism produced by another denomination, the Office of Education felt that a more formal review of its contents would be appropriate. To that end, and at the request of the office of Education, the General Synod Council at its April 2000 meeting voted to request the Commission on Theology, in consultation with the Congregational Services Committee of the General Synod Council and the Office for Christian Education,
to study and evaluate the content of these catechisms in the context of possible use in the RCA, for report to the General Synod Council.

**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.

Twenty-two regional Children and Worship trainers in the U.S. and Canada are available for scheduling and presenting either introductory sessions for congregations who want to learn more about the program or basic training events for congregations who want to become involved in the ministry. In addition, the trainers provide enrichment events or specialized events for congregations that are already involved in the Children and Worship ministry.

Trainers who work on behalf of the Reformed Church in America, the Christian Reformed Church in North America, and the Presbyterian Church in Canada include Barbara Cullum and Geania Lasda (Regional Synod of Albany); Nina Dupuis, Cathy Francis, Marie Prins, Linda Shaw, Diane Tait-Katerberg, Valerie Walker, and Anelia Wierbos (Regional Synod of Canada); Candy Baylis, Nancy Errico, and Ann Jean Vander Veen (Regional Synod of the Far West); Alice Apol, Marcia Floding, Deb Swanson, and Ellen Vellenga (Regional Synod of the Great Lakes); Deb Mechler (Regional Synod of the Heartland); Lavonne De Boer, Carol Humme, and Karen Stabelfeldt (Regional Synod of Mid-America); Kay Weeks (Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics); and Ardis Mercer (Regional Synod of New York).


In December 1998 Phyllis Palsma and Willa Brown introduced the Children and Worship program to church leaders from around the world at a three Padare (a Shona word meaning “meeting place”) workshops held prior to the World Council of Churches Jubilee Assembly in Harare, Zimbabwe. In response to interest generated by these presentations, General Synod president the Rev. Frederick Kruthof, in his report to General Synod, proposed studying the feasibility of taking the training program worldwide. In response the 1999 General Synod adopted the following recommendation:

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 (*MGS 1999*, R-33, pp. 142-143).
Representatives from the staffs of Congregational Services and Mission Services, the 1999 president of General Synod, and Children and Worship trainers met to develop plans for this venture. Their efforts resulted in a new program proposal, Children and Worship International, to provide training for mission partners in Hungary, South Africa, Kenya, and The Gambia during the next four years. This plan was approved by the General Synod Council in October 1999.

Wherever possible, the program coordinator and trainers will work closely with RCA missionaries. Financial contributions for this ministry will make it possible for the Children and Worship program training to be presented to RCA global church partners. Contributions will provide funds to pay the coordinator and trainers and to purchase the resources necessary to carry out the program. The campaign to raise funds for this new venture is already underway, with a total of $7,312.50 received to date. That amount will fund about one-quarter of the first year’s training events in Budapest and Nagykoros, Hungary.

Missionaries Jane Van Es and Ruth De Haan, who will be working in The Gambia, have participated in the Children and Worship basic training and will be able to assist with storytelling when the training takes place in The Gambia. Edna Pick from the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa will be trained in the fall of 2000 and will assist with training when it takes place in South Africa.

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 each of the racial/ethnic councils, as well as from the General Synod Council. Ron Den Hartog serves the General Synod Council as denominational youth team leader on a forty-day-per-year contract. Den Hartog 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, continue to sponsor most of 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 for the Heartland, and several classis-based events in the Far West. Through interaction provided by the youth team table, however, both creative and financial resources can be moved between parties and can enhance the quality of all the events.

Cooperative tables of ministry, however, work only when each participant or group at the table can bring its own unique contributions and its personal commitments to that table. The denomination, in addition to funding the bulk of the costs for the Denominational Youth Team, has also said that it remains committed to providing 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 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.

In addition, the Rev. Jason Perry, a member of the Classis of Illiana 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 into 1999. That contract with Perry was discontinued when he took another position, and budget restrictions will prevent the contract from being renewed with another person.

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 youth ministries 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 Helpline manager, remains in tune with current youth and youth-related resources, and with the youth team, and can provide immediate consultation services or advice to congregations. In addition, the Office of Hunger Education, under the leadership of Betty Voskuil, has produced *A Fast that Lasts*, a twenty-four-to-thirty-hour hunger education retreat designed for middle- and high-schoolers.

**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 then–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 been unable 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 a limited-basis contract, did produce some resources for congregations to use with families and provided some liaisons with other family ministry organizations. But any momentum those eighteen-to-twenty-days per year were able to sustain in ministry to families has now been lost due to the resignation of Schwanda. That leaves the RCA without staff 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.

**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 the *RCA Resources for Ministry* catalogs reveal 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, 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 to increase the knowledge of faith, but also how to equip adults to live out and model what it is 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. Here 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.

The word “engagement” was purposefully chosen, to challenge congregations to move beyond simply acquiring more biblical knowledge to asking how Scripture engages life, work, and ministry. Out of this initiative about one hundred RCA congregations named 1998 the “Year of the Bible,” using a resource by that name to provide its members a guided reading through the entire text of the Scriptures. The Office of Christian Education supported those congregations with networking and periodic communications. At least an equal number of congregations have used “Year of the Bible” themes since then, drawing on the knowledge and practice of other congregations collected by the Office of Christian Education. This emphasis 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. The catechumene process, overseen by denominational offices of worship and evangelism, opens new doors to an extraordinary process of welcoming and discipleship of new Christians. (See the report of the Office of Worship.) 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 also continues to explore partnerships with RCA camps and conference centers around the themes of spiritual formation and spiritual retreating.

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 recommendations, educational workshops, or even a redesign of the educational ministry. Consultants can most easily be contacted through the education ministry of the regional synods or by calling the Office for Christian Education, (800) 968-3943, for referral to a consultant.

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 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 for Christian Education 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 certifying 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 revised certification handbook provides 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 in the process, 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, including: the ongoing relationship of associates in ministry to the classis, the ongoing relationship of associates in ministry to the board of elders and consistory in the congregation in which she or he serves, and the accountability of associates in ministry to the classis and/or the board of elders. That’s why this office (joined by two classes) overtured the General Synod last year, asking that the Commission on Church Order 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” (MGS 1999, R-32, p. 136). The commission’s report on this issue will come to the 2000 General Synod.

More and more, leadership for ministry in local congregations will be provided by skilled persons called by God and empowered by the Holy Spirit, but not ordained to church office. It is imperative that the church find ways to ensure their competence and then take advantage of their gifts in seeking 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 of the generosity of RCA congregations, both individually and through classes, in providing crucial funding for the work of the office. Beginning in the mid-1980s, the majority of staff and office costs associated with the work has been covered by assessments. In 2000 about $2.85 of the General Synod Council assessment is designated for Congregational Services, which includes the Office of Christian Education. This assessment income, however, formed only part of the funding picture. A still-significant piece of 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 sponsored by the office. Finally, a number of churches generously support the ministry of Christian education. In 1999 Congregational Services received about $68,000 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 you, many essential initiatives could not be undertaken.

This funding basis will change with the 2001 budget, however. In October 1999 the General Synod Council approved a budget plan that will shift all assessment income to support the infrastructure needs of the Reformed Church, leaving contribution and investment income as the two primary sources of funding for Congregational Services. A Mission is One account, established by Mission Services, will be a major source of contribution funding.

This new budget plan should clarify greatly the funding of the work of the Office of Christian
Education. It also provides hope for the funding of unaccomplished or under-accomplished areas of work. 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. Funds for new initiatives in the Mission Is One budget plan may aid in some of these areas.

General Synod Referrals

The 1999 General Synod voted:

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 the resources (MGS 1999, R-16, p. 142).

The Office of Christian Education has been working with a Christian educator in an analysis of the educational settings and needs specific to urban areas. A preliminary report was presented to a gathering of representatives from the racial/ethnic councils and then to the Council for Christian Education. This report can also be the basis for a wider dialogue in the educational community. In addition, the Office of Christian Education will work with the urban ministry team and with the racial/ethnic councils to identify additional materials for recommendation and use in the church.

Report of the Office of Diaconal Ministries

In 1993 General Synod president Beth Marcus challenged the Reformed Church to look to its laity for leadership and ministry, and in the midst of that commitment, to begin additional programs for diaconal ministries (MGS 1993, R-2 and R-3, p. 153). This is what the church has done, faithfully and earnestly, and the fruits of that work are clearly evident across the church. Deacons are becoming leaders in ministries of mercy, service, and outreach in their RCA congregations and communities.

This reality was very apparent at a recent diaconal conference in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Workshops, led by deacons who have recently caught the vision of what it means to be a deacon, included:

Reorganizing to lead your congregation in mission.
Discovering the deacon’s role.
Establishing a deacon servant’s network.
Reporting on a recent deacon interchange between deacons in the U.S. and Chiapas, Mexico.

Similar training events are occurring in varying degrees and forms in each of the eight regional synods. These events are having an impact on deacons throughout the entire denomination. In addition, resource people are now available in each of the eight regional synods to complement the work of the Office of Diaconal Ministries located in Grand Rapids, Michigan.
New resources this year include *The Basin and Towel*, by Michael Card. This is an inspirational music video that debuted at the 1999 diaconal ministries gathering. Also, a deacon’s forum has been established on the RCA web page at www.rca.org/churchlife/lead/deacons/forum. This is to encourage continued dialogue and discussion around diaconal issues. The office of diaconal ministries offers a full range of resources for the training and empowering of deacons.

The 2000 diaconal gathering will be held in conjunction with Mission 2000 and General Synod at Hofstra University in Long Island, New York. Several diaconal delegates will attend, and many of them will be leading discovery groups.

Although the 1993 General Synod called for the focus on deacons to run through the year 2000, the office of diaconal ministries will continue its work of advocacy for and training of deacons into the foreseeable future.

**Report of the Task Force on Consistories**

The Task Force on Consistories (“ad hoc committee”) received its mandate from not one but two General Synods. The 1997 General Synod, responding to the report of the RCA’s general secretary, the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, adopted the following resolution:

> 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* dealing with the election, tasks, and responsibilities of consistories in light of 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).

The 1998 General Synod, noting that this committee had not yet been convened, responded to a proposal by the Rev. Dr. Charles Van Engen in his president’s report by adopting the following recommendation:

> To instruct the General Synod Council to refer to the ad hoc committee . . . the responsibility to also consider how the Reformed Church in America can develop a new understanding of the purpose, make-up, and work of its consistories so that consistories may begin to see themselves and 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 include 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, p.511).

The task force, as finally constituted, included two members of the Commission on Church Order, two members of the Commission on Theology, two ministers of Word and sacrament,
three deacons, two elders, five women, and one cross-cultural missionary. In addition, there was a member of the fourth office, all within a membership of nine persons. The members of the task force are:

Mary Clark (elder)
The Rev. Dr. Paul Fries (professor of theology, minister of Word and sacrament, Commission on Theology)
The Rev. Amy Jo Van Es Hawley (minister of Word and sacrament, Commission on Theology)
The Rev. Wesley Kiel, chair (retired pastor)
Brad Lambert (deacon)
Mary Linge (deacon)
Carol Myers (elder, Commission on Church Order)
Russell Paarlberg (deacon, Commission on Church Order)
Helen Wierenga (cross-cultural missions)
The Revs. Roger De Young and Jeff Japinga (staff resource persons)

The task force met four times. In its initial meeting it spent a good deal of time coming to a consensus about the focus of its mandate. Both resolutions seemed to rise out of a concern that the old wineskins of RCA polity were not elastic enough for the new wine of the kingdom at the present time. While the directions from the 1997 General Synod appeared to call the task force to be focused on the structural issues of consistory leadership in the mission and ministry of the congregation, the 1998 resolution directed it to address consistory leadership in a broader way.

The 1997 resolution addressed its concern for “ministry and mission” with a focus on the consistory’s leadership: “the consistory’s calling to give spiritual leadership in the ministry and mission of congregations.”

The 1998 resolution addressed the same concern with a focus on the consistory’s agency: “so that consistories may begin to see themselves and function as agents of mission and ministry in their contexts.”

It seems clear from the RCA Constitution that the primary role of consistories is to lead the congregation in its mission and ministry. The understanding of “agents” was used in approaching this task.

The reports out of which each resolution originated made it evident that there was a longing in the church for clear directions on how to function as the church (and consistory) in a rapidly changing world where old patterns were either unfamiliar (constituencies new to the Reformed Church) or didn’t appear to be working the way they once did.

The task force took issue with the word “begin” in the committee’s mandate (“so that consistories may begin to see themselves and function as agents of ministry and mission in their contexts”). Many consistories already do see themselves and function as agents (and leaders) of mission and ministry and have done so for a long time. It is important to recognize that a multitude of elders, deacons, and pastors, functioning together in consistory, are faithful to their calling and office. On the other hand, in order to be faithful, all leaders continually need renewal, spiritual growth, and new vision in mission and ministry. Some members of the task force and some responders to the questionnaire expressed concern that the work of the task force was intended to lead to more of a “business” model of assessing kingdom work, an exclusively, “management by objective” approach. On the contrary, the task force believes that the primary measuring scale in ministry and mission is faithfulness.

A secondary scale is effectiveness. It must be emphasized that this scale is secondary to faithfulness, but also necessary. Experience and research indicate there are more effective
and less effective ways of leading, organizing, and deploying the church for ministry and
mission. The “best way of doing it” in one era or setting may well be ineffective and even
counter-productive in another era or setting. The church must continually be receptive to
the leading of the Spirit in discerning the changing spirit of the age and effective ways of
responding to those changes with the gospel. It is the spirit of the charge given to the task
force and to all churches and consistories by General Synod. Effectiveness may not be the
measure of faithfulness.

In order to avoid duplicating work that had already been done, the task force reviewed
overtures and proposed amendments to the *Book of Church Order (BCO)*, going back to
1987, which addressed consistories and the offices of elder and deacon. These had to do,
almost exclusively, with three issues:

1. Participation of deacons in higher assemblies.
2. Methods of nomination and election of elders and deacons.
3. Terms of office for elders and deacons.

The sheer number of initiatives in these areas seem to indicate an underlying dissatisfaction
with the way the current system functions and suggests a need for an examination of the
structure.

The proposed new “Order for the Ordination and Installation of Deacons and Elders” was
reviewed. The new order makes a very clear statement of the role of the consistory in leading
the congregation in ministry and mission:

Elders and deacons, together with the minister/s, form the consistory, to lead God’s
people in proclaiming good news to the poor, righteousness to the nations, and peace
among all.

The 1998 report of the GSC’s Office of Evangelism and Church Development Services, “A
Revitalized Church for a Renewed Future,” was studied. This report, prepared by another
task force (Revitalization Summit Team) addressed concerns similar to those the Task
Force on Consistories was called to address, namely renewing the vitality of the church’s
life and mission. It focused primarily on dynamic leadership from the minister of Word and
sacrament as the key to renewal. The outcome of that study and report was “A Strategy
for Revitalization,” designed for pastors. This work deserves continuing attention and use.
Indeed, the pastors of many of the congregations recommended as models of mission and
mission had been influenced by the report and its strategic implementation.

Two booklets published by Reformed Church Press as resources for consistories were
reviewed: *The Ministry of the Deacon*, by Betty Voskuil, and *The Ministry of the Elder*,
Workshop,” produced by the Office of Diaconal Ministries of the RCA, was also reviewed.
These publications are commended to the church as helpful tools in training and equipping
elders and deacons.

The Rev. Paul Fries, a member of the task force, was asked to write a paper on the offices of
the church, with particular attention to the nature and function of consistories. The Rev. Amy
Jo Van Es Hawley was asked to prepare a study guide for use with the paper and the preamble
of the *BCO*. The paper and the study guide have been reviewed. They are commended to
the General Synod and to the church for further study.

Stated clerks of classes, regional synod executives, racial/ethnic council executives, and
others were asked to nominate consistories and churches who were, in one way or another,
models of faithfulness and effectiveness. Questionnaires were sent to representatives of those consistories, asking them to describe helpful approaches and programs, particularly in the areas of:

- Selection, training, and nurturing of elders and deacons.
- Structural adaptations for the consistory.
- Spiritual renewal of consistories and churches.

Members of the committee followed up these questionnaires with telephone or in-person interviews. Several important points came to light during the process:

- There is a sense in the church that this is a critical time for the church of Jesus Christ in general and for the RCA in particular.
- While circumstances vary widely (setting, size, constituency, thriving, surviving), the desire for renewal and help cuts across all lines of difference.
- Almost no one seems to have a sense of having discovered the cure for the common church. Most seem somewhat surprised at having been nominated for the study. Almost all seem hopeful they would receive a benefit from, rather than confident they would make a contribution to, the work of the task force.

At the beginning of the process of carrying out the task force’s mandate, a wide diversity of opinion about what the primary issues were and what should be done to address them were found. While a healthy diversity of vision and emphasis continues among the members of this task force, the following conclusions have been made:

**Reorganization/Restructuring.** A need is felt for some reorganization or restructuring. Several of the consistories that responded to the questionnaire reported that they had been blessed by changes in the way they did their work.

Several churches reported the benefit of placing administrative responsibility in the hands of a smaller group within the consistory. This movement began in very large churches that found that the number of elders needed to effectively care for the congregation made the size of the consistory unwieldy for doing business. Placing administrative responsibility with a smaller group has subsequently been effectively adapted for churches of most sizes and settings.

One consistory inserted in its regular agenda an item called “Creative Agenda.” This served to move the consistory from a tendency to focus on “maintenance” and to open discussion about new directions and new forms of ministry.

Another adaptation several churches have been led to consider involves “casting lots” as part of the selection process for elders and deacons. While previous General Synods have considered and rejected this process as the primary method for selecting consistory members, several churches have been experimenting with its use at various points in the selection process as a supplement to election, and they commend it as both biblical and helpful.

A number of churches reported using “gift inventories” to help members identify their gifts and then using that information to help place both consistory members and members of the church in appropriate ministries.

**Spiritual Issues.** The issues facing the church and consistories are primarily spiritual, and so are the solutions. There is a growing awareness in the church of the need to strengthen and deepen the spiritual roots of leadership and consistory functioning. At the same time, there are practical suggestions for accessing the spiritual solutions.

A call from God is the central concept in understanding these offices. As already noted, there
is considerable interest in the study and use of spiritual gifts.

A number of churches are using mentoring as a means of discipling and training, with ministers and more experienced elders and deacons entering into a mentoring relationship with less experienced elders and deacons.

Many churches have found the use of periodic retreats for orientation, education, and fellowship to be helpful in building effective consistories.

Many churches report renewal in the life and ministry of churches through inclusion in the regular agenda of significant portions of time dedicated to prayer, Bible study, and sharing. This comes to be seen as equal in importance to the business to be done.

**Learning from One Another.** There is a desire and appreciation for discovering how other churches and consistories are “doing it.” People learn from one another. The Spirit still speaks to the churches and through the churches. “Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches” (Rev. 2:7a). While particular models may not be directly transferable to a different setting, they do serve to open up the possibility of alternative and more effective approaches to mission and ministry.

One church reported that after an article appeared in the *Church Herald* describing their restructuring of consistory, they received dozens of requests for details.

**Training Opportunities:** Pastors, churches, and consistories are looking, sometimes almost desperately, for training opportunities for elders and deacons.

More than one pastor reported that the first two years of the term of a new elder or deacon was spent learning what the office was about. Most pastors make some attempt at orientation but do not feel such attempts are adequate. Others reported how helpful a regional synod orientation and training program for elders and deacons had been. Shared community as much as didactic content contributed to the value of this program.

One pastor reported that the most effective thing he did for the mission and ministry of the church was to identify a group of leaders and spend a year with them in a discipling program. Drawing on the rich Reformed tradition can also be a source of consistorial renewal.

**Flexibility.** There must be an appropriate freedom and flexibility for organizing the church for ministry and mission. That freedom and flexibility is both bestowed and limited in the RCA’s Constitution and in particular in the Book of Church Order. The task force experienced a deepening appreciation of the biblical integrity and contemporary relevance of the Preamble to the Book of Church Order. It eloquently describes, in a timeless manner, the mission and ministry of the church, the roles of the consistory, and the offices of the church in the fulfillment of that mission and ministry:

> The governmental functioning of these offices takes place, not apart from, but in harmony with the understanding of the mission of the church and the nature of its ministry. This basic affirmation has three consequences. First, the purpose of church government is to aid the church in the development of its own life, in order that it may carry out the mission of its Head—to announce the good news of his Saviorhood and extend his Lordship throughout the world. Second, there is only one ministry and that ministry is shared by all Christians. The particular ministries of those who hold office arise out of this common ministry in order to serve it. Third, the ecclesiastical offices which the Reformed church deems necessary for its ordering are understood to be essentially functional in nature, and the term “office” is everywhere viewed in terms of service (*BCO*, Preamble, pp.1-2; underlines added for emphasis).

It might be argued that these statements in the Preamble are sufficient and must be understood to preface each section of the *BCO* as they are read and applied, such as Part I, Article 2,
“Responsibilities of the Consistory.” The task force believes, however, that it might be well to include a statement about “leading the congregation in mission and ministry” at the beginning of this list of responsibilities lest the primary responsibility be lost in the tasks and details that follow. In the same vein a statement of the missional nature of the offices of elder and deacon might well be included in the BCO description of those offices (Part I, Articles 5 and 6).

R-50
To refer to the Commission on Church Order for review and/or revision to the Book of Church Order the following issues:

(a) To add a section defining the office of elder to parallel Part I, Article 1, Section 10, defining the office of deacon.
(b) To include “missional leadership” in the descriptions of the responsibilities of consistories, boards of elders, and boards ofdeacons.
(c) To more clearly accommodate the placing of administrative responsibility in the hands of a smaller group within the consistory. (ADOPTED)

R-51
To direct Congregational Services and the RCA Distribution Center to distribute and encourage the use of this report, the Preamble of the Book of Church Order, the paper, “Faithful Consistories,” and the accompanying study guide, to all the consistories of the RCA.

kThe advisory committee recommended to amend R-51 as follows (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken out):

R-51 (amendment)
To direct Congregational Services and the RCA Distribution Center to distribute make available and encourage the use of this report, the Preamble of the Book of Church Order, the paper, “Faithful Consistories,” and the accompanying study guide, to all the consistories of the RCA. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

Reasons:

1. Making these materials available, especially utilizing the website rather than mandating distribution, will be less costly and more earth-friendly.

2. Clerks of classes could also be encouraged to aid in the distribution of these materials, especially for congregations unable to access the materials electronically.

R-52
To encourage regional synods and classes to develop and present orientation and training workshops for consistories in their jurisdictions. (ADOPTED)

R-53
To instruct Congregational Services to collect, evaluate, prepare and/or make available orientation and training materials for consistories, with special attention to the office of elder. (ADOPTED)

R-54
To instruct Congregational Services to prepare and make available,
in a useable form, the three parts of the Constitution, for distribution to the churches. (NOT ADOPTED)

R-55
To encourage every church to provide the three parts of the Constitution to each of its consistory members.

kThe advisory committee recommended to amend R-55 as follows (additions are underlined):

R-55 (amendment)
To encourage every church to provide the three parts of the Constitution (the Book of Church Order, the Standards of the Reformed Church, and the Liturgy) to each of its consistory members and to incorporate these materials into consistorial training. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

Reason: Distribution and awareness of these materials is an important congregational responsibility.

Resources and Bibliography
(Available from the RCA Distribution Center)

Olsen, Charles M., Transforming Church Boards.

Resources for Ministers and Consistories of the RCA. Published by and available from the Office of Ministry and Personnel Services of the RCA.


White, Bob, The Ministry of the Elder.

Branches on the Vine, a consistory orientation program.

The Constitution of the RCA, the Confessions, the Liturgy, and the Book of Church Order.


Meeter, Daniel, Meeting Each Other in Doctrine, Liturgy, and Government.

APPENDIX

Faithful Consistories
Office, Ministry, and Mission in the Reformed Church in America
The Rev. Paul R. Fries

Introduction

The report of the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, general secretary of the Reformed Church in America, to the 1997 General Synod called for the appointment of an ad hoc committee to review denominational policy regarding the formation and function of consistories and to
suggest ways that the mission of the church could be served through changes in the selection and role definition of elders and deacons. A slightly modified version of this recommendation was adopted by the synod:

To instruct the moderator of the General Synod Council, in consultation with the general secretary, to appoint an ad hoc committee…to study those sections of the *Book of Church Order (BCO)* dealing with the election, tasks, and responsibilities of consistories in light of 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 (*MGS 1997*, R-6, p. 406).¹

When the synod met the following year, at the recommendation of its president, the Rev. Charles Van Engen, the charge to the ad hoc committee was furthered defined “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” (*MGS 1998*, p. 39).²

It became evident to the members of the ad hoc committee when they first met in January 1999, that because of its scope and complexity their task required concurrent investigations in several areas. One of the most crucial of these, committee members concluded, concerns the Reformed understanding of the offices and their assembly in the congregation, that is, of elders, deacons, ministers of Word and sacrament, and their gathering as a consistory. Accordingly, the paper that follows explores these concerns as they relate to the ministry and mission of the church, but only in regard to the congregation.³

These terms, “ministry” and “mission,” govern both the recommendation made by Granberg-Michaelson to the 1997 synod and the modified version approved by the assembly, as well as Van Engen’s proposal to the 1998 synod. As will be seen, ministry and mission are not foreign to the Reformed understanding of office, nor do they represent a new set of tasks to be added to traditional duties of consistory members. Ministry and mission are at the heart of the Reformed understanding of office. The question is not how new purposes are infused into old offices, but rather the retrieval of a theology of office that has been all but forgotten in many quarters of the church and that is missional in its nature and purpose. When the integrity of ministry, mission, and office is grasped, a sound biblical and Reformed basis will be provided for the creation of new structures and practices that will better serve Christ’s ministry and mission in a constantly changing world. The discussion, then, will begin with a consideration of the nature and purpose of office, move to an exploration of the mission of the church, and conclude with reflections on “re-visioning” the consistory.

**The Offices: Representative Government**

The Reformed understanding of governance is fundamentally representative, a point clearly made in the denomination’s *Book of Church Order (BCO)*.⁴ A word of caution must be raised immediately, however, because this statement describes a theological rather then political understanding of representation. The Reformed doctrine of church governance is not democratic (the rule of the people through representatives), but might be termed “Christocratic” (the rule of Christ through representatives). The installed officers of the church minister as Christ’s representatives, each according to the provisions of the office held. When those in office come together on a regular basis as a consistory to oversee and enable the life of the congregation, it is Christ’s governance they seek to effect, not oversight born of their own wisdom. If we think of the congregation as “the people,” then we may say that in the Reformed view, the offices both represent Christ to the people, and also represent him *through the people*. 
This understanding of the nature and purpose of office becomes clear when we examine the three foundational stones of the RCA: its creeds and confessions, government, and liturgies—those documents the Rev. Daniel Meeter whimsically compares to the three legs supporting a milk stool. Meeter notes that the constitution of the RCA, e.g., *what constitutes us*, is not governance, nor worship, nor confession, but the three together as the Preamble to the RCA *Book of Church Order* states explicitly. What do we learn from these about representative office?

The confessions of the RCA help us less than we might expect. The Belgic Confession alone speaks of government.

> We believe that this true church ought to be governed according to the spiritual order that our Lord has taught us in this Word. There should be ministers or pastors to preach the Word of God and administer the sacraments. There should also be elders and deacons along with the pastors to make up the council of the church (Article 30).

Article 30 continues with a brief description of the responsibilities of the three offices:

> By this means true religion is preserved; true doctrine is able to take its course; and the evil are corrected spiritually and held in check, so that also the poor and all the afflicted may be helped and comforted according to their need.

The discussion of office continues in the next article, which specifies that ministers, elders, and deacons are to be prayerfully elected by the church and their election understood as God’s call to office; that all ministers are equal in power and authority since Jesus Christ is the only universal bishop; and that ministers and elders (one wonders why deacons are excluded) should be esteemed by the people.

As brief as this presentation may be, several important points are established by it: the claim of a scriptural basis for a threefold understanding of office and governance; the general responsibilities of the three offices; the manner of election and call; and, of paramount importance, the testimony that Jesus Christ himself is the only true bishop and that the authority of the officeholder derives from him and him alone. Here is the solid confessional bedrock of the RCA’s doctrine that the offices represent Christ.

While the Belgic Confession firmly establishes the threefold pattern of church governance, it provides little help in understanding the meaning of office in the Reformed tradition. The *Book of Church Order*, the second “leg” on which the RCA stands, however, sheds additional light on the question. The *BCO* is far more than a manual of definitions and procedures—it is decidedly not an ecclesiastical version of *Robert’s Rules of Order*. A foundational principle of Reformed governance is that government builds on doctrine, order on confession. We might think of the *BCO* as the agent that the church uses to live out in practical day-by-day existence its evangelical faith.

Thus the first thing that the *BCO* attends to is not theories of government and administration, but a statement of the gospel. Its initial offering is an elegant and profoundly Reformed statement concerning the church and its Lord. It includes the RCA’s original mission statement. Jesus Christ is the only head of the church described in Pauline terms as his body. He and he alone holds ultimate authority, and all authority exercised in the church is derived from him. Thus the authority of the offices of the church is *delegated* authority. In its description of the elder, the *BCO* makes the point succinctly: “Christ, according to the New Testament, has appointed officers to govern the church under himself. Their authority to govern derives from him even though they are elected by the people.”
It is important to note that the line of authority described here does not move from Christ to the people to the offices, in which case pastors, elders and deacons would be accountable in their spiritual exercise to the congregation, but directly to those in office from Christ through the people. Those who hold office are responsive to the congregation, but responsible to Christ alone in the exercise of their office.\textsuperscript{10}

Two additional important points are made in the introductory section of the \textit{BCO} when it is emphatically stated that the offices are both pastoral and spiritual. To examine first the pastoral nature of the offices, it should be noted that the \textit{BCO} does not teach that ministers of Word and sacrament alone hold the pastoral office. The pastoral office is threefold, comprised by elders, deacons, and ministers of Word and sacrament. No one office adequately represents Christ; only the three together. Again, we see the importance of “Christocratic” representation. Christ himself delegates the tripartite pastoral office.

The principle of the equality of the ministry, conceived now in its broadest sense as including the functions of the elder and deacon, is based upon the fact that the entire ministerial or pastoral office is summed up in Jesus Christ himself in such a way that he is, in a sense, the only one holding that office. Every ministerial function is found preeminently in him. By his Holy Spirit he distributes these functions among those whom he calls to serve in his name.\textsuperscript{11}

The Rev. Dr. Paul R. Fries, in an essay written for the third Lutheran-Reformed dialogue, sums up the Reformed teaching by stating, “the ministry of Christ is not continued in one office but three.”\textsuperscript{12} For the purpose of this discussion, the pastoral office understood in this way will be referred to as “the pastorate.” In the RCA the pastorate assembled for governance is referred to as the consistory.\textsuperscript{13}

If the offices are pastoral in nature, they are spiritual in origination. The capitalization should be carefully noted, for the reference here is the working of the Holy Spirit and not to the human quality we point to when in ordinary speech we describe a man or woman as “spiritual.” Note that this is made clear by the \textit{BCO} when in the passage cited above the statement is made: “By his Holy Spirit he distributes these functions among those whom he calls to serve in his name.”\textsuperscript{14} The Holy Spirit creates the offices and extends the call of Christ to those chosen to fill them. Thus in Reformed perspective the Holy Spirit works not only in the hearts of men and women or in communal relationships alone. God the Spirit forges the structures of the church (the offices, consistory, classis, synod) and cultivates men and women to fill them (the officers). The \textit{BCO} is as much a gift of the Holy Spirit as is a prayer of a faithful believer. Ministers of Word and sacrament, elders, and deacons are called, gifted, and empowered through the Holy Spirit to be nothing less than agents of Christ in the power of the Spirit. It is by this spiritual action that the pastoral ministry of Christ is continued through history and the mission of the church is launched in the world.

The liturgies of the RCA, the third “leg” of Meeter’s milk stool, amplify the duties of each of the offices, and while vitally important for the life of the congregation, add little additional information concerning the nature and purpose of the offices. The liturgical orders for the ordination and installation of ministers of Word and sacrament, elders, and deacons give expression to the teachings of the confessions and the provisions of the \textit{BCO} in the language of worship. Here we find eloquent liturgical declarations proclaiming Jesus Christ as the true officeholder and source for all ministry and the call for dedicated response from those chosen by God to serve as ordained and installed servants of the Lord. Here, too, the notion of the pastorate is affirmed as the complementarity and parity of the offices is announced and their spiritual genesis is proclaimed. The liturgies of the church sum up its theology of office and at the same time give it expression in the ongoing life of the congregation.

***************
This characterization of office on the basis of the three-legged constitution of the RCA suggests two extremely important questions. First, what is the nature of the authority and powers of the offices? And, second, how do the ministries of the office relate to the ministries engaged by all baptized believers?

What is the nature of the authority and power of office in Reformed theology? The single source of the authority of office, as understood in the RCA, has already been identified. Christ as the supreme minister of the church delegates all authority and grants all powers. But how is what Christ delegates vested in those ordained and installed in one of the offices? Two views, one ancient and the other modern, are precluded by Reformed ecclesiology. The first, associated with Roman Catholic theology, holds that the Holy Spirit confers a sacramental grace by virtue of ordination, and an “indelible mark” is placed on the recipient’s character. Consequently, a priest may be removed from office but will not be reordained if reinstated because his ordination has marked him for life. A second view, popular today, is that the authority and powers of office depend entirely on function. A church, like any organization, requires leaders. Those gifted with leadership ability after appropriate training are installed in offices, which give them the authority and power to “get the job done.” Reformed theology, in regard to the first view, has held that only through the action of the Holy Spirit can the offices represent Christ, but have rejected the notion of some special grace bestowed permanently on those ordained. But neither has its understanding of office been functional. In Reformed thought an office, with its authority and powers, is not a response to community need, or even to the needs of the world, but to Christ’s ministry to and through his people, as shown above. Office does not follow function; function follows office.

If the authority and powers of office are not conferred by sacramental grace, and if they are not inherently operational, then what is the nature of their mediation in Reformed thought? We find help in answering this question in an unlikely place. The Heidelberg Catechism, after presenting its teaching on the Lord’s Supper, addresses church discipline. The basis for discipline, the answer to question 84 asserts, is the proclamation of the gospel. The next question and answer locates the responsibility for discipline in the “officers” (elders) of the church and, in reference to Matthew 16:19, describes its administration. In this much-debated passage, Jesus says to Peter “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Matt. 16:19). Question 85 inquires about how the kingdom of heaven is closed and opened by Christian discipline. The answer at first glance is puzzling, perhaps even disturbing:

> Those who, though called Christians, profess unchristian teachings or live unchristian lives, and after repeated and loving counsel refuse to abandon their errors and wickedness, and after being reported to the church, that is, to its officers, fail to respond also to their admonition—such persons the officers exclude from Christian fellowship by withholding the sacraments from them, and God excludes them from the kingdom of Christ (italics added).

What may strike the reader as puzzling about this answer is what seems to be an inexplicable reversal of roles. The passage appears to be saying that because the elders close the table to an unrepentant sinner, God will exclude this person from the kingdom. Here we encounter something that seems akin to the sacerdotalism deplored by the Reformation. Have elders been given the authority to direct divine action? Is God to be bound by human decision? This, of course, is not the intention of the authors of the catechism. The answer to question 85 does not represent a lapse in an otherwise solid presentation of Reformed belief, but rather a perspective deeply grounded in Reformed ecclesiology. The key to understanding the catechism at this point is once again the principle of representation. The authors of the catechism firmly believe that Scripture teaches that by the working of the Holy Spirit those
CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AND DISCIPLESHIP

who represent Christ, the officers of the church, in their deliberations and actions “stand in for” or “act for” the Lord of the church. We might draw an analogy with an ambassador who is given the power and authority to represent and act for the American government in a foreign land, although always in a way consistent with national policy. The decisions and actions of the elders as conceived here are not autonomous (self-determined) but “Christonomous” (Christ determined). It is Christ, the supreme pastor of the church, who originates discipline, who seeks the repentance of the sinner by withholding grace.

The result is twofold. The elders who represent Christ through the working of the Holy Spirit take action to close the table. One is reminded of a phrase used in the pastoral letter sent to the fledgling gentile churches of the first century by the Council of Jerusalem, “for it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us” (Acts 15:28). And since God grants no one admission to the kingdom except through the Son, God the Father excludes the unhappy person from the kingdom. The elders represent Christ while God the Father responds to him. Both the Holy Spirit guiding the officers of the church to excommunicate the recalcitrant member, and the Father excluding this person from the kingdom, are Christologically reciprocal. Here, as throughout the Heidelberg Catechism, the theological perspective is consistently trinitarian.

The authority and powers of those who hold office, then, are vested neither through an indelible mark, nor are they established by function, but are carried by the office itself through the working of the Holy Spirit. They are located neither in the person, nor the action, but in that which, according to Reformed theologians, Christ instituted and the Spirit effects. By the Spirit, God calls men and women, gives them gifts for their office, and provides opportunity for the cultivation of their gifts. But the offices themselves are understood to be initiated by the ascended Lord of the church and effected by the Holy Spirit. Thus when the officers of the church act faithfully, they act by the Spirit, which enacts through them the purposes of Christ. When the officers of the church act faithfully, their action serves Christ and thus mirrors the will of God the Father. Sinful men and women, forgiven and sanctified by Christ—called, ordained and installed in office—become partners with God to engage the divine mission through the church and in the world. John Calvin eloquently expresses this understanding of office when he writes:

“Christ ascended on high,” Paul says, “that he might fill all things” (Eph. 4:10). This is the manner of fulfillment: through the ministers to whom he has entrusted this office and has conferred the grace to carry it out, he dispenses and distributes his gifts to the church; and he shows himself as though present by manifesting the power of his Spirit in his institution, that it be not vain or idle…. For neither the light and heat of the sun, nor food and drink, are so necessary to nourish and sustain the present life, as the apostolic and pastoral office is necessary to preserve the church on earth.

Here Calvin speaks of the minister of Word and sacrament, but the words apply equally to offices of the church working in unified ministry. The same Spirit that inhabits the ascended Lord dwells in our lives, as the answer to question 76 of the Heidelberg Catechism teaches, and by that Spirit those who hold the offices ordained by Christ receive Christ’s power and authority of Christ’s office. The authority and powers of office in the Reformed tradition are by the working of the Holy Spirit dynamic and reciprocal. The authority and powers of the officers of the church inhere not in the officer or even in the office, but in the dynamic and reciprocal relationship of office and officer with Christ through the Holy Spirit. They are not possessed but dynamically communicated, but neither are they occasional, because by God’s promise and good pleasure they are constantly given.

The final matter remaining to be addressed in this section, and it is a matter of great importance, concerns the relationship of the ministry of the offices to the ministry to which all Christians are called. We have seen that the offices of the church form a pastorate through
which, by spiritual delegation, Christ draws the faithful into participation with himself and thus communicates his grace to them. What, then, is the role assigned those who hold no office? How does the ministry of the ordained few relate to that of the baptized many? The traditional Reformed view of office as described above may seem to leave little room for such ministry. Christ comes to the people through the representation of the ordained, but is Christ not also in some way represented by and through the people? These questions take on urgency at this time when the church has come to affirm strongly the biblical teaching that all Christians have been called and gifted by the Holy Spirit to serve Christ, and that all members of a congregation are “commissioned” to engage Christ’s mission. To state the issue bluntly: is the understanding of office derived from the confessions, order, and liturgies of the RCA capable of supporting the now broadly accepted notion of the missional church?

Obviously, such questions can be adequately answered only when there is agreement about what is meant when we speak of the missional church. The missional church, in turn, can be adequately grasped only when larger questions concerning God’s mission, that is, God’s purposes for the world, are addressed. This will be the task of the next section. At this point, we need only make a few observations, which will allow us to suggest the nature of the relationship of ministry through the offices to that of God’s baptized people.

The roots of the missional church are in the theology of mission, which developed during the first decades following World War II, especially in the Netherlands. These theologies, while diverging from one another at many points, held one premise in common: mission is not something the church does, but something the church is. Moreover, and this too was a shared assumption, mission is not the business of church officers, denominational staff, or paid professionals alone, but of all Christians. Since the Reformation doctrine of the priesthood of all believers gave expression to this theological viewpoint, it became a centerpiece of missional theology. All Christians are called by God and gifted by the Spirit to minister in the name of Jesus Christ. The call to ministry first comes not through some personal spiritual experience but through the act of baptism. The declaration provided by the RCA baptism liturgy “commissions” the baptized one to serve Christ. Immediately following the baptism, the minister says:

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the only King and Head of his Church, I declare that this child is now received into the visible membership of the Holy Catholic Church, and is engaged to confess the faith of Christ crucified and to be his faithful servant unto…life’s end.

Does the historic understanding of office, as detailed above, adequately take into account and provide for the ministry of all Christians? Does a theology of the missional church call for a new understanding of office, which will acknowledge the biblical call of all Christians to minister in Christ’s name? In our view a re-vision of the church’s theology of office is necessary, but one that unfolds from, rather than demolishes, the historic Reformed doctrine of office. We are at the same time convinced that a simple reprisal of traditional practices will fail the mission of Christ.

This judgment is based on the conviction that office in RCA order is based on solid evangelical theology. It may not be, as Calvin believed, the only biblically based system of governance possible, but it is one deeply rooted in the Word of God. A scriptural assumption undergirding the RCA’s understanding of order is that the congregation is itself the object of Christ’s mission—a community of sinners, which Christ, through the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments, joins to himself in regenerating love. We are, according to Reformation theology, saved by faith in Jesus Christ, and that faith is not a personal achievement but a gift of God given by the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments. This means that our salvation is communicated through what Calvin calls Christ’s tools, the offices of the church. Whether regeneration,
the communication of new life, is thought to encompass sanctification, the living of the new life, as Calvin taught, or to lead to it, as later Reformed theologians held, the two belong together in biblical theology. Thus through the offices of minister of Word and sacrament, elder, and deacon, Christ communicates life-transforming grace and instructs the people of God in the ways of God.

What is often ignored in discussions of the missional church is that before the community of faith engages Christ's mission, and at the time it is engaging that mission, it is itself the object of that mission. If the church is called to serve Christ in the world, the world is also called to the church, not simply in evangelistic outreach, but as the world is brought into the church by Christians who daily participate in its myriad activities. Christians need the grace that brings forgiveness, communicates God’s love, and orients their lives according to the purposes of Christ. Martin Luther described Christians as simul justus et peccator, at the same time justified and sinners. We are new creatures in Jesus Christ, but the “old Adam” is still alive and potent even in the community of faith. The church is not a communion of those who have fully achieved the goal, but of those on a journey. Men and women called to be agents of transformation must themselves be undergoing transformation. Apart from such transformation, the witness of the church will be thin and ineffectual—fast-food Christianity rather than hardy and nourishing fare. Here the offices of the church stand front stage center. Their first responsibility is not to train men and women for mission, but to communicate transforming grace that creates missional believers. Or better said: regenerating and sanctifying grace will inevitably result in missional Christians, but apart from such transformation what passes for mission will be as hollow as a politician’s promises. In addition to the mission of Christ and the missional church, we need to think of the missional office of minister of Word and sacrament, elder and deacon.

We can now return to the question “How does the ministry of the ordained few relate to that of the baptized many?” Those who minister through the offices minister primarily to the community of faith they serve, while the ministry of the baptized people of God extends through the church into the world and carries the world back to the church as the scattered people of God return to the community of faith. Through the instrumentality of the three offices, Christ by the Spirit places new life in Christians and sets about making them new creatures so they in turn can be drawn by the Spirit into Christ's mission in the world of making all things new.

There is an important distinction implied here. Christ is Lord and the true pastor of the church—Christ is not yet the shepherd of an unbelieving world. Thus there is a continuing movement of the Spirit of Christ: from Christ as the true pastor of the church through the offices to the people, and from Christ the rightful king of creation through the people into the world. Then the reverse: the people carry their families, businesses, schools, farms, work places, with them into the sanctuary so that these can be submitted to the God of mercy and justice for their transformation. The faithful consistory, then, is one that gives itself to the Spiritual work whereby Christ transforms his people so that they may become agents of his mission in the world—a people who in word and deed proclaim his kingdom.

The Mission of the Church

We have now completed our examination of the nature and purpose of the offices and may turn to the second question under consideration: what is the mission of the church that the offices serve?

It may be surprising that for all the talk of mission today—mission statements, missional churches, and personal mission resolutions—the word rarely occurs in the Bible. When we probe the term, however, we quickly see that while the term is infrequently used, language expressing its root meaning is abundant. The word “mission” comes from the Latin mittere,
“to send, to launch,” and gives us terms such as missionary, commission, missal, and even mass. The noun “mission” may be uncommon in Scripture, but the verb “send,” and the notion of sending with purpose, is one of the most prominent features of the architecture of the New Testament, with literally hundreds of textual references. When the Dutch language identifies mission as zending (sending), a mission church as a zendingskerk (sending-church), missionary activity as zendingswerk (sending work), and a missionary as a zendling (sent one), it captures more exactly than the English term “mission” the tone and meaning of biblical language.

The language of sending, then, should frame the question of the mission of the church. Before we can speak of the calling and sending of the church, however, it is important to understand that the church has no mission apart from two prior and decisive “sendings,” the sending of the Messiah and of the Holy Spirit. Only when we have the biblical teaching concerning the sending of the Messiah and the Spirit firmly in mind will we be positioned to grasp the mission of the church.

Jesus’ mission is not self-originating. He is the sent one—sent by God to fulfill God’s purposes. The best known of all such sending passages is, of course, John 3:16-17, but these verses by no means stand alone. Throughout the remainder of the fourth gospel there are abundant references to Jesus as the sent one and to the Father who sends him. Other New Testament writers also give similar testimony. Matthew, Mark, and Luke, for example, all include a saying of Jesus stating that those who receive him also receive the one who sent him (Matt. 10:40; Mark. 9:37; Luke. 9:47, cf. Luke 10:16). Paul, too, knows Jesus as the sent one. He writes of God “sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom. 8:3) and in the fullness of time sending “his Son, born of a woman, born under the law” (Gal. 4:4).

Jesus is sent by God, but for what purpose? Jesus gives what amounts to an answer to this question when, after his temptation, he reads in the synagogue at Nazareth these words from Isaiah 61:1-2a:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor (Luke 4:18-19).

This is Jesus’ mission statement. After reading the Isaiah lection he proclaims: “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (4:21). Jesus’ identification with Isaiah’s promised deliverer roots his ministry in Israel’s hope for a coming savior and gives a picture of the redemption Jesus will bring. He has been anointed by the Spirit (at his baptism) to be the servant of God who offers good news to the poor, freedom to captives, sight to the blind, freedom to the oppressed, and God’s favor to humankind. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus announces his ministry in a different way when he says: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe the good news” (Mark. 1:15). The message is the same: the promised and long-awaited kingdom of God is at hand.

A quotation from an article in Perspectives helps us grasp the magnitude of this declaration:

His (Jesus’) preaching called for response to this astonishing announcement; his parables and miracles disclosed the character of the kingdom; by his passion, death and resurrection the powers of the old order were defeated and the reality of God’s reign planted in history. The kingdom stood at the heart of Jesus’ preaching, and his life and
work cannot be understood apart from the expected rule of God. When Jesus began his ministry by announcing that he was the Spirit-filled bearer of the kingdom, his audiences were confronted by the startling claim that the Old Testament promises of a mighty working of the Spirit to initiate the new age were now being fulfilled.27

Jesus, the sent one, is sent to bring the kingdom of God. This is his mission. It is important to note that the boundaries of the kingdom extend beyond the church into the world, and they ultimately encompass the whole of creation. The kingdom of God is a new creation, for the old, fallen, creation waits to be “set free from its bondage to decay” and to “obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Rom. 8:21). The call of individuals to faith and repentance, their regeneration and incorporation into the community of faith, is certainly an essential transaction through which men, women, and children are joined to Christ and his mission, but the mission is larger and broader than personal salvation. In God’s kingdom there will be no hunger, no warfare, no disease, no oppression, no injustice, no poverty. In this kingdom God will be reconciled to men and women, and in Christ’s domain all that divides one person from another will be broken down (Eph. 2:14).

At this point it is important to emphasize that the coming of the kingdom is not an event reserved for the future, but one that is already happening. The coming of Christ is the coming of the kingdom! Where Christ is, the kingdom is present. This is not to say that God’s dominion in Christ is fully and everywhere present—obviously this is far from the case. Nor is it to suggest that there will be a steady historical development of the kingdom until finally it will be fully evolved on earth. The RCA confessions sound clearly the biblical doctrine of the return of Christ and the final judgment.28 The momentous divine actions will bring history to an end and initiate the transformation that results in what the New Testament calls the new creation. Nevertheless, to the degree that Christ’s people participate in the Lord’s life and mission, they participate in his kingdom and serve its purposes.

This brings us to the second divine sending described in the New Testament, the sending of the Spirit. There are, in fact, two “sendings” of the Spirit recorded on its pages. When Jesus read the Isaiah scroll in the synagogue at Nazareth and identified himself as the Spirit-anointed servant of God promised by the prophet, he referred to the divine gift given him at his baptism, the gift of the Spirit (Matt. 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22). The Spirit is sent by the Father to guide and empower Jesus’ ministry—to enable Jesus to fulfill God’s purposes. When Christ’s earthly mission is completed the Lord who has received the Spirit now becomes the agent of its sending. In Luke Jesus says to his disciples: “I am sending on you the gift promised by my Father; wait here in this city until you are armed with power from above” (Luke 24:49, Revised English Bible), and in John, also speaking to his followers, Jesus promises that “the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have told you.” (John 14:26, Revised English Bible).29

It is remarkable that Jesus’ followers engaged in no ministry immediately following his resurrection appearances. One might expect this glorious event to trigger a flurry of activity. But this did not happen. The New Testament presents the period between the resurrection and Jesus’ ascension into heaven as a time of instruction and learning for the disciples. No proclamation of the good news, no formation of community, no works of benevolence are recorded. Not until Pentecost Day did the activities that characterize the New Testament church commence. The Holy Spirit then forms and empowers the community, and the mission of Jesus is transferred to the church. Or to say it more accurately, Jesus, by the Spirit, now continues his ministry through the newly formed community of faith. He is no longer bodily on earth, but is represented by a new body, the church (1 Cor. 12:12-27). As Christ was sent by the Father, and the Spirit was sent by Christ, now the triune God through the working of the Spirit sends the church. Christ’s mission constitutes the church.

The ministry, the mission, of the church is the same as that of its Lord: the kingdom of
God. The church through the power of the Spirit is sent to represent Christ’s kingdom on earth and is called to become a sign and an agent of the kingdom—to show the kingdom in the life of the community of faith, and to effect its purposes through its ministry. Those joined to Christ are also called and empowered to undertake his mission—a mission that includes both the proclamation of the gospel to a sinful world and acts of justice, mercy, and peacemaking. Calling the sinner to repentance is vital kingdom work, but so is feeding the hungry, liberating the oppressed, and reconciling enemies.

The celebration of the Lord’s Supper provides an excellent illustration of the church as sign and agent of the kingdom. Its basis is union with Christ. The Reformed understanding of the Supper teaches that the Holy Spirit draws us into communion with the ascended Jesus and with one another. Our communion with Christ is beautifully described by the Heidelberg Catechism, which teaches that we are “united more and more to his blessed body by the Holy Spirit dwelling both in Christ and in us that, although he is in heaven and we are on earth, we are nevertheless flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone, always governed by one Spirit, as the members of our bodies are governed by one soul” (Q. 76). When the Lord’s Supper is celebrated, we are related to the risen Jesus, as was Adam to Eve, flesh of flesh and bone of bone (Gen. 2:23). And the same Spirit weaves into one body those who are “in Christ,” forming what the Apostles’ Creed terms the communion of saints. As the Communion liturgy of the RCA states: “Since by his death, resurrection, and ascension Christ has obtained for us the life-giving Spirit who unites us all in one body, so are we to receive this Supper in true love, mindful of the communion of saints.”

The communion of saints, unlike other human associations, does not rise out of human affinity, but depends on Christ and the Spirit. This means that all those in Christ are welcome to the table—regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, age, nationality, and social status—regardless of the cultural divisions separating people. For those baptized in Christ, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). As diverse people gather at the table, black and white, young and old, men and women, an image of the kingdom is formed, for in God’s kingdom all barriers dividing people will be broken down. A sign, a proclamation, of the kingdom appears—one where the signified unity is truly present. But if the matter ends there the work of the Spirit has been resisted, for Christians are called to effect what has been signified, to be agents of the kingdom. From the table believers are sent into the world—this is one aspect of the church’s mission—to witness to Christ the reconciler and to oppose those powers that divide human beings on the basis of race, gender, and ethnicity. The baptized are sent from the table of reconciliation into the world as ministers of reconciliation (1 Cor. 5:18).

