

REPORTS ON CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AND DISCIPLESHIP

Report of the Commission on Race and Ethnicity

The General Synod of 1998 charged the Commission on Race and Ethnicity to “coordinate planning for the Decade Freed from Racism and to establish steps that would enable the denomination to work toward this goal” (*MGS 1998*, R-10, p. 131). Since the beginning of the commission’s work in the fall of 1999, it has been gathering information, listening to stories of how racism has been experienced by members of the denomination, and discussing possible ways of addressing the challenge of making the RCA a fully multiracial and multicultural church.

In June 2001 the commission presented its action plan to the General Synod (*MGS 2001*, pp. 388-394). This year’s report assesses the progress made on elements of the recommendations approved by previous General Synods and offers an additional recommendation in pursuing the goal of freeing the denomination from racism.

1. Affirming the theological foundations that inform our life and witness as a denomination.

The 2001 General Synod adopted recommendations “to endorse and use the theological foundation of the Belhar Confession to inform the RCA’s commitment to be a church freed from racism” (*MGS 2001*, R-115, p. 389) and “to invite members of congregations and classes to carefully study the Belhar Confession and the implications of its adoption for life and ministry in the Reformed Church in America, using materials made available by the Commission on Christian Unity, and further, to respond to the Commission on Race and Ethnicity by January 2003” (*MGS 2001*, R-116, p. 389).

The Commission on Race and Ethnicity noted in its report last year that “there was little evidence that the Belhar Confession was being used to inform the RCA’s commitment to be a church freed from racism” (*MGS 2002*, p. 112). This past year the Commission on Race and Ethnicity notes that some progress has been made. The Commission on Christian Unity invited the Rev. Edwin Mulder and Elder Sara Smith to share with the delegates of the General Synod their reflections on the apartheid context in South Africa that gave birth to the Belhar Confession. The presentation was very well received.

As a result of the presentation at the General Synod 2002, the Regional Synod of New York’s October 19, 2002 meeting at the Reformed Church of Hastings was devoted, in part, to the Belhar Confession, including the presentations of Edwin Mulder and Sara Smith, which were followed by a panel discussion. Participants at the gathering recommended that other regional synods study the Belhar Confession. Their overall response to the presentation indicated that initiatives to make the confession a prominent part of the RCA standards of unity would likely receive strong support from the Regional Synod of New York. The Commission on Christian Unity is to be commended for its advocacy.

Dr. Colleen Wiessner received funding from the RCA to support a project that identified talented young writers of color who, mentored by seasoned published writers, prepared the summer curriculum for the new Sunday school curriculum materials to be published by Faith Alive Christian Resources (formerly CRC Publications). Now in its final stage, the project is a huge success. In addition, the RCA and the Christian Reformed Church in North America now have a talented pool of young writers to draw from for future projects. The commission applauds the vision and passion that Dr. Wiessner brings to the denomination.

2. Educating ourselves as members of the Reformed Church in America about the history and meaning of racism, our complicity in it, our reasons to oppose it, and the strategies by which we can participate in its elimination.

The 2002 General Synod adopted recommendations calling for a consultation on racism (*MGS 2002*, R-24 amended, p. 113) and a survey on RCA attitudes toward freeing the church from racism (*MGS 2002*, R-25 amended, p. 113). Neither of these recommendations has been implemented. Commission members reaffirmed the importance of these recommendations and anticipate their completion within the next year.

R-35

To instruct the General Synod Council to implement R-24 amended (*MGS 2002*, p. 113) and R-25 amended (*MGS 2002*, p. 113), approved by General Synod 2002, by June 2004. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. These instructions were approved and funded by General Synod 2002 but have not yet been implemented.
2. The work needs to be completed.

Recognizing the valuable contribution made to the church by the *Church Herald* and its key role as a means of communication across the denomination, the commission has communicated with the *Church Herald* its hope that there will be editorial receptivity to articles dealing with issues of race and diversity. The commission has committed itself to providing articles over the next few years that will address a variety of important issues that must be considered by members of a denomination seeking to free itself from all forms of racism.

The 2002 General Synod voted:

To instruct the Office of Christian Education, working in cooperation with the staff of the racial/ethnic councils and the Commission on Race and Ethnicity, to convene education consultations in connection with the annual meetings of the councils, for the express purpose of exploring the unique educational needs of racial/ethnic communities and the types of culturally specific curriculum that could meet those needs; and further,

to instruct the Office of Christian Education and the RCA Distribution Center to explore the most cost-effective means for making the multicultural resources identified through these consultations available to all RCA congregations (*MGS 2002*, R-26 p. 115).