The richness of the Lord’s Supper could provide other instances of the church as sign and agent of the kingdom. And, of course, it is not only in the sacrament of Holy Communion that we find these actions of the Spirit. They may be found in baptism, the preaching of the Word, prayer, praise, and myriad other activities of the church. Our concern here, however, is not to detail the relationship of the church to the kingdom, but to identify the role of the pastorate of elders, deacons and ministers of Word and sacrament in the mission of the church.

The Faithful Consistory

How then shall we understand the organization and function of the faithful consistory? Before addressing this question, let us summarize our conclusions to this point. The offices as presented by the theology, polity, and liturgies of the RCA are representative, i.e., they represent Christ within the congregation in a way analogous to that of an ambassador representing his or her government. The three consistorial offices together, working in a complementary fashion, comprise the pastoral ministry of the church (the pastorate). Those who minister through the consistorial offices minister primarily to the community of faith they serve, while the ministry of the baptized people of God extends through the church into the
world and carries the world back to the church as the scattered people of God return to the community of faith. As with the Messiah and the Spirit, the church is sent, sent by Christ in the power of the Spirit to embody, reveal, and enact the kingdom of God and is forged into the instrument Christ uses to effect his mission. The kingdom of God is Jesus’ mission, and this realm is to be understood as nothing less than the promised new creation, already present where men, women and children are united to Christ by faith. To repeat the sentence that brought section one to its conclusion: “The faithful consistory, then, is one that gives itself to the spiritual work whereby Christ transforms his people so that they may become agents of his mission in the world—a people who in word and deed proclaim his kingdom.”

These are among the elements that structure our understanding of the faithful consistory in the missional church and shape our thought concerning the organization and function of the offices. To defend a single, definitive, form of consistorial structure, or to insist that all consistories must work in the same way is to violate the Reformed understanding that the ministry of the church results from the Holy Spirit and is not an extension of the incarnation. The Holy Spirit communicates a single truth, Christ, in plural forms. The Spirit adapts the ministry of the church to receive and communicate the gifts of Christ according to the particularities of time and place. The consistory of a church in Brooklyn, New York, dedicated to the mission of Christ may be different in many ways from one serving Christ’s mission with equal fidelity in Sioux City, Iowa. The nature of the Spirit’s work yields plurality and variability.

Yet the faithful consistory in a missional church is also faithful to the Reformed understanding of the gospel and consequently will demonstrate common elements. We believe these include the following:

1. The call of Jesus Christ. The only proper basis for ordination and installation into an office of the church is the call of Jesus Christ. The call of Christ is a call from the church confirmed by an inner call. The recognition of gifts and abilities are of great importance, but they are not the basis of the conferring of an office; they rather serve as a confirmation of the Lord’s call. Thus the selection of those for nomination to one of the offices is a matter of spiritual discernment and prayer.

2. The authority of Christ. The authority of the office derives from Christ and is communicated by the Holy Spirit. The Book of Church Order of the RCA states, “Christ, according to the New Testament, has appointed officers to govern the church under himself. Their authority to govern derives from him even though they are elected by the people.” Those holding office must be men and women of deep spirituality, and the consistory must be a community of scriptural reflection, worship, and prayer so that those in leadership discern the mind of Christ. Those who are not constantly engaging Christ cannot engage Christ’s mission. Moreover, such a high view of office can lead to abuses when officeholders are not humbly faithful to the Lord of the church.

3. Governance by servants. Church governance is provided by an assembly of those who serve in and through the three offices. Each of the offices has its set of responsibilities and tasks within the congregation, and thus each office brings a particular evangelical perspective to the deliberations attendant to the governance of the church. The teaching that the church is governed by those who serve through the offices is one of the great contributions of the Reformed reformation to the church. It is deeply rooted in the biblical teaching that only those who serve are fit to rule.

4. Missional understanding of the offices. The offices are essentially missional, instruments by which Christ transforms the people of God (regeneration and sanctification) and equips them for the ministry of the kingdom in the world (witness in word and deed). The polity and liturgies of the RCA should be revised to highlight
the missional character of the offices and their responsibilities. How does each office individually and as part of the pastorate represent Christ in the community of faith so that the community pictures the kingdom? How does each office individually and as part of the pastorate represent Christ in the community of faith so that members of the community are prepared to be sent out as agents of the kingdom?

5. **Kerygma: the office of minister of word and sacrament.** The Greek word *kerygma* refers to the proclamation of the good news of God’s promised salvation in Jesus Christ. It goes beyond preaching to include all that announces God’s saving action. Through the office of the minister of Word and sacrament Jesus spiritually communicates himself through the preaching of the Word, the celebration of the sacraments, and the leading of the congregation in its liturgical worship. By the function of this office, working in concert with the other offices, the baptized people of God are drawn into a community that discloses the faith, love, forgiveness, reconciliation, justice, and joy of the kingdom—they are formed into a preview of the new creation. By the function of this office, in concert with the other offices, the congregation is called to and prepared for the work of representing Christ and his kingdom in the world. Among the many responsibilities of this office, those of proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, inviting men, women, and children to citizenship in it through faith and repentance, drawing them into the service of worship, and sending the people of God into the world as ambassadors of the kingdom are of paramount importance.

6. **Koinonia: the office of elder.** The words ordinarily used to translate the Greek term, *koinonia*, “fellowship” or “community,” do not capture the richness of the biblical concept. *Koinonia* refers to a community woven together by Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, a communion with Christ and fellow believers, which points to the fellowship of the kingdom. The traditional duties of the elder—oversight and discipline—when viewed in terms of the missional office, may be seen as responsibility for *koinonia*. Since *koinonia* depends on a continuing and dynamic relationship with Christ, the elder attends to sound teaching and discipline within the church. False doctrine threatens faith, and discipline is exercised when the relationship of a member of the congregation with Christ is compromised by sin. The elder takes responsibility for the spiritual well-being of the congregation in a missional church, ascertaining that its members are nurtured through Scripture, worship, the sacraments, and prayer.

7. **Diakonia: the office of deacon.** Here, too, the original Greek word, meaning “service” and giving us our English word “deacon,” helps to identify the special qualities of this office. To speak of this office in general terms of compassion and material maintenance sells the office short, as indeed in many congregations the chief task of deacons seems to be finances and buildings and grounds. It is questionable in the light of the biblical notion of service whether either should be the exclusive responsibility of the board of deacons. Deacons should rather lead the people of God into servant ministry within the congregation as members learn to serve one another and beyond the congregation—as members engage in ministries of witness, justice, mercy, and reconciliation in the world. Deacons enlist Christians for the front-line ministry, recruiting and helping to equip men and women to be agents of the kingdom in the world. Since all Christians are called to be servants of Christ and one another, the deacon represents the most fundamental quality of Christian life; and when leading the congregation into diaconal ministry, teaches the meaning of the gospel no less than the minister of Word and sacrament and the elder.

8. **The mutuality of the offices.** Identifying missional church foci for each of the offices does not suggest that the office has only one function, nor does this mean that the responsibilities of one office are not also borne by the others. Each office
participates in the others and serves their causes. The elder does not serve without the minister of the Word and neither without the deacon.\textsuperscript{32} The proclamation of the word of God (\textit{kerygma}) draws men and women into community (\textit{koinonia}), prepares them for ministry, and sends them in service into the world (\textit{diakonia}). The elder’s work of \textit{koinonia} is itself a proclamation (\textit{kerygma}) of unity in Christ and requires the willingness of the members of a congregation to serve one another (\textit{diakonia}). The deacon’s concern for service depends on a congregation unified in Christ (\textit{koinonia}) willing to respond to the Lord’s mission, and thus proclaims the message of the kingdom (\textit{kerygma}). Each office serves the purposes of the others, and together they form a pastorate that represents Christ, the original prophet who proclaims God’s truth, the true elder who by the Spirit binds the faithful to himself and to one another, and the incarnate divine servant who surrendered his life in the service of those whom he loves.

9. \textit{The mission of the church}. Through the offices Christ is represented to the community of faith, which is transformed to be transforming, so that each member according to his or her gifts and situation in life, is sent out by Christ in the power of the Spirit to proclaim the gospel, seek reconciliation, and engage servant ministry. Thus the baptized people of God represent Christ’s kingdom and serve it according to their calling and to the best of their abilities until he comes again.

\textsuperscript{1} 1997 Minutes of the General Synod, RCA.

\textsuperscript{2} 1998 Minutes of the General Synod, RCA.

\textsuperscript{3} The responsibilities of the offices of elder and minister of word and sacrament, of course, extend beyond the local congregation to the classis, regional synod and general synod. At the present time, the responsibilities of the office of deacon are limited to the congregation.

\textsuperscript{4} The Book of Church Order (\textit{BCO}) (New York: Reformed Church Press, 1999), Preamble.


\textsuperscript{6} Ibid. p. 4.

\textsuperscript{7} While the RCA recognizes four offices of the church—minister of word and sacrament, elder, deacon, and professor of theology—the “fourth office” is not called for by the confessions. Since this paper’s concern is the consistory of the local congregation, only the three offices associated with the pastoral ministry will be discussed here, and then only in relation to their place in the congregation.

\textsuperscript{8} \textit{BCO}, Preamble.

\textsuperscript{9} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{10} This teaching should not be interpreted to mean that office holders have no accountability to the congregation. But in the Reformed understanding, that accountability is administered through the offices. For example, if members of a congregation do not believe their pastor is fulfilling his or her responsibilities, complaints are taken to the consistory, and possibly, through consistorial action, to the classis. The congregation does not deal directly with the pastor, but through bodies comprised by officeholders.

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{BCO}, Preamble.

13 It is worth noting here that unlike Roman Catholic theology, which understands the ministerial office as an extension of Jesus’ ministry which thus can be occupied by males alone, the Reformed principle of representation does not depend on gender.

14 BCO, Preamble.

15 John Calvin, father of Reformed theology, writes: “Now we must speak of the order by which the Lord willed his church to be governed. He alone should rule and reign in the church as well as have authority or pre-eminence in it, and this authority should be exercised and administered by his word alone. Nevertheless, because he does not dwell among us in visible presence (Matt. 26:11), we have said that he uses the ministry of men [sic] to declare openly his will to us by mouth, as a sort of delegated work, not by transferring to them his right and honor, but only that through their mouths he may do his own work—just as a workman uses a tool to do his task.” John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), IV.3.1.

16 A sampling of commentaries on the Heidelberg Catechism suggests that commentators are not eager to deal with this difficult question and answer. Both Karl Barth and Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. ignore the question altogether (in The Heidelberg Catechism Today and A Place to Stand respectively), while Fred H. Klooster, Andrew Kuyvenhoven and Donald Bruggink respond to it by providing a discussion of discipline, but without mention of what seems to be a reversal of divine-human initiative (in A Mighty Comfort, Comfort and Joy, and Guilt, Grace, and Gratitude respectively).

This essay attempts to avoid the use of gender-specific language to refer to God whenever possible. When describing certain actions of the trinity, however, this becomes impossible, and the traditional designations are employed.

17 Calvin, IV.3.2.

18 For significant works on the missional church from this period, see Hans Hoekendijk, The Church Inside Out, A.A. van Ruler, Theologie van het Apostolaat, and the classic by one of the great missiologists of the century, Hendrik Kraemer’s The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World. More recently, numerous books and articles have been written on the subject.


20 See the Heidelberg Catechism, Question 65, the Belgic Confession, Article 24, and the Canons of Dort, I.3. For the source of Calvin’s designation, see note 13 above.

21 The Belgic Confession links the two in Article 24 concerning sanctification, which begins with a statement concerning regeneration: “We believe that this wondrous faith, produced in us by the hearing of God’s word and by the work of the Holy Spirit, regenerates us and makes us new creatures, causing us to live a new life and freeing us from the slavery of sin.”

22 Note that this understanding of the distinctiveness of the office pertains to the place and function of office in the congregation. It is not intended to imply anything concerning the office of professor of theology, nor about those who exercise an office in extra-congregational
settings.


25 There are multiple references to Jesus as the sent one and the Father who sent him in chapters 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12, 13, 17 of the Gospel of John. See also 1 John 4:9-10, 14).

26 As is the case with the language the church developed to speak about the trinity, a term with less gender specificity than “the kingdom of God” is desirable, but, as is also the case with the trinity, difficult to find. The phrase “the realm of God” does not suggest the personal character of God’s governance, and the phrase “the commonwealth of God” both lacks the personal dimension and is offensive to those from the third world for whom the word commonwealth expresses oppression.

27 Paul R. Fries, “Spirit, Kingdom, and Mission,” Perspectives, September 1986, p. 4. The following discussion of the kingdom and mission is drawn from this article.

28 The Belgic Confession, written at a time of persecution, most elaborately and eloquently presents this doctrine. Here judgment is vindication for the faithful, a vindication that the author longs for (Article 37).

29 Other New Testament passages describe the sending of the Spirit as directly from God, without mention of the agency of Christ. For example, Galatians 4:6 states: “And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts…..” While not the agent of sending here, Christ is both the condition for the sending of the Spirit (4:4) and the reality that is sent (“the Spirit of his Son”).

30 The RCA communion liturgy may be found in Worship in the Lord.

31 BCO, Preamble.


Overture

Criteria for Associates in Ministry

1. The Classis of Orange overtures the General Synod to renew its instruction to Congregational Services to prepare criteria (in dialogue with the appropriate commissions and officers of the church) for associates in ministry to be certified in areas such as administration, visitation, church music, outreach/evangelism, or 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 2002 General Synod.

Reasons:

1. The Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 15, states:

   The classis shall be responsible for certifying those persons who meet the criteria approved by General Synod as Associates in Ministry and shall be responsible for the supervision of Associates in Ministry.

2. This classis made a very similar overture to the 1997 General Synod, which approved it and instructed Congregational Services to report the resulting criteria to the 1998 General Synod (MGS 1997, R-21, p. 353). In 1998 Congregational Services reported that the Office for Education affirmed the intent of the action but felt that it was premature (MGS 1998, pp. 179-180). In 1999 the unit asked for a report defining the place of Associates in Ministry within our polity. That report is due to come to this synod (MGS 1999, R-32, p. 136). While we appreciate the concerns and caution of the RCA staff in Congregational Services, we note that Orange Classis began this process in 1996 (when the overture was written) and that people who were waiting to serve then have grown four years older—and will grow six years older—waiting for the classis, which is simply trying to be faithful to RCA polity, to act.

3. We question the authority of a unit or commission of the General Synod to simply dismiss an instruction from the synod without asking the synod’s permission.

4. Encouraging the certification of Associates in Ministry in specified areas and encouraging the wider use of the gifts of all RCA members frees ministers of the Word and sacrament to make better use of their particular gifts in building up the kingdom.

5. As in Christian education, the ministries in areas of administration, visitation, church music, outreach/evangelism, etc., are currently performed by laity with appropriate gifts. There is a need to formally recognize and cultivate these gifts and to offer proper supervision and training.

kThe advisory committee recommended:

R-56
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The Congregational Services Committee of the General Synod Council continues to work on the 1997 instruction (MGS 1997, R-21, p. 353) of General Synod by seeking further definitions regarding current certified associates in ministry before moving forward into new areas. Issues of polity are being examined by the Commission on Church Order, upon instruction of the General Synod (MGS 1999, R-32, p. 136).}

From the Report of the President

kIn response to P-2 of the report of the president (p. 37), the advisory committee
recommended:

**R-57**
To direct the General Synod Council, as the program arm of the General Synod, to reconstitute its structure in a way that the local offices of elder, deacon, and minister of Word and sacrament are nurtured, supported, and encouraged to assume responsibility for the pastorate of the church, for report to the General Synod in 2001. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. We have an ongoing internal audit currently underway for the General Synod Council; this recommendation will provide one focus and emphasis for the audit.

2. It is important for General Synod to continue to be aware of ongoing work and the outcome of this recommendation.

**From the Report of the General Secretary**

In response to P-1 of the report of the general secretary (p. 46), the advisory committee recommended:

**R-58**
To instruct the officers of General Synod, the General Synod Council, and RCA staff responsible for planning General Synod, to arrange the schedule of General Synod 2001 to enable delegates to engage in biblical discernment through small group Bible study and reflection groups focused on important issues facing the General Synod; and further,

to adjust other agenda items to accommodate this priority, adding neither to the time nor expense of General Synod as a result; and further,

to consider ways for permanently changing the structure and means of decision-making of General Synod so that biblical discernment and implementation of local and global mission will always receive a priority of time and attention in the agenda, for report to General Synod 2001; and further,

to encourage consistories, classes, and regional synods to expand their pursuit of discernment-style decision making and space for shared biblical reflection and also to adequately prepare their representatives to each General Synod. (ADOPTED)
Evangelism and Church Development Services (EVCD) and Congregational Services (CS) have both, in the past two years, identified clear and compelling visions for each unit’s work, but with each dependent in some way upon the other for a completed sense of discipleship. The Faithful Witnesses program, focused specifically on new church development, evangelism, and revitalization, acknowledged that a biblical understanding of a faithful witness to the gospel would also include areas like education, public witness, worship, and discipleship training for all age groups. Those ministries, it said, were the responsibility of Congregational Services—a responsibility CS had claimed in identifying the three key areas to its own work: discipleship, leadership development, and a commitment to diversity. Similarly, however, CS acknowledged what those in the evangelism unit had already named: that a wholistic understanding of Christians’ calling as disciples includes evangelism and church development alongside education and public witness.

Generally, CS and EVCD have done their particular ministry work independently of each other and within their own working groups except for the general coordination offered all denominational work at various staff tables and committees. Would a closer working relationship between both units enhance the ministry of the whole church? Would it also more closely reflect the reality of ministry on the front lines, where congregations cannot fully embrace and live out the RCA’s Statement of Mission and Vision by keeping their understandings and practice of evangelism and new church development wholly separate from their understandings and practice of education, discipleship, and public witness? In short, could these two units accomplish more to fulfill the RCA’s Statement of Mission and Vision together than they could separately?

To those questions, EVCD and CS staff, along with the Leadership Advisory Team, have said that they believe closer and more cooperative work is essential to the vitality of these two units, no matter how they are structured. Moreover, the two staffs have expressed a willingness to explore, through voluntarily working as a single unit for the next six months, the merit of permanently combining the work of CS and EVCD into a single operating unit. During this time period the Rev. Richard Welscott, director of EVCD, will serve as the acting director of the combined unit. The General Synod Council (GSC) will be an active partner in this process of exploration. The directors of EVCD and CS suggest that no final decision on structure be made before the October 2000 meeting of GSC.

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.”

FAITHFUL WITNESSES

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 discipled, 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, 1999, to April 30, 2000, Evangelism and Church Development Services engaged in the following activities that relate to the “Evangelism” section of the Faithful Witnesses program.

Denomination-wide Evangelism Mailing. Every pastor in every congregation of the Reformed Church in America received a mailing with a packet from the Office of Evangelism, including an “Evangelism Tool Kit” produced by the RCA’s ecumenical partners. This kit included all the evangelism resources of seven denominations: American Baptist Churches, USA, Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ), Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Episcopal Church, United Methodist Church, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and the Reformed Church in America. This catalog of current resources of all these denominations is categorized in eleven subjects: Communication Evangelism, Community Outreach, Cross-Cultural Evangelism, Discipleship, Event Evangelism, Hospitality and Worship Evangelism, Evangelism Leadership, Personal/Relational Evangelism, Prayer Ministries, Evangelism Revitalization, and Theology of Evangelism. This marks the first time the National Council of Churches has published such a joint resource in evangelism.

The packet also included promotional information on Evangelism Connections 2000 events in three North American cities—Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Houston, Texas; and Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota. Also included was a Good News Letter that included information on Alpha, a growing world evangelism phenomena, numerous book reviews on evangelism-related subjects, a report by the Rev. Karl Overbeek on how a local congregation can utilize “The
Lighthouse of Prayer” program, and information about evangelism workshops and seminars offered without charge by the minister of evangelism and the regional evangelism team.

**Evangelism Connections 2000.** The RCA participated in a cooperative alliance of mainline Protestant denominations that is producing three major evangelism workshops in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Houston, Texas; and St. Paul, Minnesota. Total attendance for the three events is anticipated to be more than 2,000. Addresses will be made by the Rev. Allan Jackson, senior pastor of the historic National City Christian Church in Washington, D.C.; Sally Morgenthaler, author of *Worship Evangelism* and columnist for *Worship Leader* magazine; and Tex Sample, author of *The Spectacle of Worship in a Wired World* and professor emeritus at St. Paul School in Kansas City, Missouri. Workshop subjects include lay mobilization, multiethnic ministry, Alpha, servant-empowering organization, most effective outreach, small groups, small membership church, turnaround congregations, music and worship, prayer, media methods, hospitality how-tos, and reaching post-moderns. The events are scheduled on Friday and Saturday to provide opportunity for participation by youth and lay persons, who outnumbered pastors in 1998. Sponsors for Evangelism Connections 2000 include the RCA’s *Formula of Agreement* partners, plus the African Methodist Episcopal-Zion Church, the Episcopal Church, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and the American Baptist Church.

Online registration is available on the RCA website under the resources for evangelism.

**R-59**  
To encourage members of RCA congregations to attend an evangelism event in the year 2001.

kThe advisory committee recommended to amend R-59 as follows (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken out):

**R-59 (amendment)**  
To encourage at least one pastor and at least one member of every RCA congregation members of RCA congregations to attend an evangelism event in the year 2000-2001. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

Reasons:

1. Two major evangelism events will be held in 2000, co-sponsored by the RCA.

2. To encourage churches to send both pastors and lay persons to evangelism events.

**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 $32 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-60**  
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.

**R-61**

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)

Evangelism with Integrity Workshops.

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. For congregations that spend more of their resources on maintenance than on mission, this workshop provides an excellent process for revitalization and revisioning. Free leadership is available, and costs are covered by the RCA. Information is available from regional synod executives, regional evangelism trainers, and the Rev. Bruce Laverman, RCA minister of evangelism/revitalization.

Seventeen pastors and laypersons participated in the annual regional evangelism team retreat held at the Franciscan Renewal Center in Scottsdale, Arizona, from March 27-29, 2000. The group discussed experiences leading congregational evangelism retreats and seminars, then “brainsailed” about new materials and future program ideas. The Rev. Dr. Charles Van Engen, professor of missiology at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California, spent a day with the team dialoguing around the theme “Missional Church” and its implications for the regional evangelism trainers. The ministry of these trainers is implementing the RCA Statement of Mission and Vision by equipping congregations to become mission stations in their communities. The minister of evangelism and the members of the Regional Evangelism Team conducted more than two dozen evangelism workshops and seminars throughout the RCA from April 30, 1999, through April 30, 2000.

**R-62**

To encourage RCA congregations to make evangelism a priority in their community life and have an evangelism workshop in the near future. (ADOPTED)

The 1999 General Synod passed the following actions:

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 resources for use by congregations and other assemblies of the RCA for that day (MGS 1999, R-19, p. 290).

In response to this directive the director of Evangelism and Church Development Services, in communication with the Office of Social Witness and Worship, and in coordination with Mission 2000, designated Sunday, June 4, 2000, as a church-wide day of fasting and
prayer.

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, 1999, to April 30, 2000, Evangelism and Church Development Services engaged in the following activities that relate to the “Revitalization” section of the Faithful Witnesses program.

The revitalization report was sent to all RCA churches for study. The report generated a host of comments and questions. Currently every regional synod is involved in efforts to help their congregations become more effective mission stations in their communities. The Synod of New York has published a booklet highlighting a dozen of its regional churches that model being effective witnesses to their communities. Copies of this booklet can be obtained from the Synod of New York. The Synod of Albany conducted workshops and events discussing the missional church model using the material developed by the Gospel and Our Culture Network. Further information on their efforts can be obtained by writing the Synod of Albany.

The Rev. Dr. Tom DeVries was contracted part-time to help coordinate the revitalization effort of the Faithful Witnesses vision.

The Revitalization Summit Team met in Chicago, Illinois, in November of 1999 with the Revs. George Hunsberger and Donald Troost. Discussion revolved around the implications and strategies of the missional church as developed by the Gospel and Our Culture Network and the Synod of Albany.
The Revitalization Summit Team met in February 2000 to discuss and evaluate the goal of having two hundred churches involved in a revitalization process by 2005. It was noted that currently the RCA has over one hundred fifty churches involved in a network. (The chart follows this report). A plan devised by regional persons involved in leading and coaching networks was discussed and adopted. This plan has a timeline and a strategy to have four hundred churches involved in networks by 2005. Further information on networks currently formed can be obtained by contacting the Revs. Bruce Laverman, Tom DeVries, or Richard Welscott.

R-63  
To urge each congregations of the RCA to reflect upon, discuss, and develop a strategy for being “faithful witnesses” in their community and to consider joining or forming a network of other churches for mutual support and accountability. (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. To work with the city ministries staff person to develop new churches in the urban frontiers of the North American mission field.

7. To 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. Restarting involves working with regional synods and classes to identify potential churches to “restart,” utilizing what has been learned from new church development.

8. To 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, 1999, to April 30, 2000, 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. Three methods—an assessment clinic, a Gallup interview, and a Ridley 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 2000, with eight couples and one person without a spouse participating.

During a Gallup interview, candidates interested in new church development receive feedback on their qualifications (gifts) for this ministry. Thirty-three persons received feedback from the Gallup interview in the last year.

During an eight-hour Ridley interview candidates respond to questions designed to reveal if a person has the vision, passion, and tools to be a new church start pastor. Five persons were trained in this interview process in the fall of 1999. To date the RCA has six people interviewed with this process.

R-64
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.

kThe advisory committee recommended to amend R-64 as follows (additions are underlined):

R-64 (amended)
To encourage Reformed Church in America classes, congregations, and pastors to identify persons both inside and outside the RCA 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. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

Reasons:

1. The RCA needs many qualified new church development pastors from a variety of backgrounds.
2. It is the role of the classis to supervise churches and pastors.

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 1999 General Synod passed the following actions:

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 (MGS 1999, R-15, p. 290).

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 (MGS 1999, R-88, p. 290).

In response to these directives the director of Evangelism and Church Development Services has been in communication with regional synod executives who work with classis church planning and development committees in their region. The director has also met with each racial/ethnic council staff member and the director of urban ministries.

The urban ministry office is developing a strategy for the city. Part of that strategy involves beginning new churches. However, the first priority is to develop an urban institute in which pastors can be trained for the issues they will face in the city. Models for beginning new congregations are being developed that meet the needs of indigenous people within their particular community. There is no one model that fits every situation. Beginning churches in the city must take into account the economic, cultural, and ethnic settings the church is to be started in. It will also take a person who has the skills necessary to be a church planter and the vision and call to begin a church in the city. The involvement of a local congregation in starting a new church in a city, suburban, or rural location is the healthy way to begin new congregations.

Training for New Church Pastors. Three events were held in 2000.

Church planters from the Synod of the Far West gathered in California and used a case study model in which each participant made a presentation and received feedback on that particular situation.

Church planters gathered from the Synods of the Heartland, Mid-America, and the Great Lakes in Rockford, Illinois, focusing on the skills necessary to begin a new congregation.

A national gathering of new church development pastors and spouses was held prior to General Synod 2000 at Hofstra University in Hempstead, New York. The Faithful Witnesses vision was discussed, and an opportunity for networking, fellowshipping, and fun was provided.
in parenting a new congregation before 2005. (ADOPTED)

Denominational Plan. An application to be placed in the denominational plan, which all new RCA congregations must complete, requests information about 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:

- Clancy Street Ministries, Grand Rapids, Michigan; Classis of North Grand Rapids
- Ames, Iowa; Classis of Central Iowa
- Forest Ridge Community Church, Monument, Colorado; Classis of Rocky Mountains
- The Gardens Christian Fellowship, Hawaiian Gardens, California; Classis of California
- Long Beach, California; Classis of California
- Las Vegas, Nevada; Classis of California
- Ontario, California; Classis of California
- Harvest Christian Community Church, Wheatridge, Colorado; Classis of Rocky Mountains
- Saugatuck/Laketown, Michigan; Classis of Holland
- North Side of Sioux City, Iowa; Classis of West Sioux
- Celebrate Community Church, Knoxville, Iowa; Classis of Central Iowa
- Kalamazoo, Michigan; Classis of Southwest Michigan
- Spring Valley Community Church, Allendale, Michigan; Classis of Zeeland

R-66
To request that congregations celebrate the beginning of thirteen 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 1999 and April 2000:

- Sunrise Community Church, Tulare, California
- Maple Avenue Ministries, Holland, Michigan
- New Life Community Church, Coralville, Iowa
- Good News Community Church, Okoboji, Iowa

R-67
To adopt the following resolution:

BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred and ninety-fourth session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting on the campus of Hofstra University on the thirteenth day of June 2000, gives recognition to and heartily celebrates the organization of the following congregations:

- Sunrise Community Church, Tulare, California
- Maple Avenue Ministries, Holland, Michigan
- New Life Community Church, Coralville, Iowa
- Good News Community Church, Okoboji, Iowa (ADOPTED)

Intended Results

It is hoped that 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. Eight 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.


The following charts demonstrate the current status of the Faithful Witnesses vision:

### Faithful Witnesses

### NEW CHURCH STARTS 1999-2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name/Church</th>
<th>Date of Denom Plan</th>
<th>Date of First Worship</th>
<th>Date of Organization</th>
<th>Date of General Synod Invitation Plaque</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Igreja Evangelica Vida Nova, Toronto, Ontario</td>
<td>2-9-99</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunrise Community Church, Tulare, California</td>
<td>2-9-99</td>
<td>12-5-99</td>
<td>(6-13-00)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iglesia Reformada La Senda, Norwalk, California</td>
<td>2-9-99</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Gardens Christian Fellowship, Hawaiian Gardens, California</td>
<td>6-10-99</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long Beach, California</td>
<td>6-10-99</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Las Vegas, Nevada</td>
<td>6-10-99</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ontario, California</td>
<td>6-10-99</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forest Ridge Community Church, Monument, Colorado</td>
<td>(4-10-00)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Harvest Christian Community Church, Wheatridge, Colorado (4-10-00)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name/Church</th>
<th>Date of Denom Plan</th>
<th>Date of First Worship</th>
<th>Date of Organization</th>
<th>Date of General Synod Invitation Plaque</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RiverTree Community Church, Grandville, Michigan</td>
<td>2-9-99</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maple Avenue Ministries, Holland, Michigan</td>
<td>2-9-99</td>
<td>10-31-99</td>
<td></td>
<td>(6-13-00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clancy Street Ministries, Grand Rapids, Michigan</td>
<td>10-25-99</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crosswinds Community Church, Saugatuck, Michigan</td>
<td>(4-10-00)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalamazoo, Michigan</td>
<td>(4-10-00)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring Valley Community Church, Allendale, Michigan</td>
<td>(4-10-00)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rejoice Community Church, LeMars, Iowa</td>
<td>2-9-99</td>
<td>2-7-99</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ames, Iowa</td>
<td>10-25-99</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Side of Sioux City, Iowa</td>
<td>(4-10-00)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrate Community Church, Knoxville, Iowa</td>
<td>(4-10-00)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean Choong Hyun Church of Orlando, Orlando, Florida</td>
<td>2-9-99</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SYNOD OF THE HEARTLAND

SYNOD OF MID-AMERICA

SYNOD OF THE MID-ATLANTICS

SYNOD OF NEW YORK

LEGEND:

The dates for denominational plan (which are in parentheses) await approval at the next GSC meeting.
The dates for General Synod invitation (which are in parentheses) indicate when the church will be invited to General Synod for recognition.

### CHURCH RESTARTS 1999-2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name/Church</th>
<th>Date of Dissolution of Former Service</th>
<th>Date of Renamed Former Service</th>
<th>Denom of First Plan Filed</th>
<th>Date of Invitation and Plaque</th>
<th>General Synod Invitation Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crossroads Community Church</td>
<td>Celebration</td>
<td>Elk Grove, California; Synod of the Far West</td>
<td>Life Ministries</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christ’s Community, Pompano Beach, Florida; Synod of Mid-America (pending)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Reformed, Clearwater, Florida; Synod of Mid-America (pending)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union of Highbridge Bronx, New York; Synod of New York</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mott Haven Reformed, Bronx, New York; Synod of New York</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doster Community Reformed, Plainwell, Michigan; Synod of the Great Lakes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calvary Reformed, Grand Rapids, Michigan; Synod of the Great Lakes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bethel Reformed, Grand Rapids, Michigan; Synod of the Great Lakes (pending)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Shepherd Reformed, Westland, Michigan; Synod of the Great Lakes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calvin Reformed, Grand Rapids, Michigan; Synod of the Great Lakes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red River Reformed,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
West Fargo, North Dakota;  
Synod of the Heartland 1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name/Church</th>
<th>Dissolution of First Plan</th>
<th>Date of Denom Filed Organization and Plaque</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>City, State/Province</td>
<td>Synod Renamed Former Service</td>
<td>Date of Invitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synod</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Reformed,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knoxville, Iowa;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synod of the Heartland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PARTICIPATION IN
CHURCH RESOURCE MINISTRIES
1996 -1999

Completed in

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Synod/Classis</th>
<th>Church</th>
<th>Pastor</th>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>1999</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SYNOD OF ALBANY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Albany</td>
<td>Delmar</td>
<td>David G Corlett</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Montgomery</td>
<td>Pitcher Hill</td>
<td>Phyllis Palsma</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Rochester</td>
<td>Interlaken</td>
<td>Nickolas J Vander Weide</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SYNOD OF CANADA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Canadian Prairies</td>
<td>United</td>
<td>Ron Opmeer</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Calgary Community</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christ Community</td>
<td>Michael VandenBerg</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emmanuel Community</td>
<td>Walter Opmeer</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First Reformed</td>
<td>Darryl Brooker</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ontario</td>
<td>Synod of Canada</td>
<td>Jim Moerman</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First Reformed</td>
<td>Art Van Slageren</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ebenezer</td>
<td>Abram Blaak</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Forestview</td>
<td>Heino Blaauw</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Faith</td>
<td>Kenneth Ramsey</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guelph</td>
<td>Henry DeKorte</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First Reformed</td>
<td>Ronald Sikkema</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maranatha</td>
<td>Anton Bouw</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Countryside</td>
<td>Siebrand Wilts</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Immanuel</td>
<td>Arthur J Vander Meulen</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Faith Reformed</td>
<td>Carson Culp</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First Reformed</td>
<td>John Kapteyn</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ebenezer</td>
<td>Hendrik Bylstra</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emmanuel</td>
<td>Jeff Kingswood</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• British Columbia</td>
<td>Emmaus</td>
<td>Case Koolhaas</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>Steve Swift</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Powell River</td>
<td>Mark Komyrenberg</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grace Community</td>
<td>Russell Ooms</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grace Community</td>
<td>Robert Derrick</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## SYNOD OF THE FAR WEST

### California
- **Faith Norwalk**
- **Bethany**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Church</th>
<th>Pastor</th>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Calvary Community</td>
<td>Edward N Baker</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chula Vista</td>
<td>Paul Veenstra</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corona Community</td>
<td>Donald J Brandt</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith Riverside</td>
<td>Donald L Collier</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oak Springs</td>
<td>Douglas McClintic</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chino Valley</td>
<td>Matthew Soeter</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crossroads</td>
<td><strong>Roger Beukelman</strong></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chino Valley</td>
<td>Leon Draayer</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canyon Lake</td>
<td>Peter Van Dyke</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lake Hills</td>
<td>Eugene Pearson</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rancho Community</td>
<td>Stephen Struikmans</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synod Executive</td>
<td>Raymond A De Does</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Cascades
- **First Reformed**
- **Fourth Corner**
- **Faith Community**
- **Trinity**
- **Faith Reformed**
- **Good Shepherd**
- **Nooksack Valley**
- **Faith Reformed**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Church</th>
<th>Pastor</th>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Reformed</td>
<td><strong>Marc deWaard</strong></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth Corner</td>
<td>David Korsen</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith Community</td>
<td>Philip Assink</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinity</td>
<td>Perry Raak</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith Reformed</td>
<td>Alvin Honken</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Shepherd</td>
<td>Terry Maassen</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nooksack Valley</td>
<td>Charles Kleinhesselink</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith Reformed</td>
<td>Timothy Rotman</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Central California
- **Hope Community**
- **Chinese Community**
- **Christ Community**
- **Miraloma**
- **New Hope Community**
- **Sonoma Valley**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Church</th>
<th>Pastor</th>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hope Community</td>
<td><strong>John Oldenburger</strong></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Community</td>
<td>Warren Bovenkerk</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christ Community</td>
<td>David Schutt</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miraloma</td>
<td>Neal Busker</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hope Community</td>
<td>James Schoon</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonoma Valley</td>
<td>Timothy J Boeve</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Rocky Mountains
- **Christ Community**
- **New Hope Community**
- **Springs Community**
- **Springs Community**
- **Christ Community**
- **Mountain View**
- **Wheat Ridge**
- **Our Saviors**
- **Faith Community**
- **Jicarilla Apache**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Church</th>
<th>Pastor</th>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christ Community</td>
<td><strong>Bruce Van Dusseldorp</strong></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hope Community</td>
<td>Philip Schuiling</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Springs Community</td>
<td>Steven R Brooks</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Springs Community</td>
<td>Ronald D Gray</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christ Community</td>
<td>Karl Neerhof</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountain View</td>
<td>Ronald T Gross</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheat Ridge</td>
<td>Eric Ishimaru</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our Saviors</td>
<td>Barbara Morphew</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith Community</td>
<td>Marsh Wallinga</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jicarilla Apache</td>
<td>William J De Boer</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Southwest
- **Denom. Staff**
- **Hope Community**
- **Longview Community**
- **Prescott Community**
- **Christ Presbyterian**
- **New Hope**
- **Desert Haven**
- **Mescalero**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Church</th>
<th>Pastor</th>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denom. Staff</td>
<td><strong>Bruce Laverman</strong></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope Community</td>
<td>Susan Schubert</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longview Community</td>
<td>Kenneth B Petty Jr</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prescott Community</td>
<td>Bob J Myers</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christ Presbyterian</td>
<td>Wilbur D Daniels</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hope</td>
<td>Richard Koerselman</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desert Haven</td>
<td><strong>Mary Jacobs</strong></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mescalero</td>
<td>Robert L Schut</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## SYNOD OF THE GREAT LAKES
### North Grand Rapids
- Trinity Reformed
  - Pastor: Vicky Menning
  - Year 1: X
  - Year 2: X
- Calvary Reformed
  - Pastor: Tomas Archer
  - Year 1: X
  - Year 2: X
- Third Reformed
  - Pastor: Kent Fry
  - Year 1: X
  - Year 2: X
- Rockford Reformed
  - Pastor: Richard Tigchon
  - Year 1: X
  - Year 2: X

Completed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Synod/Classis</th>
<th>Church</th>
<th>Pastor</th>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>in 1999</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bethel</td>
<td>Ellis J Sowers Jr</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Richmond</td>
<td>James R Van Zetten</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holland</td>
<td>Beechwood</td>
<td>Marlin Vis</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fellowship</td>
<td>Kenneth W Eriks</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Calvary</td>
<td>Blaine Newhouse</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Central Park</td>
<td>Larry Schuyler</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fourth</td>
<td>Keith Larson</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southwest MI</td>
<td>First Reformed</td>
<td>Tomas M Bier</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Southridge</td>
<td>Mark Vanderson</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lakeland</td>
<td>James Poit</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South GR</td>
<td>Gun Lake</td>
<td>Arlan Ten Clay</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New Life</td>
<td>Harvey Hertz</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Faith Reformed</td>
<td>Bruce Osbeck</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Newhall Reformed</td>
<td>Clayton Smith</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zeeland</td>
<td>Peace Reformed</td>
<td>John Ornee</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Classis Minister</td>
<td>Steven A Smallegan</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muskegon</td>
<td>First Reformed</td>
<td>Todd Van Ek</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lake Erie</td>
<td>Synod NCD</td>
<td>Shorty Brown</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Huron Valley</td>
<td>Donald R Veltman</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Church of the Redeemer</td>
<td>Stephen M Norman</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grace Reformed</td>
<td>John Delger</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Church of the Master</td>
<td>Rick Vollema</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### SYNOD OF THE HEARTLAND

#### Central Iowa
- Meredith Drive
  - Pastor: Tony Vis
  - Year 1: X
  - Year 2: X
- Calvary
  - Pastor: Keith Korver
  - Year 1: X
  - Year 2: X
- Meredith Drive
  - Pastor: James I Koopman
  - Year 1: X
  - Year 2: X
- Meredith Drive
  - Pastor: Jane Brown
  - Year 1: X
  - Year 2: X
- Prairie Ridge
  - Pastor: Michael J Vanrees
  - Year 1: X
  - Year 2: X
- Heartland
  - Pastor: James R Lemmenes
  - Year 1: X
  - Year 2: X
- First Reformed
  - Pastor: Roger Punt
  - Year 1: X
  - Year 2: X
- Westview
  - Pastor: Jay Braband
  - Year 1: X
  - Year 2: X

#### Dakota
- Synod Exec
  - Pastor: Stan Vandersall
  - Year 1: X
  - Year 2: X
- First Reformed
  - Pastor: Stephen Hielkema
  - Year 1: X
  - Year 2: X
- Emmanuel
  - Pastor: David Reck
  - Year 1: X
  - Year 2: X
- Grace
  - Pastor: Allen R Schut
  - Year 1: X
  - Year 2: X
- Aurora
  - Pastor: Arlin VandeZande
  - Year 1: X
  - Year 2: X
- Riverview Park
  - Pastor: Rodney D Veldhuizen
  - Year 1: X
  - Year 2: X

#### Minnesota
- Synod NCD
  - Pastor: John Sikkink
  - Year 1: X
  - Year 2: X
- Roseland
  - Pastor: Daniel T Haggar
  - Year 1: X
  - Year 2: X
- Peace Reformed
  - Pastor: Verlyn Hemmen
  - Year 1: X
  - Year 2: X
- Valley Community
  - Pastor: Randy A Blumer
  - Year 1: X
  - Year 2: X
- Church of the Savior
  - Pastor: Shirley Heeg
  - Year 1: X
  - Year 2: X
- Riverside
  - Pastor: Tomas A Simith
  - Year 1: X
  - Year 2: X
- Our Savior
  - Pastor: Lori Walber
  - Year 1: X
- Preston
  - Pastor: Jonathon Loper
  - Year 1: X
American Reformed  David C Sikkema  X X X
Financial Consultant  Bob Wallinga  X X X
Archer Reformed  J.R. Henderson  X X X
Good News  Mark Schwartz  X X X
First Reformed  Milton Sikkema  X X
Bethel  Gary VandeKamp  X X

Completed

Synod/Classis  Church  Pastor  Year 1  Year 2  1999

SYNOD OF THE HEARTLAND, continued

- **East Sioux**
  - First Reformed  Matthew Draffen  X X X
  - First Reformed  Wayne Sneller  X X X

- **West Sioux**
  - Apache  George Montanari  X X

- **Red River**
  - Macy  Earl Smith  X X

- **Central Plains**
  - Winnebago  Darryl Dalman  X X

SYNOD OF MID-AMERICA

- **Illinois**
  - Synod Exec  Albert Vander Meer  X X X
  - Hope Reformed  Roger Huiting  X X X
  - Ebenezer  Robert D Hoffman  X X X
  - Silver Creek  Randy Knoll  X X X
  - Forreston  James Stralow  X X X
  - Baileynville  Henry C Elgersma  X X X

- **Illiana**
  - Manitouqua Ministries  John Huff  X X
  - Christ Community  Scott Rees  X
  - First Reformed  William M Donkersloot  X X
  - Tinley Park  Bruce Wilterdink  X X
  - Bethany  Eric Cook  X X
  - Grace  Andrew J Nearpass  X X
  - Trinity  X
  - First Lansing  Kenneth W Kuipers  X
  - Hammond  Timothy J King  X
  - Bethel, Harvey  Sidney Martin  X

- **Chicago**
  - Palos Heights  Peter Semoyn  X X
  - Faith, West Chicago  Ronald D Sanford  X
  - New Life, Alsip  Phillip L Frens  X
  - Green Oak  Robert Vander Putten  X X
  - Fellowship, Lombard  Christopher J Piersma  X

- **Florida**
  - Bayshore Gardens  Scott Eding  X X
  - Hope Community  Jhonny Alicea-Baez  X X
  - Hudson  Gerald Hekhuis  X X
  - Bethany  Gary Hofmeyer  X X
  - Trinity  Mical Pugh  X
  - North Dade  William Thomas Slager  X X
  - Church of the Cross  Marlin Vander Wilt  X
  - Calvary  Dean Wolbrink  X

SYNOD OF THE MID-ATLANTICS

- **Raritan**
  - Faith  Robert Jones  X

- **Greater Palisades**
  - Ramapo  Dominic Apollo  X
  - Charles Wiessner  X
• Passaic Valley
United            Solomon Tivade                                    X  X
Ponds            Harold Lay                                      X  X
Franklin Lakes  Barry Wynveen                                  X  X
First Reformed   Joseph Cusack                                  X  X
First Reformed   Susan Curtis                                   X  X
Trinity          Linda Powell                                   X  X
Montclair        Beverly Sullivant                              X  X

Completed

Synod/Classis     Church                                   Pastor                  Year 1 Year 2

• New Brunswick
Linden           David Groeneveld                               X  X
Faith Reformed   Norman Hamm                                  X  X
Colts Neck       Scott Brown                                   X  X

SYNOD OF NEW YORK

• Brooklyn       New Brooklyn                                   Barbara Alexander              X
• Nassau-Suffolk New York Community                           Stuart Clark                  X
                  New York Community                                 Mary Clark                   X
• Mid-Hudson     Hopewell Junction                             Taylor Holbrook               X  X
                  Fishkill                                             Eric Titus                   X
                  First of Hyde Park                                 Tomas W Fiet                  X
                  Poughkeepsie                                       Robert Goehean                X
                  Arlington                                          P. Stephan Sickler            X
                  Rhinebeck                                          Robert Vanderlaan             X
                  St. John’s Red Hook                                  Warren Siebert                X
                  New Hackensack                                      James A Nevevel               X

• Queens         First Reformed                                 David Butler                 X
• Orange         Brick Reformed                                 Brian Randazzo                X
• New York        Fordham Manor                                 Irving Rivera                X
                  Fort Washington                                    Charles Morris                X  X
                  Synod Exec                                          Jon Norton                    X
                  DeWitt                                               Carolyn Holloway              X

• Rockland-Westchester
Tappan           James L Johnson                                 X
First Reformed   Okke Postma                                    X

PILOT NETWORK
1996
California Classis Vernon L Hoffis
Palm Canyon       Tomas De Vries                                  X
Bethel            David J Vanlant                                X
Trinity           Wayne Hoglin                                  X
Christ Community  Douglas A Scholten                            X
Lincoln Ave.      Richard de Bruyne                             X
Eldorado Park     Dale Assink                                   X
Interim Pastor    Wilbur D Daniels                             X
Faith Norwalk     Warren Thompson                               X

BOLD = Attended Facilitator Training
Underlined = Active Facilitator
From the Report of the Council for Hispanic Ministries

(The report can be found on page 83.)

R-10
To instruct Evangelism and Church Development Services, in consultation with the Council for Hispanic Ministries and congregations that are already involved with Hispanic Department models, to explore how best to support the development of Hispanic Department models; and further,

to move toward the implementation of this model.

The advisory committee recommended to amend R-10 as follows (additions are underlined; deletions are struck out):

R-10 (amendment)
To instruct Evangelism and Church Development Services, in consultation with the Council for Hispanic Ministries and congregations that are already involved with Hispanic Department models, to explore how best to support the development of Hispanic Department models; and further,

to move toward the implementation of these models. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

Reason: The use of the plural recognizes that there may be more than one model.


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 in America through the General Synod Council. Its purpose is to support the work of the General Synod Council of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America by rendering financial assistance in the erection of church buildings. In fulfillment of this purpose, it maintains and operates two separate loan funds. One is the Church Building Fund (CBF). The other is the Extension Foundation Fund (EFF). 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 you can invest in the EFF) can be obtained through the “Resources” section of the RCA’s website (www.rca.org).

The primary source of funds for the CBF is gifts, bequests, and grants from members, agencies, and instrumentalities of the RCA. The primary source of funds for the EFF is the sale of promissory notes. Such notes are offered in fixed maturities of 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 1999 the corporation had assets of over $36.2 million. Of this amount over $22.9 million was in the form of loans outstanding to RCA congregations, and nearly $5.5 million was committed but not yet funded. One hundred eighteen CBF loans and fifty-eight EFF loans were outstanding (or committed but not yet funded) to local RCA congregations at the end of 1999. Following this report is a list of all churches that currently are borrowers from the RCABEF.

During 1999 nine loans were paid off (compared to seventeen in 1998). In 1998 the RCABEF experienced a significant increase in the total number of loan commitments issued as well as the total dollar amounts committed. In 1999 the number of loan commitments issued and total dollar amounts committed were even higher. Specifically, thirty-four commitments for loans were issued to RCA congregations in 1999 (compared to twenty-two in 1998, eight in 1997 and ten in 1996), and the total dollar amount committed was over $7.5 million (compared to nearly $4.4 million in 1998, $1,658,000 in 1997, and $2,035,000 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.

A recent survey by the RCA’s director of Evangelism and Church Development Services indicates that over the next five years RCA congregations are likely to undertake capital improvement projects with an aggregate cost of between $60 million and $80 million. Moreover, as time goes on the cost of any single capital improvement project continues to increase. In light of these two factors, the RCABEF expects demand for loans to continue to increase (at least in the short term) and has already experienced an increase in requests for loans of larger amounts than it has typically approved in the past.

Thus, the RCABEF finds itself addressing a number of different (and sometimes competing) issues. For example, how can the RCABEF satisfy the requests for larger loans without jeopardizing its ability to fund future loan requests? How should the RCABEF balance its desire to make loan funds easily available to churches with its responsibility to exercise good stewardship over the resources that have been loaned or donated to it? How can the RCABEF best deal with the ongoing tension between its desire to provide loans at rates that are below those offered by commercial lenders and its desire to see the total asset value of the RCABEF increase (through interest earned on loans and, to a lesser extent, donations made to the RCABEF), thereby increasing the amount of funds that will be available to churches in the future?

These issues have no easy answers. Nevertheless, the RCABEF is dealing with them as best it can. For example, in response to increasing requests for loans of larger amounts, the RCABEF undertook a careful review of its loan limits and the policies underlying them, and concluded that it could raise its loan limits substantially without significantly jeopardizing its ability to meet future loan demand. Accordingly, the RCABEF has increased the aggregate amount that a church may borrow from $650,000 to $1.5 million. Additionally, the RCABEF remains willing to consider funding loans in tandem with loans from commercial lenders so that the aggregate amount a church may borrow can be even greater.

Rates on loans remain at or—in the case of loans from the Church Building Fund—significantly below rates offered by commercial lenders.

In response to requests that loan documentation and closing requirements be streamlined where appropriate, the RCABEF has revised its loan documentation and closing requirements so that there are fewer requirements for loans of relatively smaller amounts.
To make information about the loan and investment programs of the RCABEF available to as large a group as possible, the RCABEF established a page on the RCA’s website last year. This year the RCABEF has gone a step farther, making its loan applications available through the RCA’s website so that a local congregation may download, print, and complete them.

Finally, in an effort to reduce operating expenses wherever possible (and thereby keep loan interest rates down) the servicing of Extension Foundation Fund investment notes has been outsourced. As a result, the cost of servicing those investment notes has been reduced by over 50 percent.

Much has been accomplished, and yet much remains to be done, all for the purpose of equipping 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.

As the RCABEF continues its work, 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
Classis of Ontario (Igreja Evangelica Vida Nova), Stevensville, Ontario
Faith Reformed Church, Stevensville, Ontario
Emmanuel Reformed Church, Woodstock, Ontario

**UNITED STATES**
New Hope Community Church, Gilbert, Arizona
Christ’s Community Church, Glendale, Arizona
Hope Community Church, Scottsdale, Arizona
Desert Haven Community Church, Tempe, 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
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
Faith Community Church, Littleton, Colorado
West Broward Community Church, Fort Lauderdale, Florida
Christ Community Church, Palm Springs, Florida
First Reformed Church, Tampa, Florida
Rolling Hills Community Church, Zellwood, Florida
North Atlanta Community Church, Roswell, Georgia
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
Community Reformed Church, Lafayette, Indiana
The Adventure Life Reformed Church, Altoona, Iowa
Christ’s Family Reformed Church, Davenport, Iowa
Calvary Reformed Church, Des Moines, Iowa
Classis of Central Iowa (Knoxville restart), Knoxville, Iowa
Heartland Reformed Church, Pella, Iowa
First Reformed Church, Prairie City, Iowa
First Reformed Church, Rock Valley, Iowa
New Life Reformed Church, Sioux Center, Iowa
Hope Reformed Church, Spencer, Iowa
Westview Church, Waukee, Iowa
Crossroads Church, Overland Park, Kansas
Harvest Community Church, Wichita, Kansas
Boston Taiwanese Christian Church, Framingham, Massachusetts
Reformed Church of Corinth, Byron Center, Michigan
CrossWinds Community Church, Canton, Michigan
Open Door Reformed Church, Dorr, Michigan
University Reformed Church, East Lansing, Michigan
Resurrection Reformed Church, Flint, Michigan
Glen Lake Community Reformed Church, Glen Arbor, Michigan
Thornapple Community Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan
Trinity Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan
Covenant Community Church, Hudsonville, Michigan
Second Reformed Church, Kalamazoo, Michigan
Martin Reformed Church, Martin, Michigan
Calvary Reformed Church, Mattawan, Michigan
Church of the Savior, Niles, Michigan
Fourth Reformed Church, Oshtemo, Michigan
Gun Lake Community Church, Wayland, Michigan
Newhall Reformed Church, Wyoming, Michigan
First Reformed Church, Zeeland, 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. Peter’s, Missouri
Westwood Church, Omaha, Nebraska
Second Reformed Church, Irvington, New Jersey
The Reformed Church in Kinnelon, Kinnelon, New Jersey
First Reformed Church, Lincoln Park, New Jersey
Ocean Reformed Church, Manahawkin, New Jersey
Pinelands Reformed Church, Toms River, New Jersey
Community Church of Colonie, Albany, New York
United Reformed Church of Williamsbridge Road, Bronx, New York
New Lots Community Church, Brooklyn, New York
Old First Reformed Church, Brooklyn, New York
Christ Community Church, Clifton Park, New York
Siloam Church, Flushing, New York
Taiwanese American Reformed Church in Queens, Flushing, New York
Helderberg Reformed Church, Guilderland Center, New York
Herkimer Reformed Church, Herkimer, New York
Linlithgo Reformed Church, Livingston, New York
Nakwon Reformed Church, Sunnyside, Long Island, New York
Pitcher Hill Community Church, North Syracuse, New York
The New Church of Greater New York, Roslyn Heights, 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
Emmanuel Reformed Church, Clinton, Wisconsin
New Life Community Church, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
Bethany Reformed Church, Sheboygan, Wisconsin

Overture

Church Growth Goal

1. The Synod of the Great Lakes overtures the General Synod to urge each regional synod and classis to adopt the following goal for each church within its bounds: that each church achieve a net membership growth of one percent or more each year for the next five years; that this growth be achieved primarily through confessions and reaffirmations of faith; and furthermore, that if a congregation believes that it cannot grow in this way or a church does not grow by one percent or more each year, that the classis and the church take the following actions:

   1. Pray that God will open opportunities to plant the seed of the gospel.

   2. Enlist the help of a consultant in the area of church growth or revitalization.

   3. Develop a specific goal and plan for outreach into its community.

Reasons:

1. Christ calls us and empowers us to be witnesses within our communities first (Luke 24:46-48; Acts 1:8; 2:5-12).
2. The Reformed Church in America has adopted a Statement of Mission and Vision that calls all of us to be “unleashed, hungry for ministry; congregations mission-minded and inviting, authentic and healing, growing and multiplying, alert to the opportunities around them.” Classes and synods are called to be “communities of nurture and vision—accountable, responsible, sustained by prayer, alive to the Spirit” (MGS 1997, pp. 78-80).

3. In response to the instruction of the General Synod, the General Synod Council has established the following outcomes to assist it in identifying, prioritizing, and allocating the resources of the Reformed Church in America (MGS 1998, p. 80):

   3. RCA congregations, classes, and ministers will experience a renewed sense of hope and a clear sense of mission, and they will share the good news of Jesus Christ in word and deed.

      a. A range of strategies that have the flexibility to promote revitalization in existing RCA congregations and ministries and the promote evangelism through a diversity of congregations into local communities will be implemented.

4. In order to fulfill our mission, classes and synods need to challenge and support our churches in their calling to be mission stations within our culture.

5. One percent growth in confessions and reaffirmations of faith is a realistic goal for each church. It is also biblical, according to Jesus’ parable of the lost sheep, in which the shepherd leaves ninety-nine to find the one who was lost (Luke 15:3-7).

6. If a church is not growing, it is reasonable and helpful to ask for a time of prayer, reflection, and planning for growth. The Acts account of the early church clearly records the numerical growth of the church from 120 to 3,000 to 5,000 to multiple congregations (Acts 1:15; 2:42; 4:4; 5:14; 6:1,7; 9:31, 42; 11:21, 24; 14:1, 21; 16:5; 17:12). The teaching of Jesus clearly sets forth the expectation that the kingdom of God will grow (Mark 4:26-32).

From the Report of the General Secretary

kThe advisory committee responded to Overture 1 from the Synod of the Great Lakes and to P-2 from the report of the general secretary (p. 54) by making the following recommendation:

R-68
To urge each regional synod and classis to adopt by 2001 the following goal for each church within its bounds: that each church achieve a net membership growth of one percent or more each year; that this growth be achieved primarily through confessions and reaffirmations of faith; and further,

that if a congregation does not grow by one percent or more each year, that the classis and the church take the following actions:

1. Pray that God will open opportunities to plant the seed of the
GENERAL SYNOD/JUNE 2000

gospel,

2. Enlist the help of a consultant in the area of church growth or revitalization,

3. Develop a specific goal and plan for outreach into its community; and further,

   to request the general secretary to facilitate a discernment process which engages all classes, regional synods, boards, and agencies, for the purpose of establishing a clear and compelling ten-year goal for church health and numerical growth as the expected result of our mission and ministry together; and further,

   to request the General Synod Council to bring a preliminary report, including projected expense budget, in April 2001, with a final report no later than April 2002. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. The unmistakable moving of the Holy Spirit through Mission 2000, the Pentecost Letter, and the Faithful Witnesses emphasis calls us to “be a people who can lead others into a saving relationship” with Christ and “to discern God’s yearnings for new ministries in a new millennium.”

2. The Reformed Church in America has adopted a Statement of Mission and Vision that calls all of us to be “unleashed, hungry for ministry; congregations mission-minded and inviting, authentic and healing, growing and multiplying, alert to the opportunities around them.” Classes and synods are called to be “communities of nurture and vision—accountable, responsible, sustained by prayer, alive to the Spirit” (MGS 1997, pp.78-80).

3. The teaching of Jesus clearly sets forth the expectation that the kingdom of God will grow (Mark 4:26-32). Christ calls us and empowers us to be witnesses within our communities first (Luke 24:46-48; Acts 1:8; 2:5-12). One percent growth in confessions and reaffirmations of faith is a realistic goal for each church. It is also biblical, according to Jesus’ parable of the lost sheep, in which the shepherd leaves the ninety-nine to find the one who was lost (Luke 15:3-7).

4. In order to fulfill our mission, classes and synods need to challenge and support our churches in their calling to be mission stations within our culture.
REPORTS ON CHURCH VOCATIONS

Report of New Brunswick Theological Seminary

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:1-4, RSV).

New Brunswick Theological Seminary has been a Pentecost place for 216 years. Those who gathered in Jerusalem heard one another “telling in their own tongues the mighty deeds God has done.” Each class session at the seminary is a mirror image of that Pentecost experience. Students vary widely in their Christian faith traditions, social status, and racial/ethnic heritage. Different perceptions of Jesus, different experiences of the church, different kinds of calling, and widely variant gifts are all slowly translated, in each class experience, into a rich, shared commitment to our common calling of being “the very presence of Jesus Christ in the world” (RCA Statement of Mission and Vision).

In the Pentecost experience recorded in the book of Acts, the coming of the Holy Spirit brought focus and clarity to the mission to “all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). In a similar fashion, empowered by the Holy Spirit and taught by faithful, dedicated teachers, students learn, grow, and focus on God’s call to mission, to healing, and to peace. During this General Synod, as delegates participate in Mission 2000, there will be opportunities to witness some of the multitude of ways that the church is expressing God’s call to mission in the world. The following vignettes illustrate still more ways in which the church is pushing outward the frontiers of mission in the life and work of students at New Brunswick Seminary in the year 2000.

PRISON MINISTRY

William Harrell is a senior student at the seminary.

Working with the chaplain’s office in a major correctional facility means dealing with people who have strong feelings of fear, anger, despair, frustration, and hopelessness and often the notion that if there is a God it is too late for any personal relationship. Others have never acknowledged any need. The atmosphere is often intense, and we are allowed only a certain, limited amount of time with inmates for chapel worship services, Bible studies, crisis counseling, outside volunteer services, and administrative matters dealing with marriages, paroles, visitation issues, etc. Chaplains are employed by the state and are bound to perform their spiritual support efforts under the prison system rules, which include making no effort to get inmates to change from one belief system to another, limiting time together for all religious services, and always making security and safety a top priority.

Inmates who spend time with chaplains and volunteers in spiritual meetings can be subjected to criticism by local officers and ridicule by other inmates. The spiritual needs of inmates include forgiveness, hope, comfort, and a ministry that can assure them they have not been forgotten—by God or their fellow human beings. Prison ministry can act to assure inmates that God loves them and still responds to their prayers. A number of them are heavily into studying the Scriptures and need help with interpretation and additional study material.

Some inmates are anxious to take college correspondence courses and need financial and emotional support to do this. They also are in need of contacts with local Christian churches who can minister in-house and provide a sincere welcome to them upon their
release. If we do not reach out as a people and a church to these oppressed people as we are instructed to in Scripture, I believe we will be called to account for it. These people in particular have no one but us to come and see them with God’s comfort and blessing. If we don’t, they are left at the mercy of the secular penal system, which in many cases takes the position that the incarcerated do not deserve such privileges. We cannot accept this.

CAMPUS MINISTRY

Gabriel Salguero is a middler student at the seminary and one of only sixteen students throughout the U.S. to have been awarded a Hispanic Theological Initiative Scholarship.

My journey to ministry begins in Puerto Rico, where my father was a young man caught in the despair of poverty and heroin addiction. Imprisoned for drug-related crimes, he seemed to have little hope for a happy, productive life, but God would make a way. Through the prison ministry of Teen Challenge, my father committed his life to Christ and subsequently became a minister in the Missionary Pentecostal Church, also serving as a drug rehab counselor. My mother is also an ordained minister. So I grew up in a Christian home, with a clear model of a life of service.

My family moved from Puerto Rico to New Jersey, where I studied at Rutgers University, majoring in Spanish and history and earning a teacher’s certificate. I also became aware of New Brunswick Theological Seminary’s location in the heart of the Rutgers campus. A member of my home church—a 1996 graduate of NBTS—encouraged me to explore the seminary’s program. My parents have been especially supportive of my studies, as has my church. Even though the Missionary Pentecostal Church does not require the M.Div. for ordination, my seminary study is seen as a door-opening experience that will prepare me to further participate in the mission and witness of the church.

My supervised ministry assignment has brought me back to the Rutgers campus. Working with United Campus Ministries and Second Reformed Church (New Brunswick, New Jersey), I am actively involved in ministry to the university community. On a secular campus there are predictable difficulties regarding issues of church and state. Rutgers University, fearful of encouraging cults, has become even less sympathetic to ministry than in the past. Despite such obstacles I am enthusiastic.

To overcome resistance we have been visiting with members of fraternities and sororities in an effort to build trust. From this work, we are developing a core group of student leaders who will assist in promoting the newly–instituted Sunday afternoon worship and urge attendance at Bible studies being offered for both believers and inquirers. The objective of the campus ministry program is to serve the unchurched and those who have either fallen away from the church or who have “put their faith on hold” in response to the pressures and busyness of college life. It is true missionary work—starting a church from the ground up.

PARISH MINISTRY

Alice Everett Abner is a senior student at the seminary.

What do I do at First Reformed Church of South River? My heart is overjoyed for this golden opportunity to share this wonderful testimony about my duties at this church. It was a learning agreement made from heaven just for me. God lifted me straight away from my home church for there was no room in the inn for growth and no proper supervision. There are approximately ten ministers, including the senior pastor, in my
church. At First Reformed I have a one-to-one relationship with my supervisor, the pastor. I do not have to be concerned with competing and not enough pulpit duties.

My weekly duties are to visit the sick in hospitals and nursing homes and minister by telephone to the shut-ins. This term I am scheduled to preach two or three times a month. I am truly blessed. I know some experienced and very talented assistant ministers do not get the opportunity to preach as often as I do. One of the greatest accomplishments during my internship has been to assist the church in establishing a mission statement. It was approved and adopted by the consistory in February 1999. I believe my God has set me on this course as part of my preparation for my own greater commission.

Why would God take me from my comfort zone to a totally unfamiliar church? I didn’t have time to waste questioning God as to why this place. It is utterly impossible to figure out why God does what God does. My challenge has been to interact with the theology of the people of a different faith, culture, and ethnicity. This assignment has impacted my spiritual life and growth. It has enabled me to live in the walls of a deep tradition of Hungarian descent where women were not readily accepted in the ministry, much the less a black woman.

I believe I am the only woman and black woman who has ever ministered in this congregation. Indeed it has been a challenge in the area of worship, as I am not accustomed to worshiping God in a quiet manner and in an hour, no less. My home church is very noisy, and the worship service may last for two or more hours. I have learned to be quiet and hear the Spirit of the Lord reign in this place. Although the liturgy is conducted differently than I am accustomed to, the end results are the same. If one parishioner can acknowledge and bear witness to the Spirit of the Lord, then the angels in heaven are rejoicing.

My greatest joy in this assignment is ministering to the sick and shut-ins. They enjoy my prayers and singing. I have become very attached to this congregation and concerned with their spiritual well-being. This part of my assignment has not been an effort. I have enjoyed every minute. I truly thank the good people of First Reformed Church of South River for the patience and encouragement they offered during my internship for the past two years.

These vignettes are illustrative of the ministries that synod delegates will visit as they experience Mission 2000. Up to fifty congregations will be visited during Mission 2000, and each one has a unique ministry. New Brunswick Theological Seminary sees its mission as the preparation of leaders who can minister with blessed creativity and gospel faithfulness amid such a rich variety of cultures. While the seminary remains effective at preparing pastors for traditional parishes in rural Albany as well as suburban New Jersey, the breadth of training has increased in response to the multicultural, pluralistic culture in which all congregations will be ministering in the not-too-distant future.

**GIFTS AND GROWTH**

For fiscal year 1999 the seminary finished financially in the black for the second year in a row. The seminary is especially grateful to the Reformed Church, as undesignated gifts for current operations from RCA congregations and RCA friends of the seminary were larger than in any previous year. Along with the increased financial support, the church is making more use of the seminary. This past year has seen an enrollment of 225, more students than ever before. As in all past years, the number of students from the Reformed Church in America has been constant, between fifty and sixty-five, which means that New Brunswick is as much a Reformed Church seminary as ever. The change has been the discovery of the seminary by African Methodist Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Baptist churches, who have sent an ever-
increasing number of students. An additional twenty denominations have also begun looking to New Brunswick Theological Seminary for theological education by sending students here. So in both present and promise, New Brunswick Theological Seminary is growing.

The growth extends to the faculty as well. This year, for the first time in many years, the faculty is at full strength. Last year the seminary had interim appointments in both Old and New Testament studies. This year both of those positions have regular appointments. The Rev. Dr. Beth LaNeel Tanner, who served as interim in the Old Testament position last year, has received a regular appointment. The Rev. Dr. Virginia Wiles began her regular appointment as associate professor of New Testament last August.

New Brunswick will admit its second class of students studying for the D.Min. in Metro-Urban Ministry in the fall. The first class has finished all of the classroom work and will be spending this coming year on thesis projects. The addition of the D.Min. program has enriched the life of all students at the seminary. The presence of those students at events and in class, as well as the effect on faculty due to the thought and conversation necessary to educate a class of doctoral students, has deepened and broadened everyone’s education.

COMMUNITY EVENTS AT THE SEMINARY

During the past year the seminary has had two exciting convocations that provoked both thought and action. The first was the annual Alumni/ae Convocation in September. The presenter this year was Dr. David Myers from Hope College. Myers gave an illustrated presentation on the ways in which society is changing. During the afternoon Judge John Kuhlthau, Professor Joon Lee and the Rev. Dr. Deborah Wolfe presented formal responses. The day was a hands-on workshop in the complexities of a multicultural society.

In October the seminary sponsored Making Room—That All May Worship, a convocation on providing access in the church for persons with disabilities. Beyond the obvious physical needs, the event focused on how worship and pastoral care need to be structured in a fresh way to be fully inclusive.

The Center for Reformed Church Studies, a new outreach of the seminary, has incorporated the Standing Seminar on the Reformed Church into its program. The theme for the lectures this year was “Soundings: Reflections on the RCA Today.” The presenters were the five NBTS General Synod professors of theology—the “fourth office” in RCA polity (the first, second, and third offices being those of minister, elder, and deacon). The series rests on the conviction that the fourth office, a teaching office, has a responsibility to reflect theologically on the life and work of our church. The presenters reflected on the state of the RCA in this millennial year:

The Rev. Dr. John W. Beardslee III
Abraham Messler Quick Professor of Church History, emeritus
“Looking Back: a Generation of the RCA”

The Rev. Dr. Norman J. Kansfield
President and John Henry Livingston Professor of Theology
“The Professorate and the State of Theological Education in the RCA”

The Rev. Dr. David Waanders
Professor of Pastoral Care
“Viewing the RCA through the Lens of the Commission on Theology”

The Rev. Dr. Paul R. Fries
Academic Dean and Professor of Foundational and Constructive Theology
“The Eastern RCA: Mapping the Tradition”

The Rev. Dr. John Coakley
L. Russell Feakes Memorial Professor of Church History
“Spirit and Structure in the RCA: Reflections from a New Study”

The Albert A. Smith Fellowship in RCA Church History—created in memory of the Rev. Albert A. Smith—was given by parishioners and friends from Blawenburg Reformed Church in Blawenburg, New Jersey, Preakness Reformed Church in Wayne, New Jersey, and First Reformed Church in Schenectady, New York. It provides a pastor or parishioner who has a project to research with a two-week time of study at the seminary followed by a lecture. Normally one researcher is the Smith Fellow for the year. This year three applied and the selection committee saw great value in each application. Rather than lose the opportunity, three Smith Fellowships were awarded, and the community has benefited from this especially rich set of offerings:

The Rev. Bruce Laverman
RCA Minister of Evangelism and Revitalization
“To Flourish Amid Change: Three-Hundred-Year-Old Congregations in the RCA”

The Rev. Dr. Lynn Japinga
Associate Professor of Religion, Hope College
“The RCA Since 1945”

The Rev. David Alexander (NBTS 1980)
RCA Missionary/Evangelist in Taiwan
“The RCA and the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan: Fifty Years of Partnership”

Many other signs of mission at New Brunswick include: 1) the full-day celebration of workshops and dialogue held on January 17, 2000, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, which culminated with a service of worship by the Rev. Dr. James Forbes of Riverside Church in New York City; 2) the increased available program and information on the seminary’s website, www.nbts.edu; 3) the next Suydam Seminar on Medical Ethics in the fall of 2000; 4) the Sage Library online catalog, which makes its resources available to a much wider constituency; 5) the International Summer School, a biannual study trip to the Netherlands; and 6) two new faculty members who have recently published books. Professor Beth LaNeel Tanner is the author of *The Book of Psalms Through the Lens of Intertextuality*, and Professor Virginia Wiles is the author of *Making Sense of Paul: a Basic Introduction to Pauline Theology*.

Pentecost began a mission work among humankind that was completely new and intended for all people and for all the varieties of human experience. Since that first Pentecostal call, the people of God have continued to be filled with the Holy Spirit in the new mission opportunities that have arisen in each generation. Response to God’s leading has always required creativity and insight, and it still does. New Brunswick Theological Seminary has spent 216 years engaging the church in honing the skills needed to respond to God’s fresh, new call. The seminary today continues intentional listening—to God, to the church, and to the cries of those who need to experience the saving grace of Jesus. In its provision for New Brunswick Theological Seminary, the Reformed Church in America continues its long tradition of gospel for the whole world—“Following Christ in mission, in a lost and broken world so loved by God” (RCA Statement of Mission and Vision).

(The seminary has one dispensation that the board of trustees will process at its June 2, 2000, meeting. The report on that action will be a handout at General Synod.)
Report of Western Theological Seminary

As Western Theological Seminary and the Reformed Church in America together move into a new century of ministry, they face daunting challenges. While nearly 95 percent of North Americans report that they believe in God, their religiously pluralistic culture offers a bewildering array of religious philosophies and lifestyles, many of which have no relationship to the historic Christian faith. Moreover, in a culture that stresses individualism and self-sufficiency, there is great resistance to the institutional church.

Faced with these enormous challenges, how shall the Reformed Church in America be a faithful and effective witness to the good news of redemption and new life through Jesus Christ? How shall the RCA be a transformed and transformative community of faith in a culture that seems indifferent and even hostile to its ministry? Moreover, how shall Western Theological Seminary assist the church in preparing leaders for the church of this new century of ministry?

When we Christians become discouraged, even immobilized, by the challenges that face us, we remember that Jesus Christ is head of his church and that God will provide direction and power for our ministry. Putting confidence and trust in God, we become people of hope. And we pray with the psalmist:

Let your steadfast love, O Lord,
be upon us,
even as we hope in you (Ps. 33:22).

STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

At its February 1999 meeting, the Western Theological Seminary Board of Trustees approved a Strategic Planning Committee composed of Ronald Hartgerink, Marcia Elgersma, and Alfredo Gonzales (board members); the Rev. Dr. Carol Bechtel and the Rev. Dr. George Hunsberger (faculty); Norman Donkersloot (staff); Douglas Kiel (student council president); the Rev. Dr. James Brownson (academic dean); and the Rev. Dr. Dennis Voskuil (president). The committee was assisted by staff members Marilyn Essink and Kenneth Neevel. Professor Charles Green from Hope College was appointed as the facilitator of the committee.

Why did the board initiate a strategic planning process? Essentially, the board was motivated by the ongoing challenge of preparing leaders for the church in an ever-changing culture. As people of hope, the seminary must look to the future—building on present strengths and responding to present challenges.

Western came to strategic planning from a position of relative strength and vitality. Enrollments have approached all-time highs. The seminary’s relationships with churches have been deepening. Financial support has been strong. The members of the faculty, including several recent appointments, are gifted, educated, and experienced. Staff members are equally gifted and dedicated to the mission of the seminary.

The strategic plan was also stimulated by new institutional challenges. The Reformed Church in America is changing, and the needs of its ministry are changing. The next five to ten years will bring an unusually large number of retirements of RCA pastors; as many as 20 percent of RCA pastors will retire. This number is so large that the seminary’s present graduation rates will not be sufficient to replace them, to say nothing of the need to plant new churches. New forms and models of ministry also require fresh approaches to equipping church leaders.
Western Theological Seminary is already in the early stages of a major curricular revision that stretches faculty in new ways and requires a great deal of fresh time and energy. Western also is accountable to new accreditation standards that require intentional processes of goal-setting, assessment, and continuous improvement. Western’s student body is significantly younger than it was even five years ago, and it requires new approaches in teaching and formation.

Because Western’s enrollment is so high, Western’s physical facility and faculty are beginning to be taxed by the size of the student body and by the need for larger classrooms and more office space. The seminary cannot and must not stand on its past successes. To stand still is to fall backward. Only a forward-looking and aggressive vision for the future will enable us to keep pace with the rapid changes that are occurring all around us.

As the strategic planning committee looked to the future, it affirmed the importance of preserving those elements in the life of the seminary which make it most effective, which mark its unique heritage, and which most fully express its mission. Therefore, the seminary’s intimate partnership with the Reformed Church was celebrated.

Western needs to build upon the strengths and insights that are embodied in its new M.Div. curriculum, allowing that curriculum to mature and to flourish. The seminary needs to preserve the high value it places on personal and pastoral relationships among faculty, staff, and students, resisting the temptation to grow in ways that might compromise the vitally important interpersonal and relational context of theological education. Western needs to support and cultivate the work of the faculty and staff so that the widening of the seminary’s ministry does not overwhelm them. The school must continue to cultivate vital partnerships with the many people and churches that support its ministry. Lastly, it must continue to form partnerships with other persons and organizations that share its missional vision for church leadership. Western wishes to continue to serve the church as effectively as possible while the church continues to change and as the seminary’s ministry grows.

Having isolated the values and present programs that should be consolidated and strengthened, the committee explored fresh directions in which the seminary might move to better serve the church. The committee has identified four broad areas of initiative where the need is great. The seminary needs to provide for the continuing growth of the M.Div. program as well as for growth in the overall ministry of the seminary. It needs to find fresh ways to partner with the entire RCA, not just with western Michigan churches, in the equipping of missional leaders in its M.Div. program. The seminary needs to strengthen its effectiveness in equipping nonordained church leaders for ministry and mission through degree-based programming, and it needs to deepen its commitment to lifelong learning and mission formation for clergy and lay leaders through a vigorous program of continuing education. Western is now in the process of prioritizing these broad areas of initiative and developing more specific plans for its programmatic implementation. Feedback from churches and classes has been invaluable in the planning process.

NEW FACULTY APPOINTMENTS

Western has recently welcomed two new members to the faculty. In January 1999 the Rev. Dr. Matthew Floding assumed his duties as director of formation for ministry. Before coming to the seminary, Floding had served as the chaplain at Northwestern College in Orange City, Iowa. Having earned degrees from Bethel College (B.S.), Trinity College (M.A.), McCormick Theological Seminary (M.Div.), and Western Seminary (D.Min.), and having pastored churches in Illinois and Minnesota, Floding is well prepared for his present position, which includes teaching pastoral theology, organizing the teaching church program, and coordinating the junior learning web and January retreat.
In August the Rev. Dr. Robert Van Voorst assumed his responsibilities as professor of New Testament. A graduate of Hope College (B.A.), Western Seminary (M.Div.), and Union Theological Seminary (Ph.D.), Van Voorst came to Western from Lycoming College in Pennsylvania, where he was a valued member of the religion department. A lifelong member of the Reformed Church in America, Van Voorst had served the Rochester Reformed Church in Accord, New York, for a decade before his appointment to the Lycoming faculty. An accomplished teacher-scholar, he has already published several books, most of which are related to his studies of the New Testament and the New Testament church. At Western Van Voorst teaches courses in New Testament and Greek.

STAFF APPOINTMENTS

Two staff appointments have been made during the past year. During the summer Carla Weese became Western’s communications coordinator, replacing Laurie Baron, who had served so effectively in that position for several years. During the late fall, LuAnne Van Slooten replaced Sharon Van De Vusse as the administrative assistant to the advancement office. In her behind-the-scenes position, Van De Vusse had greatly contributed to the mission of the seminary through the appeal fund, the Campaign for Western, and ongoing continuing education events.

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

Under the leadership of senior Doug Kiel, the Student Council has been active and productive. In the fall the seminary dedicated a beautifully refurbished student lounge in the basement of the main complex. The Student Council has also sponsored monthly discussion sessions on some of the central issues that face the church today. The council has also supervised Parents’ Night Out and other opportunities for recreation and community life.

ENROLLMENT

Western experienced another modest enrollment increase during the 1999-2000 academic year. Last year sixty-seven RCA candidates were enrolled in Western’s M.Div. program. With an overall enrollment of 168 and a high full-time equivalent of 127, the seminary has experienced some strains and stresses on facilities and faculty. Several courses enrolled fifty students. With no classroom equipped to seat fifty students, several of the courses were split into two sections, or multiple discussion groups. In two cases Semelink Hall—normally used for worship and special events—was set up with tables to accommodate large classes. The seminary welcomes these large classes with gratitude and joy, for they will help to offset a growing need for pastors and educators, counselors and teachers, but in many cases faculty carry very heavy teaching loads. As indicated before, the strategic plan addresses these positive challenges related to enrollment growth.

CONTINUING EDUCATION

CONnECTS—Continuing Education for Christian Training and Service—offered a range of lecture and workshop opportunities for clergy and laity this year. The Rev. Bill Hybels, of Willow Creek Ministries, was the speaker at the 1999 Herman J. and Lenora Ridder Leadership Conference, held at Third Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan, in September. In the fall Mickie Heard O’Donnell led a workshop for Christian educators; the Rev. Dr. Thomas Boogaart, the Rev. Dr. Timothy Brown, and Dr. Leanne Van Dyk teamed up to lead a workshop for preachers; and the Rev. William Lowrey led a workshop and then met with RCA Mission Services staff.

The Rev. Terry Lapinsky led a Prepare/Enrich seminar in February. This is the second year Western has offered this certification program to equip pastors for premarital and marriage
counseling. Other workshops scheduled for spring included “Dancing with Disabilities,” led by the Rev. Dr. Brett Webb-Mitchell, and “Designing Mission in the Local Church,” led by the Rev. Dr. Donald Buteyn. The Rev. Dr. Marvin D. Hoff delivered a public lecture on recent developments in the church in China, and the Rev. Dr. Melvin Hugen delivered the Nellie Arnold Bergsma lecture on the Heidelberg Catechism.

FINANCES

Financial support for the seminary has continued to be strong, although overall giving for the 1999-2000 year is falling considerably short of that for 1998-1999, which was remarkable in nearly every category. The advancement office is working diligently to let congregations and individuals know of the growing needs of the seminary. Western’s ability to implement a strategic plan is directly linked to the financial resources that are available.

CONCLUSION

Western Seminary is grateful for every measure of support it has received throughout the Reformed Church in America. Its students, faculty, and staff are sustained daily by the prayers and encouragement they receive from congregations and individuals. By God’s grace they are eager to extend Western’s ministry of preparing leaders for the church of Jesus Christ.

Report of the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency (MFCA)

General Synod exercises oversight of ministerial formation through the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency (MFCA). General Synod elected nine people to serve as the MFCA 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—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 with 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.

The Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency was established by the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America in 1998. During the year 1998-99 the classes of the Reformed Church voted on the *Book of Church Order (BCO)* changes that created the MFCA to review and monitor the implementation of the General Synod’s standards for ministerial formation and to oversee the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry process for RCA candidates enrolled at non-RCA seminaries (*MGS 1999*, R-53, p. 229). The ratification of the *BCO* changes not only entitled the MFCA to exist, but the changes also introduced new possibilities such as the Approved Alternate Route (AAR), Candidate Care Committees (CCC), and the annual standardized examination.

The MFCA Board of Trustees met twice in its second year. The first meeting, held in July at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, dealt mostly with the funding dilemma the agency faced. The board of trustees had no choice but to follow the direction of the General Synod Council and the General Synod and increase the annual fees paid by RCA candidates studying at non-RCA seminaries from $100 to $350 in 1999-2000 and $850 in 2000-2001. At its February 2000 meeting the board decided that the fee will remain at $350, and the General Synod of this year will be asked to increase the assessment for theological education by thirty cents per member while also dividing this assessment income equally among the two seminaries and the agency.

**Formation of the Reformed Candidates’ Supervision and Care (RCSC)**

One of the more dramatic decisions made at the February meeting of the MFCA board was to create Reformed Candidates’ Supervision and Care (RCSC) services and to establish the new position of RCSC coordinator. The staffing of the RCSC is contingent upon the MFCA Board of Trustees raising the necessary funds. The RCSC has been designed to oversee the program for RCA candidates attending non-RCA seminaries, a role previously performed by the Theological Education Agency (TEA). This addition will allow the MFCA to be about the larger role of coordinating theological education and creating better vehicles of communication among the classes, teaching churches, seminaries, and denominational agencies.

**PROGRAM**

**Approved Alternate Route (AAR)**

The “alternate route” was introduced as a substitute and improvement on the former dispensation process. It allows 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. This process allows the classis to develop and suggest the means for accepting the alternate route. The Approved Alternate Route (AAR) became possible with the approval of the changes to the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 9, Section 3, by the General Synod of 1999 (*MGS 1999*, R-53, p. 229). The MFCA received the first requests for consideration of an alternate route during the 1999-2000 year. These requests have come largely from older persons who have been in ministry for many years.

A number of new applications are being considered at this time. The next wave of AAR persons will most likely be racial/ethnic minority individuals. The Regional Synod of the Great Lakes is working with six individuals in regard to the AAR. It is assumed that a significant portion of the MFCA’s work will be in this area.

**Awarding of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry**
The MFCA Board of Trustees awarded twelve certificates of fitness for ministry during the 1999-2000 session:

- Brian Andrews, Classis of California
- Scott Bonestroo, Classis of Pleasant Prairie
- Darrell Brooker (conditional), Classis of Canadian Prairies
- Ann Calender, Classis of Mid-Hudson
- Erik Cook, Classis of Illiana
- Robert Drier, Classis of Minnesota
- Craig Gilbert, Classis of California
- John Kenny, Classis of New Brunswick
- Barbara Morgan (conditional), Classis of Albany
- Joel Plantinga (conditional), Classis of Central Iowa
- Kevin Van Wyk, Classis of Pleasant Prairie
- Rob Wondergem, Classis of South Grand Rapids

**Summer Intensives**

The summer of 1999 saw the introduction of two new MFCA intensive instructors. “RCA History and Missions,” offered at Northwestern College, was taught by the Rev. Dr. John Coakley; and “RCA Worship,” offered at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, was taught by the Rev. Dr. Gregg Mast. Both courses were well received and very successful.

The 2000 schedule for the summer intensives is now in place and approved by the board of trustees. It will be as follows:

- **RCA500 “RCA Polity” (1.5 credits)**
  - Instructor: The Rev. Robert Hoeksema
  - At Hofstra University, June 15-17
- **RCA501 “RCA Standards” (2.5 credits)**
  - Instructor: The Rev. Stephen Mathonnet-VanderWell
  - **RCA502 “RCA History and Missions”**
  - Instructor: The Rev. Dennis Voskuil
  - **RCA503 “RCA Worship”**
  - Instructor: The Rev. Timothy Brown
  - At Western Theological Seminary, July 10-28

The plans are also in process for the summer of 2001. Presently it appears that “RCA Polity” and “RCA Standards” will be offered immediately after the 2001 General Synod at Central College. “RCA History and Missions” and “RCA Worship” will be taught at Costa Mesa, California, July 9-20, 2001.

**Teaching Ministry Efforts**

The MFCA continues to promote the Teaching Ministry programs of the RCA by awarding scholarships to churches that are official sites. New centers will be considered if applications for this program are submitted. This past February 15-16 the MFCA also hosted a Teaching Ministry Conference at the Fuqua School of Christian Communication, part of Crystal Cathedral Ministries in Garden Grove, California. Over forty participants joined from across the continent. The event was highly successful, with speakers such as the Rev. Harold Korver, the Rev. Karl Overbeek, the Rev. Allen Pruis, and the Rev. Keith Tanis representing Teaching Churches. The seminaries were represented by the Rev. Dr. George Brown and the Rev. Dr. Mark Kraai.

**Meeting with General Synod Professors of Theology**
The MFCA gathered the General Synod professors of theology (fourth office) on the weekend of March 11, 2000, in Chicago, Illinois. The meeting was also attended by the Rev. Dr. Gregg Mast as the president of General Synod. The meeting was designed to have the professors discuss their role in the denomination. Time was also given to items such as the Certification Committee and the proposed annual examinations.

CONSTITUTION AND BYLAWS

The board of trustees recommended a number of changes to the MFCA Constitution and Bylaws at its July 1999 meeting and ratified those changes at the February 2000 meeting. The following changes are recommended for final approval at the 2000 General Synod:

R-69
To adopt the following revisions to the Constitution and Bylaws of the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency (additions underlined and deletions stricken out):

Article III
Sec. 6 The General Synod of the Reformed Church in America will provide the necessary funding for the Agency to accomplish its mandated work. The Board of Trustees will have financial autonomy and full fiduciary responsibilities for the funds given it.

Article VI
Meetings
Sec. 1 The Board of Trustees shall meet at least three times a year. The annual meeting shall be in the spring. The Board of Trustees will meet at least two times a year, and the annual meeting shall be the first meeting following General Synod.

Article VIII
Sec. 4 The Agency shall employ a director. The director of the Agency shall be appointed elected by the board of trustees, in consultation with the general secretary, with the approval of the General Synod. Other employed staff required for the operation of the Agency shall be hired by the director after approval by the board of trustees.

The advisory committee recommended to amend R-69 as follows:

R-69 (amendment)
To adopt the following revisions to the Constitution and Bylaws of the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency (additions underlined and deletions stricken out):

Article III
Sec. 6 The General Synod of the Reformed Church in America will provide the necessary funding for the Agency to accomplish its mandated work. The Board of Trustees will have financial autonomy and full fiduciary responsibilities for the funds given it.
Article VI

Meetings

Sec. 1 The Board of Trustees shall meet at least three times a year. The annual meeting shall be in the spring. The Board of Trustees will meet at least two times a year, and the annual meeting shall be the first meeting following General Synod.

Article VIII

Sec. 4 The Agency shall employ a director. The director of the Agency shall be appointed elected by the board of trustees in consultation with the general secretary, with the approval of the General Synod. Other employed staff required for the operation of the Agency shall be hired by the director after approval by the board of trustees. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

Reasons:

1. Upon further discussion, the Board of the MFCA has agreed that requiring financial autonomy is not necessary.

2. The Board of MFCA has decided upon further discussion that consultation with the general secretary is important to the process of appointing the MFCA director.

3. The requirement for approval of the General Synod is redundant and not necessary in this bylaw change.

DISPENSATIONS

The Classis of California and the MFCA Board of Trustees present a request for dispensation from the Master of Divinity degree, including the Hebrew language, on behalf of William P. Bennett. Initially the Classis of California requested this dispensation 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. Bennett will be sixty-two years of age in August 2000.

2. Bennett’s initial master’s level course work was completed at Grace Theological Seminary-West in Long Beach, California. His degree requirements for the Master of Arts in Specialized Ministry included Greek but did not require Hebrew. His grade in Greek Elements I (four semester units) was B+ and in Greek Elements II (four semester units) was A.

3. When Bill enrolled in the Doctor of Ministry program at Reformed Theological Seminary (RTS) in Orlando, Florida, he was required to complete three courses (nine additional Master of Divinity level semester units) to meet the RTS Master of Divinity Equivalent requirement and gain admission to the RTS Doctor of Ministry program, which requires either Greek or Hebrew master’s level courses, but not both.

4. In Bennett’s own library, however, he does have both Greek and Hebrew cross-reference concordances, dual language Bibles and the Expository Dictionary of Bible Words,
which also gives detail on the original Greek and Hebrew. Additionally, he knows how to exegete applicable passages in order to properly explain the meaning and intent of that passage, based on the original languages. It may also be that the majority of Bennett’s future ministry experience will be in fields not requiring the Hebrew language, such as executive/administrative functions, care ministry, conference coordination, oversight of men’s and women’s ministries, counseling, and mediation. Because he is currently heavily committed to numerous ministry functions, including serving as the classis administrator for the Classis of California, it would be nearly impossible for him to be able to attend Hebrew language classes. Therefore, he respectfully requests a dispensation therefrom.

5. When Bennett applied to Reformed Theological Seminary for admission to its Doctor of Ministry program, he was required to complete three additional Master of Divinity courses (nine semester hours) in order to qualify for admission. He did complete the Master of Divinity courses and was qualified by RTS to the Master of Divinity Equivalent and admitted to the Doctor of Ministry program. He then completed the required thirty semester units of doctoral level work, including the doctoral dissertation, and was awarded the Doctor of Ministry degree in May 1965.

6. Bennett’s spouse Linda is in the last stages of Alzheimer’s disease, and he needs time to assist in her care and maintain family communication with his children and grandchildren.

R-70
To grant William Bennett a dispensation from the Hebrew language requirement and the Master of Divinity degree requirement of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry. (ADOPTED)

The Classis of Canadian Prairies and the MFCA Board of Trustees present a request for dispensation from the Master of Divinity degree on behalf of Darrell Brooker. Initially the Classis of Canadian Prairies requested this dispensation under the provision of the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 10, Section 2.

The following was cited for the request:

1. Dispensation is sought for Brooker because he has completed his Master of Divinity studies at Knox Theological Seminary, which is not fully accredited by the Association of Theological Schools. Knox is presently an associate member of the association and hopes to achieve full membership in the next five years.

2. Brooker has completed the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry for those attending non-RCA seminaries, including the credo, interview, and summer intensives. The Certification Committee found him prepared and fit for ministry.

3. Brooker has served Monarch Reformed Church in Monarch, Alberta, over the past two years, and his ministry is urgently required. He has done exemplary ministry and proven his call and gifts.

R-71
To grant Darrell Brooker a dispensation from the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry requirement that his Master of Divinity degree be awarded by a seminary accredited by the Association of Theological Schools. (ADOPTED)

The Classis of Central California and the MFCA Board of Trustees present a request for dispensation from the Hebrew language and Master of Divinity degree requirement on behalf
of Daniel W. Kruse. Initially the Classis of Central California requested this dispensation 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. Kruse is seeking dispensation because of the nature and demands of the ministry to which the Lord has called him. Since completion of master’s degrees in theology and marriage and family therapy from Fuller Seminary in 1991, the ministry he has been involved in has related primarily to areas of family life and congregational care. From 1991 through 1996 he served First Reformed Church in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, three-quarters time as a youth and visitation pastor. He also worked as a marriage and family therapist one-quarter time at a Christian counseling agency in Sioux Falls. From 1997 until the present he has served Calvary Reformed Church in Ripon, California, as its family life minister. He provides teaching, leadership, and pastoral care in a number of areas related to marriage and family life. He is also responsible for the training of small group leaders, overseeing the men’s ministry, and leading the visitation committee. He believes that the gifts he has been given for ministry will most often put him in areas related to congregational care, pastoral counseling, and family life ministry. He preaches once a month at the church’s Sunday evening worship service and is very content not to preach every Sunday.

2. The other reason for seeking dispensation has to do with the demands of his family. He has been married thirteen years to his wife Pam, and they have three children—Jordan, ten; Kelly, six; and Katrina, four. It has been very challenging for him to try to meet the necessary demands of a Master of Divinity degree equivalency while balancing his roles as a husband, father, and church worker. Living in Ripon, California, keeps him far removed from any seminary where he could complete the stated requirements.

3. The Rev. Dr. Cornelis Kors, former director for TEA and now for MFCA, has been overseeing his work toward ordination. Kors has supervised Kruse’s academic work since his time in Sioux Falls to the present. Kruse has been able to complete four one-week courses: “Confessions” in Orange City, Iowa; “RCA History and Missions” in Canada; and “Preaching” in Garden Grove, California. On December 16 he completed the “Pentateuch” class in Menlo Park, California. He has driven 175 miles each Thursday night for ten weeks to complete the class. He believes the demands of his work and the needs of his family will not allow him to complete the requirements of the Hebrew language for the RCA or even a Master of Divinity degree.

**R-72**
To grant Daniel W. Kruse a dispensation from the Hebrew language and the Master of Divinity degree requirement of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry. (ADOPTED)

The Classis of California has presented a request for dispensation from the Master of Divinity degree, including the Hebrew language, on behalf of Lucas Leys. Initially the Classis of California requested this dispensation under the provision of the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 10, Section 1. The MFCA Board of Trustees, upon the advice of the Certification Committee, is recommending the dispensation from the Master of Divinity degree but not the Hebrew language requirement.

Several factors were cited for the request:
1. Lucas Leys has completed the equivalent course work required for the Master of Divinity degree as judged by Fuller Theological Seminary and the Instituto Biblico Buenos Aires, short of the Hebrew language. It is his pursuit of the Doctor of Missiology degree that does not allow Leys to actually collect the Master of Divinity degree.

2. Leys will complete the RCA requirements for the MFCA and the RCA through Fuller Theological Seminary and Summer Intensive courses.

3. Leys is very active in ministry at the present time at the Hispanic ministry of the Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, California, and his teaching ministry in Argentina.

4. Leys will complete an extensive supervised ministry period with the Rev. Juan Carlos Ortiz at the Crystal Cathedral. The MFCA will monitor all the evaluations and documentation.

The specific request for the Hebrew language is made for the following reasons:

- Doctor of Missiology course work precludes Hebrew course work.
- Three Old Testament courses will be substituted.
- Goals in youth work and Christian education do not specifically need Hebrew training.

The Certification Committee recommends denial of the Hebrew language requirement because it was felt that he is young and able enough to take a course of study in the Hebrew language. The committee members also felt that it would benefit Leys to have a working knowledge of the Hebrew language for the writing of his book on Old Testament themes.

R-73
To grant Lucas Leys a dispensation from the Master of Divinity degree requirement of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry.
(ADOPTED)

The MFCA Certification Committee and the MFCA Board of Trustees present a request for dispensation from the Hebrew language requirement on behalf of Marilyn Rensink. Initially the Classis of West Sioux requested this dispensation 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. Rensink’s age dictates she serve her Lord as fully as possible as soon as possible. She will be sixty-five years old in June 2000.

2. Rensink has a promise of a contract to serve as chaplain at St. Luke’s Medical Center in Sioux City, Iowa. This is a primarily care-giving ministry.

3. The hospital requires ordination for this position.

4. Rensink has shown excellent work in all other phases of her seminary training.

5. Rensink does not anticipate entering the full-time preaching ministry.

6. Classis West Sioux is satisfied with her gifts and believes she will have a fruitful ministry as hospital chaplain.
Report of the Commission for Women

The Commission for Women met October 25-27, 1999, at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan, and January 28-30, 2000, at the Alma Mathews House in New York City. Both meetings included time for worship. At Western Theological Seminary, the Commission for Women participated in the seminary’s daily chapel service, with commission member Anna James preaching on Christ’s parable of the workers in the vineyard. In New York City, members of the commission were privileged to worship with the congregation of Elmendorf Reformed Church.

Each year the commission focuses on its mandate from General Synod. This year the commission was able to do this in the following specific areas: by raising consciousness about the roles of women in the church, especially leadership roles; by advocating for the appointments of women in denominational positions; and by encouraging the use of inclusive attitudes, images, and language.

Mandate of General Synod

The entire mandate from the General Synod of 1980 was also revisited at both meetings to help the commission focus on appropriate long- and short-term goals. The commission looks forward to finalizing these goals at its October 2000 meeting. Its priorities are: 1) develop, advocate, and implement strategies for systematic change to enable the full and complete participation of women in church and society; 2) provide opportunities and resources for developing awareness and raising consciousness concerning human liberation related to the role of women in church and society; and 3) assist the church toward ensuring inclusivity in all materials published, designed, or provided for use in the denomination. The commission looks forward to continuing its work in these areas and in the other aspects of its work.

Collaborative Relationships with Other Reformed Church Bodies

Contacts within General Synod
On Saturday, January 29, 2000, the commission had the privilege of meeting with Carol Mutch, vice president of General Synod. The commission was impressed with her vision for the Reformed Church in America and urges the General Synod to fully support Carol Mutch’s focus and emphasis on discovering and utilizing the gifts of laity and women in our churches.

Reformed Church Women’s Ministries
The Commission for Women has been actively involved in the dialogues regarding the future of Reformed Church Women’s Ministries (RCWM). Carole Walker, moderator of the commission, met in August 1999, along with other women from various agencies of the church, to prepare the recommendations that were presented to the General Synod Council (GSC) in October 1999 regarding the future of women’s ministries in the RCA. Following the GSC meeting, the Commission for Women requested a broader dialogue regarding the philosophy, scope, and direction of such a ministry.

In response, the General Synod Council Coordinating Committee supported the commission’s
request that the Commission for Women and RCWM jointly appoint a working group of up to twelve persons, with four members representing the commission, four representing RCWM, and four to be appointed at-large, to develop a plan for the future of women’s ministry within the RCA. Additionally, the committee added two GSC members to the working group: the moderator of the GSC’s Congregational Services committee, the Rev. Toni Macon; and the vice president of General Synod, Carol Mutch. The group was facilitated by Helen Monsees and staffed by Arlene Waldorf and Ellen Mers. The working group met in March 2000 and submitted a report to the GSC in April 2000. All recommendations were approved. (Refer to the Report of Reformed Church Women’s Ministries for the recommendations.)

Commission members will continue to be involved on the joint working group that has been asked to present a report to the GSC at its October 2000 meeting. Included in that report will be a position description for the director, shorter-term objectives, a working structure for the Office for Women, and evaluative criteria for the Office for Women.

The Commission for Women is committed to working together with RCWM and the GSC to “develop, advocate, and implement strategies for systematic change to enable the full and complete participation of women in church and society” (Book of Church Order, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 10.b.4).

Retreat for Theologically-Trained Women

The commission continues to follow through on its mandate to provide a retreat for theologically-trained women. Its next retreat will be held in Daytona Beach, Florida. The commission’s emphasis will be on story-telling—God’s story and people’s stories. This retreat will coincide with the winter Commission for Women meeting.

Seminaries

The commission continues to maintain its conversations with RCA seminaries. During the commission’s meeting in October 1999 at Western Theological Seminary, the commission held a two-hour forum with seminary faculty and students. The Rev. Vicky Menning made a presentation “On Allowing the Freedom to Enter Ministry.” Now serving as senior pastor at Trinity Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, Menning shared the story of her calling. The Rev. Mark Bush made a presentation “On Recognizing and Utilizing the Gifts of All Members of the Church, Especially Women.” Bush is copastor at Covenant Community church in Muskegon Heights, Michigan. During a luncheon, participants engaged in conversation around three questions:

Where did you face your first challenge regarding women in ministry?
How would you respond to a woman in your congregation whose gifts for ministry were apparent?
How would you lead a congregation in utilizing the gifts of women?

This forum was very well received. As a result the commission was able to recommend to the seminary that 1) gender issues relating to the utilization of gifts in the church be included in the curriculum, 2) inclusive language be made mandatory, 3) preaching assignments be given uniformly to women and men, and 4) appropriate assistance be given women in finding placement upon graduation.

The Commission for Women recommends this for both Western Theological Seminary and New Brunswick Seminary. The commission will maintain its contacts with the seminaries.
based on its established framework for conversation and accountability. Its contacts with students, faculty, and staff remain an important piece of its work, and one for which it is grateful.

Mentoring

The Commission for Women maintains its communication with women under care of classes. The names of ordained women who are available as mentors has been circulated. Many mentoring relationships are in place.

Women in Ministry Resources: Patterns and Portraits, bibliography, and position papers

The commission strongly urges the seminaries, RCWM, and the church at large to use Patterns and Portraits, edited by Renee House and John Coakley (Volume 31 in the RCA's Historical Series). The commission would also like to see a study guide developed for this book in order to promote its larger use. The commission is devoted to developing a bibliography on inclusive language and writing position papers that will help the Reformed Church in America more completely embrace the gifts of all of its members.

Report of the General Synod Council’s Ministry and Personnel Services Committee

Ministry and Personnel Services (MAPS) has undergone a major change in staff with the arrival in July 1999 of the Rev. Vernon Hoffs as director and the Rev. Gloria McCanna as assistant director. They joined Ellen Mers, associate, who has served the office for eleven years. Several areas of the MAPS ministry are currently receiving the highest priority.

MANAGEMENT TRAINING/PERSONNEL EVALUATION

Last summer when the new MAPS team began its ministry, it was asked to develop a process for executive management training and to create a new process for staff evaluation. MAPS contracted with Dr. Cecil Williams, formerly with Herman Miller Company in Zeeland, Michigan, to help develop the training and evaluation process.

The initial phase of the management training for General Synod Council directors and supervisors took place this spring. Training will continue to be developed for all staff supervisors in the coming months. This new process is being used as a pilot for this year. It will be reviewed and refined for the coming years.

FUNDING FOR THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

The 1999 General Synod sent a recommendation to MAPS to facilitate a meeting of key leaders from the RCA seminaries and the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency (MFCA) to develop a way of providing adequate funding for theological education in the RCA (MGS 1999, p. 259). A meeting was held in Chicago on January 5-6, 2000, to address these issues. In addition to addressing funding needs, the representatives focused their discussion and planning on additional issues of theological education. The MFCA will be coordinating many of the initiatives recommended at that meeting.
STAFF SALARY RANGES/STAFF CLASSIFICATIONS

An additional priority given to the MAPS team was the need to review and make recommendations concerning the present staff salary ranges and staff classifications. A consultant will be hired to facilitate this review.