RCA resource specialist Jane Schuyler brought books, television videos, and audio tapes/discs for examination at the African-American Council meeting held in New York City on October 10-13, 2002. Schuyler also shipped several boxes of materials to the Eastern Region Sunday School Conference held January 25, 2003, at Dewitt Reformed Church in New York City. The materials were thoroughly critiqued by the participants. The participants responded in writing regarding the educational needs of their communities and the types of culturally specific curriculum that could meet those needs.

There is still the need to explore the most cost-effective means for making the multicultural resources identified through these consultations available to all RCA congregations.

3. Participating in transformative experiences to reshape our thinking, feeling, and actions, such as anti-racism workshops, cross-cultural dialogues, and celebrations of diversity.

The Commission on Race and Ethnicity has been informed that approximately one-half of the GSC staff has participated in anti-racism workshops that have been offered at several sites over the past two years. Additional workshops are scheduled to take place at First Reformed Church in South Holland, Illinois, in September and in the Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics in March and September 2003. The General Synod Council seeks to continue to cooperate with regional synods and classes to host these events for all persons in leadership within the RCA.

In addition, the commission has taken notice of efforts by educational institutions to address issues of racism: Western Theological Seminary now includes anti-racism training as part of its fall Middler Orientation program; Central College is sponsoring an annual "Conference on White Privilege," and Hope College recently hosted the "Holland Area Summit on Racism." While all of these workshops and events make an important contribution to increased sensitivity and informed action, much greater participation will be required to reach our goals.

The Youth for Understanding project was initiated in the summer of 2001. Youth from Trinity Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, traveled to First Reformed Church in Jamaica, New York, to meet, worship with, and learn from the young people in that congregation. Together they experienced New York City, discovered much about each other's culture and life, and developed friendships that continued throughout the year.

In the summer of 2002 youth from First Reformed traveled to Grand Rapids. They spent the week working and playing with the young people at Trinity Reformed. Again they talked about lifestyles, family backgrounds, race, and culture. Their friendships deepened and grew. In the summer of 2003 the youth from both churches will gather in yet another place to continue developing friendships and deepening their respect for and understanding of one another by developing a deeper appreciation and love for the wide variety of people who are part of the family of God.

While Youth for Understanding gatherings are different from a traditional mission trip, they offer young people from varied racial and ethnic backgrounds opportunities to develop friendships that transcend geography and have the potential to last a lifetime. The commission urges the Denominational Youth Team to study the model developed by First Reformed and Trinity Reformed for possible implementation throughout the denomination.

4. Developing lay and pastoral leadership from among the membership of racial/ethnic congregations for ministry within the whole church.

The Council of Christian Education held its annual conference in Holland, Michigan, from October 4 through 6, 2002, with the express purpose of developing Christian education leadership among ministers and laypersons. Approximately ten African-Americans attended the conference—a record number—and were energized by the presentations. They met in cluster groups in the evenings and continued to meet when they returned to New York. This resulted in the Eastern Region Sunday School Conference, which was held on January 25, 2003, at Dewitt Reformed Church. It exceeded all expectations. Approximately fifty adults attended, including lay members, pastors, and Christian educators. It is anticipated that an action plan to revitalize Christian education in New York will be generated.

Helping congregations as they respond to neighborhoods experiencing racial and ethnic change is a challenge. Often pastors and congregational staff find themselves in the midst of painful discussions and decisions that can deplete energy and resources. It is important to provide a place for these congregational leaders to gather together to develop skills, gain wisdom, be held in prayer, receive encouragement, and share both the joy and the pain of

ministry. This will not only be helpful to them, but to their congregations and to the neighborhoods with whom they are called to minister as well.

The advisory committee recommended an amendment to the recommendation:

R-36

To ~~encourage~~ instruct the General Synod Council's director of Mission Services, in conjunction with the Urban Ministry Team, to ~~explore~~ identify ways to link congregations facing the challenges of demographic and racial/ethnic change, and to organize denominational or regional forums for persons involved in such ministries to share ideas, resources, encouragement, and support, by June 2005. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

Reason:

The changes proposed strengthen the recommendation in order to ensure implementation.

Budget implications: The forums and resulting resources will require \$10,000; funds to be identified in the 2005 budget process.