MINISTRY TO THE RCA STAFF

Gloria McCanna has initiated a ministry of personal interviews and care with the RCA staff. She is visiting the various RCA offices and conducting personal interviews with each staff member. Staff files are being updated, and the concerns of staff members are being addressed. It is anticipated that this initial process of visitation will be completed by the fall of 2000.

EFFECTIVELY LINKING PASTORS AND CONGREGATIONS

Ellen Mers has continued to work with pastors and search committees in the process of linking pastors and congregations for ministry. The MAPS team has begun a study of the search process and the content of church and pastor profiles. The goal is to increase the effectiveness of the process by which MAPS links pastors and congregations and to focus the profiles on significant ministry values, gifts, and needs. RCA members, including the regional synod executives, have been involved in this study. The MAPS team has also begun a study of the feasibility of putting profiles on the Internet.

IDENTIFYING AND RAISING UP LEADERS FOR MINISTRY

It is becoming increasingly evident that all the ministry areas of the RCA will need to identify and raise up leaders in the coming years. MAPS plans to facilitate a meeting to document the need for future leaders and to begin to develop a denominational strategy for identifying and raising up leaders for ministry.

DEVELOPING CONFLICT RESOLUTION TEAMS

There is an urgent need for congregations, classes, and regional synods to be able to adequately respond to conflict situations. MAPS is working with various classes and the regional synod executives to develop a process for training conflict resolution teams who will be able to assist congregations, classes, and synods. Plans for developing and training these teams will be completed by the fall of 2000.

SENIOR PASTORS

One of the most valuable ministries of the Board of Pensions is the work of designated “senior pastors.” The senior pastors minister through visitations and personal contact to a growing number of retirees in the Reformed Church. This year two regions were divided and additional senior pastors were hired to enhance this excellent ministry. The MAPS office works in a coordinated effort with the Board of Pensions and the senior pastor ministry to supervise this much-needed pastoral service. The senior pastors and spouses meet with the Board of Pensions and the MAPS Committee of the General Synod Council each fall to review their ministry and provide input to the work of the Board of Pensions and MAPS.

NEW MINISTRY CONFIGURATION

In 1999 the supervision responsibilities of the RCA pension and insurance offices were placed
under the supervision of the Finance Office. With the changes that have taken place in the new retirement program, the Board of Pensions has recommended that the ministry/pastoral aspect of the pension and insurance offices be placed once again under the director of MAPS. The financial side of the new retirement program will remain with the finance office.

CHAPLAINS

The MAPS office endorses and certifies military, prison, and institutional chaplains on behalf of the Reformed Church in America. The annual gathering of these chaplains is held each year immediately prior to General Synod. This gathering, which is facilitated by Ellen Mers, gives chaplains the basis of a network that functions throughout the year. The gatherings are intentionally located at the site of General Synod in order to make it possible for chaplains to make informal contact with General Synod delegates—which is especially important for those who often serve far from any RCA context.

The director of MAPS serves the RCA as endorsing agent for the fourteen military chaplains who currently represent the RCA. The RCA's prison chaplains are ably served by the Rev. Donald Jiskoot as endorsing agent. Jiskoot also visits and maintains pastoral relationships with these chaplains. A shortage of prison chaplains currently exists, and Jiskoot is eager to discuss possibilities with potential chaplain candidates. All areas of the armed services also need new chaplains.

RCA CLERGY/SPOUSE RETREATS

The annual Freedom in Ministry event, which draws clergy and clergy spouses from the synods of Albany, New York, and the Mid-Atlantics to the Warwick Conference Center for a Friday night through Sunday noon time of restoration and recreation, was again a satisfying retreat. The positive response to this gathering has caused the MAPS staff to ask whether there should be a revival of Spring Sabbath, a gathering for all RCA clergy and their spouses.

PRERETIREMENT WORKSHOPS

Working with the pensions office and the RCA Foundation, MAPS continues to offer preretirement workshops for clergy and spouses who are fifty years of age and older. Topics include “Making the Break,” “What Does Retirement Look Like to Me?”, “Housing and Environment,” “Pensions,” and “Financial Planning.” Synods and classes are encouraged to schedule a workshop in their area by contacting the assistant director of MAPS.

SOCIETY FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR MINISTRY

The assistant director of MAPS, Gloria McCanna, attended the Society for the Advancement of Continuing Education for Ministry (SACEM), which met January 13-16, 2000, at Auburn Seminary on the campus it shares with Union Theological Seminary in New York City. The focus of the conference was “Liberating Our Imaginations for Continuing Theological Education.” Speakers and workshop leaders included pastor James A. Forbes, Jr., author Maria Harris, professor Barbara Lundblad, and consultant Edward White.

SACEM also held a workshop for new directors, introducing new members to the history and purpose of the organization. Founded in 1967, SACEM’s purpose is to share information, encourage high standards, and seek excellence in the development of continuing education for ministry. The group identifies continuing education issues and provides advocacy through literature and other resources. SACEM encourages and supports research that will advance continuing education for ministry.

SACEM is a rich resource of information, education, and contacts for the MAPS office as it
seeks new ways to inform clergy of the numerous continuing theological education events and as it works with other agencies and denominations to provide even more opportunities.

MYERS-BRIGGS TYPE INVENTORY/STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Having successfully completed the “Orientation to Jung’s Theory and the Myers-Briggs Type Inventory Qualifying Program,” Gloria McCanna is certified to purchase and administer the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator testing materials. The inventory is used to help people understand personality types and how people use their preferences in relating to others. Many RCA staff have completed the inventory and have found it helpful in both their personal and working relationships. McCanna, along with the Rev. Luis Perez, secretary for Hispanic Ministries, held a daylong Myers-Briggs seminar for staff in the RCA insurance office. Discussions of individual preferences included where people focus their attention, from where they draw their energy, how they take in information, how they make decisions, and how they prefer to deal with the outer world.

SUMMARY

The MAPS team considers it to be a great privilege to minister to the Reformed Church in America, and it invites suggestions and prayers for its ministry.

From the Report of the Board of Pensions

RETIRED CLERGY

During 1999 twenty-eight 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-75
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.

Owen Bechtel
Whiting, New Jersey

John Boender
Allendale, Michigan
Donald Brandt  
Kirkland, Washington

Sherwin Broersma  
Cadillac, Michigan

Donald Bruggink  
Holland, Michigan

Carl De Jong  
Oak Forest, Illinois

Vincent Fasano  
East Harwich, Massachusetts

Evert Fikse  
Grandville, Michigan

John Hiemstra  
West Nyack, New York

Glenn Hine  
Spencer, New York

J. Samuel Hofman  
San Diego, California

Benjamin Hsu  
Rockville, Maryland

Richard Huls  
Escondido, California

Costas Kounadis  
Framingham, Massachusetts

Harlan Nyhof  
Grahamsville, New York

John Opmeer  
Richmond, British Columbia

Robert Peterson  
Niskayuna, New York

Alan Rice  
Grove City, Pennsylvania

James Stackpole  
Williamsburg, Virginia

William VanKerkhoven  
Simcoe, Ontario

Paul Vande Hoef  
Grandville, Michigan

Lyle Vander Werff  
Orange City, Iowa

Wilmer VerMeer  
Colton, South Dakota

Martin Wang  
Belle Mead, New Jersey

Gordon Webster  
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Dennis Westbrooks  
Monroeville, Pennsylvania  
(ADOPTED)

Arnold Kress  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

John Needham  
Kingston, New York

Overtures

Funding of the Ministerial  
Formation Coordinating  
Agency and the Education of  
Candidates
1. The Classis of Dakota overtures the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America to fully fund the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency; and further,

that the financial burden currently imposed on women and men pursuing seminary education be studied with the intention of finding sources to help finance the education of candidates for service and ministry within the Reformed Church in America.

Reasons:

1. The 1999 General Synod approved the creation of the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency but failed to provide a funding source for this new agency.

2. With the establishment of the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency not only were the responsibilities of the previous Theological Education Agency given to it, but also broader responsibilities that include every seminarian under care of a classis in the Reformed Church in America.

3. While given responsibility for every seminarian, the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency board chose to place the burden of the needed funding on those who for many and various reasons are not attending Western or New Brunswick Theological Seminaries.

4. Currently churches are being asked by the General Synod to recruit the best and brightest for ministry in the Reformed Church in America. Given our current funding of seminary education and the assessment on students who are not at RCA seminaries, we are discouraging those same students from pursuing ministry within the Reformed Church in America.

5. If the Reformed Church in America is truly pursuing ecumenical relations with various denominations, it is a contradiction to then place a tax on those who are attending seminaries other than Western and New Brunswick.

6. If the current structure is maintained, it will become increasingly difficult for Dakota Classis to recruit and maintain qualified candidates for ministry in this region.

7. Given the financial cost of attending seminary, ways and means to curtail cost and support those who are seeking to serve the Reformed Church in America must be explored and investigated.

kThe advisory committee recommended:

R-76
To refer overture 1 to the General Synod Council for study and report to the 2001 General Synod. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The General Synod Council has approved the establishment of a task force to study long-range funding for theological education, including the MFCA.

Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency Registration Fee

2. The Classis of Columbia-Greene overtures the General Synod to instruct the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency (MFCA) to rescind the $850 registration fee imposed upon students who do not attend either of the Reformed
Church in America seminaries.

Reasons:
1. MFCA is a duly established body of the church like Mission Services, the Office of the General Secretary, and the Board of Pensions.

2. Funding for duly established bodies of the church is included in the general budget of the church.

3. The imposition of the registration fee, on top of seminary tuition, creates an “over against” attitude among seminarians and future candidates for the pulpits of our churches.

kThe advisory committee recommended:

R-77
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The MFCA Board has already rescinded the proposed $850 fee increase.

Financial Assistance to Those Preparing for Ordination

3. The Classis of Mid-Hudson overtures General Synod to initiate a study of ways to provide financial assistance to members of the Reformed Church in America who are involved in theological studies preparatory to ordination to the Office of Minister of Word and Sacrament.

Reasons:

1. We pride ourselves on having an educated clergy. It serves us ill to put those who are willing to take the time and put out the effort to achieve the education we require at significant financial disadvantage before they start to fulfill their calling.

2. The cost of theological education, at RCA seminaries as well as others, has sky-rocketed in recent decades to proportions that are in many cases quite unmanageable. For example, the current cost per credit hour at New Brunswick Theological Seminary is $260. The M.Div. degree requires one hundred credit hours. That’s $26,000. When one adds the cost of books—probably between $5,000 and $10,000 total—plus traveling costs and other incidental expenses, the financial commitment is exponentially greater than the meager sums set aside years ago by some of the classes and churches to help seminarians.

Approximately half of the current student body at NBTS are “second career” people. These are middle-aged folks who have decided to enter the ministry after working many years in another field. Sometimes (rarely) such students are financially secure from their first careers. More often than not, sadly, the opposite is the case. Many struggle to make a living for their families and are in need of help. Others bring to the table the whole range of financial and family problems common to our society in general. These folks are well motivated and worthy of our help.

3. The monumental financial burden—especially in the case of those entering seminary right after college—is often incurred while the student is still in debt due to the expenses attendant upon obtaining an undergraduate education. This puts the seminary graduate even more deeply in debt because of the necessity of further (heavy) borrowing.
4. The churches that tend to call those recently graduated from seminary are unlikely to offer the reimbursement packages that will enable the new minister to get out from under the burden of debt for many years.

5. It is surely less than fair to the churches that will call these ministers for us to send them pastors who must bear the strain of severe debt loads in addition to the demands of acclimating to the realities of life in the parish. These pastors can hardly be expected to do their best as spiritual leaders while distracted by financial worries.

6. The General Synod, having the broadest financial base, is the best suited of any institution in the RCA to undertake the responsibility of assisting those who have made a commitment to serve our congregations, missions, colleges, seminaries, agencies, and boards in the years to come.

The advisory committee recommended:

R-78
To refer overture 3 to the General Synod Council for study and report to the 2001 General Synod. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The General Synod Council has approved the establishment of a task force to study the long-range funding of theological education and this study can be included in the work of the task force.

Profile Forms

4. The Classis of Montgomery overtures the General Synod to instruct the Office of Ministry and Personnel Services to develop new profile forms for ministers and churches that are more concise and that reflect the values of the missional church.

Reasons:

1. The profile forms could be easier to prepare and adapted to modern technology.

2. What it means for a church to be a “mission outpost” in its community could be given practical shape as ministers and congregations describe their callings, spiritual gifts, strengths, and vision for being equipped for mission.

3. The profiles could be used to assist ministers and churches in seeing themselves in missional terms.

In response to overture 4, the advisory committee recommended:

R-79
To instruct the Office of Ministry and Personnel Services to develop new profile forms for ministers and churches that are more precise and that reflect the values of the missional church. (ADOPTED)

Funding for the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency

5. The Classis of Red River overtures the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America to completely fund the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency.
Reasons:

1. Our goal is to prepare more leaders for the church, therefore we should not create economic deterrents for candidates for ministry. The $850 fee on MFCA students was levied not because it promotes this goal, but because it was a last resort to fund a budget shortfall.

2. The Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency does not have the funding to do the work the General Synod has called it do.

kThe advisory committee recommended:

**R-80**
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The intent of the overture was addressed in a previous recommendation.

**Requirements for Certificate of Fitness for Ministry**

6. The Classis of Red River overtures the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America to direct the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency to redress the inequities between MFCA requirements for the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry and the requirements for the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry of students attending Western and New Brunswick Theological Seminaries.

Reason:

There are inequities between the requirements of MFCA students and those attending RCA seminaries for the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry. These inequities are evidenced by:

a. All MFCA students must take one quarter Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) program. This is not required of Western and New Brunswick students.

b. All MFCA students are required to do a one-year internship. Western and New Brunswick students are not required to do an internship, but may fulfill their 800 hours of supervised ministry in other ways.

c. MFCA students are required to write a credo beyond the scope of what is expected of non-MFCA students.

d. Finally, MFCA students must pay $850 for one year and $350 for succeeding years for the cost of supervision to meet the requirements for the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry. This administrative fee is not charged to Western or New Brunswick students.

kThe advisory committee recommended:

**R-81**
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. The MFCA does not have the jurisdiction to dictate to Western Theological Seminary and New Brunswick Theological Seminary their requirements for the certificate of ministry.
2. Each theological agency or institution has determined its own requirements for the certificate of fitness for ministry.

The advisory committee brought a new recommendation:

**R-82 (new)**
To instruct the General Synod Council to do an impact study regarding the potential lack of ministry leadership in the Reformed Church in America in the next five years and determine possible courses of action to provide qualified leadership for all areas of ministry in the Reformed Church in America. (ADOPTED)

Reason: Current statistics indicate that all areas of RCA ministry will be facing an urgent need to find qualified leaders in the next five years.
REPORTS ON FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Report of the General Synod Council’s Finance Services Committee

REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF FINANCE

The goal of the Office of Finance is to provide quality financial service to the General Synod, the General Synod Council, 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, procedures, and controls are in place to support the program efforts of the RCA and to permit the officers and directors of RCA corporations to fulfill their fiduciary responsibilities.

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 Finance Services, dedicated, hard-working staff members handle a wide range of tasks. These include: 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, 4) preparation of payroll for RCA staff and missionaries, and 5) working with outside investment managers, the Investment Advisory Committee, and board members to ensure that its funds are prudently invested. Finance staff members are also responsible for interfacing legal counsel, independent auditors, state regulators, the Internal Revenue Service, and corporate insurance providers.

In 1999 the treasurer assumed responsibility for the administrative oversight of the Office of Pensions and the Office of Insurance. During 1999 the RCA outsourced investment management and record keeping for the Church Annuity Fund to the Bank of New York. This is a very significant accomplishment that has greatly enhanced investment management and reporting capabilities. Now the focus of the Board of Pensions will be to provide expanded communications and education for all plan participants so that a new retirement plan can be successfully implemented.

Finance Services: 1999 Highlights and Challenges for 2000

In 1999 Finance Services made significant progress in the following areas:

- With the Board of Pensions, outsourced investment management and related administrative functions.
- With the other GSC Units, installed Raiser’s Edge, the RCA’s new contribution management system.
- 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.
- Added an assistant controller to staff to provide critical competency in accounting.

In addition to ongoing work in the above areas, challenges for 2000 and beyond that will demand attention include:

- Changing to a September 30 fiscal year-end, which is more appropriate for an organization that receives most of its cash in the last quarter of the calendar year. (Note that this will not have any immediate impact on other than the denominational agencies.)
- Working closely with Information Systems and program staff to complete critical systems
projects. These include Raisers Edge, American Fundware General Ledger Upgrade, a new Human Resources Information System, and a new Endowment System.

- Integrating Board of Pensions back-office operations into Finance Services.
- Continuing work on Finance Services’ organization, staffing, and cross-training to ensure that the organization can fulfill its fiduciary responsibility in an effective, cost-efficient manner.
- Reviewing and revising internal and external reporting to implement sound budget control procedures and to better satisfy the needs of the RCA’s officers and directors.
- Responding to the requests of, and providing timely information to, the new GSC Finance Services Audit Committee.
- Establishing a rolling three-year budget planning process, targeted to begin with the 2002 fiscal year.

Financial Summary for 1999 (Pre-Audit Results)

The following is a summary of preliminary, pre-audited 1999 revenue and expenses for the various agencies serviced by Finance Services. Audited financial statements are available upon request.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1999</th>
<th>Revenue</th>
<th>Expenses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>General Synod Council</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operating Fund</td>
<td>$16,579,433</td>
<td>$16,367,023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCWS Disaster Relief Fund</td>
<td>913,113</td>
<td>551,074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCA “If-Raised” Fund</td>
<td>482,381</td>
<td>464,437</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Development Fund</td>
<td>21,703</td>
<td>5,425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$9.8 by ’98 Fund Drive (Cumulative)</td>
<td>6,235,131</td>
<td>5,785,481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Ministry Fund Drive (Cumulative)</td>
<td>563,869</td>
<td>236,631</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reformed Church Women’s Ministries</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Fund</td>
<td>182,091</td>
<td>212,954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triennial Fund</td>
<td>6,399</td>
<td>13,945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth Marcus Scholarship Fund</td>
<td>3,507</td>
<td>3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Board of Pensions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Fund</td>
<td>2,248,411</td>
<td>1,991,092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church Annuity Fund</td>
<td>28,492,079</td>
<td>15,375,091</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annuity Bond Fund</td>
<td>-74,142</td>
<td>667,862</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Fund</td>
<td>5,636,884</td>
<td>-3,783,570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment Fund</td>
<td>223,980</td>
<td>-475,207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insurance Fund</td>
<td>9,487,950</td>
<td>9,829,335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RCA Foundation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Fund</td>
<td>620,336</td>
<td>661,624</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endowment and Trust Fund</td>
<td>-754,751</td>
<td>1,063,826</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey Fund</td>
<td>55,879</td>
<td>11,624</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philanthropic Fund</td>
<td>8,936</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gift Annuity Fund</td>
<td>37,760</td>
<td>171,207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revocable Gift Fund</td>
<td>-2,697</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pooled Income Fund</td>
<td>-27,344</td>
<td>25,074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unitrust Fund</td>
<td>67,035</td>
<td>42,939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RCA Building and Extension Fund, Inc.</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extension Foundation Fund</td>
<td>783,334</td>
<td>932,765</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church Building Fund</td>
<td>3,414,901</td>
<td>383,151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RCA Fund</strong></td>
<td>835,871</td>
<td>2,202,224</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Investments
The RCA’s investments are managed by outside investment managers. The treasurer, the Investment Advisory Committee, and the various boards are responsible for ensuring that the RCA’s funds are prudently invested and that investment managers adhere to established Investment Objectives and Guidelines. Performance of the funds is monitored on an ongoing basis.

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. Up to 20 percent of the RCA Fund’s Outside Depositor assets of $18.2 million (or $3.6 million) may be invested in Extension Foundation Fund (EFF) notes; however, given the present liquidity of the EFF, only about 4 percent of the RCA Fund’s Outside deposits are presently comprised of EFF notes. In addition to raising new capital for the building of churches, the program makes it possible for local churches, classes, agencies, and regional synods to receive an attractive rate of return for the short-term investment of surplus funds. Earnings for the RCA Fund in 2000 are targeted at $5^{3/4}$ to 6 percent.

The Investment Objectives and Guidelines for the RCA Fund marketable securities, for which the Bank of New York serves as investment manager and custodian, are as follows:

1. **Investment Objectives**: To preserve capital, maximize current return on investment consistent with safety of principal, and maintain a high degree of liquidity in accordance with anticipated needs. The portfolio is an aggregation of investments from denominational and affiliated agencies, and at any time depositors may draw on the fund. Therefore the fund should be structured so that 50 percent of the assets are easily liquidated.

2. **Investment Guidelines**:

   Maturity Restriction: The average duration of the fixed income portfolio shall remain within a 25 percent range versus the average duration of the Lehman Brothers Intermediate Government/Corporate Index. Individual investments may not exceed ten years in maturity from the date of purchase.

   Social Screening Constraints: The following are not permissible investments for issuers in the fixed income asset classes: alcoholic beverages, tobacco products, gambling devices, and other products or services that may be deemed unethical or in violation of biblical principles as determined by the General Synod Council upon investigation and recommendation.

   Fixed Income Investments:
   - The portfolio seeks to diversify risk by holding the securities of a variety of issuers.
   - With the exception of U.S. Government and Agency securities, no single issuer will represent more than 5 percent of the overall value of the portfolio at the time of purchase.
   - Individual issuers shall be limited to a minimum rating of A by either Standard and Poor’s or Moody’s at the time of purchase.

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. The RCA Foundation’s policy is to pay out 6 percent of a five-year rolling average market value in four equal quarterly installments.

Scudder Kemper Investments serves as investment manager for the bulk of the Reformed Church Investment Program, which had assets of $11,838,322 at 12/31/99. The Security National Bank in Sioux City, Iowa, provides accounting and custodial services for the securities held in the Reformed Church’s endowment accounts. Fleet Bank holds a small portfolio (for those endowments that are legally restricted to remain in a New Jersey banking institution) and First Union manages the Charitable Gift Annuity Fund.

Board of Pensions Investments

At December 31, 1999, marketable securities of the Board of Pensions totaled $309,262,317. In 1999 the Board of Pensions outsourced investment management and custody of its marketable securities to the Bank of New York and instituted new investment options for Church Annuity Fund participants. In addition, record keeping for the Church Annuity Fund was outsourced to the Bank of New York. Participants’ balances have been marked to market and reflect the full impact of fluctuating securities prices; this in exchange for the ability to choose from five different asset allocation options, which include an option to invest up to 75 percent in stocks. A new Constitution for the Board of Pensions, which extends these options to participants whose funds are presently invested in the Annuity Bond Fund, the Support Fund, and the Investment Fund is found on pp. 334-351.

The following is a summary of the Investment Objectives and Guidelines for the Church Annuity Fund:

1. **Investment Objective**: The investment objective of the various funds is to 1) obtain a reasonable total rate of return commensurate with prudent management in order to provide retirement benefits for the participants, 2) preserve capital, maximize current return on investments consistent with safety of principal, and 3) maintain adequate liquidity in accordance with anticipated needs.

2. **Investment Guidelines**

   a. **Social Screening Constraints**: The following are not permissible investments for issuers in the fixed income or equity asset classes: alcoholic beverages, tobacco products, gambling devices, or other products or services that may be deemed unethical or in violation of biblical principles as determined by the Board of Pensions upon investigation and recommendation.

   b. **Asset Allocation**: The portfolio is invested in money market instruments, bonds, and equities. The asset allocation options will vary in accordance with the recommendations of the Board of Pensions. Presently, the investment options are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Option 1</td>
<td>Money Market 100% Money Market and Short Term Bonds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Option 2</td>
<td>Conservative Balanced 30% Stocks; 70% Bonds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Option 3</td>
<td>Moderate Balanced 40% Stocks; 60% Bonds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Option 4</td>
<td>Moderate Growth 60% Stocks; 40% Bonds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Option 5</td>
<td>Aggressive Growth 75% Stocks; 25% Bonds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Option 6</td>
<td>Scudder Growth and Income Mutual Fund (for Salary Reduction Contributions only)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

   c. **Equity Investments**
1. Equity selections will focus on quality companies with a market capitalization in excess of $500 million.
2. The portfolio should be reasonably diversified by industry in accordance with the investment manager’s current outlook.
3. No single equity asset should be greater than 6 percent of the market value of the equity fund.
4. Convertible securities will be considered as part of the equity portfolio.
5. No investments will be made in private placements.
6. Covered options (with a maximum of 25 percent of the equity portfolio) may be used for the protection of asset values and the generation of incremental return to the portfolio.
7. The performance measurement benchmark will be the S&P 500 Index. The equity component is expected to outperform the benchmark through a full market cycle, generally three to five years.

d. Fixed Income Investments:
1. The portfolio will seek diversification of risk by holding the securities of a variety of issuers.
2. With the exception of U.S. Government and Agency securities, no single issuer will represent more than 5 percent of the overall value of the portfolio at the time of purchase.
3. The performance measurement benchmark will be the Lehman Brothers Aggregate Index. The fixed income component is expected to outperform the benchmark through a full market cycle, generally three to five years.
4. Individual issues shall be limited to a minimum rating of A by either Standard & Poor’s or Moody’s at the time of purchase, with the exception of a maximum of 10 percent invested in BBB-rated securities. Downgrades in credit quality shall be reported to the client. The average quality of the portfolio shall be maintained at a minimum of AA, on a weighted-average basis.
5. The average duration of the portfolio will not exceed 25 percent greater or less than the duration of the Lehman Brothers Aggregate Index.

For additional information concerning the Board of Pensions’ finances, investments, and new retirement plan, please refer to the Annual Report, which is targeted to be available at General Synod.

The Canadian portion of the Church Annuity Fund operated until December of 1996 under a group annuity contract with the Imperial Life Insurance Company in Toronto, Ontario. In January of 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.

Mission Investments

In 1970 the General Synod Executive Committee (GSEC) established a mission investment policy which 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 $301,596.96. Mission investment monies are placed with firms such as the South Shore Bank located in the African-American section of Chicago; the NCCC Minority Bail Bond Fund; the Shared Interest Group, which is investing in South Africa’s democratic development;
Navigators Kenya, which is making small business loans in impoverished parts of Kenya; and the most recent investment, Fonkoze USA, Inc., which is making small business loans in impoverished parts of Haiti.

Because of certain maturities in recent years, the total funds invested are far below the ten 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 1999 assessment due, 99 percent was collected by the due date of December 31. Of the outstanding 1 percent, all was received early in the calendar year 2000. The total assessment for 1999 was $28.36 per communicant member. This total includes $23.51 for the General Synod Operational Budget, $1.50 for the Board of Pensions General Fund, and $3.35 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 if 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 of 1999, listed two newly formed churches to be added, five name/address changes, and six 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 1999 financial statements of the Reformed Church in America are examined and certified by Lambrides, Lamos, Moulthrop & Co., Certified Public Accountants, and are presented in person to the General Synod Council at the spring meeting. Copies of the annual audit are available to members of the Reformed Church in America by calling the 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, supplemental pensions, assistance grants, insurance benefits, and certain specified personnel support services for all ordained ministers and their families, and for lay workers of the Reformed Church in accordance with the rules prescribed in the *Constitution and Rules of the Board of Pensions*.

Through its retirement, assistance, and insurance programs, the Board of Pensions seeks first and foremost to be of service to those who participate in those programs. Many people in the Reformed Church in America benefit directly from the several programs of the Board of Pensions. These include retired ministers, missionaries, and other church employees, along with their spouses and children, as well as all those who are still working and participating in the Reformed Church in America Retirement Plan or one of the insurance programs provided under RCA sponsorship. Their numbers total in the thousands, including 992 retirees and surviving spouses, 2,086 active participants in the Reformed Church in America Retirement Plan, and approximately 2,129 persons insured in one or more of the insurance programs.

**A Year of Transition and a New Reformed Church in America Retirement Plan**

The past year was one of transition for the Board of Pensions as it undertook major changes in order to continue to carry out its mission successfully and responsibly. After a complete review of the retirement plan, the board selected the Bank of New York to manage the RCA investment portfolio and the record keeping, including individual account balances. It put into place a more flexible investment plan, in which participants choose from among several investment options, depending upon their individual circumstances and needs. The board also developed a new Reformed Church in America Retirement Plan, which will give retirees more discretion over how their funds are withdrawn.

The board is pleased to report that this very significant shift is nearing completion. All records have been transferred to the Bank of New York, whose set-up for participant access to their own accounts by voice and website is now being finalized. Participants throughout the denomination have selected their investment options and have received the first of what will be quarterly reports on the performance of the investment option they have chosen. In addition, the *Constitution and Rules of the Board of Pensions*, which has been revised to incorporate the new Reformed Church in America Retirement Plan, is before this synod for approval.

These changes represent a significant shift to partnership with participants. Education is crucial if the board is to meet its goal of providing adequate resources for retirement for RCA employees and their families with more flexibility during both working and retirement years. The RCA staff in New York is setting up a system that will provide denomination-wide education and individual support. That system is expected to be in place within the year.

The Board of Pensions is confident that the Reformed Church in America Retirement Plan supports and continues the historic covenant between the Reformed Church in America and its ministers and employees to provide adequate resources for their retirement. This plan will serve our mission well for years to come. In addition, in order to reflect more accurately the duties and responsibilities of the Board of Pensions, it is proposed that its name be changed to the Board of Benefits Services as of the effective date of this amendment to the Constitution. Therefore, the board recommends:

**R-83**

That the General Synod adopt the revised *Constitution and Rules of the Board of Benefits Services of the Reformed Church in America*, subject to a favorable ruling by the Internal Revenue Service.
The advisory committee recommended to amend R-83 as follows (additions are underlined):

R-83 (amendment)
That the General Synod adopt the revised Constitution and Rules of the Board of Benefits Services of the Reformed Church in America, subject to a favorable ruling by the Internal Revenue Service; and further,

to grant the Board of Benefit Services authority to make minor revisions to the Constitution that may be required by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

Reason: To permit the adoption of the new constitution as soon as the IRS approves it even if the IRS approves it with minor revisions.

THE CONSTITUTION AND RULES OF THE BOARD OF BENEFITS SERVICES OF THE REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA

FOREWORD

The Board of Pensions of the Reformed Church in America was established by the General Synod of the Reformed Church and incorporated by Act of the Assembly of the State of New York, approved April 16, 1923, under the original name of “The Ministers’ Fund of the Reformed Church in America, Inc.” In June 1923, the General Synod designated the Ministers’ Fund as one of the regular boards of the Reformed Church.

The original charter was amended by Act of the Assembly, approved March 23, 1938, so that a retirement fund could be established for the benefit of lay workers of the Reformed Church. Under date of March 19, 1954, the name of the board was changed to “The Board of Pensions of the Reformed Church in America” in order to conform to the names of the other boards of the Reformed Church and pursuant to Section 40 of the General Corporation Law of the State of New York.

In order to reflect more accurately the duties and responsibilities of The Board of Pensions, it will be known as “The Board of Benefits Services of the Reformed Church in America” as of the effective date of this amendment to the Constitution.

The purpose of The Board of Benefits Services is to provide retirement income, supplemental pensions, assistance grants, insurance benefits, and personnel support services for all ordained ministers and their families, and for other employees of the Reformed Church in accordance with the rules prescribed herein.

The Constitution of The Board of Benefits Services given herein, and the rules prescribed in each department of the two divisions are the official constitution and rules adopted by The Board of Benefits Services and approved by the General Synod and supersede the constitutions and rules of the following funds and departments which heretofore comprised the Ministers’ Fund of the Reformed Church in America, Inc.:

The Widows’ Fund, organized 1837
The Disabled Ministers’ Fund, organized 1855
The Ministerial Pension Fund, established 1928
The Widows’ Department of the Ministerial Pension Fund, established 1932
The Contributory Annuity Fund, organized 1936
The Retirement Fund for Lay Workers, organized 1937
The Children’s Christmas Fund (Orphans’ Fund)

This Constitution as amended and restated is effective July 1, 2000.

THE CONSTITUTION AND RULES
OF THE BOARD OF BENEFITS SERVICES
OF THE REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA

PART I
THE BOARD

MANAGEMENT

1.1 The supervision of the retirement and benefit plans of the Reformed Church in America shall be vested in a Board which shall consist of sixteen members, all of whom are members of the Reformed Church in America. The composition of the board shall be as follows: the president and vice president of the General Synod and the moderator of the General Synod Council, one member of the General Synod Council Ministry and Personnel Services Committee, and one member of the General Synod Council Finance Services Committee. The members from the General Synod Council shall be nominated by the General Synod Council Coordinating Committee and elected by the General Synod Council for one-year terms. Eleven members at-large shall be nominated by the General Synod Commission on Nominations and elected by the General Synod to terms of three years and may be re-elected for a second three year term. The Commission on Nominations will strive to assure that no more than 1/3 of the at-large member terms expire annually. Members shall be ineligible for two years after they have served two consecutive terms. The at-large members shall be professionals qualified as follows: three in the field of finance; two in the field of employee retirement benefits; two in the field of health care services; one in the field of law. Also, three at-large positions shall be filled by ordained ministers who are participants in the plan at the date of their nomination. The general secretary and the treasurer of the Reformed Church in America shall be ex-officio members without vote. The general secretary shall use every opportunity to bring the work of The Board of Benefits Services before the Reformed Church.

1.2 The Board of Benefits Services shall have power to fill vacancies on The Board of Benefits Services occurring by reason of death, resignation, or otherwise.

1.3 The Board of Benefits Services shall have and, except as provided in 1.1 hereof, shall exercise all the power necessary to receive, accumulate, manage, invest, and dispose of the funds and property entrusted to it, consistent with the laws under which the Board has been incorporated or with any action of the General Synod of the Reformed Church.

1.4 The Board of Benefits Services is empowered to make rules for the administration of its work in accord with plans approved by the General Synod and consistent with this Constitution.

OFFICERS AND COMMITTEES

1.5 The Board of Benefits Services shall elect annually a president, vice-president, and
a secretary. The treasurer of the General Synod and the General Synod Council shall be the treasurer of The Board of Benefits Services and shall serve the board as an *ex-officio* member without vote. The secretary need not be a member of the board. The president and vice president shall be elected from the membership of the board.

1.6 The Board of Benefits Services may engage such additional assistance as may be necessary for the performance of the work of the Board.

1.7 The Board of Benefits Services shall appoint a Finance Committee and such other committees as may be necessary to carry out its work.

1.8 The Board of Benefits Services shall appoint a delegate to serve as an *ex-officio* member, without vote, of the Board of Trustees of the Registered Pension Plan for the Employees of the Regional Synod of Canada, Inc. Said delegate shall attend the annual meeting of the Plan Trustees and report to The Board of Benefits Services on the status of the plan, the adequacy of retirement benefits, and the annual audit of said plan.

**DUTIES OF OFFICERS**

1.9 The president shall preside at all meetings of The Board of Benefits Services and shall perform such other duties as are usually required of that officer, or as may be requested by The Board of Benefits Services. The president shall be a member, *ex-officio* with full privileges, of all committees of The Board of Benefits Services.

The vice-president shall, in absence of the president, perform the duties of the president.

The secretary shall attend the meetings of The Board of Benefits Services and of the regular committees, and such other meetings as may be prescribed by The Board of Benefits Services; shall have custody of the minutes and other records and papers of The Board of Benefits Services and the corporate seal, and shall also perform the duties ordinarily required of a recording and corresponding secretary; and shall be responsible for the preparation of an annual report for The Board of Benefits Services to act upon and present to the General Synod.

**MEETINGS**

1.10 The Board of Benefits Services shall hold at least two regular meetings each year or as called by the president of The Board of Benefits Services. Nine members present at a meeting shall constitute a quorum.

At the meeting of The Board of Benefits Services preceding the annual meeting of the General Synod, the reports prepared by the secretary and the report of the auditors shall be considered and adopted for presentation to the General Synod.

The annual meeting of The Board of Benefits Services shall be held in the fall, at which time the members and officers shall be elected and the committees appointed.

**DUTIES OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE**
1.11 (a) The finance committee shall have general oversight of the financial operations of The Board of Benefits Services and shall be responsible for the review of investment performance of all assets in the Retirement Plan. The finance committee shall also annually review and recommend to The Board of Benefits Services any changes in investment options, management and custody of Retirement Plan funds. The finance committee, subject to the approval of The Board of Benefits Services, may appoint from time to time, a separate investment advisory committee, to review and advise on investment options, performance and management of all assets in the Retirement Plan, whether held by The Board of Benefits Services or a custodian as described herein, as well as the selection of any investment advisor to which responsibility for investments may be delegated. The investment advisory committee shall submit periodic reports of such activities to the finance committee and/or Board according to the procedures that may be established by the Board.

The investment advisory committee shall consist of up to seven members, all of whom are members of the Reformed Church in America. The composition of the investment advisory committee shall be as follows: the moderator of the GSC Finance Services Committee, the moderator of The Board of Benefits Services Finance Committee, and up to five at-large members. The at-large members shall be professionals qualified as follows: up to four investment management professionals and one lawyer. The treasurer of the Reformed Church in America shall be an ex-officio member without vote. The investment advisory committee shall nominate candidates for the at-large positions, and such candidates shall be subject to the approval of The Board of Benefits Services Finance Committee and the GSC Finance Services Committee. At-large members will be invited to serve a one-year term and may be re-elected for renewable one-year terms. Each year, the investment advisory committee shall elect a chairperson who will preside over all meetings.

1.11 (b) The finance committee, subject to the approval of The Board of Benefits Services, may delegate and grant to a custodian which is a bank, trust company or financial institution, any or all of the authority of The Board of Benefits Services with respect to retention, investment and reinvestment of the assets of the Retirement Plan, or any part thereof. Such custodian shall report its activities with regard to the investments held to the Finance Committee and/or investment advisory committee, and shall hold such property in safekeeping, collect the income thereof, and pay over the same to the Board at such times and in such manner as the finance committee shall specify. The finance committee, in its discretion, may also delegate and grant to a custodian or investment advisor so designated, all or any portion of the authority possessed by The Board of Benefits Services with respect to the retention, investment, and reinvestment of assets of the Board, or any part thereof, on condition:

(1) That such custodians’ purchase, sale, and exchange of Board assets be conducted in accordance with such investment standards and policies and such other terms and conditions as may from time to time be established by the finance committee or by the investment advisory committee;

(2) That such custodians’ designation and authority and such investment standards and policies and terms and conditions shall be subject to modification or revocation at any time at the discretion of The Board of Benefits Services;

(3) That notification of all purchases, sales, and other transactions including periodic performance reports of all investments held, effected by such custodians pursuant to such authority shall be given promptly to the investment advisory committee and the finance committee by the custodians or investment advisor. The finance committee shall provide annually for the auditing of the books of the Board.
AMENDMENTS

1.12 The Constitution and Rules of the Board may be amended by a two-thirds vote of the members present at any regularly constituted meeting of The Board of Benefits Services; provided that the proposed amendment has been presented in writing at a previous regularly constituted meeting. The amendment shall become effective only after approval by the General Synod, by a majority vote of those present and voting at any regularly constituted meeting.

1.13 The Constitution and Rules of the Board may be amended by the General Synod by a majority vote of those present and voting at any regularly constituted meeting; provided that the proposed amendment has been submitted in writing to The Board of Benefits Services for its consideration at least three calendar months before the meeting of the General Synod in order that the Board may be able to present its views of the matter.

THE CONSTITUTION AND RULES
OF THE BOARD OF BENEFITS SERVICES
OF THE REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA

PART II

REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA RETIREMENT PLAN

ARTICLE I
Preliminary Matters

1.1 Name of Plan. The Plan shall be known as the Reformed Church in America Retirement Plan.

1.2 Purpose of Plan. The purpose of the Plan is to provide retirement and other benefits for those Employees who qualify for participation under the terms of the Plan. Where indicated, the terms of this Plan are intended to comply with specified Sections of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as amended, and the Treasury Regulations thereunder.

ARTICLE II
Definitions

Unless otherwise required by the context, the following words and phrases used in the Plan shall have the meanings set forth in this Article.

2.1 “Account” shall mean the Account established for each Participant reflecting the amounts attributable to Church Payments, Salary Reduction Contributions, Participant Payments, and any other additional payments provided for herein as approved by the Board, which Account shall be adjusted from time to time to reflect deposits, withdrawals (if allowed under the terms of this Plan) and investment gain or loss corresponding to the market value of the Investment Option in which the Account is invested pursuant to Article V herein.

2.2 “Beneficiary” shall mean the person or persons to whom the deceased Participant’s benefits from the Plan, if any, are payable as provided herein.

2.3 “Board” shall mean the Board of Benefits Services of the Reformed Church in
America.

2.4 **“Church Payments”** shall mean the payments made by the Employer to a Participant’s Account as provided in Section 4.2 herein.

2.5 **“Code”** shall mean the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as amended, and the applicable Treasury Regulations promulgated thereunder from time to time.

2.6 **“Commercial Annuity”** shall mean an annuity purchased from an insurance company as provided for in Section 8.1(b) of this Plan.

2.7 **“Compensation”** shall mean for any Plan Year, a Participant’s total salary and wages paid by the Employer during a Fiscal Year, and includes the value of a housing allowance or parsonage, but excludes employer paid social security taxes, automobile allowances, educational allowances, insurance premiums, reimbursement of expenses, fringe benefits and bonuses; provided, however, in the case of a Participant who receives housing as a portion of his or her Compensation, the value of such housing shall be considered as equivalent to such a percentage of fixed Compensation as the Board may from time to time determine and added thereto in order to determine the salary basis. If free board and lodging are received by the Participant, then an equivalent value as agreed upon shall be treated as Compensation to determine the Compensation basis. Any annual bonus or housing allowance received by a Participant shall be treated as Compensation to determine the compensation basis as agreed upon between an Employer, the Participant, and the Board; provided, that all or a portion of such bonus and/or cash gift may be contributed by a Participant as a Salary Reduction Contribution.

2.8 **“Constitution”** shall mean the Constitution and Rules of the Board of Benefits Services of the Reformed Church in America, as amended from time to time.

2.9 **“Contingent Account”** shall mean the Employer-owned account that consists of all credits from any sources released under the rules of the Plan together with contributions, gifts, legacies, and funds from any other sources, which may be applied to provide additional benefits or applied in such other ways as the Board may determine in its sole and absolute discretion.

2.10 **“Disability”** shall mean total and permanent physical or mental disability of a Participant, prior to the date payment of benefits from the Plan begin hereunder, which renders the Participant totally unable to perform his or her duties for an Employer as determined by the Board upon the basis of a written certification of a physician selected or approved by the Board.

2.11 **“Effective Buying Power per Household”** (hereafter “EBPH”) shall mean an amount based on published data for selected counties as determined by the Board and annually approved by the Board as the minimum base on which Church Payments made on behalf of ministers are calculated pursuant to Section 4.2 herein.

2.12 **“Effective Date”** shall mean July 1, 2000, the date on which this Plan Document, as a supplement to the Constitution, becomes effective, or, if later, the effective date of any pending approval of the status of the Plan issued by the Internal Revenue Service.

2.13 **“Eligible Employee”** shall mean an Employee eligible to participate in the Plan as set forth in Section 3.1.
2.14 “Employee” shall mean (a) any person who is an ordained Minister of Word and Sacrament of the Reformed Church in America, (b) an ordained minister as described in (a) and on behalf of whom a Church Payment is made to the Plan by another denomination qualifying as both a church under Code Section 414(e) and as a tax-exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3) and employing such minister in accordance with an agreement with the Reformed Church in America, and (c) any other person who is directly employed by the corporations of the Reformed Church in America, its assemblies, institutions or agencies. “Employee,” as defined in this Section 2.14, expressly excludes residents of Canada serving The Regional Synod of Canada Inc., Reformed Church in America, in the capacity as ordained or installed Minister of Word and Sacrament and any other individual so employed, and participating in the Revised Pension Plan for the Employees of The Regional Synod of Canada Inc., Reformed Church in America or any other retirement plans sponsored thereby.

2.15 “Employer” shall mean the corporations of the Reformed Church in America, and the assemblies, institutions or agencies of the Reformed Church in America, but expressly excludes The Regional Synod of Canada Inc., Reformed Church in America and any of its churches, related agencies and institutions.

2.16 “Employment” shall mean service with the Employer as an Employee.

2.17 “Fiscal Year” shall mean the same fiscal year as the Reformed Church in America General Synod Council, as the same may be revised by the General Synod Council from time to time.

2.18 “Investment Option(s)” shall mean at any time the various possible investment alternatives offered under the Plan.

2.19 “Participant” shall mean (a) any Employee who has met the eligibility requirements of Section 3.1, (b) any former Employee who is receiving or is eligible to receive benefits under the Plan.

2.20 “Participant Payments” shall mean the amounts, if any, contributed by a Participant as after-tax voluntary contributions and not by an Employer, as provided in Section 4.3.

2.21 “Plan” shall mean the Reformed Church in America Retirement Plan as amended from time to time.

2.22 “Plan Year” shall mean the calendar year.

2.23 “Reformed Church” shall mean the corporations of the Reformed Church in America, its assemblies, institutions and agencies, but expressly excludes The Regional Synod of Canada Inc., Reformed Church in America and any of its churches, related agencies and institutions.

2.24 “Reformed Church in America Retirement Plan” or the “Plan” shall mean and refer to the Plan and all benefits thereunder as provided in this Plan Document and the Constitution, but does not include the Revised Pension Plan for the Employees of the Regional Synod of Canada, Inc., Reformed Church in America.

2.25 “Retirement” shall mean the relinquishment by an Employee of any or all salaried relationships, as may be defined by the Board from time to time, in connection with any service to an Employer at the time of application for payment of benefits from
the Plan, and in the case of an ordained minister, the approval of retirement status by the classis to which the Participant belongs, on or after the Participant’s attainment of age 60.

2.26 “Salary Reduction Agreement” shall mean a voluntary agreement between a Participant and the Employer to reduce the Participant’s Compensation for the purpose of making pre-tax Salary Reduction Contributions on the Participant’s behalf to the Participant’s Account. Other than in the initial year of eligibility, any Salary Reduction Agreement shall only be applicable to any Compensation earned in calendar years subsequent to the calendar year in which the Salary Reduction Agreement is executed.

2.27 “Salary Reduction Contributions” shall mean the pre-tax contribution made by an Employer to a Participant’s Account pursuant to a Salary Reduction Agreement in lieu of the payment of Compensation to such Participant.

2.28 “Spouse” shall mean for the purposes of benefits under this Plan, the spouse of the Participant, or the former spouse of a Participant if such designation is required by law and if approved by the Board.

ARTICLE III
Eligibility; Vesting

3.1 Eligibility. An Employee who is an ordained Minister of Word and Sacrament and is installed, or any other full time Employee (defined as an Employee giving service of at least 30 hours per week) as designated by the Employer, is an Eligible Employee for purposes of this Plan. An Eligible Employee may participate in the Plan as of the date he or she commences service.

3.2 Vesting. All amounts contributed to a Participant’s Account attributable to Church Payments, Salary Reduction Contributions, and Participant Payments, and all investment gains or losses thereon, are always fully vested in the Participant and nonforfeitable.

ARTICLE IV
Participant Account; Contributions

4.1 Participant’s Account. A single Account will be established for each Participant which will reflect Church Payments, Salary Reduction Contributions, Participant Payments, any other additional payments approved by the Board, and any additions thereto or withdrawals therefrom allowed under the terms of this Plan and subject to the prior approval of the Board, as well as the return on investment of the Account based on the Investment Option selected by the Participant pursuant to Article V.

4.2 Church Payments.

(a) Ordained Ministers. For each Plan Year, the Employer shall make a periodic Church Payment to the Account of a Participant who is an ordained minister in an amount equivalent to eleven percent (11%) of the Participant’s Compensation, or the EBPH rate, whichever is greater. The Board reserves the right to change the percentage of a Participant’s Compensation constituting such Church Payment at its discretion.

(b) All Other Participants. For each Plan Year, the Employer shall make a periodic Church Payment to the Account of a Participant who is not ordained in an amount
not less than eight percent (8%) of such Participant’s Compensation. The Board reserves the right to change this minimum percentage constituting such Church Payment.

(c) All Church Payments, whether made to the Account of an ordained minister or any other Participant, shall be contributed by the Employer to the Participant’s Account on the Participant’s behalf to be held, administered and distributed under the terms of the Plan; provided, that all such amounts shall be subject to the rights of the general creditors of the Employer as provided in Section 12.3 herein.

4.3 Participant Payments. A Participant may elect to (a) make Participant Payments to his or her Account under the Plan, or (b) elect to terminate or modify the amount of his or her Participant Payments in accordance with the rules and regulations promulgated by the Board from time to time; provided, that all such amounts attributable to investment gains or losses as set forth in Article V shall be subject to the rights of the general creditors of the Employer as provided in Section 12.3 herein.

4.4 Salary Reduction Contributions.

(a) Each Participant may enter into a Salary Reduction Agreement as provided for in this Section 4.4, on a form approved by the Board specifying the percentage of his or her Compensation that is to be contributed to his or her Account under the Plan. Salary Reduction Contributions shall be contributed by the Employer to the Participant’s Account on the Participant’s behalf to be held, administered and distributed under the terms of the Plan; provided, that all such amounts shall be subject to the rights of the general creditors of the Employer as provided in Section 12.3 herein.

(b) An election to make Salary Reduction Contributions under the Plan by an Employee is voluntary. In order to make Salary Reduction Contributions, a Participant shall execute a Salary Reduction Agreement with the Employer authorizing pre-tax Salary Reduction Contributions to the Participant’s Account. A Participant shall deliver a Salary Reduction Agreement to the Employer before any Salary Reduction Contribution elections can become effective. Such Salary Reduction Agreement shall be void with respect to any Salary Reduction Contribution unless submitted before the beginning of the calendar year during which the amount to be considered a Salary Reduction Contribution will be earned; provided, however, that in the year in which the Plan is first adopted or an Employee is first eligible to participate, such Salary Reduction Agreement shall be filed within thirty (30) days of the date on which the Plan is adopted or the date on which an Employee is first eligible to participate, respectively, with respect to Compensation earned during the remainder of the calendar year.

(c) The Salary Reduction Agreement shall, subject to the limitations set forth in this Section 4.4, designate the amount of Compensation to be contributed on behalf of each Participant, the Beneficiary or Beneficiaries of the Participant and such other items as the Board may prescribe. Such designations shall remain in effect unless amended as provided in subsection (d) below.

(d) A Participant may amend his or her Salary Reduction Agreement from time to time; provided, however, that any amendment to the amount of a Participant’s Salary Reduction Contributions shall comply with the provisions of subsection (b), above.
4.5 **Additional Optional Payments.** Subject to the approval of the Board, the Participant may pay into his or her Account, or there may be paid into the Participant’s Account, such optional amounts as the Participant may elect, in addition to the regular Church Payments and any Participant Payments, to be modified by investment gains or losses as provided for in Article V, for the purpose of increasing the Participant’s benefits.

4.6 **Inactive Status.** If a Participant who is an ordained minister remains in the ministry of a church other than the Reformed Church, or if any other Participant remains in the employ of the Reformed Church, but contributions to his or her Account are discontinued, the Participant will be considered as inactive and during such status will be entitled to no modifications to his or her Account other than (a) the modifications of a Participant’s Investment Option pursuant to the terms of this Plan (subject to Board approval) or (b) any gains or losses experienced by the Account as provided for in Article V.

4.7 **Return of Contribution Made in Error.** If any Employer contribution on behalf of a Participant under this Article IV is made because of a mistake of fact, and if demand is made by the Employer, such contribution may be returned to the Employer during the one year period beginning on the date such contribution is made.

**ARTICLE V**

**Participant Account Investment Options**

5.1 **Investment Options.** In accordance with the rules and procedures established by the Board, Participants will select an Investment Option in which the balance of each Participant’s Account, including the Participant’s Church Payments, Salary Reduction Contributions and Participant Payments, will be invested by the Board. The Participant’s selection of such investment of his or her Account is subject to Board approval at all times. The finance committee or an investment advisory committee, as defined in Part I of the Constitution, may from time to time add, eliminate, or otherwise modify the Investment Options offered under this Plan with the express approval of the Board.

Once a Participant has selected an Investment Option, his or her entire Account balance and all contributions made on his or her behalf will be invested in that option and will reflect the market value of the Investment Option held therein. The returns experienced by a Participant’s Account may be positive or negative, depending on the performance of the Investment Option.

5.2 **Account Statements.** Statements containing a Participant’s Account balance will be sent on a quarterly basis.

5.3 **Changing Account Investment Option.** Participants may request a change of their Investment Option pursuant to procedures established by the Board and subject to Board approval.

5.4 **Plan Expenses and the Assistance Fund.** The Board reserves the right to annually withdraw an amount from Plan assets and earnings thereon (if any) that will (a) be used for any administrative service costs incurred on behalf of the Plan and (b) provide funding for supplemental assistance to those individuals eligible under Part III of the Constitution and the programs the Board deems necessary to effectively
provide such assistance.

ARTICLE VI
In-Service Withdrawals; Hardship Distributions

6.1 In-Service Withdrawals. Upon attaining age 59\(\frac{1}{2}\), a Participant may elect to receive, upon the approval of the Board:

(a) any amount as requested by the Participant from his or her Account, up to a maximum of five percent (5%) annually of the Participant’s Account balance as of December 31 of the year prior to the year in which the withdrawal is to be made, to be paid in accordance with procedures established by the Board. A Participant may request a distribution from total contributions held in the Account, earnings thereon, if any, or from both sources in any combination thereof as approved by the Board subject to the 5% maximum; or

(b) a lump sum payment of up to ten percent (10%) of the balance of a Participant’s Account upon submission of written evidence to the Board of the Participant’s intent to purchase housing.

6.2 Hardship Distributions.

(a) No withdrawals prior to the Participant attaining age 59\(\frac{1}{2}\) shall be permitted, except a Participant may withdraw Salary Reduction Contributions only in accordance with the following provisions:

(i) Except as otherwise provided in this Section, in the event of a “Hardship,” as defined below, a Participant may make application to the Board to withdraw all or part of his or her Account attributable to his or her Salary Reduction Contributions.

(ii) A distribution on account of “Hardship” may be made only if the distribution is (A) made on account of an immediate and heavy financial need of the Participant caused by an event beyond the control of a Participant or Beneficiary that would result in severe financial hardship to the individual if early withdrawal is not permitted and (B) is necessary to satisfy such financial need.

(b) For purposes of this Section, a distribution will be deemed to be made on account of an immediate and heavy financial need of the Participant in the discretion of the Board if the distribution is on account of one of the following events and is necessary to satisfy such financial need:

(i) Medical expenses described in Code Section 213(d) incurred by the Participant, the Participant’s Spouse or any dependent of the Participant (as defined in Code Section 152);

(ii) The purchase (excluding mortgage payments) of a principal residence for the Participant;

(iii) Payment of tuition and related education fees for the next twelve months of post-secondary education for the Participant, his or her Spouse, children, or dependents;

(iv) The need to prevent the eviction of the Participant from his or her principal residence or foreclosure on the mortgage on the Participant’s principal
residence; or

(v) Any additional event which the U.S. Secretary of the Treasury shall deem as an immediate and heavy financial need as described in the Code or the regulations promulgated thereunder.

(c) For purposes of this Section, distribution will be deemed by the Board to be necessary to satisfy an immediate and heavy financial need of the Participant if all of the following requirements are satisfied:

(i) The distribution is not in excess of the amount of the Participant’s immediate and heavy financial need;

(ii) The Participant has obtained all distributions, other than Hardship withdrawals from the Plan; and

(iii) The Participant shall not be permitted to make Salary Reduction Contributions or Participant Payments for at least twelve months after the receipt of the Hardship withdrawal pursuant to this Section.

(d) The amount of the Hardship withdrawal is limited to the lesser of (i) the amount of the immediate and heavy financial need, or (ii) one hundred percent (100%) of the amounts attributable to Salary Reduction Contributions excluding earnings, if any, allocable thereto held in the Participant’s Account.

ARTICLE VII
Termination of Employment

7.1 Salary Reduction Contributions. If an ordained Participant is demitted, or any other Participant ceases services with an Employer before payments have commenced under Article VIII, the entire amount in the Participant’s Account attributable to Salary Reduction Contributions, and any earnings thereon, shall be either (i) distributed by the Board if requested by the Participant and approved by the Board, or (ii) held by the Board, to be adjusted thereafter by any earnings or losses thereon as provided for in Article V, and to be applied to provide benefits at a later date as permitted under the terms of this Plan.

7.2 Church Payments. If an ordained Participant is demitted, or any other Participant ceases service with an Employer before payments have commenced under Article VIII, no further contributions shall be made to his or her Account. However, the entire balance of the Participant’s Account and any earnings thereon attributable to Church Payments shall be either (i) distributed by the Board if requested by the Participant and approved by the Board, or (ii) held by the Board, to be adjusted thereafter by any earnings or losses thereon as provided for in Article V, and to be applied to provide benefits at a later date as permitted under the terms of this Plan.

7.3 Participant Payments. If an ordained Participant is demitted, or any other Participant ceases services with an Employer before payments have commenced under Article VIII, the entire amount in the Participant’s Account and any earnings thereon attributable to Participant Payments, subject to Board approval, shall be either (i) distributed by the Board if requested by the Participant, including any earnings thereon, or (ii) held by the Board, to be adjusted thereafter by any earnings or losses thereon as provided for in Article V, and to be applied to provide benefits at a later date as permitted under the terms of this Plan.

7.4 Statement of Rights. Upon demission or termination, a Participant shall be given,
within a reasonable time, a statement of his or her rights and benefits under the Plan arising because of such demission or termination. Such statement shall include the amount in his or her Account, the time and manner in which such benefits and values will be paid, and the procedure and action necessary on his or her part to receive such benefits and values. Such statement shall either be handed to the Participant prior to his or her last day of Employment or it shall be mailed to him or her at the last known mailing address.

ARTICLE VIII
Distribution of Benefits

8.1 Retirement Options. Subject to the prior approval of the Board, a Participant (or a Participant’s surviving Spouse) may elect one of the following options upon either Retirement (before or after age 70 1/2) or attaining age 70 1/2 (before or after Retirement).

(a) Individualized Payment Option. A Participant may elect to receive, upon the approval of the Board, any amount from the balance of his or her Account as requested by the Participant to be paid in accordance with procedures established by the Board. A Participant may request a distribution from total contributions held in the Account, earnings thereon, if any, or from both sources in any combination thereof as approved by the Board.

(b) Commercial Annuity Subject to the Approval of the Board. A Participant may elect to have the entire balance of the Participant’s Account, as determined on the valuation date established by the Board, used by the Board to purchase a single premium Commercial Annuity from an organization recommended by the Participant and approved by the Board which issues such annuities, payable in one of the following forms:

(i) The joint life expectancy of the Participant and his or her Spouse (if the Participant is married) with a fixed percentage of such annuity, not less than 66 2/3 percent, being continued to the surviving Spouse of the Participant.

(ii) The single life expectancy of the Participant if he or she is not married. An unmarried Participant may name a Beneficiary or elect such other provision for retirement income as the Board may make available.

(iii) The single life expectancy of the married Participant if his or her Spouse consents in writing in the manner prescribed by the Board. Notwithstanding the spousal consent requirement, if a Participant establishes to the satisfaction of the Board that the Spouse’s consent cannot be obtained, the Board may waive the spousal consent requirement.

The election of a Commercial Annuity by a Participant under this Plan shall be irrevocable.

(c) Annuity Bond Fund. The Annuity Bond Fund option is not available to Participants making an election under the terms of this Article after the Effective Date of this Plan. Participants already participating in the Annuity Bond Fund may, subject to the approval of the Board, either (i) continue participation in the Annuity Bond Fund and their Accounts will continue to be held and administered under the terms and provisions of the Constitution dated July 1, 1996, or (ii) make an irrevocable election to have the balance of his or her Accounts, as determined on the valuation date established by the Board, transferred out of the Annuity Bond Fund and invested in one of the Investment Options offered
by the Board under the Plan, and distributed in accordance with the procedures established by the Board and the provisions of this Plan.

(d) **Support/Investment Option Program.** The Support/Investment Option Program is not available to Participants making an election under the terms of this Article after the Effective Date of this Plan. Participants already participating in the Support/Investment Option Program may, upon the approval of the Board, either (i) continue participation in the Support/Investment Option Program and their Accounts will continue to be held and administered under the terms and provisions of the Constitution dated July 1, 1996, or (ii) make an irrevocable election to have the balance of his or her Accounts, as determined on the valuation date established by the Board, transferred out of the Support/Investment Option Program and invested in one of the Investment Options offered by the Board under the Plan, and distributed in accordance with the procedures established by the Board and the provisions of this Plan.

### Article VIII

**8.2 Disability.** In the event of a Participant’s Disability, with resultant loss of Compensation, before payment of benefits have commenced under Article VIII, subject to Board approval, the Participant may elect to receive benefits under the Plan to which he or she is entitled from the forms available under Section 8.1.

**8.3 Minimum Account Balance.** In the event that the balance of a Participant’s Account is less than $5000, the Board, in its sole discretion, has the right to make a lump sum payment in cash in lieu of other payment options.

**8.4 Exempt Housing Allowance.** By action of the Board, ordained ministers are eligible to have a portion of salary designated as a tax exempt “housing allowance.” This housing allowance may not exceed the lesser of the fair rental value of the residence plus the expenses of utilities for the residence or the amount actually expended thereon. Participants in the Plan who are eligible for this housing allowance may elect to designate an amount of up to 100% of the amount of benefit payments received under the terms of this Plan as a housing allowance, provided that the minister’s actual costs (the lesser of the fair rental value of home plus cost of utilities or the actual amount expended) equal such amount of benefit payment.

**8.5 Distribution Election.**

(a) Each Participant shall designate the manner in which payments shall be made from the choices available under this Article VIII. Such designation shall apply to all amounts distributed from such Participant’s Account. All distribution elections are subject to the approval of the Board.

(b) A Participant may modify the election made under the above Section 8.5(a) by submitting to the Board a completed and executed form provided by the Board for such purpose; provided, however, that such change shall not be given any effect unless it is made by a Participant and submitted to the Board on an election form no later than the last day of the calendar year which precedes the calendar year in which distributions under the Plan are to commence. Any request submitted by a Participant seeking commencement of retirement income distributions from the Plan in the same calendar year as the effective date of a Participant’s Retirement is subject to the approval of the Board in its sole discretion.

### Article IX

**Benefits Payable Upon Death**

**9.1 Death Prior to Commencement of Benefits – Married Participants.** In the event a married Participant dies before payments of Retirement or Disability benefits have commenced under Article VIII, subject to Board approval the Participant’s surviving Spouse may elect one of the distribution options available under Section 8.1.
9.2 **Death Prior to Commencement of Benefits – Single Participants.** In the event an unmarried Participant dies before payment of Retirement or Disability benefits under Article VIII have commenced, the balance of his or her Account, as determined on the valuation date established by the Board, shall be distributed in a lump sum payment to his or her Beneficiary, and if none, to his or her estate, as approved by the Board.

9.3 **Death After Benefit Commencement.** In the event of the death of a Participant after distribution of benefits commences, benefits payable under the Plan shall be such amounts payable under the distribution option selected by the Participant then in effect for the Participant under the Plan and approved by the Board.

9.4 **Beneficiary Designation.** Subject to the approval of the Board, each Participant shall designate one or more direct or contingent Beneficiaries to receive any amounts which may become payable under the Plan upon his or her death, provided, however, that no Beneficiary designation other than the Spouse shall be effective unless the Participant’s Spouse consents to such designation. The Participant may (but need not) designate the method of payment for such death benefits with the approval of the Board. A Participant’s designation of a Beneficiary and designation of a method of payment (if any) shall be in writing and filed with the Board. A Participant may change such designation at any time by filing a new or revised form with the Board. If no Beneficiary designation is made by the Participant, or if the designated Beneficiary dies before the Participant or before complete distribution of the Participant’s benefits, then the Participant shall be deemed to have designated the following person or persons (if living) as the Beneficiary or Beneficiaries and contingent Beneficiaries in the following order of priority:

(a) The Participant’s Spouse;

(b) The Participant’s natural and adopted children and children of deceased children, per stirpes;

(c) The Participant’s parents in equal shares;

(d) The Participant’s brothers and sisters, and nephews and nieces who are children of deceased brothers or sisters, per stirpes; and

(e) The Participant’s estate.

**ARTICLE X**

**Plan Administration**

10.1 **Board.** The Board is the fiduciary of the Plan and shall have the authority as set forth herein and in the Constitution to control and manage the operation and administration of the Plan.

10.2 **Duties and Powers.** The Board shall operate under the power and authority granted by the Constitution to carry out the provisions of the Plan. For this purpose, the Board’s powers shall include, but shall not be limited to, the following rights and privileges to be exercised in its discretion:

(a) To adopt and enforce such rules and regulations as it deems necessary and proper for the efficient administration of the Plan, provided such rules and regulations are consistent with the terms and provisions hereof;
(b) To interpret and apply all terms of the Plan, to authorize the payment of benefits hereunder, and to determine all questions concerning eligibility, status, benefits and rights and all other questions arising in the administration of the Plan;

(c) To employ or retain actuaries, attorneys, accountants, physicians, investment advisors, consultants, specialists and other persons or firms to advise or assist in the performance of its duties.

All determinations and actions of the Board shall be final and conclusive on the Employer, Participants, Employees, Beneficiaries and all other persons.

10.3 Delegation of Duties. The Board at its discretion may delegate specific fiduciary responsibilities or ministerial duties to employees of the Employer or other individuals, all of whom shall serve at the pleasure of the Board. Any such person may resign by delivering written notice of such resignation to the Board. Vacancies created by resignation, death or other causes may be filled by the Board or reabsorbed or redelegated by the Board.

10.4 Uniformity of Rules. The Board, at all times, in the administration of the Plan and in the interpretation and application of the provisions of the Plan, shall exercise all powers and authority given it in a non-discriminatory manner, and shall apply uniform administrative rules of general application in order to assure similar treatment to all persons in similar circumstances.

10.5 Records and Recordkeeping. The Board shall keep a record of all proceedings and acts, and shall keep all such books of account, records and other data as may be necessary for the proper administration of the Plan. The Board shall file or cause to be filed such annual reports, financial and other statements, and shall furnish such reports, statements and other documents to such Participants and Beneficiaries under the Plan as may be required by any federal or state statute or regulation within the time prescribed for filing and furnishing such documents.

10.6 Expenses. Expenses charged with respect to Participant Accounts shall be debited to such Accounts unless the Employer agrees, to the extent permitted by law, to pay directly any such item of expense which the Employer may agree to incur in addition to the obligation of making contributions as herein provided. The Employer shall pay the reasonable expenses of the Board.

10.7 Benefit Claims Procedure. Any person who thinks he is entitled to a benefit under the Plan shall have the right to file with the Board a written notice of claim for such benefit. The Board, in its discretion, may request a meeting with the claimant to clarify any matters it deems pertinent. Within ninety (90) days after receipt of such written notice of claim, the Board shall either grant or deny such claim, unless special circumstances require an extension of time for processing the claim. If such an extension of time for processing the claim is required, written notice of the extension shall be furnished to the claimant prior to the termination of the initial 90-day period. In no event shall such extension exceed a period of 90 days from the end of such initial period. The extension notice shall indicate the special circumstances requiring an extension of time and the date by which the Board expects to render the final decision. In the event such claim is denied, the Board shall give written notice to the claimant that describes:

(a) The specific reasons for the denial;

(b) Specific reference to the pertinent Plan provisions on which the denial is
based;

(c) A description of any additional material or information necessary for the claimant to perfect the claim and an explanation of why such material or information is necessary;

(d) An explanation of the Plan’s claim review procedure.

Each claimant shall have the right to appeal the denial of his claim to the Board for a full and fair review at any time within sixty (60) days after the claimant’s receipt of the written notice of such denial. The Board shall thereby afford the claimant or his duly authorized representative the opportunity (1) to review documents pertinent to the claim, (2) to submit issues and comments in writing, and (3) to discuss such documents and issues with the Board. The final decisions of the Board shall be made promptly, and no later than sixty (60) days after its receipt from the claimant of such request for review, unless special circumstances require an extension of time for processing, in which case a decision shall be rendered as soon as possible, but not later than 120 days after receipt of a request for review. Such final decision shall be made in writing and shall include specific reasons for the decisions, written in a manner calculated to be understood by the claimant, and specific references to pertinent Plan provisions on which the decision is based.

10.8 Service of Legal Process. The Treasurer of the Board shall be the agent for service of legal process.

ARTICLE XI
Amendment and Termination of Plan

11.1 Amendment and Termination of the Plan.

(a) The General Synod shall have the sole authority to modify or amend this Plan. The Board reserves the right to make any modification or amendment to the Plan that it deems necessary to comply with any requirements of law or to ensure that Participants or Beneficiaries will not be taxed on assets under the Plan until they are received.

(b) While it is the intention of the Board to continue the Plan indefinitely, the Board reserves the right, subject to the approval of the General Synod, to reduce, suspend or discontinue contributions to the Plan or to terminate the Plan at any time in accordance with the Constitution. Upon termination of the Plan by the Board, all Salary Reduction Agreements shall be terminated automatically, and the date of such termination shall be treated as a valuation date. No Employees shall thereafter be admitted to participation hereunder. Following such termination, payment of such credited amounts may be made in a single-sum payment if the Board so designates. Any such decision to pay in a single lump sum shall apply to all Participants.

(c) The foregoing notwithstanding, no amendment affecting the fundamental operation of the Plan shall be adopted and instituted without the approval of the General Synod in accordance with the procedures set forth in the Constitution.
(d) Information about any amendment of the Plan shall be provided to the Participants.

ARTICLE XII
Miscellaneous Provisions

12.1 Spendthrift Provisions. A Participant’s or Beneficiary’s right to payment under the Plan shall not be subject to alienation, assignment, attachment, transfer, garnishment or any other legal or equitable process, and no Participant or his Beneficiary shall have any right to alienate, sell, anticipate, commute, pledge, encumber or assign any such benefit or payment, either voluntarily or involuntarily, except to the extent as may be required by law. Subject to Board approval, a Participant’s benefits under the Plan may be distributed pursuant to the terms of a divorce decree issued under state law, or may be retained and held in a separate account in the name of the non-Participant Spouse. Notwithstanding anything in the Plan to the contrary, upon the Board’s approval of the segregation of a Participant’s Account for the sole benefit of a non-Participant Spouse in accordance with a divorce decree, the non-Participant Spouse will be deemed an unmarried Participant for purposes of this Plan and his or her Account will be held and administered as such under the terms of Articles V (Investment Options), VI (In-Service Withdrawals; Hardship Distributions), VIII (Distribution of Benefits), IX (Death Benefits), and XIII (Miscellaneous Provisions).

12.2 Limitation of Rights and Benefits. Nothing appearing in or done pursuant to the Plan shall be held or construed to create a contract of Employment with the Employer, to obligate the Employer to continue the services of any Employee, or to affect or modify any Employee’s terms of Employment in any way, or to give any person any legal or equitable right or interest in the funds under the Plan or any part thereof or distribution therefrom, or against the Employer, except as expressly provided herein.

12.3 Plan Status.

(a) A Participant or Beneficiary shall not have any right with respect to, or claim against, any assets acquired under the Plan, nor shall any such purchase be construed to create a trust of any kind or a fiduciary relationship between the Board, the Employer and the Participants, their Beneficiaries or any other person, except as may be required under state law. Any such assets (including any amounts contributed by a Participant or contributed by the Board or the Employer pursuant to Article IV hereof) shall be and remain a part of the general, unpledged, unrestricted assets of the Board, subject to the claims of its general creditors, and the Plan constitutes a mere promise by the Employer to make benefit payments in the future. The Board shall be designated owner and Beneficiary of investments acquired in connection with the Board’s obligations under this Plan.

(b) Each Participant and Beneficiary shall be required to look to the provisions of this Plan and to the Board itself for enforcement of any and all benefits due under this Plan, and to the extent any such person acquires a right to receive payment under this Plan, such right shall be no greater than the right of any unsecured general creditor of the Board.

(c) The Plan shall be construed according to the laws of the state in which the Plan is executed, with distribution to a Participant or Beneficiary subject to any taxation only at the time of receipt, and the terms of the Plan are to be administered accordingly.
(d) This Plan is intended to meet the requirements of a church plan as defined in Sections 414(e) and 3121(w)(3)(A) of the Code and Section 3(33) of the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974, as amended (“ERISA”), and, as provided under Section 4(b)(2) of ERISA, does not intend to elect coverage under ERISA pursuant to Section 410(d) of the Code. Anything else in this Plan to the contrary notwithstanding, this Plan is intended to be an unfunded deferred compensation plan for purposes of the Code and Title I of ERISA, the assets of which, if any, are subject to the claims of the Board’s or the Employer’s creditors.

12.4 **Responsibility of Parties.** All parties to this Plan and all persons claiming any interest whatsoever hereunder agree to perform any and all acts and execute any and all documents or papers which may be necessary or desirable for carrying out any of the provisions of this Plan or of any amendments to this Plan or for complying with any federal or state disclosure laws.

12.5 **Misstatement of Fact.** If it shall be found that the status of any Participant with respect to his Employment or participation under this Plan, the age or sex of the Participant or contingent annuitant or any relevant fact with respect to a Participant or contingent annuitant has been misstated, the amount of benefit shall be adjusted to what would have been payable on the basis of the correct information.

12.6 **Construction.** The headings of the Plan have been inserted for convenience of reference only and are to be ignored in any construction of the provisions hereof. Whenever used herein, a pronoun or adjective in the masculine gender includes the feminine gender, the singular includes the plural and the plural includes the singular, unless the context clearly indicates otherwise. In the event any provision of the Plan shall be held illegal or invalid for any reason, such determination shall not affect the remaining provisions of the Plan and it shall be construed as if such illegal or invalid provisions had never been included.

12.7 **Military Service.** Notwithstanding any provision of this Plan to the contrary, contributions, benefits and service credit with respect to qualified military service will be provided in accordance with Section 414(u) of the Code.

12.8 **Unclaimed Benefits.** The entire balance of a Participant’s Account shall be forfeited if the Board, after reasonable effort, is unable to locate the Participant or Beneficiary to whom payment is due. Such forfeited amount shall be credited to the Contingent Account. However, upon Board approval, any forfeited amount will be reinstated and become payable if a claim is subsequently made by the Participant or his or her Beneficiary for such amounts. The Board will be deemed to have made a reasonable effort to locate a Participant or his or her Beneficiary by mailing a notice to the Participant or Beneficiary’s last known address, putting a notice in a newspaper of general circulation in the area of the Participant’s last known address, and inquiring with the Internal Revenue Service and the Social Security office, if possible, for the Participant’s or his or her Beneficiary’s last known address.

THE CONSTITUTION AND RULES
OF THE BOARD OF BENEFITS SERVICES
OF THE REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA

PART III

SUPPLEMENTAL ASSISTANCE AND INSURANCE
Under this provision, funds shall be made available to provide supplemental assistance and support in the event of hardship, illness, accident, or death. Benefits shall be granted in accordance with provisions set forth herein and for such other programs for the benefit of those eligible to participate in the Reformed Church in America Retirement Plan as the Board may from time to time approve. The Board shall review the funding needs for supplemental assistance annually to assess the adequacy of benefits and level of funding as provided under Section 5.4(ii).

**ASSISTANCE BENEFITS**

**Eligibility.**

1. An ordained minister or General Synod Council missionary of the Reformed Church or a lay employee of the General Synod or the General Synod Council who has served for fifteen years or more shall be eligible for assistance benefits in the event of a Disability while in active service, with resultant loss of Compensation.

2. The surviving Spouse of an ordained minister or General Synod Council missionary of the Reformed Church or a lay employee of the General Synod or the General Synod Council who has served for fifteen years or more shall be eligible for assistance benefits when financial need exists.

3. The surviving Spouse or family of an ordained minister or General Synod Council missionary of the Reformed Church or a lay employee of the General Synod or the General Synod Council who has served for fifteen years or more shall be eligible for a grant immediately upon the death of the Spouse in the amount as the Board may from time to time determine if financial need exists as determined by a Senior Pastor or Classis.

4. Dependent minor children of deceased ordained ministers or General Synod Council missionaries of the Reformed Church or lay employees of the General Synod or the General Synod Council who have served for 15 years or more shall be eligible for assistance benefits when financial need exists. Such benefits may be continued, at the discretion of the Board, in any cases where the children are studying in institutions of learning.

5. Eligibility for benefits from this department shall be limited to Members in good standing in the Reformed Church in America Retirement Plan, and their dependents, who are ordained ministers, General Synod Council missionaries of the Reformed Church, or lay employees of the General Synod or the General Synod Council, who have served for 15 years or more.

6. Temporary emergency benefits may be paid to ordained ministers and General Synod Council missionaries of the Reformed Church or lay employees of the General Synod or the General Synod Council who have served for 15 years or more, retired from active service, and to surviving spouses or ordained ministers, General Synod Council missionaries or any employees of the General Synod or General Synod Council who have served for 15 years or more at the discretion of the Board in such amounts as may be determined by the Board.

**Benefits.**

The amount of the assistance benefits in all cases shall be determined by the Board on the following basis:
1. The facts presented to the Board.

2. The resources available from the invested principal funds of this department, from receipts from benevolent gifts and such assessment income as the General Synod may determine.

INSURANCE DEPARTMENT

For ordained ministers, General Synod Council missionaries, and lay employees of the Reformed Church in America, the Board of Benefits Services shall maintain various insurance programs, including medical, long-term disability, life and long-term care coverage and such other insurance coverage as the Board deems advisable for the welfare of plan participants.

The benefits and administration of these plans are financed through premium payments in amounts determined from time to time by the Board. All rules and provisions governing these insurance plans are stated in detail in the Master Policies issued by the Board.

End of the
Constitution and Rules of the Board of Benefits Services

Senior Pastors Program

The Board of Pensions provides a very special service through the Senior Pastors Program, a ministry of caring that began in 1973 and continues today. Senior pastors have two objectives. They help link retirees to their previous church relationships, which can loosen with geography, time, and failing health. These relationships are their primary concern. The ten senior pastors also have opportunities to determine if retirees have any special financial or other needs. Currently, the senior pastors include the Revs. Edwin Mulder, Russell Pater, Roger Leonard, Bruce Penn, Harold De Roo, Henry Mouw, Joe Muyskens, Cornie Keunen, Eric Schulze, and John Ver Hoog.

The office of the Board of Pensions also facilitates the distribution of In Touch, an unofficial publication by, for, and about retired ministers and employees of the Reformed Church in America and their spouses—a list that numbers more than seven hundred. The paper was authored, compiled, and edited by the Rev. Glen Peterman in past years and will now be compiled and edited by the Rev. Robert Hoeksma. The retirees are deeply grateful for Mr. Peterman’s excellent ministry of communication through the In Touch magazine.

RCA Insurance Report

The RCA insurance program also took on a major change last year when it converted to Health Plan Management as the third party administrator and the consequent building of a new RCA medical network. Every effort is being made to minimize the disruption of this change to participants by identifying and enrolling their existing care providers whenever possible. This process continues as areas of inadequate coverage are discovered.

The board made several changes in the insurance plan itself in the past year, including adjusting the prescription co-payments to control the effects of rising drug costs; and instituting a once yearly open enrollment period. The staff was reconfigured and one person added to serve participants better and to handle the additional work required by the addition of the long-term care program in July 1998.

As the year 2000 unfolds, the insurance office will be installing new software that will advance its technical capabilities and increase its efficiency. Participants can also expect soon to be able to download claim forms from the RCA web page. And, for the first time,
with the aid of parish nurses, the insurance office is offering health screenings on site at the General Synod to highlight its focus on preventative care.

Above all, the RCA medical insurance program seeks to provide quality care at a reasonable cost. It is a self-funded program operated with concern and compassion, aiming for excellence in a challenging arena.

In Appreciation

On May 31, 2000, Barbara Diekman ended thirteen years of dedicated and excellent ministry in the RCA Office of Pensions. The Reformed Church in America is deeply grateful to Barbara for her commitment to and compassion for the participants in the Annuity Fund. Her ministry has provided guidance, counsel, and wisdom to countless servants of the church as they faced the transition from active ministry to retirement. We thank God for her life and ministry and pray for God’s continued blessing upon her as she begins a new phase of life.

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 RCA Foundation resources.

The foundation provides fund-raising services to the RCA, General Synod Council (GSC), 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.

For most of 1999 the foundation had four full-time staff persons. The Rev. Wayne Antworth served as director until October 1, when he resigned to take a pastoral position. The other staff persons were: the Rev. Norman Tellier, coordinator for gift planning; Larryl Humme, special gifts coordinator; and Jane Richardson, stewardship educator and urban ministry capital campaign consultant. Four persons served as part-time capital campaign consultants on contract: Fay Marcus, Milton Nieuwsma, Douglas Leonard, and Harold Ritsema.

The RCA Foundation board is composed of five members of the General Synod Council (GSC) and four persons at large. The present board members are:

- Harlan Bergman 2000
- Arthur Hessinger 2000
- Rodney Koopmans 2000
- Edward Mondore 2000
- Harry DeBruyn 2001
- Marilyn Norman 2001
- Okke Postma 2001

One at-large position and one GSC position are presently unfilled because of resignations.

In the years 1995-1999 the foundation raised more than $9 million in life income gifts, special gifts, direct-mail appeals, and the GIFTS Philanthropic Fund. In addition, RCA Financial Campaign Services assisted local congregations and other ministries in raising more than $4 million over the last three years. Every year funds are specified for ministry 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 begun without adequate funding. It is a goal of the foundation to become a viable entity with adequate financial support. This is a primary concern of the foundation staff and board.

No funds were provided to capitalize the foundation when it was started in 1994. In 1998 the GSC gave the foundation a grant of $400,000 from the unrestricted GSC endowment fund and a $50,000 grant to offset the 1997 deficit of $431,946 and to provide a "financial cushion" for the 1998 budget; 1998 anticipated a possible deficit of $265,000. The "cushion" the foundation carried forward from the GSC grant/loan in 1998 was $135,000—resulting in a $130,000 deficit in 1998. The GSC approved an additional grant/loan of $230,000 to cover the 1998 deficit and to carry over into 1999. At the end of 1999 the foundation had a deficit of $23,396.

Of vital importance is the need for the foundation to show unrestricted reserves of over $100,000. That is the minimum amount several states require in order to write charitable gift annuities in those states. Others have even higher requirements.

The foundation has taken several steps to help correct its lack of funding. Marvin and Jerene DeWitt of Zeeland, Michigan, have pledged an endowment of $1 million for the foundation. This endowment will provide an income to the foundation each year. The RCA Foundation is extremely grateful to the DeWitts for this generous gift.

The 2000 budget was reduced as far as possible in order to cut costs. As noted below, the Office of Stewardship Education was eliminated from the 2000 budget. However, funds were allocated for the purchase of stewardship resources that will be distributed to the churches.

A search is continuing for a new director of the foundation. Since that office will not be filled until several months into the year, there will be some cost savings as well.

The board took an action to require that ten percent of the remainder of all life income gifts be designated to the foundation. While this will not have immediate impact upon the income of the foundation, in future years it will assist in covering the expense of administering these gifts.

The foundation board continues to actively seek other ways to cut costs or increase funding of the foundation. It is hoped that within a few years the foundation will be on a self-funding basis and in a position to repay the grant/loan from the GSC.

TEACHING BIBLICAL STEWARDSHIP

One of the four fundamental purposes (mission) identified by the RCA Foundation from its inception is to teach biblical stewardship. Every staff person and every board member, as they carry out day-to-day witness and ministry, has the mandate and the opportunity to contribute to the fulfillment of this part of the purpose. In addition, Jane Richardson has served as a part-time specialist in stewardship education for the RCA. Her primary responsibilities are to evaluate and promote stewardship resources, including annual giving programs, within RCA congregations and to make assistance available to congregations as they implement these resources.

Stewardship Education and Annual Giving

Most of the stewardship education that occurs in RCA congregations is done in conjunction with annual giving programs. Hence, responsibility for stewardship education and providing resources for annual giving programs are linked in the foundation program. A total of eighty days per year is dedicated for the review and evaluation of stewardship education resources
and to promote annual giving programs in the congregations.

Resources

*Giving Magazine* is a new ecumenical annual publication produced through the Ecumenical Stewardship Center. The RCA has played a significant role in the development and production of the first two issues of *Giving*. The Rev. Wayne Antworth served on the editorial board, Jane Richardson has been a contributor and served on the editorial board, and Kim Baker and RCA Production Services did all of the production for the magazine and related materials. A copy is mailed to every RCA congregation in the spring.

Each annual issue of *Giving* contains an eight-page removable center section that is a complete program for a congregational annual giving campaign, which is usually done in the fall. The 1999 issue of *Giving* featured the stewardship program *All God’s Children Need to Give*. This program 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.

Beginning in 2000, theme materials that reproduce the artwork, logo, and concepts of the annual giving program are being offered to congregations to use in conjunction with the program. These items include bulletin covers and inserts, pledge cards, envelopes, stationery, and 11” by 17” full-color posters. This year RCA congregations will order these materials through Cokesbury.

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 the use of these programs throughout the church through the orientation and deployment of “guest stewards.”

A broad array of additional annual giving and stewardship education resources, both print and audiovisual, continue to be available from the RCA Distribution Center.

**RCA Stewardship Education Team**

In response to the recommendation by a staff consultation in June 1998, a stewardship education team was convened by the Office of Stewardship Education in June 1999. Representatives came from various agencies, units, and offices that provide support and services for congregations in stewardship education. These included Congregational Services (children’s ministry and the Council for Christian Education), TRAVARCA, Mission Services (including diaconal ministries), regional synods, and the racial/ethnic councils. One of the functions of the Stewardship Education Team is to enhance the cooperative and holistic nature of the various ways in which support is provided for congregations in order to enhance the foundation’s work and better serve congregations.

The Stewardship Education Team reviewed and made recommendations on a revised and expanded bibliography and a mediography of stewardship resources. These resources are available through existing networks such as the diaconal ministries team, mission stewardship associates, and guest stewards, as well as the RCA Distribution Center and TRAVARCA.

Regular updates about resources, leadership training, and other stewardship education programs and other key information are sent regularly to the Stewardship Education Team and the various offices, units, and agencies that they represent. Developing and maintaining
a stronger sense of partnership with these networks is an ongoing task.

Ecumenical Partnerships

The Ecumenical Stewardship Center continues to be the foundation’s strongest ecumenical partnership for stewardship education. The introduction of Giving magazine is a tangible benefit for RCA congregations. A number of conferences, workshops, and other resources and opportunities are available through the center.

Future of Stewardship Education

In light of conversations at the October board meeting and at an informal group that met the day previous to the board meeting to brainstorm the direction of the RCA Foundation in the next five to ten years, and in an attempt to project a balanced budget for the year 2000, stewardship education has been removed from the RCA Foundation portfolio and budget, effective January 1, 2000.

The Leadership Advisory Team of the RCA has discussed where (if anywhere) the stewardship education function will be placed. Congregational Services is currently considering incorporating stewardship education along with other priorities, seeking to determine what energy and resources might be devoted.

The RCA Foundation is committed to Giving magazine, the new resource produced for the first time last year. The RCA’s commitment to this project for 2000 is about $5,000 (for mailing the magazine and related resources to RCA congregations). Continuing involvement in this project has been identified as a priority. This would involve the participation of an educator who has a solid understanding of the theology of stewardship on the editorial team. The RCA’s Communication and Production Services has a year-by-year contract to print the magazine and supplemental resources and is currently promoting this resource to RCA congregations.

ENCOURAGING PEOPLE TO GIVE

All RCA Foundation staff members are engaged in encouraging people to give. Stewardship education leads to a desire to give. Encouragement also occurs as people are assisted with estate and financial planning. RCA church members are also asked to contribute gifts for current and future programs.

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. In order to provide these services, the Office of Gift Planning uses several methods to communicate the benefits of gift planning to the members and friends of the RCA.

In 1999 the office had one full-time staff person, the coordinator, the Rev. Norman J. Tellier, and an administrative assistant, Noreen Fargione. The coordinator makes presentations on estate planning and/or financial planning to groups in churches and 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.

Presentations on endowments are made to deacons, consistories, and other decision-making bodies. These presentations suggest that churches establish endowment funds and guidelines
for the use of gifts or bequests prior to the receipt of contributed funds.

In 2000 the coordinator of gift planning will be making presentations to ministers and deacons on the importance of gift planning, with an emphasis on how to get started locally. He will highlight the resources available to churches within the foundation.

Help with estate and financial planning is offered to members and friends of the RCA at no cost. Tellier is a CFP® licensee (CFP® and Certified Financial Planner® are federally registered marks of the Certified Financial Planner Board of Standards, Inc.).

The Board of Pensions of the RCA also provides preretirement workshops for ministers and other persons who work for the RCA. Tellier assists in the presentations at these workshops and works with ministers doing preretirement financial planning. The Board of Pensions pays a fee to the foundation in order to provide these services.

The office keeps on hand a large supply of literature pointing out the value of having a will and the way in which gifts can be made in other ways. These materials are sent on request and are distributed at workshops and displays.

Through 1999 the Office of Gift Planning had a partnership program with several organizations that contributed to the RCA Foundation to encourage gifts through gift planning. The intention of the partnership was to have the member organizations identify prospective donors and have the foundation work with the donors. The foundation also provided the ability to write gift annuities in some states where registration is difficult.

The number of organizations participating in the planned giving partnership declined significantly in 1999, and it was decided to discontinue the program for 2000. Several reasons for the decline in participation could be cited, but perhaps the two most important are too few RCA Foundation staff members to adequately serve the participating organizations and a desire on behalf of the organizations to work with their own donors instead of referring them. The foundation can continue to serve these organizations but now will earn the equivalent of fees by becoming a ten percent remainderman on all life income agreements.

The RCA Foundation is an affiliate member of the Council of Reformed Charities. This group promotes stewardship of financial resources through a variety of nonprofit service organizations that have a large Reformed constituency. Membership by the foundation is helpful in creating and maintaining relationships with others who work among the same people in the same way as the foundation does.

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, revocable gift agreements, the GIFTS Philanthropic Fund, and other instruments. In 1999 the RCA Foundation has continued working toward registration of its gift annuity program in those states that require registration and in which it is expected the foundation staff will 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 1999 luncheons were held in various parts of the country to express the church’s gratitude to the members of the society.
These luncheons will continue in 2000 in other areas of the church.

The General Synod Council, at its October 1993 meeting, voted to have the following summary of the Van Bunschoten 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 Bunschoten, 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 Bunschoten 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 Bunschoten 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 Bunschoten, the Van Bunschoten 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 $5,207,382 during 1999. These gifts were received in the following forms:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of gift</th>
<th>Total Received: $5,207,382</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Charitable annuities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charitable trusts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endowments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GIFTS Philanthropic Fund</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Gifts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The GIFTS Philanthropic Fund is a donor-advised fund that allows donors to make gifts to the RCA Foundation, which in turn distributes the gifts 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 1999 $614,207.23 was received in this fund, and $801,744 was distributed to charities. The RCA Foundation receives one-half of the interest earned on GIFTS Philanthropic Fund accounts. In 1999 this amounted to $5,763.
The gifts received by the RCA Foundation during 1999 in all funds were designated as follows:

**Gift Designations – 1999**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local church</td>
<td>$3,310,797</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fund drive</td>
<td>$746,789</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundation</td>
<td>$356,874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>$183,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Appeal</td>
<td>$159,768</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undesignated</td>
<td>$104,660</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleges</td>
<td>$22,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missions</td>
<td>$14,722</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camps</td>
<td>$895,062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partners</td>
<td>$23,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleges</td>
<td>$183,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seminaries</td>
<td>$104,660</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Total gifts designated: $5,368,918

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 on 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, the churches of the RCA are asked the number and amount of bequests and planned gifts received by them each year. Gift planning staff noted while reading the consistorial reports for 1996, 1997, and 1998 that bequests and planned gifts came more frequently from churches where the foundation has worked than from other churches. In 1998 the churches reported receiving 328 bequests totaling $6,537,672 and thirteen planned gifts totaling $124,223. The planned gifts came in the form of trust distributions and matured annuities. Total bequests and planned gifts reported by the congregations amounted to $6,661,895. The distribution of these gifts by synod is as follows:

**1998 Bequests and Planned Gifts by Synods**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Synod</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albany</td>
<td>$1,511,667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>$1,395,915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Far West</td>
<td>$416,662</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Lakes</td>
<td>$72,204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heartland</td>
<td>$420,603</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-America</td>
<td>$1,544,245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-Atlantics</td>
<td>$1,511,667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>$560,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Total received: $6,661,895
A concern of the RCA Foundation has been its inability to offer a full range of services to our churches in Canada. Canadian law prevents the foundation from offering gift annuities or the management of funds to RCA churches there. In extensive discussions with the Regional Synod of Canada, the foundation believes it has found a solution to this problem. Because of Canadian law a foundation may not offer gift annuities. The regional synod has agreed that it will become the agency through which gift annuities will be written. All annuities will be re-insured, since only a few nonprofit organizations in Canada are allowed to manage and invest an annuity portfolio. Additionally, work is proceeding on the incorporation of the RCA Foundation Canada. The primary purpose of the foundation will be to provide management of endowment and other funds for the churches and other RCA organizations in Canada.

The Office of Gift Planning also promotes the RCA Building and Extension Fund investment notes. Investments in these notes 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

The Office of Special Gifts also encourages people to give gifts to specific causes. The goal is to seek gifts from individual donors to fund projects that would otherwise not 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, Larryl Humme, is responsible for identifying, cultivating, and soliciting support from RCA members 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 have approved.

In funding these approved projects or programs, the coordinator for special gifts looks at a variety of potential funding sources. The coordinator for special gifts works with individuals who contributed previously to RCA appeals and/or fund drives and works toward transferring the 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 1999 the coordinator for special gifts worked with varying entities of the RCA leadership in raising approximately $1 million in cash and pledges for the following programs and/or projects:

- Urban ministries gifts and pledges—$662,328.00
- $9.8 by '98 Fund Drive—$83,560.85
- 1999 special projects—$183,000
- GSC undesignated—$159,798.09
- Total gifts and pledges—$1,088,686.94

The coordinator for special gifts is currently serving as the director of the Urban Ministries Fund Drive. Through December 2000, 90 percent of his time will be devoted to the Urban Ministries Fund Drive, and the remaining 10 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 his time with special project funding.
The Office of Special Gifts is located at 8765 W. Higgins Road, Suite 410, Chicago, IL 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 in America 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 as 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 urban centers of the United States and Canada. Christ’s message of grace and redemption is alive in North America 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 guidance of hundreds of urban pastors and lay people 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.

**Partnership:** 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 in January 1999. Prior to that, many hours of planning and preparatory work went into structuring the campaign, recruiting steering committee members, and staffing the fund drive.

The Urban Ministries Steering Committee is comprised of lay people across the denomination. The Rev. Dr. Edwin G. Mulder, general secretary emeritus, is serving as the chairperson of the fund drive. Other steering committee members are: Warren (“Bud”) Moww from Visalia, California; Oliver Patterson from Queens Village, New York; James Riekse from Grand Rapids, Michigan; Donald Triezenberg from Palos Park, Illinois; Carol Wagner from Palos Heights, Illinois; and William Waldorf from Brookville, New York.

Staff members working in conjunction with the steering committee in 2000 are:

1) Larryl Humme, coordinator for special gifts, who is serving as the 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 90 percent of his time working on the Urban Ministries Fund Drive with emphasis on individual support.

2) Richard Rienstra, director of development for urban ministries, who is sharing his time between fundraising for local urban ministries projects and preparing congregational proposals for the Urban Ministries Fund Drive. He is working out of an office located at 112 E. Grand Ave., Muskegon, MI 49442.
3) John Nordstrom of Holland, Michigan, who is serving as a consultant to the director of the Urban Ministries Fund Drive.

The Urban Ministries Fund Drive’s goal is to raise $5 million. Of this, $2.5 million will be raised to fund the four program areas, and the other $2.5 million will provide seed money to begin an endowment fund that will support urban ministry into the future.

This fund drive is being conducted somewhat differently than previous RCA fund drives. The target audience for this fund drive will be individual donors who have the capability of making a significant contribution as well as having an interest in urban ministries. Additionally, about fifty congregations across the denomination will be asked to participate significantly in the fundraising program. These are congregations that have an interest in urban ministry and in programs designed for urban ministry.

The urban ministry fundraising efforts are just now beginning to peak. As of January 1, 2000, a total of $1.5 million had been pledged toward the goal of $5 million. It is anticipated that all fundraising efforts, individual as well as congregational, will conclude by December 31, 2000.

People interested in assisting the staff in this important endeavor are asked to call Larryl Humme at (800) 228-3813 for more information.

Direct Mail

The direct mail program was implemented in response to the 1992 action of General Synod to “strengthen its program of direct solicitation of contributions from individuals in its future denominational fundraising 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 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.

Five direct mail appeals were conducted in 1999. The editorial and graphics staff of Communication and Production Services, together with Mission Services staff, wrote and produced the 1999 direct mail appeals. The appeals were as follows:

- March: Eastern European missions
- September: Central American missions
- October: Our Mission Is One newsletter with appeal for general mission work
- November: Congregational Services
- December: Year-end appeal for general mission work

The program has been evaluated, and in 2000 the appeals will be spread out over the year rather than concentrated at the end of the year. The mission projects to be featured will be those that are likely to attract substantial interest from donors.

Financial Campaign Services
Through its Financial Campaign Services, the RCA Foundation assists 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.

Financial Campaign Services 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.

Five persons are providing campaign consulting services: Jane Richardson, Larryl Humme, Douglas Leonard, Milton Nieuwsma, and Harold Ritsema. Financial Campaign Services has provided capital campaign consultation to more than twenty-five congregations and agencies. During 1999 it worked with the following groups:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Consultant</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hope Church, Holland, Michigan</td>
<td>Antworth</td>
<td>$550,000</td>
<td>$604,324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old First Reformed Church, Brooklyn, New York</td>
<td>Antworth</td>
<td>$300,000</td>
<td>$115,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinnelon Reformed Church, Kinnelon, New Jersey</td>
<td>Antworth</td>
<td>$300,000</td>
<td>$200,000+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palm Beach Community Church, Palm Beach, Florida</td>
<td>Antworth</td>
<td>$1,500,000</td>
<td>$1,700,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clancy Street Ministries, Grand Rapids, Michigan</td>
<td>Antworth</td>
<td>$450,000</td>
<td>$500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holland Christian Home, North Haledon, New Jersey</td>
<td>Antworth</td>
<td>$1,000,000</td>
<td>$750,000+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pitcher Hill Reformed Church, North Syracuse, New York</td>
<td>Antworth</td>
<td>$200,000</td>
<td>No calls yet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preakness Reformed Church, Wayne, New Jersey</td>
<td>Antworth, Richardson</td>
<td>$550,000</td>
<td>advance gifts: $294,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hope Community Church, Gilbert, Arizona</td>
<td>Humme</td>
<td>$650,000</td>
<td>advance gifts: $200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reformed Church of Locust Valley, New York</td>
<td>Leonard</td>
<td></td>
<td>feasibility study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GSC Urban Ministry</td>
<td>Humme, staff</td>
<td>$5,000,000</td>
<td>ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mennonite Churches</td>
<td>Antworth, Nieuwsma</td>
<td></td>
<td>strategic planning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Financial Campaign Services charges an on-site consulting fee for services. The fee is $3,000 for congregations up to two hundred members, plus travel expenses and related campaign costs. For churches with more than two hundred 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.

The Foundation in the Future

As it looks to the future, the RCA Foundation faces the challenge of refocusing its efforts to best support the mission and ministry of the RCA. Discussions among the board and staff in consultation with others in the RCA familiar with fundraising have convinced the foundation that its purpose at this point must be centered on cultivating a community of donors whose gifts can undergird the denomination’s witness and service. Experts say that an enormous
FINANCIAL SUPPORT

This transfer of wealth could be an enormous positive impact on the RCA’s resources for supporting the future directions of ministry and outreach essential to its faithfulness and growth. Beyond any doubt, the Reformed Church faces a tremendous opportunity for encouraging special gifts for particular needs as well as encouraging lifetime gifts through planned giving from RCA members committed to the denomination’s future mission.

This means that various past efforts of the RCA Foundation will be given a lower priority or transferred to other places. Stewardship education, financial campaign services, and direct mail solicitation are examples. While the foundation has been conducting a variety of services useful to congregations and other groups, its future success requires clarity about its defining purpose and goal. Many say they do not give because they have never been asked. The RCA Foundation faces the challenge of learning how to encourage potential donors to respond to God’s graceful generosity with generous giving that will equip the Reformed Church in America to follow Christ in mission in a lost and broken world so loved by God.

From the Report of the Board of Directors

BUDGET

PROPOSED 2001 GENERAL SYNOD OPERATIONAL (ASSESSMENT) BUDGET

The “Mission Is One” Model

In October 1999, the General Synod Council voted “to endorse the ‘Mission Is One’ model; and further, to ask staff to proceed with developing the 2001 budget with this concept as the framework” (GSC 99-90). The basic principles of the new model are as follows:

1. Infrastructure costs will be covered by revenue from assessments.

2. Program costs will be covered by contributions.

3. Basic service charges will be charged only to outside “service” agencies (e.g. BOP, BEF, and the Church Herald).

4. A percentage of the overall Mission Services budget will be used to create a “Mission Is One” fund to support the work of both Evangelism and Church Development Services and Congregational Services and to stimulate new initiatives related to the twelve Priorities.

The attached General Synod assessment budget has been prepared with this model as the framework. In October, the 2001 contribution budget will be presented as the
other piece of this model. Of course, no transition is simple. Consequently, the proposed budget adheres, as far as possible, to the principles of the Mission Is One model with some minor exceptions.

The Budgeting Process

The attached assessment budget represents staff’s best effort at squeezing growing infrastructure costs into a relatively flat assessment budget. The initial budget indicated that a 13 percent increase in assessments would be required to cover “the real cost of doing business” as we are doing it today.

Why so great an increase in costs? 1) This is the first time that the assessment budget includes infrastructure costs and only infrastructure costs. The costs of infrastructure were greater than the assessment budget to begin with. 2) The Information Systems area is in need of an additional programmer (classification IIIB) to accommodate the critical need for additional systems support to the RCA. 3) Costs such as the following increase at a higher rate than inflation: staffing costs, travel expenses, and the costs of printing (utilized heavily by General Synod and GSC).

It was not possible to balance the budget by adjusting individual line items. Changes in the way business is done is the only way that the volume of reductions needed could be achieved. Thus, via conference calls and a two-day Leadership Advisory Team meeting, actions were taken to reduce the projected budget by some $500,000. Proposed changes are shown in the table that follows.

The Resulting Budget

The resultant budget represents a significant refocusing of the administrative infrastructure of the RCA in order to implement the Statement of Mission and Vision. Specifically, the proposed budget:

1. Calls for the elimination of some staff positions.

2. Eliminates some print and video resources for General Synod and requires greater efficiencies in the way meetings are done.