5. Reshaping institutional structures that perpetuate racism within the RCA in order to include and affirm the gifts and ministries of the diverse people who are and will be members of this denomination.

The General Synod of 2001 adopted a recommendation instructing the General Synod to gather denominational leaders “to devise a long-term strategy for recruiting, training, and empowering those called to the ordained pastoral leadership of the RCA in order to carry out our mission” (*MGS 2001*, R-74, p. 275). In 2002 General Synod addressed the report from that gathering. Another recommendation was adopted instructing the general secretary to continue the process initiated by the 2001 General Synod and to “explore how the RCA can more effectively identify, support, train, certify, and ordain emerging leaders who are in faithful ministries in their cultural contexts” (*MGS 2002*, R-105, p. 311).

As the leadership group met, it addressed the question, How can the RCA uphold a trustworthy commitment to its Reformed identity in relation to those whom it ordains as ministers of Word and sacrament and still allow for a diversity of models for ministerial formation, some that are more congregationally based and others primarily based at seminaries? It also sought to address the changes needed in the system of ministerial formation that would ensure that all RCA congregations have the possibility of being served by a minister of Word and sacrament.

Representatives from the racial/ethnic communities identified issues of access to the system. Classes have varying standards, and some are more welcoming than others. Language and cultural perspectives can be barriers in the process. Also, many candidates are actively serving in ministry and are unable to leave that setting in order to study at an RCA seminary. They would like training to be brought to their region so practical ministry can be balanced with academic studies.

A report of the committee, “Guidelines for Commissioned Pastors in the RCA,” is found in the report of the Office for Ministry Services.

The commission noted its concern that the diversity objectives approved and initiated by the General Synod Council are moving slowly. Many of the projected completion dates have passed and the objectives have not even been addressed. The commission urges the

general secretary to develop a plan for implementing these objectives by December 31, 2003.

Conclusion

The commission continues to pursue the initiatives adopted by the General Synod as its initial strategy for implementing the Decade Freed from Racism. As it continues to monitor the progress of these activities and their impact on the denomination, the commission senses that progress will require a long and persistent effort to live our way into a denominational future that celebrates and embraces the diversity of God's people.

Report from Central College

Introduction

In June of 1853, exactly one hundred fifty years prior to this meeting of the Reformed Church in America General Synod, the Iowa Baptist Convention launched the Central University of Iowa, later to become Central College, in Pella, Iowa. Central College was founded upon the principle of providing whole education—that of a strong balance of mind, body, and spirit—to whosoever may come, and today, in partnership with the RCA, continues in that strong tradition established so long ago. As Central prepares to celebrate its sesquicentennial this fall and greatly anticipates its future, it is with deep gratitude that this annual report is submitted to the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America.

Enrollment

Central began the year with 1,659 students enrolled in fall classes, the most students enrolled since 1990 and the largest entering freshman class since 1992. The 2002 enrollment figures surpassed the record high 2001 figure of 1,623 by more than 2 percent. First-year students totaled 425, up from last year's 412. Central also welcomed seventy-one transfer students and nineteen students who returned after taking breaks from their studies. Since the beginning of 1997 enrollment has grown by over four hundred students, roughly equivalent to one new class of students.

Student persistence data also continues to show signs of real strength. Of the 425 new freshmen who started in the fall of 2002, 403 (95 percent) were enrolled for the spring semester. This is the second year in a row that the percentage surpassed the strategic plan persistence goal and strongly affirms the college's commitment to the individual.

The most recent enrollment predictors for the fall of 2003 first-year class are very favorable. As of February total applications and acceptances had surpassed by nearly 21 percent last year's record numbers. Nearly eight hundred accepted students with an average ACT composite of 26 were invited to participate in the President's and Dean's Scholarship competitions.

Academic Affairs and AQIP

At the core of the Central College experience is the academic program. Central prides itself on the quality of its academic program and this year was ranked eighth in the *U.S. News and World Report* of colleges in the Midwest that offer the best comprehensive bachelor's degree. Central was also ranked third in the same publication for great schools in the Midwest with great prices.

Under the leadership of Dr. Paul Naour, vice president of academic affairs, Central was accepted as a participating member in the Academic Quality Improvement Project (AQIP). AQIP is a forward-thinking reaccrediting philosophy that offers an alternative method to the traditional North Central Association (now the Higher Learning Commission) reaccreditation process. Central is one of seventy institutions that have already signed on, with another two hundred fifty actively considering adopting this process.