3. Requires greater efficiencies in Finance Services via introducing new systems and upgrading existing ones.

4. Provides the personnel required to be well-equipped technologically.

5. Provides the capacity for a unified communication strategy.

6. Provides for continuing development of fund-raising capacities through the work of the RCA Foundation.

7. Makes possible a pool of approximately $100,000 in the Mission Is One fund for new initiatives related to the twelve Priorities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTION</th>
<th>SAVINGS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Efficiencies in various meetings and related print and video materials</td>
<td>$110,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff cost reduction in PPA</td>
<td>$70,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff cost reduction in FSU</td>
<td>$50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduction of print resources produced by CAPS</td>
<td>$25,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduction in <em>Church Herald</em> budget</td>
<td>$50,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Block grants to units for salary increases $50,000

Subtotal of cost reductions $355,000

Basic service charges to be paid by RCWM $20,000
Additional Basic service charges to be paid by BOP for work of PPA $37,000
Additional investment income to be included in assessment budget in order to preserve MIO funding $28,000
Additional investment income due to staff cost reduction in EVCD/CSU $75,000

Subtotal of additional revenue 160,000

Total budget adjustment $515,000

RCA 2001 ASSESSMENT BUDGET SUMMARY

Assessment Summary

Confessing Members, last year 183,252

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Per-Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001 GSC Assessment</td>
<td>4,708,140</td>
<td>$25.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000 GSC Assessment</td>
<td>4,513,660</td>
<td>$24.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment change</td>
<td></td>
<td>$1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Assessment Change</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Per-Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001 BOP &amp; Theol. Ed. Assessment</td>
<td>970,878</td>
<td>$5.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000 BOP &amp; Theol. Ed. Assessment</td>
<td>916,260</td>
<td>$5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Change</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Per-Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001 Total Assessment</td>
<td>5,679,018</td>
<td>$31.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000 Total Assessment</td>
<td>5,429,920</td>
<td>$29.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Change</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2000 “Y2K” Assessment 154,500 $0.84

2001 Total Assessment 5,679,018 $31.14

2000 Total Assessment with Y2K 5,584,420 $30.47
Assessment Change 94,598 $0.67
Percent Change 2.2%

Assessment Amount
Each percent change in assessment requires a $54,300 change in amount of Assessment.
### GENERAL SYNOD/JUNE 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>1999 Actual</th>
<th>2000 Budget</th>
<th>2001 Budget</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CAPS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic Service Charge</td>
<td>340,000</td>
<td>278,000</td>
<td>24,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>35,750</td>
<td>38,000</td>
<td>271,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2,633,052</td>
<td>2,609,000</td>
<td>2,826,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3,008,802</td>
<td>2,925,000</td>
<td>3,122,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CH</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic Service Charge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>941,000</td>
<td>941,000</td>
<td>907,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>145,887</td>
<td>158,000</td>
<td>158,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,086,887</td>
<td>1,099,000</td>
<td>1,066,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FND</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic Service Charge</td>
<td>220,588</td>
<td>160,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>158,524</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>415,720</td>
<td>536,500</td>
<td>438,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>636,308</td>
<td>696,500</td>
<td>597,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FSU</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic Service Charge</td>
<td>1,055,192</td>
<td>1,186,895</td>
<td>435,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>711,524</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>123,402</td>
<td>55,000</td>
<td>70,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,178,594</td>
<td>1,241,895</td>
<td>1,216,524</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MAPS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic Service Charge</td>
<td>9,000</td>
<td>111,850</td>
<td>111,669</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>317,019</td>
<td>309,864</td>
<td>334,062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>101,412</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>427,431</td>
<td>436,714</td>
<td>445,731</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PPA</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic Service Charge</td>
<td>300,016</td>
<td>217,833</td>
<td>191,856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>2,188,587</td>
<td>2,193,363</td>
<td>2,462,754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>115,286</td>
<td>252,283</td>
<td>157,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2,603,889</td>
<td>2,663,479</td>
<td>2,811,610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BOP</strong> Assessment ($1.50 per member each year)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment for theological education</td>
<td>641,000</td>
<td>641,382</td>
<td>696,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>918,294</td>
<td>916,260</td>
<td>970,878</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic Service Charge</td>
<td>1,924,857 *</td>
<td>1,969,023 *</td>
<td>762,525 †</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3,534,759</td>
<td>3,625,783</td>
<td>3,651,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment ‡</td>
<td>3,482,356 ‡</td>
<td>3,482,227 ‡</td>
<td>4,846,140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less Unallocated Other Reductions</td>
<td>138,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted Assessment</td>
<td>3,482,356</td>
<td>3,482,227</td>
<td>4,708,140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Revenue</td>
<td>8,941,972</td>
<td>9,077,033</td>
<td>9,121,865</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Total Basic Service Charges by all areas to all areas.
† Total Basic Service Charges by support areas to non-GSC Agencies.
‡ This line is the total of assessment amounts shown in the table above, however in 1999 and the 2000 budget other areas were included in the assessment budget.

**PROPOSED 2001
GENERAL SYNOD OPERATIONAL ASSESSMENT**
## BUDGET

### Revenue Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CAPS</th>
<th>CH</th>
<th>FND</th>
<th>FSU</th>
<th>MAPS</th>
<th>PPA</th>
<th>Proposed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Investment Income</td>
<td>35,000</td>
<td></td>
<td>65,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>157,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>257,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operating Income</td>
<td>2,791,800</td>
<td>158,500</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2,950,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>70,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>70,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributions</td>
<td>80,100</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management fees</td>
<td>35,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CGA disbursement fees</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCABEF grant</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOP pre-retirement workshops</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cap Camp - Urban Min</td>
<td>124,400</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>124,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cap Camp - Other</td>
<td>65,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital campaign adm. Income</td>
<td>6,900</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct mail</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Other Revenue</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,826,800</strong></td>
<td><strong>158,500</strong></td>
<td><strong>438,900</strong></td>
<td><strong>70,000</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>157,000</strong></td>
<td><strong>3,651,200</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Unit Expenses

#### Staffing Costs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CAPS</th>
<th>CH</th>
<th>FND</th>
<th>FSU</th>
<th>MAPS</th>
<th>PPA</th>
<th>Proposed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wages &amp; Salaries</td>
<td>916,000</td>
<td>219,000</td>
<td>321,300</td>
<td>713,000</td>
<td>719,281</td>
<td>1,258,975</td>
<td>3,627,565</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contract Staff</td>
<td>67,500</td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>77,500</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fringe Benefits</td>
<td>278,500</td>
<td>53,500</td>
<td>73,500</td>
<td>200,775</td>
<td>47,650</td>
<td>281,365</td>
<td>935,290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff Development</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>8,500</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>10,500</td>
<td>31,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Staff Costs</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,199,500</strong></td>
<td><strong>275,500</strong></td>
<td><strong>463,800</strong></td>
<td><strong>922,284</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,560,840</strong></td>
<td><strong>4,671,855</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Total Staff Travel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CAPS</th>
<th>CH</th>
<th>FND</th>
<th>FSU</th>
<th>MAPS</th>
<th>PPA</th>
<th>Proposed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rent</td>
<td>133,000</td>
<td>51,000</td>
<td>19,000</td>
<td>76,000</td>
<td>15,300</td>
<td>127,750</td>
<td>422,050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office Maintenance</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td></td>
<td>500</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>6,400</td>
<td>27,900</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office Supplies</td>
<td>13,500</td>
<td>6,500</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>6,150</td>
<td>1,800</td>
<td>31,620</td>
<td>61,070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone</td>
<td>17,500</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>7,000</td>
<td>13,600</td>
<td>8,000</td>
<td>47,600</td>
<td>97,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printing</td>
<td>6,500</td>
<td>539,500</td>
<td>3,500</td>
<td>6,500</td>
<td>8,000</td>
<td>16,300</td>
<td>580,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postage</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>178,500</td>
<td>5,500</td>
<td>7,200</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>14,900</td>
<td>216,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depreciation</td>
<td>63,000</td>
<td></td>
<td>23,990</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>24,600</td>
<td>116,590</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office Equipment &amp; Repair</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td></td>
<td>9,750</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>5,900</td>
<td>18,050</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contingency</td>
<td>11,000</td>
<td></td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>6,250</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>4,900</td>
<td>26,150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital Replacement/</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td></td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>11,000</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>29,500</td>
<td>69,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Cap</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>40,000</td>
<td>40,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardware Maint</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Software Maint</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Office Costs</strong></td>
<td><strong>288,500</strong></td>
<td><strong>779,500</strong></td>
<td><strong>46,000</strong></td>
<td><strong>160,940</strong></td>
<td><strong>51,000</strong></td>
<td><strong>350,470</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,676,410</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Other Operating Expenses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Audit</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>58,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audit Consulting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td></td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>35,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>40,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lockbox / Bank Fees</td>
<td>38,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>38,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insurance</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>27,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>33,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCA Resource Publication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1,300</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td></td>
<td>15,500</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Support</td>
<td>28,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>28,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastoral Visitation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td></td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaplains Conference</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuing Education CPE</td>
<td>3,700</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interim Ministry Training</td>
<td>2,700</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiring Costs</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastoral Services</td>
<td></td>
<td>25,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>25,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seminary Seminar</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dues Professional Associations</td>
<td>2,400</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in Ministry Events</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry Development Council</td>
<td>600</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prison Ministry Travel</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prison Ministry Contract</td>
<td>5,400</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration Assistance</td>
<td>6,500</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parish CPE</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MFCA</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operating Expenses</td>
<td>1,516,100</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1,516,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overdraft payback</td>
<td>30,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCA Today Insert</td>
<td>30,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCA Today Video</td>
<td>10,200</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Servant Leader</td>
<td>8,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Report</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board Meeting Expenses</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundation Administration</td>
<td>6,900</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seminars/Workshops</td>
<td>500</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Church Grants</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Software maint</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stewardship Materials</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Van Bunschooten Society</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Other Operating Expenses</strong></td>
<td>1,594,300</td>
<td>51,000</td>
<td>41,900</td>
<td>161,300</td>
<td>120,800</td>
<td>1,969,300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### General Synod Meeting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meeting</td>
<td>225,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>225,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiatives</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printing &amp; Postage</td>
<td></td>
<td>160,000</td>
<td>160,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>160,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insurance</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G/S Video</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff Meetings</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total General Synod</strong></td>
<td>422,500</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>422,500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Proposed Total 2001
## Financial Support

### General Synod Council Meetings
- **129,000**

### Commissions:
- **Christian Action**: 8,000
- **Christian Unity**: 9,000
- **Christian Worship**: 9,000
- **Nominations**: 4,000
- **History**: 4,500
- **Judicial Business**: 3,500
- **Church Order**: 6,500
- **Theology**: 10,000
- **Race and Ethnicity**: 8,000
- **Women**: 7,500

### Ethnic Scholarships
- **12,000**

### African-American Council
- **23,000**

### S. Africa/RCA Partner Coord Team
- **1,500**

### Hispanic Council
- **24,000**

### PAAM Committee Expenses
- **23,000**

### American Indian Council
- **15,000**

### Classes Stated Clerks Meeting
- **9,500**

### Classes Training Racial/Ethnic Min
- **2,500**

### Race Ethnicity Training
- **9,000**

### Assessment Contingency
- **10,000**

### Program Contingency
- **5,000**

### Total Committees
- **333,500**

### Publications

#### Book of Church Order
- **10,600**

#### BCO Translations
- **4,500**

#### Miscellaneous Reprints
- **8,000**

### Total Publications
- **23,100**

### Ecumenical

#### NCC
- **22,000**

#### NCC Governing Board
- **5,500**

#### Lutheran Reformed Joint Worship Comm.
- **1,500**

#### Christian Reformed Church
- **500**

#### Travel of Ecumenical Appointees
- **16,000**

#### Interpretive Speaking
- **4,000**

#### WCC Assembly
- **32,000**

#### Ecumenical Contingency
- **4,000**

#### World Alliance of Reformed Churches
- **16,000**

#### Canada Council of Churches
- **500**

### Total Ecumenical
- **102,000**

### Proposed Total 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CAPS</th>
<th>CH</th>
<th>FND</th>
<th>FSU</th>
<th>MAPS</th>
<th>PPA</th>
<th>Total 2001</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>397</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Unit Income Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basic Service Charges Assigned</td>
<td>24,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unassigned RCWM Basic Service Charges</td>
<td>20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Investment Income</td>
<td>68,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Revenue (from Page 1)</td>
<td>2,826,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adjusted Unit Revenues</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,850,800</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Unit Expense Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Unit Expenses (from Above)</td>
<td>3,122,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget Reduction as Proposed by LAT</td>
<td>(25,000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduction - Salary Block Grant</td>
<td>(50,000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adjusted Unit Expenses</strong></td>
<td><strong>3,122,300</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Required Assessment</td>
<td>271,500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### General Synod Council Finance Services Committee

The moderator of the General Synod Council Finance Services Committee, who is also a member of the Committee of Reference, presented the recommendation of the Board of Directors.

The General Synod had taken action that resulted in the following proposed increases in the assessment budget for General Synod Operations:
1. Membership in the National Association of Evangelicals .................................................................................................... $10,940

2. Production of the paper, “The Crucified One Is Lord: Confessing the Uniqueness of Christ in a Pluralist Society” in a manner suitable for study .................................................................................................... $3,500

3. Production, duplication, and packaging of a brief video of Mission 2000 to accompany the Pentecost Letter mailing to the RCA congregations, classes, regional synods, ecumenical partners, and mission partners ........................................................................................................ $6,500

Total proposed additions ........................................................................................................ $20,940

This amount is offset by $10,000 already in the proposed assessment budget for “General Synod Initiatives.” The revised total proposed change in the assessment budget for operations is $10,940 if approved by synod. This would increase the proposed assessment amount by $.06 per member.

With these revisions the 2001 per-member assessment amount represents an increase of 2.4 percent over the previous year, or 5.3 percent if the special 1999 assessment for computer upgrades and year 2000 reprogramming is not considered.

The revised amounts are reflected in R-84, R-85, and R-86.1

**R-84**

To approve the 2001 General Synod Operational Budget of $4,719,080; and further,

- to set the 2001 per-confessing-member assessment for General Synod Operational Budget at $25.88. (ADOPTED)

(The 2000 General Synod Operational Budget assessment is $24.63 per confessing member.)

**2001 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).

- $3.82 to provide unified funding for the administration of theological education ($3.50 in 2000).

$5.32 TOTAL

**R-85**

To fix the 2001 budget for other General Synod assessments (sufficient retirement income and theological education administration) at $5.32 per confessing member. (ADOPTED)

(The 2000 General Synod assessment amount for the above two items per confessing member is $5.00.)

**Total 2001 General Synod Assessments**
The preliminary total assessment for General Synod concerns in 2001 is $31.20 ($25.88 plus $5.32). This is an approximate increase of 5.3 percent over the 2000 total of $29.63 ($24.63 plus $5.00) per confessing member.

R-86
To fix the total General Synod assessment budget at $31.20 per confessing member. (ADOPTED)

R-87
To refer recommendations 83 through 85 to the Advisory Committee on Financial Support for report back to this General Synod. (ADOPTED)

Overtures

Capping General Synod Assessments

1. The Classis of California overtures the 2000 General Synod of the Reformed Church in America to instruct the General Synod Council to cap each future annual General Synod total assessment at an amount per member equal to the prior year plus an increase for inflation. This increase inflation percentage is that published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics as the CPI (consumer price index) for all urban consumers (CPI-U). Changes to this formula would require a two-thirds majority vote from the General Synod voting members.

Reasons:

1. To improve on the “Cap on 1999 General Synod assessments” overture (R-4) approved at the 1996 General Synod. Improvements are as follows:
   a. Identify a specific rather than a general inflation index.
   b. To have the cap apply to all future years as originally intended by the 1996 Financial Support Committee.

2. To discontinue the practice that the ever-decreasing RCA membership role absorbs the loss of funding from the last membership.

3. Using the Classis of California as an example, the growth in assessments over the last six years has been $2.27 per member and General Synod assessments have increased by $5.91. The regional synod has experienced no increase. The classis is focusing on increasing new members through its New Vision Fund program, which could be an increase in assessment funding budgets. Increasing membership is a preferred source of funds for increased assessments.

4. To allow the majority of the voting members to make changes at General Synod should the formula produce undesirable major fluctuations or should there be programs that the body determines must be funded, much like the Y2K project.

The advisory committee recommended:
R-88
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. Under the new funding provisions of the General Synod Council, program and mission are funded by church contributions while administrative infrastructure is funded by assessment. A cap on assessments could deny the program and missions of the church the additional administrative support needed for dynamic growth and mission.

2. For the past thirty years the largest expenditures in real dollars by far have been in the local congregations. Funding for General Synod causes has increased at a far lesser rate. To place a spending cap on one level of the church and not on others is to deny our essential unity as the body of Christ.

3. The Spirit has called this General Synod to an experience of Pentecostal vision. Funding mechanisms that rely on caps and ceilings rather than needs and opportunities would hamper the church in following the leading of the Spirit.

History of Pension Fund

2. The Classis of Wisconsin overtures the General Synod to request the Board of Pensions to declare any loans, grants, or gifts of any of its pension fund money to the RCA; any of its boards, agencies, commissions, funds, and/or committees; any RCA or non-RCA congregation; any denomination or parachurch organization; or any organization or individual either connected with or not connected with the RCA; and if ever so loaned, etc., to give a full history of such transactions with the amount; interest rate, if any; earnings; and completion of such transactions.

Reason: The Pension Fund of the RCA has been in existence for many years and has accumulated a significant amount of money for distribution to retired ministers, missionaries, RCA staff, and other qualified persons.

The advisory committee recommended:

R-89
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The only grants given by the Board of Pensions are assistance grants to retired ministers or RCA employees in special need, and these grants are pastoral and confidential in nature.

Investigate Board of Pensions Asset Management

3. The Classis of Rockland-Westchester overtures General Synod to direct its Board of Pensions to initiate without delay an in-depth investigation by an independent commission into past asset management practices and report the results to General Synod in 2001.

Reasons:

1. A Reformed Church Annuity Fund (RCAF) portfolio review, covering a period of two months, by the custodial manager of RCAF appointed in the spring of 1999, brought to light investment practices in the Reformed Church Annuity Fund management that were irregular and inappropriate. Rates of turnover in portfolio holdings were unusually high, and commissions were well above institutional rates. While this was reported
to the Board of Pensions (BOP), their records do not show that further follow-up was attempted or reported.

2. An investigation is needed to bring out more facts. It is the character of a pension plan to have the trust of plan members and congregations over a very long period of time. Data of a period of much more than a mere two months are needed to refute or defend the integrity of a major RCA institution.

3. An independent investigation will affirm that the BOP is performing, and will continue to perform, its essential duty of oversight by acknowledging ultimate asset management responsibility and accountability, whatever it takes.

4. The church of Jesus Christ has a social responsibility to make sure that brokers and investment managers are held accountable to the highest standards. Since questions have surfaced, the church needs to ensure that past unrighteousness, if any, is set aright, and that any provider or manager will be admonished and not be allowed to continue such practices.

The advisory committee recommended

R-90
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The cost-effectiveness of an in-depth investigation does not appear warranted, given the information already presented by the Board of Pensions regarding its informal investigation.

Investment Options

4. The Classis of Rockland-Westchester overtures General Synod to instruct the Board of Pensions to make available investment options beyond the five asset allocations in only two risk portfolios as currently offered.

Reasons:

1. The current plan, managed by the Bank of New York, has only two components: a bond fund and a common stock fund that is managed for growth. A more diversified strategy is necessary and prudent for a long-term approach.

2. The common stock part of the portfolio has diversification, but all indications are that it is managed for rather aggressive growth. Plan members may prefer options of other management strategies on the equity side of the Reformed Church Annuity Fund (RCAF) portfolio without being forced to choose the bond fund. Five or six additional investment options with different risk profiles could be provided, as do other church pension plans.

3. The RCAF has a long history of focusing on only one or two strategies. For a while it concentrated on the so-called “nifty-fifty” growth stocks of the early seventies, to be followed by large scale investments in guaranteed investment contracts offered by insurance companies, which in turn was followed by an all bonds strategy. Even when managing for safety, or optimal cash return, the overall strategy of a pension fund needs to be widely diversified, and not be dangerously exposed. As we have seen, to have mostly one main strategy is the riskiest position of all (e.g., staking virtually all hopes on bonds in the face of a five-year run-up in stocks). RCAF patterns of investing have in recent years led to very substantial losses relative to plans implemented by others.
The Board of Pensions needs to do its utmost to ensure that a wide diversification is not only suggested, but implemented in the portfolios.

The advisory committee recommended:

**R-91**
To instruct the Board of Pensions to make available investment options beyond the five asset allocations in only two risk portfolios as currently offered. (ADOPTED)

Reason: To diversify the investment options available to plan participants.

**Submit New Constitution and Rules of the Board of Pensions**

5. The Classis of Rockland-Westchester overtures General Synod to instruct the Board of Pensions to submit a new Constitution and Rules of the Board of Pensions in order to enable Reformed Church Annuity Fund participants to select adequate investment options with risk profiles of their own choosing, and to provide Reformed Church Annuity Fund participants with more selections of payout options for retirement and tax planning; and further,

...to make provisions to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of the members on the board and its subcommittees, as well as non-voting members and staff.

Reasons:

1. To allow the Board of Pensions (BOP) to change investment strategies and options, significant changes are needed for legal and regulatory reasons.

2. General Synod may amend the Constitution and Rules directly, after due process (including a three-months review by the BOP). However, the classis much prefers that the BOP itself present a new Constitution and Rules for approval by General Synod (see current Constitution and Rules of the Board of Pensions, Article II, Section 2.11 and 2.12).

3. Apparently neither the New York State Insurance Board nor the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 (ERISA) govern the Reformed Church Annuity Fund (RCAF) plan. Clear options and guarantees for payout need to be provided, allowing for the BOP’s broad charge to maintain a “covenant of care” as well as allowing flexibility for the widely diverging tax situations of participants at retirement time.

4. The risk profile of any investment must be clearly understood, either through effective communication with passive plan members, or by providing a broad array of risk categories to actively-managing plan members so they have and make informed choices.

5. In order to avoid past dysfunctionality, it is necessary to determine and make public precise guidelines for direction and investments of all the holdings and cost aspects of the portfolio of the RCAF. Minutes, not only of the plenary BOP meetings but also of its various subcommittees, will facilitate a much greater transparency and accountability of the investments.

6. Currently, no guidelines for policy or process are provided to evaluate or respond to the effectiveness of BOP members.

The advisory committee recommended:

**R-92**
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The Advisory Committee has recommended a new *Constitution and Rules of the Board of Benefits Services* that provides for the components of this overture to be addressed now and in future years.

*Follow-Up Investigation into Board of Pensions Asset Management*

6. The Regional Synod of New York overtures General Synod to direct its Board of Pensions to initiate without delay a follow-up investigation into asset management practices during the year 1998, and to report the results to General Synod of 2001.

Reasons:

1. The overture alleges improper management practices and excessive fee charges based on a detailed survey of two months of transactions done by the Bank of New York for the Board of Pensions (BOP). We are of the opinion that the management practices were not in compliance with industry standards and that the fees charged were unreasonable as indicated by the Bank of New York.

2. Conducting the study called for would cost nothing if done by task volunteers. This is one way the denomination could make better use of the gifts of qualified laity. A Bank of New York employee completed the Bank of New York report at home, over a weekend, after some data processing by her department. Any accountant familiar with brokerage statements of bond trading and holdings could accomplish in a few days a similar task surveying a one-year period.

3. Based on our opinion in paragraph 1, there is a reasonable expectation that funds could be recovered from the brokerage firms.

4. Litigation, if initiated at all, would be the church suing the brokers, and not be contrary to Scripture. If the brokers indeed churned (overtraded) in church pension accounts, they violated SEC rules and are breaking the law, even if such orders were initiated by an account manager or client. Reputable brokerage firms do not want such brokers working for them as they are probably cheating other clients as well.

5. The plan participants, and the BOP itself, were adversely affected during the period covered by the Bank of New York report, as there were regularly higher than necessary transaction expenses.

6. The BOP has initiated substantive changes in the RCA retirement plan documents. It also announced changes in its investment procedures that may prevent the possibility of poor management practices. However, the BOP failed to examine its past poor management practices in any depth. To date, the BOP still has not publicized the method it used to oversee transactions of account managers and has not explained why it could not identify poor management practices. Indeed, it has not publicized its current practices either.

kThe advisory committee recommended:

R-93
FINANCIAL SUPPORT

To direct the Board of Pensions to initiate without delay a follow-up investigation into asset management practices during the year 1998, and to report the results to General Synod of 2001. (ADOPTED)

Reason: To put to rest concerns about the investment management practices of the Board of Pensions.

Follow-Up on Investment Options

7. The Regional Synod of New York overtures General Synod to instruct the Board of Pensions to make available by 2001 investment options beyond the five asset allocations in only two risk portfolios as currently offered.

Reasons:

1. The BOP has recently instituted five so-called investment options that have not been operative for a long enough period of time to be properly evaluated. However, these are not investment options, but various weightings of bonds versus a stock portfolio of aggressive growth stocks with above average volatility. This is not truly a diversified portfolio. Alternative investment groups such as industrials, financials, transportation, real estate, international investments or S&P 500 stocks are currently not options that a participant can choose.

2. The BOP is too slow in adding investment options.

3. Changes in investment options should only be made after thorough study and analysis, not by mandate from the General Synod, but by persons who are investment professionals. Several of the larger fund companies offer many single purpose funds such as the alternative investment groups listed in paragraph 1 above. Holders are able to make choices among such options to create a balanced portfolio at no additional cost. Currently, the RCA plan participants are in a specialized portfolio of volatile growth stocks.

kThe advisory committee recommended:

R-94
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. The issues have been addressed in overture 4.

2. The committee does not wish to specify a date by which additional investment options must be implemented because it would hinder the board’s flexibility in managing the fund assets.

Follow-Up on Submit New Constitution and Rules of the Board of Pensions

8. The Regional Synod of New York overtures General Synod to instruct the Board of Pensions to submit a new Constitution and Rules of the Board of Pensions in order to enable participants to select adequate investment options with risk profiles of their own choosing and to provide Reformed Church Annuity Fund participants with more selections of payout options for retirement and tax planning; and further,
to make provisions to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of the members on the board and its subcommittees, as well as nonvoting members and staff.

Reason: The BOP has adopted a proposal for a new Constitution and Rules of the Board of Pensions. It does not adequately deal with the concerns raised in the overture. The BOP’s primary responsibility should be selecting investment managers and closely monitoring stock and bond transactions, as well as performance. Outside performance consultants may be necessary if the BOP lacks this talent in its ranks. The covenant and mission of care for retirees with special financial needs should be separate from the pension plan. Separate funds should be raised from the churches for this need. The two funds should not be commingled. One is devoted to long-term investment management. The other is a pay-as-you-go fund for individual financial needs as they arise. Both are essential, but they should be separate.

kThe advisory committee recommended:

R-95
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The Advisory Committee has recommended a new Constitution and Rules of the Board of Benefits Services that provides for the components of this overture to be addressed now and in future years.
REPORTS ON CHURCH ORDER

Report of the Commission on Church Order

The Commission on Church Order met twice since the last meeting of the General Synod: first on September 23 and 24, 1999, and again on February 10 and 11, 2000, near Chicago Illinois.

SUSPENSION PENDING COMPLAINT

In response to an inquiry, the Commission considered the proper procedure for requesting the suspension of an action of a judicatory or assembly when a complaint has been filed, and in particular with whom such a request should be filed. After consideration, the following recommendation was approved by the commission for inclusion in its report to the 2000 General Synod:

R-96
To adopt the following revision of the Book of Church Order, Chapter 2, Part II, Article 1, Section 4, for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined):

Section 4. Neither notice of intent to complain nor the complaint itself shall have the effect of suspending the action against which the complaint is made, unless within thirty days one-third of the members of the assembly complained against who were present when the action was taken file with the clerk of the judicatory in which the complaint is filed a request for such suspension until a decision is made in the higher judicatory. The clerk, upon receipt of the request for suspension shall immediately notify, in writing, the clerk of the assembly complained against, and shall request the clerk of the assembly to certify a list of those members of the assembly present when the action complained against was taken. (ADOPTED)

Reason: Section 4 as presently written does not provide guidance as to with whom the request for suspension is to be filed. The proposed amendment clarifies this and also provides that the clerk of the judicatory provide notice to the lower body, a matter of fundamental fairness.

ADMONITION AND REBUKE

In response to an inquiry by the Classis of South Grand Rapids, the commission was asked to clarify the sections of the Book of Church Order (BCO) which define those instances when an assembly may impose discipline, and which types of discipline may be imposed only by a judicatory. The commission proposes the following to the 2000 General Synod:

R-97
To adopt the following revision of the Book of Church Order, Chapter 2, Part I, Article 1, Section 2, for recommendation to the classes for approval (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 assembly or 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. (ADOPTED)

R-98
To adopt the following revision of the Book of Church Order, Chapter
2, Part I, Article 2, Section 2 and Section 3, for recommendation to
the classes for approval (deletions are stricken out; additions are
underlined):

Section 2. Offenses which are known at most to a very few
persons shall be dealt with first in the manner indicated by the
Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 18: 15-17. If this procedure fails,
the matter shall be presented to the judicatory body to which
the offender is amenable.

Section 3. Notorious and scandalous offenses require immediate
action by the responsible judicatory body. (ADOPTED)

Revision of endnote

Following approval of the preceding recommendation by the General Synod and the classes,
the commission suggests the following revisions to the Book of Church Order Endnotes (p.
84). As the commission believes that endnotes are not constitutional (see section 9 of this
report) the amendment of the endnote does not require approval of the classes (deletions are
stricken out; additions are underlined):

1Article 1 provides a definition of “discipline.” The authority exercised by any assembly
or judicatory is given only by God. The judicatory body in the exercise of this authority
is responsible to the accuser, the accused, the church, and Jesus Christ.

The exercise of discipline may begin informally. The A body exercising
informal discipline may never have to resort to all of the procedures provided in Chapter 2
of the Book of Church Order. Many times an assembly addresses discipline issues through
its executive committee, pastoral relations committee, or judicial business committee.
However, if the assembly determines that the offense warrants only admonition or
rebuke, either may be imposed without implementing the provisions of Chapter 2, Part I
of the BCO as a formal judicatory. (A body is an “assembly” for non-judicial proceedings.
An “assembly” becomes a “judicatory” when it enters into judicial proceedings.) If,
however, the offense is such that a more serious form of discipline is appropriate, the
formal discipline process is to be invoked.

When a judicatory conducts a trial, Robert’s Rules of Order do not apply. The administrative
rules established in Chapter 2, Part I, Article 5, Section 11a and the other rules throughout
Chapter 2, Part I govern the proceedings.

The deletion of the words “and trial” from the last sentence of Section 2 allows for an
issue a disciplinary matter to be settled short of a formal trial.
Reasons:

1. “A governmental unit exercising its judicial powers is called a judicatory, and at all other times the governmental unit is known as an assembly” (BCO Preamble). Since admonition and rebuke may be exercised by an assembly in the ordinary course of its proceedings, the use of the word “judicatory” in Section 2 and Section 3 is too restrictive. Substituting the more inclusive term “body” removes any doubt that an assembly may exercise discipline (in the form of admonition and rebuke) when appropriate.

2. Proposed revisions make it clear that an assembly may determine whether an offense is sufficiently grave to warrant the imposition of discipline beyond admonition and rebuke. If discipline other than admonition or rebuke is warranted in the opinion of the assembly or judicatory, the body must invoke the judicial process. A judicatory may also admonish or rebuke.

CARE OF GENERAL SYNOD PROFESSORS OF THEOLOGY

In response to the substance of an overture from the Classis of California, the 1999 General Synod voted:

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 (MGS 1999, R-77, p. 269).

General Synod professors of theology are ministers of Word and sacrament who teach at RCA seminaries and have been elected by the General Synod to this office, commonly called the “fourth office.” When an RCA minister has completed three years as a full-time faculty member at one of the RCA seminaries, the board of trustees may nominate that person to the General Synod as a candidate for the Office of General Synod Professor of Theology. Such persons are to be ministers in good standing, sound in the faith, possessed of ability to teach, have the confidence of the churches, and have made recognizable contributions to the church (BCO, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 8). Not all seminary faculty members are or will become General Synod professors. Currently the full-time faculties at the two seminaries number twenty-four, nine of whom hold this office. When considering the Office of General Synod Professor of Theology, it is important to remember that this term does not apply to entire seminary faculties, but only to those who have been elected to this unique office.

The 1999 instruction to the commission is concerned with 1) the care for, 2) supervision of, and 3) accountability structures for General Synod professors of theology.

Care of General Synod Professors of Theology

The BCO states that General Synod professors of theology are “under the care of the General Synod and [are] subject to its government and discipline” (BCO, Chapter 2, Part I, Article 3, Section 4). It has been the RCA’s practice that such a minister “not serving as an installed pastor shall become a member of a local church” (see BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 13, Section 6). That this includes General Synod professors is further clarified in William Demarest’s commentary:

The question may arise whether the membership of the professor in his local church is affected. He has been ipso facto member of the church of which he was pastor. When without charge he would remain a member of it or ask admission to a church of his choice. When, without charge he has become a professor, this plainly still applies. He remains a member of the church he served or asks a letter of dismission naturally to
the church of the place of his new residence and professorial work. The General Synod has been substituted for the classis, not for the local church (Notes on the Constitution of the Reformed Church in America, 1928, 1950, p. 61).

This historical practice, assuming active participation in the life of a local congregation, including pastoral care for the professor as well as other family members, has much to commend it. It separates the sphere of care from that of supervision. As the General Synod itself only exists during its annual session, it carries out its responsibilities through its agents or other designees.

**Supervision of General Synod Professors of Theology**

The General Synod has delegated supervision of General Synod professors of theology to the boards of trustees of the RCA seminaries. “The office of professor of theology is… supervised through the board of trustees of an RCA seminary” (BCO, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 8, Section 1). The boards of trustees are the agents to whom the General Synod has given supervisory responsibility for both theological education and its General Synod professors of theology.

A professor of theology shall be amenable in matters of doctrine solely to the General Synod, but the professor will be subject to the same policies and procedures of employment as the other professors of the seminaries established by the seminary boards, except that a professor of theology shall have the right of appeal to the General Synod against dismissal from a position at one of the seminaries. (BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 8, Section 5).

Even though the General Synod retains original authority over matters pertaining to doctrine and polity as they relate to the seminaries, the seminary boards of trustees are responsible for carrying out the trust committed to them. Responsibility for the doctrinal integrity of their institutions and their faculties is among the several tasks given these boards (such intent is clear in the MGS 1989). In regard to General Synod professors of theology, this obligation may be even greater because theirs is the sole supervisory responsibility for this office. The General Synod may advise or instruct these agents in the fulfillment of their charge.

**Accountability for General Synod Professors of Theology**

General Synod professors of theology are accountable under the disciplinary procedures given in the BCO: “Professors of theology are under the care of the General Synod and are subject to its government and discipline (Chapter 2, Part I, Article 3, Section 4).

In the “Declaration for General Synod Professors of Theology” (Formulary 7), each professor declares: “I believe the gospel of the grace of God in Jesus Christ as revealed in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as expressed in the Standards of the Reformed Church in America. I accept the Scriptures as the only rule of faith and life. I accept the Standards as historic and faithful witnesses to the Word of God.”

Each professor of theology, in subscribing to the declaration, also declares: “I will submit myself to the counsel and admonition of the General Synod, always ready, with gentleness and reverence, to give an account of my understanding of the Christian faith.”

A bit of historical perspective often helps the understanding and application of polity. In commenting on an earlier version of the declaration, Demarest notes:

The formula which must be subscribed by the professor of theology is in substance
much the same as that signed by candidates and that signed by ministers . . . Sincerity, genuine conviction, is first of all in point. Definite and adequate maintaining of the church’s beliefs while maintaining the right and duty of intellectual independence and of individual and advancing interpretation of the revelation of God is essential. Substance and spirit are to be supremely stressed. Small objections or doubts in initial stage are hardly to be at once brought to the synod; to claim synod’s attention, they should be substantial, virtually confirmed, of a nature where silence as to them in the classroom or pulpit or elsewhere cannot be honestly maintained (p. 62).

The RCA stands in a tradition that has shown considerable reluctance to move to the bringing of doctrinal charges. There has been a high degree of commitment to remaining focused on the doctrines of the Standards while maintaining the “right and duty of intellectual independence and of individual and advancing interpretation of the revelation of God” as part of our ever-reforming heritage.

To illustrate the breadth with which the RCA’s tradition has held doctrinal matters, consider Demarest’s comments regarding classis examinations:

This is not to be understood as presenting a duty to search for attacks upon the standards, to initiate or foster controversies, to give large attention to points where churches differ or where the enemies of all religion may especially indulge their opinions. It does mean the assuming of an obligation to be clear, courageous, outspoken in the expressing and supporting of what our standards set forth when occasion arises, when the gospel, the substance of it, the welfare of the church which confesses it, demands such defense. It is always to be borne in mind that points in the standards are of varying importance, that ready and vigorous defense may be in order touching the more important, while less important points may be given the less attention. It may sometimes be a plain duty to distinguish between the central and the incidental, between the spirit which makes alive and the letter which kills (p. 26, italics added for emphasis).

And, further, “It cannot be insisted that there must be no latitude, after entering the ministry, in interpreting the Scriptures or in interpreting the standards” (p. 27).

These words are good counsel for the church in any time and remind us that the church has always had serious differences and has been held together by focusing on the center and accepting diversity on the edges.

If, after exhausting all other avenues, an accusation of an offense is brought, it is critical that the disciplinary process in Chapter 2 be employed, as this process is intended to safeguard all parties. It is through exercise of disciplinary procedure that all ecclesiastical offices are held accountable; it is the procedure by which the General Synod holds its professors accountable.

To assist the church in understanding how the disciplinary procedures apply in the case of General Synod professors of theology, the commission offers a description of the process:

Sec. 4. Discipline of a General Synod Professor of Theology

Professors of theology are under the care of the General Synod and are subject to its government and discipline. The General Synod shall have jurisdiction in the case of a charge against a professor of theology. If the charge is proven, the professor of theology may be suspended or deposed from the Office of General Synod Professor of Theology or the Office of Minister of Word and Sacrament or both, suspended from the privileges of membership in the church, and/or excommunicated (BCO, Chapter 2, Part I, Article 3).
PROCEDURE FOR BRINGING A CHARGE AGAINST A GENERAL SYNOD PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY

1. A charge is a written accusation of an offense filed with the clerk of the responsible judicatory, in this case, the general secretary of the Reformed Church in America. The requirements for the accusation would be the same as for any other charge (see BCO, Chapter 2, Part I, Article 4, Section 1).

2. A charge may be brought by an individual who is subject to the jurisdiction of the General Synod, which includes any member of the Reformed Church in America. If the charge is brought by an individual, as in any other case, such individual must come forward openly to support the charge throughout the proceedings. A committee designated by the General Synod may also bring a charge (BCO, Chapter 2, Part I, Article 4, Sections 2, 3).

3. If filed by an individual, the charge shall be referred to a committee appointed by the General Synod to determine whether there is sufficient merit to the charge to warrant further consideration. If the charge is filed by a committee designated by the judicatory, that same committee shall continue its proceedings to determine whether there is sufficient merit to the charge to warrant further consideration (BCO, Chapter 2, Part I, Article 4, Section 4).

4. The procedure for disposition of the charge would then proceed in the same manner as a charge brought at any other level. The committee would conduct its work confidentially to protect the parties and to preserve the impartiality of the General Synod should the charge move forward. If the charge is not resolved, and the committee determines there is sufficient merit in the charge, the General Synod would proceed to trial. If there is not sufficient merit, the committee shall dismiss the charge. This dismissal shall be the final resolution of the charge by the General Synod. Such action would be reported to the General Synod (BCO, Chapter 2, Part I, Article 4, Sections 5, 6, 7).

5. The procedure for trying a charge would then be followed. In such a case, as in any other judicial proceeding, no member or groups of the Reformed Church in America, nor any person connected with the case, shall circulate, or cause to be circulated, any written or printed arguments or briefs upon any charges before the final disposition of same (BCO, Chapter 2, Part I, Article 5, Section 11).

Our review of the place and discipline of General Synod professors of theology revealed that our current order has lost the right of redress following a judgment of the General Synod, which leaves General Synod professors as the only parties in cases of discipline without an avenue for remedy should they be aggrieved or injured by a judgment (cases which originate in other judicatories have two levels of appeal open to them, and in particular circumstances, three). This prerogative was stated in the earlier Declaration for Professors of Theology: “reserving to ourselves the right for a rehearing or a new trial in case we conceive ourselves aggrieved by the sentence of the Synod, without disturbing the peace of the Church pending such trial” (Demarest, pp. 61, 62).

To provide General Synod professors with the right to redress, as is provided for cases originating in the other judicatories of the church, the commission recommends:

R-99

To adopt the following revision of the Book of Church Order, Chapter 2, Part I, Article 3, Section 4, by inserting new subsection b (and placing the current text in subsection a), for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined):
Sec. 4. Discipline of a General Synod Professor of Theology

a. Professors of theology are under the care of the General Synod and are subject to its government and discipline. The General Synod shall have jurisdiction in the case of a charge against a professor of theology. If the charge is proven, the professor of theology may be suspended or deposed from the Office of General Synod Professor of Theology or the Office of Minister of Word and Sacrament or both, suspended from the privilege of membership in the church, and/or excommunicated.

b. When a charge against a General Synod Professor of Theology is proven and discipline is imposed by the General Synod, the professor has the right to a new trial at the next regular session of the General Synod, the determination of which will be the final disposition of the case. (ADOPTED)

Concern for the place of General Synod professors of theology is not a new one. It has come before the church repeatedly, with thorough study in 1986, 1980, and 1968, including reports and recommendations in 1988, 1989, and 1991. The current concerns raise again the question of the place of General Synod professors within the assemblies of the Reformed Church. It is important to note again the distinction between seminary faculties and those who hold the Office of General Synod Professor of Theology. The full-time faculties of the two seminaries currently number twenty-four, of whom nine are General Synod professors.

In order for the office to fulfill its responsibilities in theological education and teaching within the whole church and for the church to exercise its oversight of the office, it is essential for the professors to be present to the church in its General Synod. These professors are amenable solely to the General Synod, which is their only ecclesiastical home. The General Synod holds their membership; they are not members of classes. Their place and relationship with the church, as well as their service to it, would be strengthened by their annual attendance at General Synod. This would allow these professors to participate in the body to which they belong; it would enable the church to better know its professors; synod deliberation would be enhanced; opportunity would be provided for one facet of teaching the church. The church would benefit from the presence of its teachers. The numbers holding this office are small, at present nine (four of whom currently serve as delegates each year), so the impact in terms of size and cost is a reasonable one, especially considering the benefits to be derived from their presence. As the General Synod elects persons to this office, it determines how many are called to office. (See also MGS 1989.)

Therefore, to strengthen the care, supervision, and accountability of General Synod professors of theology, to provide General Synod professors a regular place to exercise membership, and to enrich General Synod proceedings with its own elected theological resources, the commission recommends:

R-100
To adopt the following revision of the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 1, and refer it to the classes for approval (additions are underlined; deletions stricken out):

The General Synod is the highest assembly and judicatory of the Reformed Church in America. It consists of two minister delegates and two elder delegates from each of the classes . . . ; one elder or minister delegate from each of the regional synods; the General
Synod professors of theology, except those who are declared emeritus; two General Synod professor of theology delegates from each of the theological seminaries of the Reformed Church; a number of furloughing missionary . . . (NOT ADOPTED)

The advisory committee presented the following new recommendation:

R-101 (new)
To instruct the Commission on Church Order to consult with General Synod professors of theology as to the frequency of their participation as delegates to General Synod and to report to General Synod 2001. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The Commission on Church Order did not consult fully with the General Synod professors of theology when it recommended R-101 to this session of the General Synod. The advisory committee believes that the relationship of the General Synod with its professors needs to be strengthened and encourages the commission to work with the professors on this issue and report to synod next year.

In reviewing the place of the office of General Synod professor of theology in the Book of Church Order, the commission noted that professors who elect to be declared emeritus are left without a place of membership. All ministers of Word and sacrament, whether professors or not, actively serving or not, need a place to belong, a place of care and supervision. The commission recommends:

R-102
To adopt the following revision of the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 8, and refer it to the classes for approval (additions are underlined; deletions stricken out):

Sec. 8. When a professor of theology resigns the office elected to by the General Synod, or is no longer in full-time service at a Reformed Church seminary, the professor shall receive a certificate of dismission from the General Synod to a classis or other ecclesiastical body, unless declared a professor emeritus.

Sec. 9. Upon reaching the age of seventy years, a professor of theology shall elect to be declared professor emeritus and shall or to be dismissed to a classis or other ecclesiastical body. (NOT ADOPTED)

The commission requested that the General Synod office add an additional list of the professors of theology to the annual edition of the Directory.

ALTERNATE COURSE OF STUDY FOR MASTER OF DIVINITY CANDIDATES

At the 1999 General Synod meeting the following recommendation of the Advisory Committee on Church Order was adopted (MGS 1999, R-54, p. 229):

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.
The following reasons were given:

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, p. 374) requested the Commission on Church Order to propose changes to the Book of Church Order that 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.

R-103
To adopt the following revision of the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 9, Section 3, and refer it to the classes for approval (additions are underlined):

(The previous text under Sec. 3, Other Candidates, will be numbered Sec. 4.)

Sec. 3. Alternate Means to Satisfying Requirements
A candidate for the ministry who is a student enrolled in a Master of Divinity degree program at a theological seminary and who, because of age, lack of necessary academic preparation, or other sufficient reason, finds it too difficult to meet the full requirements for the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry, shall make application to the classis.

a. If the classis finds the reason sufficient, it shall petition the appropriate agent of the General Synod (the board of trustees of an RCA seminary or the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency) on behalf of the applicant for approval of an alternate means to meet any part of the requirements for the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry.

b. The agent of the General Synod shall consider carefully the reasons submitted by the classis as to why the applicant is unable to meet the full requirements for a Certificate of Fitness for Ministry. If the agent finds the reason sufficient, it shall provide a means for the applicant to compensate for the inability to meet the requirement. If the application is rejected, the agent shall state its reasons. If the agent finds that the compensatory steps have been satisfactorily completed, it shall judge that the requirement has been fulfilled.

c. The agent shall report its actions to the next General Synod.

(ADOPTED)
STATUS/CALL OF COPASTORS

The 1998 General Synod received an overture from the Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics requesting the General Synod to study the issue of copastors. The General Synod referred the overture to the Commission on Church Order for study and report to the General Synod, with the instruction that the commission consult with current copastors (MGS 1998, R-23, p. 326).

Consistories have desired “copastors” primarily in two types of situations. In one, a consistory desires its pastors to enjoy an equal standing in ministry, the ministry of Word and sacrament being shared among more than one person. In another, two pastors who are married have been called to serve the church. The two instances are not, of course, mutually exclusive. The question at issue is often which pastor is to serve as the president of consistory. A concurrent matter is the question of the nature of the instrument of the call. Are the two to receive one call?

The Book of Church Order appears to be written within a context in which one pastor is judged “senior pastor.” That need not, however, be the case. Historically, large Reformed churches have had several pastors, none of which was designated as “senior.” Under “Responsibilities of the Consistory,” the Book of Church Order states, “The consistory shall provide a minister, or ministers, for the church” (BCO, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 2). This clearly allows a consistory to call more than one minister as “head” or “senior” minister.

The only question that remains is which minister shall act as the president of the consistory. In the case of copastors it is important that the consistory itself decide whom this shall be. A consistory may, for example, decide that the presidency shall rotate among the ministers. Or it may decide that a particular minister be its president based on the peculiar gifts for ministry as evidenced among the ministers. The proposed change leaves in place the provision that allows a consistory to name a person other than the designated president as its presiding officer at particular meetings.

Furthermore, some consistories and classes have gotten into difficulty by issuing a joint call. The problem emerges if one of the ministers requests dissolution. Must a new call be issued? Indeed, it is this commission’s opinion that a call is upon a person, not an “amalgam” of persons, and thus separate calls should be issued. An amendment to the church order would clear up this difficulty.

R-104
To adopt the following revision of the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, by inserting a new Section 4 (and renumbering subsequent sections); and Chapter 1, Part I, Article 3, Section 1, for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined, deletions are stricken out):

Art. 2, Sec. 4. A consistory may, with the consent of the classis, call copastors to serve the congregation. The consistory shall issue separate calls to each minister.

Art. 3, Sec. 1. The consistory shall elect one of its ministers serving under call to be the minister shall be president of the consistory, who and shall preside at all of its meetings except where otherwise provided. 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 advisory committee recommended that R-104 be amended as follows:

**R-104 (amendment)**

To adopt the following revision of the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, by inserting a new Section 4 (and renumbering subsequent sections); and Chapter 1, Part I, Article 3, Section 1, for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined, deletions are stricken out):

**Art. 2, Sec. 4.** A consistory may, with the consent of the classis, call copastors that calls more than one minister to serve the congregation. The consistory shall issue a separate call separate calls to each minister.

**Art. 3, Sec. 1.** The consistory shall elect one of its ministers serving under call to be ... The minister shall be president of the consistory, who shall preside at all of its meetings except where otherwise provided. 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. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

Reason: The term “copastor” is problematic.

**INSTALLATION OF PASTORS FROM FORMULA OF AGREEMENT CHURCHES**

The General Synod of 1997 approved the *Formula of Agreement* among the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Reformed Church in America, and the United Church of Christ. Part of that agreement was to recognize each other’s various ministries and make provision for the orderly exchange of ordained ministers of Word and sacrament (*MGS 1997*, p. 193).

Representatives of the participating communions have been meeting since 1998 to implement this provision of the formula. In consultation, they developed the following “principles of agreement”:

1. An ordained minister of a full communion church may be eligible to engage in extended service in any position open to a minister in another participating church except as noted otherwise in the polity of either church. Such service is not intended for a first call.

2. It is important to the faithful and orderly exchange of ordained ministers among the four churches of the *Formula of Agreement* that one who would serve in a congregation of another church first be formed and educated for ministry in one’s own tradition and have experience in serving in that church’s ordained ministry. Such experience and grounding in one’s own tradition are seen to be essential prior to serving in a setting of another tradition.

3. To be eligible to serve in another of the participating churches, an ordained minister will demonstrate to the appropriate regional body of the inviting church knowledge of and appreciation for the history, polity, theological and liturgical identity, practices of ministry, and discipline of that church. The minister will also be expected to teach, administer the sacraments, and participate in the governance of the church in
a manner consistent with that knowledge and appreciation.

4. In evaluating the availability of ordained ministers for service, regional bodies of each participating church will do so in accordance with the stated intentions in the *Formula of Agreement*.

5. Placement, supervision, and evaluation procedures of the inviting church shall be observed.

6. Approval for extended service shall occur only in consultation with, and concurrence of, the sending body. When granting concurrence for an ordained minister to serve in another church, the sending body will do so in accordance with the stated intentions in the *Formula of Agreement*. The minister remains accountable to the sending body for continuation of ministerial status.

7. Responsibility for pastoral care of ordained ministers is shared by the inviting and sending bodies: In the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the synod; in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the presbytery; in the Reformed Church in America, the classis; and in the United Church of Christ, the conference and association.

8. In a disciplinary review or judicial process, the ordained minister remains under the jurisdiction of the sending body, but the inviting body may be asked to participate as appropriate.

9. Each church will develop a provision whereby an ordained minister may be granted full participation, which may include privilege of voice and vote, in the appropriate regional body of the church in which the ordained minister is serving.

10. An ordained minister serving in another of the participating churches will continue to participate in the pension and benefits program of the sending church.

The principles present a particular difficulty for Reformed churches that may desire to install a minister from a *Formula of Agreement* church. When a minister is installed in a Reformed church she or he reads the Declaration for Ministers of Word and Sacrament that includes the sentence: “I will submit myself to the counsel and admonition of the classis, always ready, with gentleness and reverence, to give an account of my understanding of the Christian faith.” Thus, the minister comes under the discipline of a classis. Principle 8 (above) has the minister remaining under the discipline of the communion in which she or he holds “ministerial standing.”

It is important to note that the Reformed Church order allows ministers from other denominations to become a minister within the Reformed Church when a classis follows the prescriptions in Chapter 1, Part II, Article 12 of the *Book of Church Order*. The change effected by the *Formula of Agreement* allows a minister of a participating communion to serve within another of the churches within the agreement while remaining an ordained minister within his or her original communion.

At present a minister of another communion can serve a Reformed congregation, but does so as a minister under contract. A contract between a congregation and a minister must be approved annually by the classis (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 9). It would be preferable if a classis could install those ministers, particularly since the *Formula of Agreement* itself implies that the Reformed church fully acknowledges the validity of the ordination of the minister from the other communion. This can be accomplished if the classis installs the minister but does not receive him or her into the classis, the reception into the classis being that part of the service where the new pastor reads and signs the Declaration...
for Ministers of Word and Sacrament.

Furthermore, Principle 9 states that the receiving communion will grant full participation in “the appropriate regional body” of the church. Currently, this can be accommodated in the RCA’s church order by granting temporary membership in a classis to ministers of other denominations. However, such members are to be subject to the discipline of the classis (BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 13, Section 15). The church order needs to be amended to accommodate Principle 9.

R-105
To adopt the following revision of the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, by adding a new Section 3 (and renumbering the subsequent sections); and also the revision to Chapter 1, Part I, Article 1, Section 3; and also Chapter 1, Part II, Article 13, Section 15, for recommendation to the classes for approval:

Art. 2 Sec. 3. A consistory may call a minister of a communion that is a partner in the Formula of Agreement. The classis or its committee shall install the minister according to the office for installation in the Liturgy but shall not receive the minister into the classis. The minister shall be ipso facto a temporary member of the classis.

Art. 1 Sec. 3. Ministers are those men and women who have been inducted into that office by ordination in accordance with the Word of God and the order established or recognized by the Reformed Church in America. They are equal in authority as ministers and as stewards of the mysteries of God. Ministers shall ordinarily be confessing members of only the Reformed Church in America, except as otherwise provided in Chapter 1, Part II, Article 12, Section 1 and in Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 3. No person who has relinquished the ministry for which installed or who has been suspended or deposed from the ministry shall exercise that office.

Art. 13, Sec. 15. A minister of another denomination whose ordination meets the criteria of Chapter 1, Part II, Article 13, Section 1, whose good standing has been certified by that denomination, and who serves with the approval of classis as a minister under contract, an assistant minister, a minister in a cooperative specialized ministry in which classis shares sponsorship, [or] a minister to a congregation composed of denominational units at least one of which is associated with the classis, or an installed minister may hold temporary membership in the classis. Such temporary members shall have the rights and privileges of membership for the period of the approved service, but may not represent their classis in the higher judicatories, assemblies, agencies, or commissions of the Reformed Church in America. Temporary members shall be subject to the discipline of the classis as provided in Chapter 1, Part I, Article 7, Section 2s.

Temporary members shall not subscribe to the declaration, but, in accepting temporary membership, shall agree that in their duties approved by the classis they will conduct themselves in a manner consistent with the declaration and accept the counsel
and admonition of the classis.

A motion was made from the floor to amend R-105 as follows:

**R-105 (amendment)**
To adopt the following revision of the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, by adding a new Section 3 (and renumbering the subsequent sections); and also the revision to Chapter 1, Part I, Article 1, Section 3; and also Chapter 1, Part II, Article 13, Section 15, for recommendation to the classes for approval:

*Art. 2 Sec. 3.* A consistory may call a minister of a communion that is a partner in the *Formula of Agreement*. The classis or its committee shall install the minister according to the office for installation in the Liturgy but shall not receive the minister into the classis. The minister shall be *ipso facto* a temporary member of the classis.

*Art. 1 Sec. 3.* Ministers are those men and women who have been inducted into that office by ordination in accordance with the Word of God and the order established or recognized by the Reformed Church in America. They are equal in authority as ministers and as stewards of the mysteries of God. Ministers shall ordinarily be confessing members of only the Reformed Church in America, except as otherwise provided in Chapter 1, Part II, Article 12, Section 1 and in Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 3. No person who has relinquished the ministry for which installed or who has been suspended or deposed from the ministry shall exercise that office.

*Art. 13, Sec. 15.* A minister of another denomination whose ordination meets the criteria of Chapter 1, Part II, Article 13, Section 1, whose good standing has been certified by that denomination, and who serves with the approval of classis as a minister under contract, an assistant minister, a minister in a cooperative specialized ministry in which classis shares sponsorship, [or] a minister to a congregation composed of denominational units at least one of which is associated with the classis, or an installed minister may hold temporary membership in the classis. Such temporary members shall have the rights and privileges of membership for the period of the approved service, but may not represent their classis in the higher judicatories, assemblies, agencies, or commissions of the Reformed Church in America. Temporary members shall be subject to the discipline of the classis as provided in Chapter 1, Part I, Article 7, Section 2s with the exception of ordination status.

Temporary members shall not subscribe to the declaration, but, in accepting temporary membership, shall agree that in their duties approved by the classis they will conduct themselves in a manner consistent with the declaration and accept the counsel
and admonition of the classis. (ADOPTED)

A further motion was made:

R-106
To refer the amended R-105 back to the Commission on Church Order. (ADOPTED)

MEMBERSHIP ON THE COMMISSION ON NOMINATIONS

In response to an inquiry from the Commission on Nominations regarding racial/ethnic representation on the commission, the Commission on Church Order noted that the *Bylaws* of the General Synod omitted a representative of Native Americans on the commission. Therefore the commission recommends:

R-107
To amend the *Bylaws and Special Rules of Order of the General Synod* for submission to the next regular session of the General Synod for its approval (deletions are stricken out; additions are underlined):

*Part I, Article 5, Section 8, Commission on Nominations*

a. Membership

The commission shall have *thirteen fourteen* members, one representing each of the regional synods, one representing African-Americans, Hispanics, *Native American Indians*, and Pacific and Asian Americans, respectively, one representing the women of the church, and one being the immediate past president of General Synod. Each regional synod shall nominate a layperson or a minister in alternating six-year periods in order to ensure that the commission will have within its membership four laypersons and four ministers. The members representing African-Americans, Hispanics, *Native American Indians*, and Pacific and Asian Americans shall be nominated by the African-American, Hispanic, *Native American Indian*, and Pacific and Asian American Councils. The member representing the women of the church shall be nominated by Reformed Church Women's Ministries in consultation with the Commission for Women. (ADOPTED)

ASSOCIATES IN MINISTRY

The commission reviewed a study paper prepared and circulated prior to the meeting. It entered into a discussion of certification as it is currently carried out in the RCA. Commissioners reviewed the previous actions of General Synod, the sections of the *BCO* that refer to “associates in ministry,” and the current *Certification Handbook*. Commissioners discussed the rationale for classes “certifying” professional competence in education. The commission determined that the current program requires significant additional study before any recommendation can be brought to the General Synod. The commission agreed that it should enter into wider discussion on this issue with Christian Educators of the Reformed Church in America (CERCA), the General Synod Council’s Congregational Services Committee and staff, and possibly ecumenical partners in the *Formula of Agreement* churches.
AUTHORITY OF FOOTNOTES IN THE BOOK OF CHURCH ORDER

The commission responded to a question about the BCO footnotes and endnotes. The commission reiterated its position that footnotes and endnotes are meant to be explanatory in nature and do not have constitutional authority. The commission requested that in the next edition of the Book of Church Order all notes be placed at the end of the book with a brief explanation that they are included to be helpful and should not be regarded as constitutional.

NOMINATION AND ELECTION PROCEDURES FOR THE OFFICERS OF GENERAL SYNOD

The commission was asked to consider reviewing the nomination and election procedures for the president and vice president of General Synod. The commission agreed to take up the matter at its fall 2000 meeting.

PROCESS FOR DISSENT

The 1998 General Synod requested this commission to “formulate a more general process of dissent for inclusion in the Book of Church Order” (MGS 1998, R-4, p. 474).

This commission reported its considerations to the 1999 General Synod (MGS 1999, pp. 214-215). The commission continues its discussions in consultation with the Commission on Theology. The Commission on Church Order continues to examine a number of options, remaining cognizant of both the nature of the Government and the principle of conscience as expressed in a number of earlier reports to the General Synod. In addition, this commission remains fully aware of avenues for dissent that currently exist. It intends to present a fuller report to the General Synod of 2001.

Report of the Committee to Review the Church Order

Upon the report of the Task Force on the Purposes and Responsibilities of Regional Synods and Classes, the General Synod of 1998 voted:

To call upon the Reformed Church in America to undertake a comprehensive review of its church order through a four-year process of dialogue and discernment; and further,

to instruct the moderator of the General Synod Council, in consultation with the president of the General Synod and the general secretary, to appoint a task force of up to twelve members that is representative of the Reformed Church in America to guide the above process; and further,

to instruct the task force to conduct its work in consultation with representatives at all levels of church order and church office; and further,

to instruct the task force to present interim reports, which may propose changes, to the General Synods of 1999, 2000, and 2001, and to present a final report to the 2002

This commission offered a short report to the 1999 General Synod (MGS 1999, p. 213). The task was given to this commission with additional members to be appointed by the moderator of the General Synod Council. Those members were appointed following the General Synod of 1999. In addition to the members of this commission, the members of the task force to review the church order are the Rev. Richard Baukema, the Rev. Stephanie Doeschot, Carol Mutch, the Rev. Okke Postma, and Andrea Van Beek. The Rev. Kenneth Bradsell provided staff support.

The expanded committee met in September 1999 and February 2000. The committee began a two-pronged approach to the review. First, it began an extensive solicitation of persons “at all levels of church order and church office” to determine how the current church order both assists and hinders the church in its mission, paying particular attention to the principles of the church order as outlined in the Preamble to the BCO. That solicitation continues.

Second, the committee began an intensive theological discussion to reflect on the foundations of the church order within a Reformed understanding of the church. It hopes thereby to assist the broader church in an understanding of the nature and purpose of the church order in the RCA’s common life.

The expanded committee intends to report its preliminary findings and intentions to the 2001 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 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 executive committee meeting.

GSC, at its March 1995 meeting, voted to continue reviewing at least two commissions each year. The following schedule was approved at the April 2000 GSC meeting:

2001—Commission for Women
    Commission on Judicial Business
2002—Commission on Church Order  
Commission on Nominations  
2003—Commission on Christian Worship  
Commission on Theology  
2004—Commission on Christian Action  
Commission on Christian Unity  
2005—Commission on History  
Commission on Race and Ethnicity

Review of the Commission on Christian Action

For the review of the Commission on Christian Action, the General Synod Council appointed Margo Taylor and Irvin Boersen. Following a review of its task, the committee proceeded as follows:

Each member of the Commission on Christian Action was sent a questionnaire asking about the commission’s major accomplishments over the previous five years, the value of its work for the life of the denomination, its plans for the future, etc.

The commission was interviewed via conference call on Saturday, February 5, 2000 during its meeting in Chicago.

The GSC received the final report of its committee in April 2000.

Commission on Christian Action

The Book of Church Order (BCO) mandates that the Commission on Christian Action “shall inform and advise the church concerning current social issues and the scriptural and Christian principles by which critical evaluation may be exercised and proper action taken” (BCO, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 2b). Issues for study are referred to the commission by General Synod, advisory committees, overtures from classes, and various denominational groups. Issues for study are also chosen because they are of particular interest to the commission members. Issues currently being examined for report include organ donation, capital punishment, racism, economic justice, hunger, and welfare.

The commissioners are the Rev. Frederick Mueller, moderator; Eddy Aleman; Mary Bechler; the Rev. Donald De Young; John Fitzgerald; JoAnna Cary Lougin; Moira Poppen-Gargano; Sara Tolsma; the Rev. Terry Troia; the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, ex-officio; and the Rev. John Paarlberg, staff. These members are staff and volunteers with expertise in Bible, theology, law, education, medicine, the social sciences, and other areas. The commissioners have developed relationships with consultants willing to provide expertise on issues under study. The commission both offers and seeks ecumenical participation as they study key issues of concern for the RCA in today’s society.

The GSC subcommittee concludes that the Commission on Christian Action provides an invaluable service to the RCA. There are three concerns that may be addressed in order for the commission’s work to be more effective:

1. The voice of the Commission on Christian Action has increased in importance due to other assemblies cutting their social witness voice. Outside consultants have frequently provided services gratis, but commission members themselves cover most of the expense of the actual research. Individual commission members provide a tremendous service to the RCA without published credit. Although the RCA is a small denomination, the $8,000 budget currently allotted is extremely lean considering the importance of this
work.

2. *The reports prepared by the commission are not widely read or disseminated.* There is an opportunity for the RCA to provide coordination between the commission and the program office. Curriculum study guides could be developed to aid in local deacon and congregational development. Papers could be posted on the RCA website for downloading and local reproduction. The information and Christian viewpoints on these important issues should be actively disseminated throughout the RCA.

3. *The commission’s name does not accurately describe its mandate.* The commissioners consult, research, and write papers to give guidance to the church. Their thorough and thoughtful papers equip judicatories and assemblies to take action. The commission also provides advice, counsel, and support to the Office of Social Witness. A more appropriate name might be “Commission on Church and Society.”

Members of the RCA must apply the Word of God appropriately with love and understanding to the challenges of society. The church must continue to relate to developments in science and technology and must provide leadership and guidance in how to apply Christian ethics to an ever-changing society. New and creative avenues should be found for the very important voice of the Commission on Christian Action to be augmented and expanded.

**R-108**

To affirm the continuation of the Commission on Christian Action as specified in the Bylaws of the General Synod, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 2. (ADOPTED)

**Commission on History**

**Process**

The review of the Commission on History was carried out through unstructured interviews with the following people: three current members of the commission, including the moderator; three professional historians who serve in educational institutions of the RCA and regularly research, write, and lecture on the history of the denomination; the RCA archivist; and the general editor of the RCA Historical Series. These interviews were conducted with reference to the “Review of Commissions Questionnaire,” but not all interviewees were asked to respond to all questions. In addition, annual reports of the commission were reviewed to determine the actual focus and scope of its work in recent years.

**Findings**

A central concern of the review process is to assess the value of the commission in enabling the denomination to carry out its commitments and to keep faith with its mission and vision. Therefore, this assessment must examine the correspondence between denominational commitment and mission and the responsibilities and performance of the commission. A lack of correspondence between these realities may offer a critique of one or the other, or both, and invites further inquiry in service to recommendations.

The responsibilities of the Commission as currently defined fall into four broad categories:

1. Provide advice to the General Synod concerning the denomination’s Archives.
2. Prepare annually for the General Synod a necrology report.
3. Encourage research, interest in, and reflection on the history and traditions of the RCA.
4. Inform the RCA of the relevance of the denomination’s history and traditions to its programs.

Responsibility #1

The Bylaws of the General Synod require the General Synod Council “to maintain a permanent archive for the collection of official records and documents of the RCA, its churches, assemblies, and agencies” (*BCO*, Chapter 3, Part 1, Article 3, Section 6d). The advisory role of the Commission on History to the Archives is in clear service to this directive. The RCA’s archivist is eager to receive advice concerning the policies and operation of the Archives. Unfortunately, the effective fulfillment of this advisory role has been difficult for the commission. Competing interests concerning the location and oversight of the permanent Archives have surfaced within the commission’s membership and compromised its ability to serve the current archival program effectively. As part of this review process, the commission has asserted as policy that the permanent RCA Archives be located at New Brunswick Theological Seminary. The settling of this basic policy will enable the commission to focus on and provide advice concerning other aspects of the Archives. In addition, it is recommended that this advisory function be fulfilled by two or three members of the commission chosen by the RCA archivist for their interest and expertise. This smaller advisory group would be responsible to understand the work of the RCA Archives, to meet separately with the archivist, and to make recommendations to the commission as a whole.

Responsibility #2

The annual necrology report for ministers of the RCA is prepared by the archivist and should no longer be defined as a responsibility of the Commission on History.

Responsibility #3

Responsibility number three, “to encourage research, interest in, and reflection on the history and traditions of the RCA,” represents the core of the commission’s work and is accomplished primarily through the commission’s involvement with the RCA’s Historical Series. Interestingly, the precise responsibilities of the commission vis-a-vis the series are not explicit in the commission’s charge as set forth in the *Book of Church Order*. This review process has helpfully clarified the relationship between the Commission on History and the Historical Series:

1. The Historical Series is a program of the commission; it was conceived in the commission and continues to reside there.
2. The general editor of the series serves at the will of the commission and as a consultant to the commission.
3. The commission responds to proposals from the general editor for publications in the series, actually reads submissions, and either approves or disapproves their publication.
4. The commission has been proactive in suggesting and soliciting specific historical publications that it perceives are needed by the RCA (such as an updated general history of the denomination).

Without a doubt, the RCA’s Historical Series is an invaluable historical resource, both within and beyond the denomination. The indefatigable commitment and labor of the general editor is a key factor in the success of the series, and the commission has also played a critical role in this success. If the commission did nothing other than assist in the publication of the Historical Series, it would fulfill its commission to the RCA. Because it is a program of the
commission, full oversight of the series belongs to the commission. This review process has clarified the need to make explicit the responsibilities of the commission regarding the Historical Series.

Responsibility #4

As concerns the commission’s responsibility “to inform the RCA of the relevance of the denomination’s history and traditions to its programs,” members of the commission are clear that this aspect of their work is the most difficult to accomplish. At least potentially, RCA members and denominational staff could be helped to understand the relevance of the denomination’s history and traditions to its programs by some of the publications in the Historical Series. But this responsibility invites a much more proactive engagement on the part of the commission. On the one hand, the commission could fulfill this responsibility by being attentive and responsive to denominational currents and regularly offering historical perspectives on issues and initiatives. On the other hand, denominational staff and/or the General Synod could request specific guidance from the Commission on History in relation to current discussions and initiatives. For instance, in the RCA’s deliberations concerning the Formula of Agreement, it would have been extremely helpful for the commission to clarify the historical relationships between the RCA and the United Church of Christ, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. This historical perspective could have eliminated a great deal of confusion about the actual import of either embracing or rejecting the Formula.

If the Commission on History is to fulfill this proactive role in the denomination, it will need to be regularly informed of the denomination’s deliberations and invited to offer a historical perspective early in the process. Further, the commission should be called on to review the historical content of resources recommended for use by the churches of the RCA. In addition, the Commission on History should be prepared to offer a historical perspective, either orally or in writing, on matters being presented to the General Synod.

RCA Mission, Vision, and the Commission on History

The responsibility of the Commission on History to be keepers of the church’s history, to raise historical consciousness, and to stimulate historical research within the denomination is not an explicit focus of the denomination’s Statement of Mission and Vision. And, it is impossible to argue that it is an implicit part of this statement. But, it is possible to argue that it should be. The church exists, in the power of the Spirit, through its acts of remembering. The church understands God’s gracious gift and call to it through its acts of remembering. The church finds its identity through its acts of remembering. The center of the church’s remembering is God’s story revealed through the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The way the Reformed Church remembers, tells, and lives this story is marked by a particularity that further shapes its remembering, telling, and living. It is this particularity that must be constantly examined, affirmed, and/or critiqued as RCA members seek to live as Reformed Christians and participate in God’s mission. This work is carried out by the Commission on History and the educational institutions of the RCA in which professional historians commit themselves to the study and teaching of the denomination’s history.

R-109
To affirm the continuation of the Commission on History.
(ADOPTED)

R-110
To adopt in first reading the following revisions of the Bylaws of
the General Synod in the Book of Church Order, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 5, as follows (additions are underlined, deletions are stricken out):

a. Membership

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

b. Responsibilities

1. Through a sub-committee of two or three of its members, chosen on the advice of the RCA archivist, the commission shall advise the General Synod on the collection of official records and documents of the Reformed Church in America, its churches, assemblies, and agencies.

2. The commission shall actively promote research on, interest in, and reflection on, the history and traditions of the Reformed Church in America through publications and such other means as it may find effective.

3. The commission shall actively stimulate and encourage research in the history and traditions of the Reformed Church in America.

The commission shall be responsible for complete oversight of the Historical Series:

(i) It shall define the mission and scope of the series.

(ii) It shall appoint the general editor of the series and review his/her work.

(iii) It shall invite publications, fully review publications recommended by the general editor to determine whether or not they shall be published, and make decisions concerning reprinting previously published works.

(iv) It shall create and maintain policies concerning such matters as author/editor remuneration, royalties, publication subventions, the means of production and distribution, and handling of proceeds.

(v) It shall annually receive and review a complete financial report from the general editor of the series.

4. The commission shall inform the Reformed Church in America of the relevance of the denomination’s history and traditions to its program, and regularly review denominational resources that present the church’s history.
5. The commission shall ensure that the General Synod receives an annual report of information concerning ministers who have died since the previous General Synod meeting.

The commission shall provide a “history center” by regularly reporting on the activities of the Reformed Church in America’s educational institutions as these relate to the history and traditions of the denomination. (ADOPTED)

Final Report of the Task Force on the Responsibilities and Purposes of Regional Synods and Classes

BEGINNING A CONVERSATION ON PURPOSE

In 1996 the Classis of Greater Palisades, reflecting a concern for good order within the church, submitted the following overture to the General Synod (MGS 1996, R-3, p. 426):

The Classis of Greater Palisades overtures General Synod to conduct a full review of the purpose and responsibilities of regional synods within the Reformed Church in America. The review should include the following:

a. Take into account the historical evolution of responsibilities of regional synods within RCA church order.

b. Consider for what purposes and programs the regional synods may appropriately assess classes within their bounds.

c. Make recommendations that clarify what programmatic responsibilities the regional synods may assume without violating the prerogatives of the classes within their bounds.

Reasons:

1. The RCA Constitution assigns no specific calling to regional synods other than as a judicatory.

2. The Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part III, Article 2, Section 4, permits such a broad interpretation as to allow regional synods to function with widely varying understandings of proper missions and purposes for regional synods.

3. A cursory examination of the front pages of the RCA Plan Calendar which list staffs of regional synods suggests a wide disparity in the self-determined functions of the eight RCA regional synods.

4. Because of a lack of clear definition, the self-determined programmatic activities of the eight regional synods duplicate the activities of the General Synod and the RCA classes.
5. General Synod must perform this review of the purpose and responsibilities of regional synods and give guidance because General Synod is the judicatory to which regional synods are accountable.

6. The current status and situation with respect to regional synods stands in opposition to the principle expressed in the Preamble of the Book of Church Order: “That purpose is achieved most effectively when good order and proper discipline are maintained by means of...governmental agencies.”

7. The recent restructure of the RCA (July 1, 1993) stopped short of performing a review of the purposes and responsibilities of regional synods (see MGS 1992, pp. 73-76) and thereby perpetuated the disparity among regional synods.

In response to the overture, General Synod adopted the recommendation of the Committee on Reference, which modified and expanded the overture, responding to other concerns being raised throughout the church (MGS 1996, R-4, p. 427):

To direct the moderator of the General Synod Council, in consultation with the general secretary and the director of Policy, Planning, and Administration Services, to appoint a task force comprised of eight persons with representation from the General Synod Council, the General Synod Council unit directors, regional synod executives, and stated clerks of classes; and further,

to direct this task force to conduct a review of the purpose and responsibilities of regional synods and classes; and further,

to direct this task force to propose any necessary structural changes arising out of its work; and further,

to direct this task force to take into account the following:

1. The historical evolution of responsibilities of regional synods and classes within the RCA church order and the relationship of these assemblies and their responsibilities to each other and to the General Synod and the General Synod Council;

2. The purposes and programs that are most appropriately assigned to regional synods and classes without violating the prerogatives of the General Synod; and

3. The need to develop a coordinated and integrated funding strategy for the work of the RCA carried out through the General Synod, the regional synods, and the classes;

and further,

to direct this task force to report to the 1998 General Synod.

Following consultation with the general secretary and the director of Policy, Planning, and Administration Services, the 1996-1997 moderator of the General Synod Council (GSC), the Rev. Dr. I. John Hesselink, appointed the following persons to serve on the task force: the Revs. Anthony Vis, chair (past president of General Synod); the Rev. Jon Norton, the Rev. Raymond DeDoes, the Rev. Ann Akers, the Rev. Phyllis Palsma, Nancy Miller, the Rev. John Kapteyn, and the Rev. Louis Lotz. The Revs. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson and Kenneth Bradsell served as staff resource persons for the task force. Following the resignation of Akers from the task force, the moderator of the GSC, the Rev. Anthony Vis, appointed the Rev. Paul Janssen to replace her. Vis reported to GSC at its January 1998 meeting that he
felt the task force needed representation from the western region of the RCA. In response, GSC approved increasing the membership of the task force from eight members to nine. Vis then appointed Lisa Teague to the task force. When, in 1998, Vis resigned from the task force, Phyllis Palsma was named the new chair.

Responding to the mandate of General Synod in 1996, representative members of the task force participated with regional synod executives, the general secretary, GSC directors, and several GSC executive staff in a conference on the task and purpose of middle judicatories in January 1997. (A scheduled meeting of the full task force was cancelled due to poor weather, and scheduling conflicts hampered additional meetings.) The task force met again in September and November 1997 and in March 1998. Subcommittees of the task force met in February and May 1998. The first full report of the task force was presented to the General Synod in June 1998.

A significant event that would affect the life of the task force took place at the General Synod meeting of 1997. The General Synod adopted a Statement of Mission and Vision for the Reformed Church in America. That statement indicated the following: “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” (MGS 1997, pp. 78-80).

Further, the General Synod instructed “the General Synod Council to audit all of its present programs and commitments in light of the statement of mission and vision” (MGS 1997, R-3, p. 428).

The Task Force understood its focus to have been expanded by the 1997 General Synod actions and that its charge had become “to consider how best the RCA can make available the resources that can equip and empower congregations for ministry and mission locally and globally.” In that light the task force presented to the 1998 General Synod an ambitious and provocative model that attempted to redirect the energies of the staff and resources of the RCA toward the judicatories closest to the congregational level, so that congregations would find the utmost support from both governmental and programmatic structures of the RCA (MGS 1998, pp. 196-206). In response, General Synod in 1998 gave the task force a new mandate (MGS 1998, R-3, pp. 204-205):

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,

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,

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
report 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.

At the same time the task force recognized that the issues of church order that occasioned the original overture had been left untouched. Therefore the task force urged the General Synod to undertake a comprehensive review of its church order. The General Synod, acting on the recommendation of the Review Committee on Church Order, took up the task of reviewing the government of the RCA (MGS 1998, R-7, pp. 298-299).

Following the 1998 General Synod the task force spent considerable energy discerning the nature of its new mandate. Given the expressed desire of the General Synod to focus on the lives of congregations, the task force focused its energy since the 1998 meeting on carrying out broad consultation with those who would be most affected by its work. Consultations were held by reviewing the bylaws of the forty-six RCA classes and eight regional synods, as well as receiving programmatic information shared by those bodies. This information was shared and discussed with the 1999 annual meeting of the stated clerks of classes and regional synods.

In addition, in an attempt to be responsive to the expressed needs of the congregations of the RCA, the task force commissioned a review and analysis of the essay portion of the annual consistorial reports for 1998. This task has been completed and is being distributed to the appropriate agencies and commissions of the RCA.

CONVERSATIONAL BREAKDOWN?

In the course of discerning the roles of the governing structures of the RCA, the task force was guided by historical studies of the regional synods, by an analysis of the roles of regional synods and classes as stated in the Government, and by the bylaws of the forty-six classes and eight regional synods.

The task force has learned that the specific function of regional synods has been questioned throughout the whole history of their existence. Their presence as a middle judicatory (and the terminal judicatory for cases that arise from discipline imposed by a board of elders) has never been doubted. Beyond that, the regional synods have changed significantly over the life of the RCA. In recent years significant resources of the regional synods have been dedicated to programmatic functions. To some extent, the regional synods have initiated such programs; to a large degree, the regional synods have been assigned such roles by the General Synod.

The Government of the Reformed Church in America succinctly states the roles of classes and synods. To classes is given the authority to “exercise general superintendence over its enrolled ministers and over the interests and concerns of the churches within its bounds” (BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 2, Section 1). Specific provisions are detailed concerning how classes are to carry out their supervision of ministers and superintendence of churches. The Government gives to regional synods a parallel authority; they are to “exercise general superintendence over the interests and concerns of the classes within [their] bounds” (BCO, Chapter 1, Part III, Article 2, Section 1). However, there are no parallel provisions regarding how the synods are expected to superintend their classes. Instead, the Government grants to regional synods a broad mandate: “the regional synod shall create whatever organization it desires for the furtherance of the work of the gospel within its bounds, provided such organization does not infringe upon the prerogatives of the several classes or churches” (BCO, Chapter 1, Part III, Article 2, Section 4).
Upon conducting a review of the bylaws of all forty-six classes and eight regional synods, the task force came to understand that at present the classes are (as per the authority granted them) principally involved in carrying out their tasks of superintendence and supervision of ministers and churches. Further, although ministries offered by regional synods vary, all are deeply engaged in ministry far beyond acting merely as a judicatory. The task force concurred that the loss of ministries currently carried out by regional synods would have a significant negative impact on the life of the RCA.

Analysis of current bylaws further revealed five values that appear to be widely shared throughout the RCA:

- Order (fairness)
- Relationships (compassion)
- Word and sacrament (core congregational ministries)
- Gifts (being led by the Spirit)
- Communication (continuing conversation)

Bylaws reflect that with regard to these values, the classes act as coaches, caregivers, custodians, coordinators, and communicating links. The values indicate where the structures of the RCA invest their resources. What is most significant is that these values will be honored, whether or not they are carried out by the “appropriate” body. For example, although classes are clearly given the role of offering pastoral care to ministers (and their families), where classes have less adequate structures for offering that care, a regional synod will take up the task. The task force observed that these values act as a strong force that binds together the wide variety of congregational cultures that make up the RCA.

Absent from the Government’s mandate to the regional synods is a clause that would preclude them from infringing upon the prerogatives of the General Synod. (See the original mandate of the task force.) Indeed, the task force heard concerns from many quarters that the regional synods may be duplicating the work of the General Synod (and vice versa). The charge of “redundancy” becomes especially strident in times of increasing assessments from regional synods and the General Synod. While the task force confirmed that there are indeed some redundancies between regional and General Synod staff, it also considered that the programs designed and staffed by regional synods may be among the most effective, simply because they have been developed to meet the unique needs of a specific geographical area.

Recognizing that the Statement on Mission and Vision focuses the more general purpose of the RCA (to minister to the life of all people by preaching, teaching, and proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ) through the lens of “equipping congregations for ministry,” the task force requested that the expressed needs of consistories throughout the RCA be tabulated. How might the task force encourage the RCA to respond to these expressed needs? How might classes and regional synods work together to equip congregations to do what they hear the Spirit telling them they need to do? The results of this inquiry, placed side by side with what is being done at the classis and regional synod level (and with the current priorities of the General Synod Council) may be instructive:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consistory Concerns</th>
<th>Classis Emphases (functions involved in superintendence and supervision)</th>
<th>Regional Synod Ministries (most broadly shared ministries in random order)</th>
<th>General Synod Council Priorities (in random order)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visitors the Congregational</td>
<td>Coach</td>
<td>Pastors’ Retreats</td>
<td>Reflect the diversity of RCA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Caregiver</td>
<td>Continuing Education</td>
<td>Support ‘lay’ leadership</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The task force shares the concerns of the church concerning the appropriate roles that the bodies above may best play in equipping congregations for ministry. It notes the critical distinction between bodies that are called together to superintend and supervise (governmental structures) and bodies that are mobilized to perform specific ministries (programmatic structures). At the same time that the task force is pleased to discover the range of ministries occurring throughout the RCA, it is concerned that conversations between these kinds of bodies may not be occurring in a way that prosper the ministry of the whole church.

An excerpt from the report from the Frost Center is particularly insightful:

> It may not be possible for the general church to develop generic programs or products for individual parishes to use in addressing [issues that “play out” differently from one congregation to another]. However, it should be possible for the denomination to assist congregations in their work by providing access to information ideas, best practices, and (when necessary) additional sources of funding. This would require a new approach to the relationships between congregations and the ecclesiastical structures within which they work, an approach that could be more beneficial to individual churches and even more rewarding for classical and synodical staff members (“Frost Report,” pp. 76f.).

In sum, the task force, having conducted reviews of the responsibilities and purposes of the regional synods and classes, affirms the positive roles that regional synods play in the RCA today. Classes and regional synods need to be in constant conversation so that synods do not infringe upon the prerogatives of the several classes or churches within their bounds. As to the relationships between regional synods and the General Synod, the task force notes that what is most needed is regular conversation around strategic planning and a shared sense of vision for the ministry of the RCA. Thus, the task force has chosen not to present to the General Synod a comprehensive “organizational plan with implementation steps and a timeline for deployment of RCA staff” because several conversations have been taking place that have significant potential to lead the RCA in a positive direction. Those other conversations are the subject of the next section.

**WHILE THE TASK FORCE HAS BEEN IN CONVERSATION**

The task force notes that since its establishment in 1996 a number of events have occurred that touch at least tangentially upon its original and modified mandates.
Concurrent with the existence of this task force, the General Synod has appointed task forces on revitalization (1996) and consistories (1997). Although these three task forces have not met conjointly, they have all had on their agenda a concern for how the ministry of the gospel might most effectively be carried out at the congregational level.

In 1998 the Commission on Church Order (with additional consultants) was given the task of reviewing the *Government*. The task force hopes that this review will help all structures of the RCA to be more clear concerning their roles and responsibilities.

As noted above, in 1999 the task force initiated a request for the tabulation of results from the 1998 consistorial reports in an attempt to clarify the expressed needs of local consistories. The task force hopes that the results of this tabulation will be given ample consideration as the RCA considers how to “equip congregations for ministry.” At the very least, the RCA has (for perhaps the first time) a comprehensive view of what consistories claim as their own priorities.

Most significant for the concern regarding the relationship between regional synods and the General Synod, in the fall of 1999 a joint meeting between the Leadership Advisory Team (LAT) and the Council of Synod Executives (COSE) was convened. This meeting developed important mutual understandings between general and regional synod staff. Among the “emerging strategies” identified at this meeting are that regional and general synods will in the future:

1. Develop, where possible, contracts with staff that involve combined funding and accountability, including the General Synod Council, regional synod(s), and classis(es).

2. Convene meetings of regional synod executives and specific General Synod Council directors and/or the racial/ethnic executives around a specific agenda/project.

3. Establish meaningful mutual accountability and consultation between the general secretary and the regional synod executives. (The accountability intended here is neither the accountability that comes through money/budgets nor accountability based on authority to hire/fire. Rather, it is accountability to each other that comes through mutual commitments and covenants affirmed by the bodies to which people report.)

4. Develop patterns of consultation and cooperation concerning responses to the needs of congregations between the regional synod and General Synod staffs in existing regional offices.

5. Develop and initiate a specific cooperative response around one newly identified need, such as leadership training for lay persons or (especially) training and nurture for elders.

Further, this consultation adopted a covenant in order to lay the basis for its future meetings:

*A Covenant of Response*

- As regional and General Synod staff, we are structurally accountable to different sending bodies but serve the same people for the same purpose: the mission of the church of Jesus Christ as articulated and carried out in the Reformed Church in America.

- As regional and General Synod staff, on September 8-10, 1999, we renewed a journey, as stated partners guided by the RCA’s Statement of Mission and Vision, to seek out
the means by which we all best serve the congregations of the Reformed Church in America. We shared honestly; we listened carefully; we rejoiced where God has moved among us; and we experienced each other’s pain, joys, and frustrations that have sometimes come out of our individual work and sometimes come out of a common place. And we honored each other’s faithfulness and commitment to the church and to each other, and the many places in which we already are cooperating.

- From this place, and in this spirit, we now covenant, as regional and General Synod staff, to discuss with each of our sending bodies the log of this meeting, the values and emerging strategies, and to communicate its spirit. Similarly, we will bring this same information to our staff colleagues.

- We covenant to bring the discussion and response of our sending bodies back to a subsequent meeting of this group, at a time and place to be mutually established, and at that place to continue the exploration of future cooperation.

- In the interim we covenant to pray for each other regularly; to continue to seek means by which relationships can be built and cooperation fostered through the strengthening of current cooperative efforts and the creative seeking of new efforts; and to seek God’s guidance for the common mission of the church.

The task force expects that this consultation will continue and will be an important conversation as the church attempts to order its programmatic structures in a way that prospers the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The task force notes that while it has been discussing the roles of classes and synods, conversations have been occurring at the “local” level as well. The Regional Synods of Albany, New York, and the Mid-Atlantics have all been hard at work discerning how they might best serve their classes, thus serving the congregations superintended by the classes. The Regional Synod of the Far West has commissioned its executive to perform a detailed study of the relationship between the synod and the five classes it comprises. Throughout the other synods the conversation is also emerging as synods respond to the needs of classes and their congregations.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE GENERAL SYNOD

In light of the extensive report offered above, the task force offers the following recommendations to the General Synod of 2000:

R-111
To urge regional synods to consult with the appropriate classis prior to engaging any local consistory in a manner that may infringe upon the prerogatives of the local classis. (NOT ADOPTED)

R-112
To direct the Commission on Church Order to consider the following addition to the Book of Church Order:

The regional synod shall consult the appropriate classis prior to engaging a local consistory in a manner that may infringe upon the authority of the classis to superintend its churches. (Proposed section: Chapter 1, Part III, Article 2, Section 5 of The Book of Church Order.) (ADOPTED)

R-113
To affirm the “Covenant of Response” developed at the Leadership Advisory Team/Council of Synod Executives consultation. (ADOPTED)

R-114
To direct the General Synod Council and urge regional synods to direct their personnel to ensure that no new initiatives are begun that may draw upon or duplicate the resources and/or staff of the other assembly without careful evaluation of which assembly is best able to carry out the work. (ADOPTED)

R-115
To direct the General Synod Council to ensure that its executive staff hold annual consultation with Council of Synod Executives (to be convened by the general secretary and the chair of the Council of Synod Executives) for the purpose of assuring effective communication and cooperation as regards the program, mission, and administration of the mission of the church. (ADOPTED)

R-116
To direct the general secretary and executive staff to engage in a regular process of strategic planning in consultation with regional synod staff with the purposes of avoiding the duplication of resources and discerning how the RCA might most effectively direct its programmatic efforts to equip its congregations for ministry. (ADOPTED)

Overtures

Dual Membership

1. The Classis of the Lake Erie overtures the General Synod to clarify Chapter I, Part II, Article 13, Section 15 of the Book of Church Order, particularly with regard to ministers of Word and sacrament maintaining dual membership in the assemblies of the Reformed Church in America and another denomination.

Reasons:

1. There is sufficient ambiguity in Chapter I, Part II, Article 13, Section 15 with respect to installed ministers who desire to maintain membership in a classis and an assembly of another denomination. While the Book of Church Order does not explicitly prohibit dual membership, establishing a practice from silence appears tenuous.

2. The practice of “dual membership” varies widely from classis to classis, with dual membership being permitted in several classes.

3. The Formula of Agreement speaks to the matter of ministers of Word and sacrament serving a congregation of one of the four partner denominations while retaining
membership in an assembly of another. It does not speak to the matter of dual membership.

4. With the increasing practice of congregations entering into contractual relationships with ministers of other denominations, the potential for the request for dual membership increases.

The advisory committee recommended:

R-117
To refer overture 1 to the Commission on Church Order. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. There is sufficient ambiguity in the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 13, Section 15 with respect to installed ministers who desire to maintain membership in a classis and an assembly of another denomination.

2. The practice of dual membership varies widely from classis to classis.

3. The Formula of Agreement speaks to the matter of serving one partner denomination while retaining membership in an assembly of another, but not to dual membership.

4. There is an increasing practice of congregations entering into contractual relationships with ministers of other denominations.

Revocation of Ordination

2. The Classis of Mid-Hudson overtures the General Synod to make an addition to the Book of Church Order, Chapter 2, Part I, Article 3, Section 3d, instituting the immediate revocation of the ordination of a minister of Word and sacrament when a minister confesses to sexual misconduct or is found guilty of sexual misconduct in a classis trial. The deposed minister shall remain, however, under classis’ pastoral care for a period of not less than six months.

Reasons:

1. The sacred, moral, and psychological authority vested in clergy creates for them an unequal and greater power than that of the laity in their interpersonal relationships. Such authority and power impose professional boundaries that clergy are charged to respect and maintain.

2. Sexual misconduct on the part of clergy represents violation, exploitation, betrayal, and abuse of the minister’s ordination vows and the pastoral relationship as well as the crossing of the professional boundaries for which clergy must be held responsible.

3. Sexual misconduct by a minister represents a “notorious and scandalous offense requiring immediate action by the responsible judicatory” (BCO, Chapter 2, Part 1, Article 2, Section 3).

4. Ministerial sexual misconduct creates multiple victims: laity directly involved in the sexual behavior, congregants whose response to the revelation of such behavior include shock, pain, grief, divisiveness, anger, even withdrawal of church membership; classis and other denominational judicatories whose behavior toward the misconduct may be seen as inadequate or conspiratorial; and the church whose purity and honor have been desecrated. Where the minister has a family, they too are victims.
5. Too often in the past, classis response to ministerial sexual misconduct has led victims, including congregants, to feel that classis has protected the offending minister and neglected the pain and sense of injustice felt by the victims. In dealing with ministerial sexual misconduct, achieving a sense of justice must precede meaningful and effective forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoration.

6. The revoking of the minister’s ordination, clearly a heavy penalty and extreme consequence, sends notice to the clergy and laity alike of the seriousness of this offense and the resolve of the denomination that such behavior will not be tolerated. The church must be a safe as well as a sacred family of believers, and its clergy must be the guardians of its safety and sanctity.

7. In as much as the Book of Church Order provides for a process by which a minister’s revoked ordination may be restored, the responsibility for achieving that restoration rests properly on the future behavior of the minister whose actions must literally earn back the trust of the classis (BCO, Chapter 2, Part I, Article 6, Section 2).

8. The extended pastoral care by classis for the deposed minister/minister’s family is an opportunity for classis to assist in recommending psychological assessment/treatment and proposing appropriate steps designed to foster approaches to atonement, restitution, forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoration. Such care and concern by classis acknowledges, too, that the minister’s family has been victimized, damaged by betrayal of trust and vows, deprived of income and security, bereft often of its church family, and left with broken relationships whose healing is unpredictable. In exercising its pastoral responsibilities, classis can help the minister/minister’s family toward taking constructive steps for building a future.

kThe advisory committee recommended:

R-118
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. Discipline is already addressed adequately in the Book of Church Order.

2. It would not be appropriate to single out one sin.

3. This overture would reduce the possibility of restoration and forgiveness.

Standards for Ministerial Preparation

3. The Classis of New York overtures the General Synod to develop standards for ministerial preparation that outline the knowledge, skills, competencies, and characteristics expected of women and men who will serve as ministers of Word and sacrament, for report to the General Synod of 2001.

Reasons:

1. The responsibility of preparing persons for ordination to the ministry of Word and sacrament is shared by the General Synod, RCA seminaries, the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency (MFCA), and classes.

2. The task of setting standards for ministerial preparation belongs to the General Synod
and provides guidance to the seminaries, the MFCA, and the classes in the carrying out of their responsibilities of teaching and supervising ministerial candidates.

3. Presently the Book of Church Order provides guidelines for the examination and oversight of ministerial candidates, but these do not encompass the whole range of expectations for ministry in the RCA.

4. Through the review and appropriation of fully articulated standards prepared by the General Synod, classes will be helped freely to define their particular processes of student oversight in keeping with the RCA's standards for ministerial preparation.

kThe advisory committee recommended:

R-119
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reason: A similar proposal was dealt with by the 1999 General Synod, voted on by the classes, and affirmed by a declarative vote on June 9, 2000 (p. 63, R-3).

Multiple Changes to the Book of Church Order

4. The Classis of Orange respectfully overtures the General Synod to make the following amendment to Section 2 of "Rules and Amendments of the Government of the Reformed Church in America and Disciplinary Procedures" as it appears in the Book of Church Order (BCO 1999, p. 73) and forward it to the classes for approval (additions are underlined):

Sec. 2. Amendments to the Government, the Disciplinary Procedures, the Formularies, and the Liturgy and the Directory for Worship shall be made only upon adoption by the General Synod at a stated meeting, with recommendation to the classes for approval. The synod shall not recommend to the classes as a single amendment multiple changes that are not integrally dependent upon one another for the proposed change to be effective. At least two-thirds of the classes shall approve a proposed amendment in order to secure its adoption. If an amendment is approved by the classes, the General Synod, at its discretion, may pass a final declarative resolution on the amendment. When the declarative action has taken place, the amendment shall become effective.

Reasons:

1. The 1998 General Synod forwarded to the classes an amendment titled “Placement of the responsibilities of the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency in the Book of Church Order,” which included a section on “Elimination of Need for Dispensations.” In the opinion of this classis, the proposed structure of the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency (MFCA) does not entirely eliminate the need for dispensations. The classis notes that the amendments under this section, as proposed, are not necessary for the functioning of the MFCA as it is currently constituted. The classes were forbidden by action of the synod, however, from considering the issues separately. Orange Classis has had this concern about amendments presented in previous years and has communicated this concern to the office of the General Synod before.

2. By structuring amendments in this way, the General Synod not only makes them very long and difficult for classes to address, but binds the classes (which, in our polity, have supreme episcopal authority) to view the issues in the same light which the synod or
its agents have viewed them. While we acknowledge that some long amendments are necessary because changes are integrally dependent on one another, other changes are grouped for the sake of expediency, forcing classes to either reject good amendments or approve bad ones, robbing the classes of their authority to truly approve all changes to the *Constitution* and of their responsibility to carefully, deliberately, and prayerfully seek God’s will in all these matters.

The advisory committee recommended:

**R-120**

To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The proposed addition is ambiguous and encumbers the *Book of Church Order*.

**Amendments to the Book of Church Order and its Relation to the Whole**

5. The Classis of Orange overtures the General Synod to make the following amendment to the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 4.b.1, (additions are underlined):

1. The commission shall have the responsibility for making recommendations concerning the content, structure, and style of the *Book of Church Order*. It shall report to the General Synod on how any proposed amendment to the *Constitution of the Reformed Church in America* relates to all other sections of the *Constitution* before the General Synod recommends such amendment to the classes for approval.

Reasons:

1. The *Constitution* includes not only the *Government and Disciplinary Procedures*, but also the *Liturgy* and *Doctrinal Standards*. A change in one portion of the *Constitution* may put it in conflict with the other sections; and, since no one section takes precedence over the other two, the church can be left at a loss as to how to properly respond.

2. Since it is unreasonable to expect all the delegates to any given synod to be fully aware of the whole of the *Constitution*, such a report would aid the delegates in voting responsibly.

The advisory committee recommended:

**R-121**

To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reason: The implementation of this overture would make the process of amendment unduly cumbersome.

**Commissioning of Ministers of Word and Sacrament**

6. The Classis of Orange overtures the General Synod to make the following amendment to the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 13, Section 1, and to send it to the classes for approval (addition underlined):

A classis within the geographic area of service in which a minister serves in an RCA congregation or in a specialized ministry shall be the classis in which membership is held and, as such, shall be responsible for the installation or commissioning and supervision of that minister with the following
exceptions:

and further,

overtures the General Synod to instruct its Commission on Christian Worship to prepare a liturgy for the commissioning of ministers to specialized and contract ministries.

Reasons:

While the Government currently requires classes to install ministers into their ministries, the Liturgy, which is also part of the Constitution, clearly identifies installation as an act in which a classis witnesses to a minister who is amenable to the classis and a congregation or other body which is also amenable to the classis making promises to God, to the classis, and to one another, thus constituting an open-ended pastoral relationship (Liturgy, “Reception into the Classis and Installation of a Minister of the Word, 1987,” and “The Order for Installation of a Minister, 1968”). The fact that the pastoral relationship is open-ended and that all bodies involved must be amenable to the classis is witnessed by the fact that only the classis may terminate a pastoral relationship (BCO, 1.II.13.8).

1. Specialized ministers often exercise their ministries in, and are responsible to, organizations that are not and often cannot be amenable to the classis in which a minister holds membership, such as hospitals, educational institutions, regional synods, or the General Synod itself. Theoretically, under the present requirement, the classis of which the RCA general secretary was a member could deny the General Synod permission to terminate its relationship with the general secretary.

2. Because a pastoral relationship is ongoing, according to the Constitution, and can only be terminated by the classis, any contract relationship where the contract expires automatically after a set time cannot be a pastoral relationship, since the contract can be terminated simply by one party or the other declining to renew it. Again, according to the Liturgy, if a pastoral relationship is not constituted, there is no installation.

3. Those who sign the Form of Declaration for Ministers of the Word and Sacrament (BCO, Appendix, 3) promise to “conduct the work of the church in an orderly way and according to the Liturgy and the Book of Church Order.” When the Liturgy and the Book of Church Order contradict one another, as in this case, ministers are forced to choose between breaking one part of that vow or the other.

4. It is still important for a classis to formally recognize and pray for the ministries of all the ministers under its care. An order for commissioning ministers to specialized and contract ministries would make such recognition and prayer possible, while avoiding the contradiction which currently exists in the Constitution.

k The advisory committee recommended:

R-122
To refer Overture 6 to the Commission on Church Order, in consultation with the Commission on Christian Worship, for report to General Synod. (ADOPTED)

Reason: It is important for a classis to formally recognize and celebrate the ministries of all ministers under its care. An order for commissioning ministers to specialized and contract ministries would make such recognition and celebration possible.
Amendments to the Book of Church Order Regarding Church Officers

7. The Classis of South Grand Rapids overtures the General Synod to instruct the Commission on Church Order to prepare amendments to the sections of the Book of Church Order relating to ministers of Word and sacrament, elders, and deacons, to indicate that church officers must live “in fidelity within the covenant of marriage of a man and a woman or chastity in singleness.”

Reasons:

1. In the 1998 report, “Moral Standards for Holders of Church Offices,” the Commission on Theology recommended an amendment to the Declarations for licensed candidates, ministers of Word and sacrament, and General Synod professors of theology that would add a promise to “live a holy and exemplary life, guided by the Holy Scriptures as interpreted by the Standards of the Reformed Church in America, in generosity, chastity, and humility.” The proposed amendments in that report don’t include the elders and deacons, as the 1997 Northern Michigan overture asked, thus contradicting the Reformed principle of the essential unity of the offices of the church.

2. The proposed additions for the Declarations for ministers used the word “chastity,” explaining (in the report, not the amendment): “‘Chastity’ is not merely, or even primarily, the avoidance of sex. The first definition of the word in all major English dictionaries refers to abstention from unlawful or religiously proscribed sexual intercourse. For Christians, chastity is the commitment to place one’s sexuality under the authority of Scripture and to direct one’s sexuality toward faithful, committed love and toward the good of the other. At the most basic level, it is the exercise of restraint over one’s impulses in order to give space for love, commitment, and concern for the other to grow. Chastity is thus just as important in marriage as it is in singleness. For leaders of the church, the cultivation of chastity is a necessary antidote to the pervasiveness of sexual misconduct and sexual impurity in our culture” (p. 2). However, the use of “chastity” to refer to marriage will be confusing to many, since one of the common meanings is to abstain from sexual relations, which would not be the case with Christian marriage. It is better to avoid using a term in a way which does not conform with normal usage.

3. It will be helpful and healthy for our church to state clear standards for sexual behavior which cannot be interpreted as opening a door to behaviors which are inconsistent with the repeated General Synod statements about homosexual behavior. If “chastity” in marriage as proposed by the Commission means “faithfulness in a marriage of a man and a woman,” it is more helpful for the church to say so.

4. Clear statements added to the appropriate sections of the Book of Church Order concerning responsibilities of ministers of the Word, elders, and deacons would be sufficient to give a clear understanding about the church’s expectations for office holders and to the church as a whole, while being consistent with past General Synod actions.

kThe advisory committee recommended:

R-123
To deny the overture. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. The Commission on Theology is presenting a recommendation regarding ministers of Word and sacrament and General Synod professors of theology for which the commission had solicited responses two years ago and for which the classes had ample time to provide input.

2. The Commission on Worship has submitted a liturgy for approval in which elders and deacons promise to lead by example “in faithful service and holy living.”

**Supervision of Churches Using Preaching Elders**

8. The Synod of the Heartland overtures the General Synod through its Commission on Church Order to clarify the role of the classis in the supervision and discipline of churches that use preaching elders.

**Reasons:**

The Use of Non-Ordained Persons:

The commissioning of licensed elders was considered by the Commission on Church Order for the General Synod of 1984 (*MGS 1984*, R-9, pp. 181-182). It was recommended that the classis upon recommendation of the consistory may grant a license to an ordained elder to preach and to administer the sacraments, and perform marriages if permissible under state law. It was not adopted.

Elders, however, “may administer the sacraments, if authorized by the board of elders” (*Book of Church Order*, 1.I.1.8). In 1997 General Synod approved the role of a preaching elder, opening the door for churches to use nonordained persons as preachers (*MGS 1997*, R-11, pp. 283-284).

Some Current Situations in Need of Further Clarification:

1. According to the *Book of Church Order* (*BCO*), preaching elders are “[not] to assume the office of Minister of Word and Sacrament” (*BCO*, 1.II.14.5). Instead they are commissioned to preach for up to two years (*BCO*, 1.II.14.4). Currently there are congregations using preaching elders who not only preach but also administer the sacraments (*BCO*, 1.I.1.8). What line constitutes, in the minds of the congregation, the difference between a preaching elder and minister of Word and sacrament? How can a congregation refrain from assuming their preaching elder is in the role of minister of Word and sacrament?

2. According to the *BCO*, “The consistory must demonstrate that its circumstances make the calling of an ordained minister of Word and sacrament impossible” (*BCO*, 1.II.14.1). Some congregations resist paying minimum salaries for ordained persons. Is this enough to make calling an ordained minister impossible? How does a consistory demonstrate “impossible circumstances” that warrant the use of a preaching elder?

3. According to the *BCO*, “A preaching elder shall be an ordained elder in the Reformed Church in America” (*BCO*, 1.II.14.2). Currently, in order to utilize what appears to be a loophole, congregations are finding nonordained preachers first, then ordaining them as elders so they may become preaching elders. Usually these persons did not have a relationship with the congregation before they were elected as an elder.