AQIP is quite different from the traditional reaccreditation process. The focus is on nudging institutions forward by providing an enhanced understanding of how differing elements of an institution work together as a part of a larger system to continuously adapt to the changing education landscape and to improve.

Whereas the traditional reaccrediting process is more about “judging” based on minimum standards, AQIP focuses institutions on high performance by expecting widespread involvement from all parts of the college; asking the college to think about itself as a system and, as such, to focus on systematic improvement by identifying processes and results; allowing the college to identify focal points (action projects) on which to work every three years; providing an opportunity for the college to assess its performance across all areas; and building collaborative relationships within the college as well as among AQIP institutions.

The three action projects that Central selected for concentration for AQIP were First-Year Experience, international education, and increasing the number of graduates Central turns out from its basic science and mathematics programs along with the number of graduates certified to teach math and science.

Faculty

The quality of Central’s academic program is directly attributable to its world-class faculty. In the fall of 2002 Central added several new faculty members, bringing the full-time roster to ninety-three professors, 81 percent of whom have the terminal degree in their field. The student/teacher ratio at Central is 14 to 1.

A few notable achievements among the faculty in 2002-2003 deserve special mention.

- Dr. Carol Wallace, assistant professor of Spanish, was one of a group of only twenty-five college and university faculty nationwide who participated in a faculty development seminar in Cuba last summer. The seminar was organized by the Council on International Educational Exchange and hosted by the Center for U.S. Studies at the University of Havana; participants attended lectures and had meetings with University of Havana faculty.
- Chia Ning, associate professor of history, was elected to the board of directors of ASIANetwork, a national organization for liberal arts institutions to develop Asian Studies. Ning will serve a three-year term on the board of eleven current members.
- Dr. Jim Zaffiro, professor of political science, contributed a chapter titled “Mass Media and Democratization of Politics and Society: Lessons from Zimbabwe, 1990-2000” in *Media, Democracy and Renewal in Southern Africa* and a chapter entitled “Globalization and Foreign Economic Policy-Making in Botswana” that appeared in *Globalization and Emerging Trends in African States’ Foreign Policies*.

Going PLACES

This year nearly three hundred fifty Central students have blanketed the Central Iowa community in droves to perform service work that helps others in need. In Ottumwa they tutor Latino immigrants who need help with English skills. In Des Moines they help disadvantaged students at Adams Elementary School. In Newton they work with adults at the Willowbrook Adult Day Care Center. In Pella they read with children who have difficulty reading through the Literacy Army.

While service learning isn't new in college settings, Central is the only school in Iowa that integrates it into its academic curriculum. The PLACES (Program for Learning Awareness of Cultures in Experiential Settings) program began at Central in 1996 when the college initiated a new core curriculum, which included a cultural awareness requirement, unique to most liberal arts settings. Students are required to study a foreign language and non-Western cultures, and they also must obtain two semester hours of experiential (x) credit.

Many students who cannot take advantage of the opportunity to study abroad at one of Central's ten international campuses use the PLACES program to obtain their x credit, which gives them a chance to experience other cultures right here in Iowa. "What sets this program apart is that this is not only community service, this is civic engagement," said PLACES director Cheri Doane. "Central recognizes service learning as a valuable pedagogy, not just a do-gooder activity. We're trying to help our students realize that there will be problems they will need to solve in their communities. We're teaching them how to do that here." One of the unique benefits of the PLACES program is that many students who used the opportunity to obtain the x credit have been so affected by the experience that they now regularly volunteer their time to make a difference at other service learning sites.

Spiritual Life

The Rev. Joel Brummel began his third year of service at Central in 2002 as its chaplain, and Leah Van Maaren, worship and ministry team leader, joined this year. Together they lead a very active campus ministries program. Approximately half of the student body is actively engaged in various ministry opportunities, including weekly campus worship, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, large and small group Bible studies, mission work trips, and social witness programs.

Perhaps the most visible of the faith development efforts at Central takes place at the two weekly campus worship services and at the large group gathering of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship on Wednesday nights. In addition, this year nearly two hundred Central students were actively involved in Christmas and spring break mission trips and Habitat for Humanity projects.