This confuses the office of elder. How are these persons accountable to classis? How long are preaching elders required to serve as elders in the Reformed Church in America before being commissioned a preaching elder?
The advisory committee recommended:

**R-124**

To refer overture 8 to the Commission on Church Order for clarification so that the local churches will know how to interpret the role of preaching elder (*Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 14). (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. According to the *Book of Church Order*, preaching elders are “[not] to assume the responsibilities of the Office of Minister of Word and Sacrament” (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 14, Section 5). However, there are congregations currently using preaching elders who not only preach but also administer the sacraments (*Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 1, Section 8).
REPORTS ON CHRISTIAN ACTION

Report of the Commission on Christian Action


A Fair Share: Working to End Hunger

Since the 1996 U.S. welfare reform legislation, the General Synod has several times voiced its concern about the effects of that legislation on the poor and most vulnerable in society. RCA diaconates were encouraged to cooperate with local agencies in meeting the needs of those most severely affected by changes in welfare programs (MGS 1997, R-8, p. 96; MGS 1998, R-7, p. 117). The Office of Social Witness has gathered and shared information both about the effects of welfare reform legislation and about how RCA congregations and ministries are responding to the needs of the poor (MGS 1997, R-10, p. 97; MGS 1998, pp. 115-117; MGS 1999, p. 112). The General Synod has urged members of the Reformed Church in America to write elected officials advocating for welfare policies that, among other things, ensure that all people in need, particularly children, receive assistance (MGS 1998, R-8, pp. 117-119).

Welfare reform legislation and a booming economy have succeeded in reducing unemployment and moving many people from welfare to work. Despite this success, one in every ten households in the U.S. cannot always afford the food their families need. Twelve million children—two million more than in 1997—and nineteen million adults are now affected by hunger. The major emergency food providers in the U.S. report increases in requests for food ranging from 14 to 38 percent, with 40 percent of all requests coming from families with workers. The U.S. Conference of Mayors reported that in 1999 requests for emergency food assistance in twenty-six major cities increased for the fifteenth year in a row by an average of eighteen percent.

Two major problems have caused hunger to persist at high levels. First, while the growing economy has reduced unemployment, many people are taking jobs that pay too little to adequately feed a family. People working full-time at the minimum wage earn $10,712 annually—$3,000 below the poverty line for a family of three. The number of full-time year-round workers with incomes below the poverty line rose by nearly five hundred thousand in 1998. Second, fewer hungry families are getting help from the food stamp program. Ten million fewer people receive food stamps now than in 1994, a drop larger than the strong economy would warrant. The decline in participation especially hurts children. The number of children living in poverty dropped by 350,000, or 3 percent, in 1997, but the number of children receiving food stamps dropped by 1.3 million, or 10 percent, says the Government Accounting Office. The Children’s Defense Fund reports that the number of children living in extreme poverty rose by 426,000, or 26 percent, from 1996 to 1997, primarily due to the loss of food stamp benefits. (Extreme poverty is less than half the poverty line, or less than $123 a week for a family of three.)

The food stamp program needs additional national improvements to reach all hungry people and help end hunger in the United States. Food stamps can help make work pay and support the transition from welfare to work. However, several barriers prevent the food stamp program from providing this support for work. For example, the program still limits the value of a car that food stamp recipients may own to $4650—a value that is only $150 more than the 1977 limit and that is lower than what thirty-five states allow for welfare recipients. Additionally, in the calculation of food stamp benefits, shelter costs remain “capped” for all but the elderly and disabled, so that 729,000 families with children receive a smaller allowance than they need to pay for both food and housing. Additionally, the only legal immigrants who may
currently receive food stamps are certain children, elderly, and disabled people who were in the United States before 1996. More than seven hundred thousand legal immigrants, many of whom work and pay taxes alongside citizens, are still denied access to food stamps.

Many RCA congregations and ministries are responding to the needs of those who are poor and hungry by providing direct assistance and by offering support, training, and encouragement to help families move toward gainful employment. RCA members can also offer the gift of their citizenship and advocate with governmental leaders on behalf of poor and hungry people. The solutions to the problems of poverty and hunger call for acts of both generosity and justice—sharing substance with those in need and working to build a society and an economy where none are forgotten or left behind.

Bread for the World is a Christian citizen’s movement that seeks justice for the world’s hungry people by communicating with U.S. legislators and advocating for policies that help people in need. Each year Bread for the World encourages Christians to conduct an “offering of letters” to elected officials, focusing on some specific issue or legislation. This year’s offering of letters campaign, “A Fair Share: Working to End Hunger,” supports legislation that would strengthen the food stamp program and raise the minimum wage by at least $1 over the next two years. The legislation seeks to close the gap between the need for food and food stamp assistance by removing some of the barriers for eligibility in the program so that people who do not have enough money for food, especially working people, can receive adequate assistance to provide for their families.

Additional information about the offering of letters campaign is available from the RCA Office for Social Witness, the RCA Office for Hunger Education, or directly from Bread for the World.

R-125  
To encourage RCA congregations to participate in the Bread for the World offering of letters campaign, “A Fair Share: Working to End Hunger.” (ADOPTED)

Congregations can also strengthen their hunger ministry through a Covenant Church relationship with Bread for the World. Through the Covenant Church program a church commits itself to integrate hunger concerns into the life of the congregation. Bread for the World provides tools that will equip the congregation to learn more about hunger, pray about it, and take action to end hunger through advocacy. Tools include education, worship, and action resources focused on hunger, the annual Offering of Letters Kit, and five free individual Bread for the World memberships for leaders in congregations.

R-126  
To request the Office of Social Witness and the RCA Office of Hunger Education to make available information about the Bread for the World Covenant Church program; and further,  

to encourage RCA congregations to become Bread for the World Covenant Churches. (ADOPTED)

ORGAN AND TISSUE DONATION

The 1999 General Synod, in response to an overture from the Classis of Chicago, adopted the following recommendation:

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 (MGS 1999, R-31, p. 117).

More than thirty years ago the General Synod of the Reformed Church addressed this issue in the 1969 report of the Theological Commission, “Bodily Organ Transplants,” and made the following findings and recommendations:

Your commission would endorse the principle that medical and scientific knowledge and skill are gifts from God for the benefit of mankind, and that surgical transplants are a proper development of the normal functions of medicine...

The problems involved are intricate and complex. Problems of expense in relationship to stewardship of wealth and resources, the shortage of donors, discrimination in the selection of beneficiaries, determination of the moment of death, are areas to which thought must be given and where, perhaps, new concepts need be espoused.

Your commission would urge Christians to support within their various states the enactment of the Anatomical Gift Act (making it possible for an individual to donate his body so that at the time of death it may be used for medical purposes) and to consider willing their bodies for medical use as an act of Christian love, thus assisting their fellow-men to a healthier life (MGS 1969, pp. 233-234).

In the years since that report advances in medical science have made successful organ donation much more possible and frequent and the need for donated organs and tissue much greater.

• As of this writing, thirty-seven of the fifty states of the United States of America and two territories of the U.S.A. (Guam and the Virgin Islands) have adopted the Uniform Anatomical Gift Act of 1968.

• In addition, many states have approved legislation that not only permits organ and tissue donation but facilitates the requisite process, i.e., health care proxies, advanced directives, living wills, and donor cards. Some states make the process as simple as placing a check mark on one’s drivers license. Most individuals, with few exceptions, are eligible to become organ and tissue donors by the simple execution of a written document. Generally, anyone—from a newborn to a senior citizen under the age of seventy—legally competent to make the choice, personally or via a legal document, and not suffering from a few delineated diseases or conditions, may become an organ donor.

• Most religions approve of organ and tissue donation. The general biblical mandate to love one’s neighbor undergirds the affirmation of organ donation. Furthermore, organ donation is seen as an expression of the biblical call to “lay down our lives for one another” (1 John 3:16). In other words, from a biblical perspective, organ donation is an act of sacrificial love for one’s neighbor, and therefore, a Christ-like outreach and service to another.

• There is a great need for human organs and tissue. As of March 1999, 62,068 people were on the waiting list to receive an organ donation. A new name is added to the list every sixteen minutes. It is estimated twelve to fifteen people die each day awaiting a transplant. More donors from certain racial/ethnic groups are necessary to meet the current demand for human organs and tissue to be distributed among eligible recipients. About half of the people on the waiting list for donor organs are African-Americans, Hispanics, or other minorities. Yet, only about 25 percent of donors are from these
groups. Racial factors do play a role in finding a proper match. Finding a matching kidney, for example, for an African-American involves more than merely identifying a donor of similar size and blood type. Transplant recipients from some racial/ethnic groups often wait twice as long as others because of the difficulty in finding a compatible organ. The solution, according to Dr. Clive Callender, transplant director at Howard University in Washington, D.C., is to educate communities about organ donation.

- Increasing the supply of human organs and tissue, along with improved methods for eligibility determination and revised selection criteria, may help relieve the shortage of organs and tissue. Approximately twenty-five organs/tissues can be harvested and transplanted, such as bone, bone marrow, cartilage, cornea, heart, lung, kidney, pancreas, and liver.

- The legalization of the sale of human organs and tissue, in the opinion of many bioethicists, public health officials, and physicians, is not an acceptable way to increase the supply of human organs and tissue. This practice is perceived as fostering the exploitation of the poor and leading to the creation of a “black market” for stolen or illegally obtained organs and tissue.

- Although some significant steps have been taken in the development of artificial organs, the use of animal organs, and the perfection of techniques for the regeneration of human tissue, the donation of human organs and tissue is still the most viable resource for the needed organs and tissue.

- Many of the common myths and fears relative to organ and tissue donation have been proven to be false and unwarranted. Organ donation never compromises the donor’s own health care. Transplants are performed at no cost to the donor or the donor’s family. The donor’s body is not disfigured, and the procedures do not delay funeral arrangements.

- Local churches can be utilized to educate members and others about organ and tissue donation. In performing this service, congregations can assist members in becoming organ and tissue donors.

- Organ and tissue donation, as an act of love, can be rewarding and a source of spiritual healing and reconciliation for the donor and his or her family. For the recipient, it is a source of life and great gratitude.

- Many health care providers are hesitant or refuse to honor and accept the written authorizations of a deceased person for donation of his or her organs and tissue without affirmation of the choice of the deceased by relatives, clergy, or treating physician. Members of the Reformed Church in America are therefore encouraged to discuss openly, with members of their families, pastor, and physician, their wish to be an organ and tissue donor.

R-127
To encourage 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)

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

In response to an overture from the Classis of Delaware-Raritan the 1999 General Synod voted:

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—MSG 1965, pp. 211-214, 222-225; and MSG 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 (MGŚ 1999, R-30, p. 116).

The reasons cited in support of this recommendation were:

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.

The Classis of Delaware-Raritan in presenting the overture also noted that several other Christian churches have presented statements opposing capital punishment. Among them are:

- American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.
- Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
- Church of the Brethren
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
- Mennonite Central Committee
- Orthodox Church in America
- Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
- United Church of Christ
- United Methodist Church
- United States Catholic Conference

A copy of the 1965 and 1966 statements together with a list of suggested study resources was sent to every congregation in the fall of 1999. Several individuals and consistories prepared thoughtful responses to the papers. Their correspondence contributed to the discussion of the issue among the members of the Commission on Christian Action.

The commission reaffirms the 1965 and 1966 General Synod statements. To that end the commission presents a summary of the previous statements with additional information and comment. In particular the commission calls the church’s attention to three of the reasons cited for opposing capital punishment:

- Capital punishment is of doubtful value as a deterrent.
- Capital punishment results in inequities in application.
- Capital punishment is a method open to irremediable mistakes.

The 1965 report of the Commission on Christian Action listed seven reasons for the church’s opposition to capital punishment:

1. Capital punishment is incompatible with the spirit of Christ and the ethic of love.

The law of love does not negate justice, nor does it indulge in sentimental softness toward the wrongdoer. But it does nullify the motives of vengeance and retribution by forcing us to think in terms of redemption, rehabilitation, and reclamation. The application of the death sentence puts an offending person outside the pale of human help or hope. The cold demands of justice may be met, but the warm concern of love for the person is completely denied...The Christ who refused to endorse the stoning of the woman taken in adultery would have us
speak to the world of compassion, not vengeance (MGS 1965, p. 212).

2. **Capital punishment is of doubtful value as a deterrent.**

The 1965 paper reported that practically all available documentation failed to substantiate the argument that capital punishment curbed homicidal tendencies or curtailed capital crimes. More recent studies bear that out.

When comparisons are made between states with the death penalty and states without, the majority of death penalty states show murder rates higher than non-death penalty states. The average murder rate per 100,000 population in 1997 among death penalty states was 6.6, while the average murder rate among non-death penalty states was only 3.5. A look at neighboring death penalty and non-death penalty states show similar trends. Death penalty states usually have a higher murder rate than their neighboring non-death penalty states. (Death Penalty Information Center: Facts about Deterrence and the Death Penalty; http://www.essential.org/dpic/deter.html#STUDIES.)

The capital punishment as a deterrence argument assumes that the potential criminal will engage in a kind of rational, cost-benefit analysis before he or she commits the crime of murder. Most murders, however, are crimes of passion or are committed under the influence of drugs or alcohol. This does not excuse the perpetrator of responsibility for the crime, but it does show that in most cases capital punishment as a deterrent won’t work.

In an article in the March 28, 1979, issue of *Christian Century* (“Capital Punishment: The Issue of Justification”) David Hoekema argues that even if capital punishment could be shown to be an effective deterrent it cannot be morally justified:

> Those who defend capital punishment on grounds of deterrence would have us take the lives of some—persons convicted of certain crimes—because doing so will discourage crime and thus protect others. But it is a grave moral wrong to treat one person in a way justified solely by the needs of others. To inflict harm on one person in order to serve the purposes of others is to use that person in an immoral and inhumane way, treating him or her not as a person with rights and responsibilities but as means to other ends. The most serious flaw in the deterrence argument, therefore, is that it is the wrong kind of argument. The execution of criminals cannot be justified by the good which their deaths may do to the rest of us.

3. **Capital punishment results in inequities of application.**

“The application of the death penalty demonstrates that it is an uneven and unfair instrument of justice. In no other area is the law applied so unevenly and with such obvious discrimination” (MGS 1965, p. 212).

Numerous studies since 1965 have shown that racial factors play a significant role in determining whether or not a person receives a sentence of death.

Of the five hundred prisoners executed between 1977 and 1998, 81.2 percent were convicted of murdering a white person, even though blacks and whites are victims of homicide in almost equal numbers nationwide.

The landmark study of death sentencing patterns in Georgia by Professor David Baldus found that the odds of a death sentence were four times higher for cases with white victims than for cases with black victims. The odds of a death sentence in cases in which blacks killed whites were as much as eleven times higher than capital murder cases involving a black victim by a white person. (David Baldus, George Woodworth and Charles Pulashi, *Equal*...

Another analysis of race and the death penalty in Philadelphia conducted by Baldus and statistician George Woodworth revealed that the odds of receiving a death sentence were nearly four times higher if the defendant is black. (D. Baldus, et al., “Race Discrimination and the Death Penalty in the Post Furman Era: An Empirical and Legal Overview, with Preliminary Findings from Philadelphia,” Cornell Law Review, Volume 83, Sept. 1998.)

In its 1990 review of empirical studies on racism and the death penalty, the U.S. General Accounting Office reported to Congress that its review showed “a pattern of evidence indicating racial disparities in the charging, sentencing, and imposition of the death penalty” and “that race of victim influence was found at all stages of the criminal justice system process.”

In 1997 the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial Summary or Arbitrary Executions filed a report with the U.N. Commission on Human Rights stating that “race, ethnic origin, and economic status appear to be key determinants of who will and will not receive a sentence of death.”

In February 1997 the American Bar Association concluded that the authorities were failing to confront the undeniable and unacceptable role of racial bias in the application of the death penalty and called for a moratorium on the use of the death penalty in the U.S.

Whether or not a person convicted of a capital crime is actually executed has little to do with the character of the crime and a great deal to do with the skill of the legal counsel, and the latter depends largely on how much money is available for the defense. In the United States the death penalty has been imposed most frequently on the poor. Over 90 percent of defendants charged with capital crimes cannot afford to hire an experienced criminal defense attorney to represent them.

Post-Conviction Defender Organizations (PCDO) were established by the U.S. Congress in 1988 to ensure adequate legal representation for death row inmates during the appeal process. But in 1995 Congress voted to eliminate the $20 million annual budget for PCDOs nationwide, leaving the majority of the centers with insufficient funding and forcing their closure.

If unable to afford good legal help, families of defendants must depend on inexperienced, underpaid, and often incompetent court-appointed attorneys, or settle, in desperation, for any lawyer who will take the case, regardless of reputation. A Chicago Tribune study of death penalty cases found that thirty-three defendants sentenced to die were represented by a lawyer who had been disbarred or suspended. Even when the lawyers are competent they often do not have the money to conduct their own thorough investigations.

According to Elisabeth Semel, who heads an American Bar Association project on legal representation and the death penalty, a proper defense in a death penalty case takes months of research and costs $250,000 or more. But many defendants are represented by lawyers who are paid a few thousand dollars or less and spend as little as two days on the case. It is striking that in three cases in Illinois, college students working on class projects at Northwestern University were able to find evidence that had escaped the attention of defense lawyers.

4. Capital punishment is a method open to irremediable mistakes.

The 1965 statement reported that it was estimated that the wrong person was executed as high as 5 percent of the time.

There are too many variables, such as the vagaries of memory, erroneous recognition, fallibility of experts, faulty summing up, shortcomings of legal aid, jurors, rough police methods of obtaining evidence, sensational newspaper coverage and biased public opinion. In consideration of these all too-human elements, no decision upon a man’s
life should be final” (MGS 1965, p. 213).

The current emphasis on faster executions, fewer resources for the defense, and an expansion in the number of death cases mean that the execution of innocent people is even more likely. The deadliest year on the United States’ death row in almost half a century was 1999. In the decade immediately following the reinstatement of the death penalty (1976-1986) sixty-eight people were executed. Today more than 3,600 people are on death row in the United States, and in 1999 alone there were ninety-eight executions. As of March 20, twenty-six executions had already been carried out in 2000.

This almost-frenzied quest for executions and the rapid imposition of the sentence only increases the danger that innocent people will be executed because of errors in the criminal justice system. As many as twenty-three wrongly convicted people have been executed in the United States in the past century.

The increasing number of innocent defendants being found on death row is a clear sign that the process for sentencing people to death is fraught with fundamental errors—errors which cannot be remedied once an execution occurs. Eighty-six people have been released from death row since 1973 after evidence of their innocence emerged. Many of these cases were discovered not because of the normal appeals process but rather as a result of new scientific techniques, investigations by journalists, and the dedicated work of expert attorneys not available to the typical death row inmate.

The state of Illinois recently announced a moratorium on executions because of the concern that an innocent person might be executed. Since the death penalty was reinstated in Illinois in 1977, thirteen people who were condemned to die have been exonerated. Three people were freed from death row in Illinois after a journalism class at Northwestern University established their innocence and proved that someone else had committed the crimes. One condemned man came within two days of execution.

The late Supreme Court Justice Harry A. Blackmun, in a dissenting opinion in the court’s order denying review in a Texas death penalty case (Callins vs. Collins, February, 1994), stated:

I feel morally and intellectually obligated simply to concede that the death penalty experiment has failed. It is virtually self-evident to me that now no combination of procedural rules or substantive regulations ever can save the death penalty from its inherent constitutional deficiencies. The basic question—does the system accurately and consistently determine which defendants “deserve” to die?—cannot be answered in the affirmative... The problem is that inevitability of factual, legal and moral error gives us a system that we know must wrongly kill some defendants, a system that fails to deliver the fair, consistent and reliable sentences of death required by the Constitution.

5. Capital punishment ignores corporate and community guilt.

The 1965 statement argued that the death penalty does not address community responsibility for those conditions that may contribute to criminal behavior—poverty, unemployment, injustice, and racial discrimination. Such factors may diminish but certainly do not destroy the responsibility of the individual. Yet society also bears some responsibility for directing efforts and resources toward correcting those conditions that may foster such behavior.

6. Capital punishment perpetuates the concepts of vengeance and retaliation.

“As an agency of society, the state should not become an avenger for individuals; it should not presume the authority to satisfy divine justice by vengeful methods.”
7. Capital punishment ignores the entire concept of rehabilitation.

“The Christian faith should be concerned not with retribution, but with redemption. Any method which closes the door to all forgiveness, and to any hope of redemption, cannot stand the test of our faith.”

In 1966 the Commission on Christian Action also presented to General Synod a summary of its biblical study concerning capital punishment. That report noted that while Old Testament law mandated a death penalty in certain cases, a legalistic and literal application of those laws is a virtual impossibility. Capital crimes in the Mosaic code include not only murder but worship of foreign gods (Exodus 22:20), kidnapping (Exodus 21:16), adultery (Leviticus 20:10), deception by a bride concerning her virginity (Deuteronomy 22:21), disobedience to parents (Deuteronomy 21:18-21), witchcraft (Exodus 22:18), and striking or cursing a parent (Exodus 21:15).

Furthermore, the intent and direction of many Old Testament laws was on limiting retaliation. “An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a life for a life” was not so much a command to seek vengeance as it was a limitation on retribution. Later rabbinic tradition placed even more restrictions on the death penalty. By Jesus’ day most penalties had evolved to where they could be taken care of through some form of restitution.

A frequent theme in the Old Testament is mercy for the offender. The first murder recorded in the Bible was followed by an act of God protecting the murderer (Genesis 4). Cities of refuge were to be provided where the guilty could avoid revenge by the victim’s family (Numbers 35, Deuteronomy 4 and 19, Joshua 20). Such sanctuaries allowed time for tempers to cool and a solution to be worked out. “To me belong vengeance and recompense” (Deut. 32:35) and “You shall not take vengeance...but shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev. 19:18) are themes that recur frequently in the Old Testament.

The Old Testament contains another perspective that is relevant to a discussion of the death penalty. The Old Testament concept of justice was comprehensive. It focused on righteousness and right relationships and aimed at establishing the shalom community. In the Old Testament “justice” refers more often to the justice of distribution than to the justice of retribution. Unequal wealth, power, and unequal administration of the laws were as much sins as those we commonly call crimes today. Given this perspective of justice, the death penalty as it is administered today seems incompatible with Old Testament justice for two reasons: 1) death penalty laws focus only on the crime without attempting to deal with larger inequalities, and 2) the death penalty is administered unequally, falling most heavily on the poor and the powerless. In its current application the death penalty is fundamentally contradictory to the spirit of the Old Testament.

In the New Testament Jesus takes the Old Testament law of limited retaliation and extrapolates it so it becomes the law of nonresistance and active love for one’s enemies:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also...You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matt. 5:38-45).

The 1966 report concluded: “The New Testament dimension of love stands as a high point in the Christian revelation. There can be no biblical position without placing the principle of love at the very heart and center of every moral and ethical consideration... Because ‘the love of Christ constrains us,’ we feel compelled to speak against the lovelessness and evil
of capital punishment.”

Some of the recent correspondence with the Commission on Christian Action called attention to the God-instituted authority of government, including the authority to “bear the sword” (Rom.13:4). In cases of self-defense, or where potential criminal activity presents an immediate and grave threat and no alternative means of preventing that threat are apparent, then law enforcement officials may be justified in killing. But capital punishment bears little resemblance to such situations. It involves the planned, deliberate killing of someone in custody who is not a present threat to human life. Planned execution is not necessary to save the lives of future victims. There are alternative means of protecting society (such as life imprisonment) and of exercising legitimate government authority on behalf of law-abiding citizens. The practice of capital punishment in the United States does not advance these causes and may in fact hinder them because in its application it is arbitrary, unjust, and prone to error.

R-128
To commend to the church the 1965, 1966, and 2000 Christian Action Commission reports on capital punishment. (ADOPTED)

R-129
To urge members of the Reformed Church in America to contact their elected officials, urging them to advocate for the abolition of capital punishment and to call for an immediate moratorium on executions. (ADOPTED. Division of the house; 121 yes, 109 no)

Ecumenical Observers

The Commission on Christian Action requests General Synod to approve a change in the Bylaws of the General Synod concerning the observers to the Commission on Christian Action. The 1997 General Synod adopted a Formula of Agreement with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and the United Church of Christ (MGS 1997, R-2, p. 186); and the commission recommends that observers from the churches represented in the formula attend Commission on Christian Action meetings.

R-130
To adopt in first reading the following revision of the Bylaws of the General Synod in the Book of Church Order, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 2a, for recommendation to the 2001 General Synod for approval (additions are underlined):

Sec. 2. Commission on Christian Action

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

kThe advisory committee recommended to amend R-130 as follows (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken out):
R-130 (amendment)
The Commission shall have nine eleven members. There shall also be two ecumenical observers named by the Commission on Christian Action, subject to the approval of the General Synod: ...
(ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

Reason: To clarify the distinction between ecumenical observers and regular members.

Work in Progress

The commission is working on a follow-up paper on the moral and ethical questions raised by genetic engineering (MGS 1999, R-22, p. 98) and is beginning discussion on issues of public education. The commission has also been in communication with RCA staff members, the urban ministries team and the Commission on Race and Ethnicity concerning several of the recommendations that resulted from the 1998 Commission on Christian Action report, “Bringing Racism to Light for a Decade Freed from Racism” (MGS 1998, pp. 119-134).

Finally, the commission notes with gratitude those who are completing their term of service: Mary Bechler, John Fitzgerald, and Moira Poppen-Gargano. Each of them has brought unique gifts, energy, and commitment to the commission’s work. Their contributions and their presence have enriched the meetings of the commission and life of the church.

From the Report of the Council for Asian-American Ministries

(The report is found on page 88.)

R-11
To instruct the general secretary and the minister for social witness to write to Indonesia’s fourth president, Abdurachman Wahid, to commend him in his effort to foster racial/ethnic and religious harmony, and to encourage him as he attempts to build a democratic society in Indonesia; and further,

to call on the members of the Reformed Church in America to pray for the Indonesian government in its genuine effort to bring peace to its people under the leadership of president Abdurrahman Wahid.
(ADOPTED)

New Business
The advisory committee, in response to new business presented at the beginning of General Synod (p. 32), recommended:

R-131 (new)
To encourage members of the Reformed Church in America to give thanks to God for the summit meeting between the leaders of North and South Korea; and further,

to pray that the summit meeting will be a significant step in a process leading to peace in Korea; and further,

to request the general secretary to communicate to the president of the United States, key members of the U.S. Congress, and the general secretary of the United Nations, encouraging them to continue to do whatever they can to facilitate peace in Korea. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. The coming summit meeting may indeed signal a moment of opportunity for the advancement of peace in Korea.
2. Peace and openness between North and South Korea could further facilitate the spread of the gospel in Korea.

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

REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF SOCIAL WITNESS

“The purpose of the Reformed Church in America, together with all other churches of Christ, is to minister to the total life of all people by preaching, teaching, and proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and by all Christian good works” (Preamble to the Book of Church Order). 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, working for justice and reconciliation among peoples and races, and by striving to more faithfully care 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.

The office is often called upon to assist deacons in their “ministry of mercy, service, and outreach” (Book of Church Order, 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 and provides staff support for the Commission on Christian Action.

Resources for study and action
In recent years the Office of Social Witness has developed or provided study resources on the following issues: genetic engineering, physician-assisted suicide, racial justice, restorative justice (ministry in the criminal justice system), ministry with children, simpler living, third world debt, peacemaking, abortion, ministry in a “two-tiered” society (economic justice), health and the environment, land use, welfare reform, climate change, “welcoming the stranger,” capital punishment, and police-community dialogue. Many of these resources remain current and available through the RCA Distribution Center.

The office also publishes an occasional newsletter, the City Gate, and maintains a list of RCA members who receive periodic “action alerts.”

Workshops and training events

The Office of Social Witness facilitates RCA participation in events that help inform the church’s social witness, enable church members to interact with legislators and other leaders, and provide opportunities for people to consider how the biblical calls for justice, peace, and the well-being of creation can impact public policy. Such events enabled RCA people to express Christian social concern to leaders in society and to hear from others about how changes in public policy are affecting their lives.

In the past year the Office of Social Witness helped to make it possible for RCA members to participate in a variety of such experiences. Two seminarians were part of an ecumenical travel seminar to Cuba; a group of Northwestern College students participated in a conference on environment and public policy in Washington, D.C. and another group attended a Christian multicultural student leadership conference; and a group of Hope College students participated in training and demonstrations to close the School of the Americas in Fort Benning, Georgia. RCA members also participated in the Call to Renewal National Summit on the Churches and Poverty, the Bread for the World national gathering, as well as state and local gatherings.

Ecumenical Gatherings

The Office of Social Witness represented the church in a number of ecumenical settings. Among them were meetings with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Division of Church in Society; a National Council of Churches of Christ (NCCC) forum on public policy; the Eco-justice working group of the NCCC; and the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR).

Caring for Creation

Caring for God’s creation is the original human vocation. Humankind was placed in the garden “to till it and keep it” (Gen. 2:15). That we have been less than faithful in this calling is painfully apparent. The threat of climate change, species extinction, destruction and degradation of habitat, and pollution of land, air, and water are today not only local problems but global threats of unprecedented proportions. In the twenty-first century caring for and defending God’s creation has become an important part of the church’s witness.

The 1998 General Synod encouraged each classis to name a “caring for creation coordinator” to serve as resource and support persons to aid congregations in their ministries of defending and restoring God’s creation. There are now coordinators in each regional synod and in more than one-third of the classes. Coordinators work in cooperation with the regional synod diaconal ministry teams. The Office of Social Witness continues to nurture this network of volunteers and to supply them with resources and training to assist congregations in this area of ministry.

In the past year caring for creation coordinators have led workshops at diaconal ministry training events; conducted adult education courses in their congregations; served on ecumenical work groups in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Michigan; helped establish natural habitat gardens
on church property; conducted energy audits of church facilities; visited with elected officials; wrote articles for church newsletters; and conducted local field trips and creation care work projects. Through the network of coordinators the Office of Social Witness was also able to offer small grants for “creation care” projects in local congregations.

Early in 2000 Robin Hoy accepted a part-time contract position as an associate in social witness. Hoy is a member of the North and Southampton Reformed Church in Churchville, Pennsylvania. Among her responsibilities will be the continuing development and nurture of the network of caring for creation coordinators.

**General Synod Referrals**

The 1999 General Synod instructed the Office of Social Witness to make available study and discussion resources about climate change and methods of reducing fossil fuel consumption (MGS 1999, R-25, p.104), about the debt crisis (MGS 1999, R-29, p. 111), and on the issue of capital punishment (MGS 1999, R-30, p.116). The Office of Social Witness has provided resources and study materials through the network of caring for creation coordinators, The City Gate newsletter, action alerts, and the RCA web pages. The 1965 and 1966 General Synod statements on capital punishment and a list of suggested study resources were sent to each congregation. Several congregations, consistories, and individuals studied and discussed the statements and responded with comments and questions, which were shared with the Commission on Christian Action.

In response to other General Synod actions the Office of Social Witness and Worship helped to prepare worship resources for a day of fasting and prayer for church revitalization (MGS 1999, R-19, p.290) and for a commissioning service for Mission 2000 representatives. The minister for social witness also wrote letters to the president of the United States and key elected officials concerning the persecution of Christians and others in India (MGS 1999, R-20, p. 115).

In response to the 1998 Commission on Christian Action report, “Bringing Racism to Light for a Decade Freed from Racism” (MGS 1998, pp. 119-134), the General Synod designated the decade 2000-2010 as the “Decade Freed from Racism in the RCA.” The synod called for congregations to become models in addressing racism and in breaking down racial and ethnic barriers. In a resource packet mailed to each congregation the Office of Social Witness provided some suggested study resources and worship materials (MGS 1998, R-16, p. 132). Many additional resources are available from the Office of Social Witness and the RCA Distribution Center/TRAVARCA. The office is also in the process of gathering descriptions of ministries aimed at breaking down racial and ethnic barriers (MGS 1998, R-16, p. 132). The minister for social witness, representatives of the racial/ethnic councils, and other denominational staff have made preliminary plans for conducting anti-racism training workshops for RCA staff (MGS 1998, R-17, p. 133).

**Report of the Commission on Race and Ethnicity**

The Commission on Race and Ethnicity met in Chicago, Illinois, on October 6-7, 1999, and
on February 25-26, 2000. Since this is a newly formed commission, an important initial focus was to learn more about the responsibilities assigned to the commission by the General Synod. The commission’s stated objectives include:

1. The commission shall advise the church on policies and initiatives that address issues of institutional racism and the commitment of the Reformed Church in America to become a fully multicultural and multiethnic denomination.

2. The commission shall serve as an advocate for transformation of the Reformed Church in America in regard to its multiracial and multiethnic life.

3. The commission shall recommend policies, objectives, guidelines, and strategies to assist the Reformed Church in America in its effort through all of its agencies, commissions, institutions, and other affiliated bodies to become a fully multiracial and multiethnic church.

4. The commission shall monitor, evaluate, and report on the Reformed Church in America’s progress in achieving its multiracial and multicultural objectives.

In addition, the 1998 General Synod made referrals to the commission. These included:

- To instruct the Commission on Race and Ethnicity, between June 1998 and January 1, 2000, to coordinate planning for the Decade Freed from Racism in the Reformed Church in America; and further,

  to instruct the commission on Race and Ethnicity to establish steps that truly make the year 2000 the start of the Decade Freed from Racism, for report to the 2000 General Synod (MGS 1998, R-10, p. 131).

- To instruct the Commission on Race and Ethnicity to invite RCA regional synods, classes, congregations, agencies, commissions and institutions to plan events with the diverse people who make up the Reformed Church in America for open discussions of issues of race and racism in an atmosphere of Christian love, and to provide information about trained teams of facilitators for such discussions; and further,

  to instruct the Commission on Race and Ethnicity to collect information about these discussions on race throughout the Reformed Church in America, for report to the 2005 General Synod (MGS 1998, R-11, p. 131).

The commission used the first meeting to learn more about the purpose and the history of the commission’s formation and to explore ways that it might serve the denomination in both the elimination of racism within the church and the fostering of a multiracial and multicultural church.

Following extensive discussion about the challenging tasks assigned, the commission agreed that the next meetings should include significant opportunities to listen to stories of how racism has been experienced individually and institutionally by members of the RCA. The commission also decided to establish a discussion forum on the denominational website (www.rca.org) in order to assist the commission in gathering stories and perspectives from the wider church.

At its second meeting commission members were invited to review the objectives contained in the GSC’s priority, “Build a Church that Reflects the Diversity Around Us,” prior to the presentation to the spring GSC meeting. In addition to suggesting recommendations for clarification and elaboration, the commission commends the intent and content of the
objectives and views them as central components of a Decade Freed from Racism in the Reformed Church in America.

Through listening to stories conveyed through two racial/ethnic councils or its staff, the commission was able to identify some emerging common threads that help to identify how racism is experienced within the denomination.

The commission has identified the following areas of concern as possible agenda items for future consideration:

1. Are there inequities in the ways we begin new churches, allocate resources, and evaluate their success? Are there different patterns of beginning new churches by racial/cultural groups that have proven successful?

2. Do we have appropriate resources for nurturing the faith of children, youth, and adults in churches whose members are racial/ethnic minorities? Do the current educational resources help prepare the members of the denomination for a culturally and racially diverse society?

3. Do we give sufficient attention to recruiting and developing pastoral and lay leadership from our racial/ethnic congregations?

4. Are racial/ethnic congregations sometimes subjected to subtle stereotyping by RCA staff, judicatories, and program agencies? How do we ensure that there is no “benign neglect” of racial/ethnic congregations at different levels within the structure of the church?

5. Can we do a better job assisting congregations who depend on others for worship space to find welcoming hosts who generously provide affordable space?

6. Are majority members of the RCA sometimes insensitive to the needs and concerns of racial/ethnic congregations? Are there strategies, or “best practices,” for increasing cross-cultural sensitivity?

7. How can we increase opportunities for the kinds of face-to-face, cross-cultural conversations, and other interactive activities that often transform our ways of thinking, feeling, and acting?

It is the commission’s intention to continue to explore these areas of concern, to seek ways to address them, and to address additional concerns as they are identified.

The commission received several referrals from the General Synod of 1998. At this time the commission is not prepared to bring a report or recommendations that specifically address these referrals. Since the commission was actually established one year later than was anticipated at the time the synod made these referrals, the commission will require an additional year to give these weighty tasks the careful attention they require. It expects to bring to the General Synod of 2001 a general outline of components to be included in the Decade Freed from Racism in the Reformed Church in America, including specific steps that will help the church begin to make these intentions a reality.
REPORT OF THE COMMISSION ON NOMINATIONS
(as of 6/5/00)

The Commission on Nominations met in person on February 10, 2000, and again, by conference call, on April 18 and March 24, 2000. Between these meetings members of the commission actively sought out qualified candidates for each of the commissions and agencies of the Reformed Church in America. In order to effectively fulfill the responsibilities of the commission, members seek out potential nominees, solicit Talent Bank Forms (a brief application), and check references on those who are interested. In these ways the commission is proactive in fulfilling its responsibilities, 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: “SHAPE.” 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 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 nomination 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 in the list that follows, are asked to fill out a Talent Bank Form (a brief two-page application) and submit it to the Commission on Nominations as indicated on the form. Forms are available on the display table at General Synod, 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.

Note: * indicates a final term.
    # indicates an official nomination from the assembly, institution, or agency listed.

GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL

Class of 2001
The Rev. Stephen Allison .......................................... Classis of Columbia Greene#
Stephen Janssen ........................................................ Classis of Pleasant Prairie#

Class of 2002
Kristi Egger-Brown ................................................... Classis of Central Plains#
The Rev. Daniel Gillett .............................................. Classis of Holland#
The Rev. Peter Nordstrom ........................................ Classis of Florida#
Alice Rowan ............................................................. Classis of Schoharie#
The Rev. Steven Sayer .............................................. Classis of Orange#

Class of 2003
Esa Attocknie ............................................................. Native American Indian Ministries Council#
*Harlan Bergman .................................................... Classis of Central Iowa #
*The Rev. Stephen Breen ............................................ Classis of West Sioux#
John Bos ................................................................. Classis of California#
The Rev. William Donkersloot ................................ Classis of Iliana#
Ted Dykstra ............................................................. Classis of Canadian Prairies#
The Rev. Barbara Fillette ........................................... At-large
*The Rev. Ronald Gray .............................................. Classis of Rocky Mountains#
*Arthur Hessinger ................................................... Classis of Nassau-Suffolk#
The Rev. John Hubers .............................................. At-large
The Rev. Larry Izenbart ............................................ Classis of North Michigan#
Stephanie Kaper-Dale ............................................. At-large
The Rev. Louis LaFazia ............................................. Classis of Delaware-Raritan#
Gene Ligtenberg ..................................................... Classis of Rochester#
The Rev. Ben Lin .................................................... Classis of Queens#
*The Rev. Toni Macon ............................................... At-large
Annie Lee Phillips ................................................... African-American Council#
The Rev. Karyn Ratcliffe .......................................... Classis of Passaic Valley#
Loretta Rolle ......................................................... Classis of Lake Erie#
The Rev. Ed Schreur ................................................ Classis of Dakota#
The Rev. Bob Terwilliger ......................................... Classis of Southwest Michigan#
The Rev. Pacia Vamvas ............................................. Classis of Albany#

COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN ACTION

Class of 2003
Ai-Lan Wong
Christina Barthel
The Rev. Stephen Mathonnet-VanderWell

COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN UNITY

Class of 2003
The Rev. David Hartono
Anna Melissa James
The Rev. Pedro Windsor

COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Class of 2003
*The Rev. Judith Marvel
The Rev. Dawn Boelkins

COMMISSION ON CHURCH ORDER
Class of 2003

*Carol Myers
Andrea Van Beek

COMMISSION ON HISTORY

Class of 2003

The Rev. Jesus Serrano
The Rev. Melody Meeter

COMMISSION ON JUDICIAL BUSINESS

Class of 2003

Daniel VandeZande ................................................ Regional Synod of Mid-America#
The Rev. Tom Meyer ................................................ Regional Synod of Canada#
The Rev. Janet Johnston ........................................ Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics#

COMMISSION ON NOMINATIONS

Class of 2003

Vacant ................................................................. Regional Synod of Canada#
*Virginia Bowman .............................................. Regional Synod of New York#
The Rev. Madeline Fuentez ......................................... Council for Hispanic Ministries#
*The Rev. Gary Van Heukelom ................................ Regional Synod of the Heartland#
*Beverly Clark ............................................................ African-American Council#
Rev. Samuel Kwon ................................................. Council for Pacific and Asian American Ministries#

COMMISSION ON RACE AND ETHNICITY

Class of 2003

Gretel Van Wieren .................................................. At-large
The Rev. Brigido Cabrera ........................................... Council for Hispanic Ministries#
Bernice Mast .......................................................... Native American Indian Ministries Council#

COMMISSION ON THEOLOGY

Class of 2003

Dr. Steven Bouma-Prediger
The Rev. David Landegent
The Rev. Carolyn Holloway

COMMISSION FOR WOMEN

Class of 2003

*The Rev. Mary Bos
Sandra Fisher
*The Rev. Evelyn Diephouse
NOMINATIONS

BOARD OF BENEFIT SERVICES

Class of 2001

Jack Dalenberg
Dr. Carolyn Jones-Assini
William Rockhold
The Rev. Okke Postma
Vacant

Class of 2002

Harlan Bergman
* Harry DeBruyn
Gordon Dobson
The Rev. Bob White

Class of 2003

Mary Baumann
Donald Nash
Craig Neckers
Kurt Van Genderen

BUILDING AND EXTENSION FUND

Class of 2003

* Thomas Leach

EDITORIAL COUNCIL OF THE CHURCH HERALD

Class of 2003

John Buntsma ........................................................ Regional Synod of the Heartland#
* The Rev. Joe Veltman ............................................ Regional Synod of Canada#
Rev. Ron Sanford.................................................. Regional Synod of Mid-America#
Ms. Regina Johnson.............................................. At-large

MINISTERIAL FORMATION COORDINATING AGENCY

Class of 2003

The Rev. Andrea Godwin-Stremler
* Christina Thé
* Carol Wagner

RCA FOUNDATION

Class of 2002

Bob DeYoung

Class of 2003

* Arthur Hessinger
* Edward Mondore

WORLD ALLIANCE OF REFORMED CHURCHES

Class of 2003

The Rev. Dan Meeter
No openings

NEW BRUNSWICK THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

All nominees to the boards of the seminaries are the official nominees of the board (MGS 1993, R-4, p.300). The nominations from the regional synods have been made in consultation with those synods.

**Class of 2003**

Janice Moddejonge ................................................ Regional Synod of Canada
The Rev. Laurel Brundage ........................................ New Brunswick Theological Seminary#
*Eunice Folkerts ..................................................... New Brunswick Theological Seminary#
Gloria Norton ......................................................... New Brunswick Theological Seminary#
*The Rev. Louis Ruprecht ........................................ New Brunswick Theological Seminary#
Andrea VanBeek ..................................................... New Brunswick Theological Seminary#
The Rev. Gordon Dragt .......................................... New Brunswick Theological Seminary#
Gilberto Pagan ..................................................... New Brunswick Theological Seminary#

**WESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY**

All nominees to the boards of the seminaries are the official nominees of the board (MGS 1993, R-4, p.300). The nominations from the regional synods have been made in consultation with those synods.

**Class of 2001**

Karen Mulder ....................................................... Western Theological Seminary#

**Class of 2002**

Vacant ........................................................................ Regional Synod of New York

**Class of 2003**

*Thomas Claus ...................................................... Western Theological Seminary#
Dellvin Hoezee ...................................................... Western Theological Seminary#
The Rev. Dirk Kramer ........................................... Regional Synod of Canada
The Rev. Myung Woo Lee ....................................... Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantic
The Rev. Phyllis Palsma ........................................ Regional Synod of Albany
*Stephen Thomas .................................................. Western Theological Seminary#
Carol Wagner ....................................................... Western Theological Seminary#

**CENTRAL COLLEGE**

**Class of 2004**

*Susan Brandl
*Mark DeCook
*Donald Vogel
NOMINATIONS

HOPE COLLEGE

Class of 2004

The Rev. Brian Vriesman
*The Rev. Peter Semeyn
vacant
vacant

NORTHWESTERN COLLEGE

Class of 2004

The Rev. Mark Kraai ................................................. Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics#
The Rev. Irvin Rivera ............................................. Regional Synod of New York#
Nancy Schoep ....................................................... Regional Synod of Albany#

R-132
REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE OF REFERENCE

RESOLUTIONS

The Committee of Reference presents the following resolutions:

R-133
WHEREAS the delegates and guests of General Synod have been graciously received by Hofstra University; and

WHEREAS the beautiful setting, abundant bagels, hospitality of the university, and meeting space have been conducive to the work, sustenance, engagement, and productivity of the delegates;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-fourth General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Hempstead, New York, on the fifteenth day of June 2000, expresses its gratitude to Hofstra University for its hospitality in hosting delegates of the General Synod. (ADOPTED)

R-134
WHEREAS the ministers and members of area churches within the Synod of New York opened their houses of worship to the delegates for Pentecost Sunday worship; and

WHEREAS these Christian brothers and sisters offered us food, table fellowship, and “a cup of cold water” in the heat of the day, and graciously welcomed us into their communities and churches with eagerness and openness;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-fourth General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Hempstead, New York, on the fifteenth day of June 2000, expresses its sincere appreciation to the pastors and members of the churches of the Synod of New York. (ADOPTED)

R-135
WHEREAS we were led 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-fourth General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Hempstead, New York, on the fifteenth day of June 2000, expresses its sincere gratitude to God for the musical gifts of Paul Thé, and for sending other gifted musicians and dancers to share their time and talents with us. (ADOPTED)

R-136
WHEREAS the worship team, worship leaders, and the Rev. Dr. Carol Bechtel, the Rev. Dr. Arthur Caliandro, the Rev. Dr. Emilio Castro, the Rev. Dr. James Forbes, and the Rev. Dr. Robert H. Schuller welcomed us into joyous, inspiring, prayerful, and challenging worship;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-
fourth General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Hempstead, New York, on the fifteenth day of June 2000, expresses its sincere gratitude to God for their careful planning, inspiration, and invitation to live more fully in the power and promises of God. (ADOPTED)

R-137
WHEREAS the Rev. Dr. Gregg A. Mast presided with sincerity and commitment during his tenure as president of General Synod, calling us to pray and to be taught by the global church, and helping us to embrace the gifts of our Reformed tradition as these relate to pastoral leadership, ministry and mission; and

WHEREAS he has expressed compassion and concern for children and ministry at home and abroad; and

WHEREAS he has chaired the meetings of the General Synod with occasional alertness, grace, clarity, and a constant crooked grin;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-fourth General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Hempstead, New York, on the fifteenth day of June 2000, expresses its heartfelt gratitude to our heavenly Father for the joyful, humble, strong, and gentle leadership of the Rev. Dr. Gregg A. Mast. (ADOPTED)

R-138
WHEREAS elder Carol Mutch has been elected president of General Synod; and

WHEREAS the Rev. Steven Brooks has been elected vice president of General Synod;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-fourth General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Hempstead, New York, on the fifteenth day of June, 2000, expresses its congratulations and commends elder Carol Mutch and the Rev. Steven Brooks to the utterly reliable care and keeping of the Sustainer. (ADOPTED)

R-139
WHEREAS the general secretary of the Reformed Church in America, the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, has continued to encourage dialogue throughout the church, reminding us of our evangelical and ecumenical heritage, calling us to unity and faithfulness; and

WHEREAS he serves the denomination with passion, integrity, courage, and tireless commitment; and

WHEREAS he has demonstrated, despite creeping age, great good humor through belly laughs over a singing, flapping fish, whose musical performance was outshone by that of the general secretary himself decked in party hat;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-
fourth General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Hempstead, New York, on the fifteenth day of June 2000, expresses its sincere appreciation and thanks to its general secretary and praises God for the gifts we receive through his leadership. (ADOPTED)

R-140
WHEREAS the moderators and vice moderators of the various advisory committees, staff members, and resource persons have facilitated the work of the advisory committee and the General Synod in such a fashion that the deliberative decisions of the General Synod have been reached with a spirit of mutual respect and a constant awareness of the Spirit's presence and labors among us;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-fourth General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Hempstead, New York, on the fifteenth day of June 2000, expresses its heartfelt thanks for their dedicated service. (ADOPTED)

R-141
WHEREAS the many elder delegates offered their tireless energies and careful consideration to the sometimes mysterious work and complicated deliberations of the General Synod; and

WHEREAS many have sacrificed personal vacation time at fancy resorts to do so, sleeping instead, on drool-proofed pillows;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-fourth General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Hempstead, New York, on the fifteenth day of June 2000, 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-142
WHEREAS the staff of the Reformed Church in America has facilitated the remarkably smooth and efficient operation of the General Synod, often from behind the scenes, on very little sleep, with the kind of love, joy, peace and patience that only the Spirit makes possible;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-fourth General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Hempstead, New York, on the fifteenth day of June 2000, 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:


R-143
WHEREAS Russell Paarlberg has served the General Synod as its parliamentarian with competence and alertness, despite long stretches of being underemployed;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-fourth General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Hempstead, New York, on the fifteenth day of June 2000, expresses its thanks to Russell Paarlberg for his dedicated contribution to the work of the synod. (ADOPTED)

R-144
WHEREAS members of various General Synod commissions, councils, and agencies are completing their terms of service this year, having served God and the church faithfully in their respective capacities;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-fourth General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Hempstead, New York, on the fifteenth day of June 2000, expresses its enthusiastic appreciation to these dedicated servants of the church. (ADOPTED)

R-145
WHEREAS Chaplain Willem Kroon made tangible the love and presence of Christ through his service as the General Synod chaplain;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-fourth General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Hempstead, New York, on the fifteenth day of June 2000, expresses its appreciation to the Rev. Willem Kroon for his care. (ADOPTED)

R-146
WHEREAS, the Rev. LeRoy Koopman has served the Church Herald and the Reformed Church in America for the past twenty-five years; and

WHEREAS he has preserved our history through his care and faithfulness in editing the Minutes of General Synod; and

WHEREAS, in general terms, he has dedicated himself to taking the words of many persons and making them sound “way more better” than they would have without his intervention as denominational tender of words;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-
fourth General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Hempstead, New York, on the fifteenth day of June 2000, expresses its thanksgiving to God for LeRoy Koopman’s long faithfulness to the denomination and his patient care for the church’s words; and we wish him all joy in his retirement (should he ever actually act on this reality). (ADOPTED)

R-147
WHEREAS Mission 2000: Discerning the Spirit, Engaging the World met June 9-12, 2000, at Hofstra University, in Hempstead, New York; and

WHEREAS worship participants made the services lively and exciting through music, drama, dance, and instruments; and

WHEREAS Reformed Church missionaries, ecumenical representatives, and delegates, along with mission partners enhanced our vision; and

WHEREAS we were enriched by the presence of many past presidents of General Synod; and

WHEREAS this convocation caused us to wait on the Spirit of God for the renewing of our vision and to know the Spirit’s presence in our discernment and dreaming;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-fourth General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Hempstead, New York, on the fifteenth day of June 2000, expresses its gratitude and joy for this time of worship, celebration, and discernment through which our spirits have been renewed by the power of the Holy Spirit for the sake of engagement with the world. (ADOPTED)

R-148
WHEREAS the Reformed Church in America’s celebration of Mission 2000: Discerning the Spirit, Engaging the World would have remained a dream if not for the faithful labors of hundreds of persons;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-fourth General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Hempstead, New York, on the fifteenth day of June 2000, expresses its appreciation and gratitude to:

Art Hessinger, who so ably chaired the Regional Synod of New York planning team and organized all transportation for the General Synod and Mission 2000;

Barbara Neevel, of the site committee, who with precision and unfailing grace single-handedly managed the entire registration process;

Mary Clark, who energetically chaired the site committee with
competence and good spirit;

Jane Konitz, who thoughtfully chaired and organized the New York Synod 200th anniversary celebration;

Jane Richardson, who carefully organized and supervised the plunge process and the volunteers for the Sunday night Pentecost service;

Roger Kleinheksel and Jon Norton, who dreamed and made reality of multiple interesting immersion experiences;

Lula Thomas, who patiently coordinated and advised the fifty-four churches who hosted Mission 2000 participants;

The 2,842 volunteers who made the event possible;

Chris Adams and the Hofstra Conference Services staff, along with the staff of the Hofstra Arena; and

Each church that helped us see God at work in this city of our birth, and who made our stay memorable and meaningful. (ADOPTED)