The Campaign for Central

In October 1999 the Central College Board of Trustees approved the start of the largest capital campaign in Central College history. Through The Campaign for Central the college is seeking a minimum of \$50 million over the next few years to support endowed scholarships, technology, faculty development, facility enhancement, and campus-life programs. With over \$33.5 million either contributed or pledged to date, Central launched the public phase of the campaign in April with kickoff recognition events in Pella and Des Moines. Below are some recent notable contributions to The Campaign for Central:

- A gift of \$200,000 from 1934 graduates Mart and Elva Mae Van Houweling Heerema to support the Heerema Van Houweling Scholarship program at Central.
- A gift of \$150,000 from graduates Preston and Mary Boat Steenhoek.
- The Central College faculty and staff gave or pledged more than \$1 million in the employee phase of the campaign. That total represented an incredible 99.7 percent participation rate!

Leading the efforts in The Campaign for Central is the new vice president of college advancement, Ron Bagnall. Bagnall came to Central from Iowa State University, where he was the executive director of planned giving since 1999.

The Changing Campus Landscape

Since 1998 the campus landscape has changed dramatically at Central in response to the college's steep growth curve. New campus construction projects have included the Weller Center for Business and International Studies; the Ron Schipper Fitness Center; and Firth House, a student residence townhouse. There also have been major renovations completed in Graham Hall, the Cox-Snow Music Building recital hall, and the college's heating and cooling plant.

In the fall of 2002 Central opened the new portion of the \$20 million expansion of the Vermeer Science Center. When renovation work is completed this year on the original portion of the building, the finished project will include over 75,000 square feet of classroom, laboratory, and office space.

Due to the large number of students on campus, Central broke ground last fall on a new residence facility near the collegiate center that will house seventy-two students and feature pod-style living arrangements with students in four double bedrooms sharing a common living space, kitchen, and two bathrooms. It is expected to open in the fall of 2003.

Conclusion

What began as a dream and a sincere desire for an institution of higher learning in 1853 for the Iowa Baptist Convention and later culminated in the start-up of classes in the fall of 1854 in Pella, Iowa, is today's Central College.

In 1916 the Reformed Church in America captured the vision of what a college of the church could mean, not only for its sons and daughters but also for thousands of other young people desiring quality values-based education, and gladly accepted the mantle of Central College from its Baptist friends. This was the beginning of a remarkable relationship between the people of the RCA and Central, and it continues today, nearly ninety years later. Central treasures this relationship and looks forward to sharing it together well into the future.

Report of Hope College

Introduction

It is a pleasure to submit this report to the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America (RCA). Hope College treasures its historic covenantal relationship with the RCA 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 RCA 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 in its intention to provide an exceptional academic experience in a caring, Christian environment. It is the college's 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, Northwestern, or Hope College; and supporting the colleges financially.

This is a fragile relationship. The record of history shows 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. Hope College is inextricably committed to maintaining this Christian dimension and trusts that the church is likewise committed to maintaining this relationship with Hope.

The 2002-2003 academic year has provided many affirmations. There also have been enough challenges to keep the college appropriately humble!

Admissions

Hope began the year with a record enrollment of 3,035 students. This occurred despite a 12 percent decline in applications. Continued superb retention and a higher yield from applications to matriculation produced this record enrollment.

The number of applications for the fall of 2003 is exceptional. More applications had been received by mid-January than at any other time in Hope's history at the *end* of the recruiting year in August. Hope College is grateful for this strong level of interest. It is obvious that the college will not be able to enroll all the prospective students who meet the admissions standards and will, therefore, need to implement a plan developed one year ago for greater selectivity in the acceptance of applications. As a preferred group it is anticipated that RCA students who meet admissions standards will still be able to attend Hope.

The challenge in admissions for the foreseeable future will be the competition from area private colleges, the flagship state universities, and especially nearby and rapidly developing Grand Valley State University, which now enrolls more than twenty thousand students.

Academics

Following the retirement of longtime Hope College provost Dr. Jacob E. Nyenhuis and the subsequent interim appointment of Dean Nancy Miller, Dr. James N. Boelkins has assumed the chief academic officer position at the college. He comes with superb credentials, having served administratively in two medical schools and a state university, and for fifteen years as provost at a Christian liberal arts institution. Dr. Boelkins' leadership experience and expertise will enable a continued exceptional academic program at Hope.

Hope received a Lilly endowment grant for theological exploration of vocation. This \$2 million award allows the college to provide personnel and programming that will enable Hope students to explore their calling for future vocation in the context of a faith dimension. It will strengthen the college's partnership with the RCA and with the wider Christian community in identifying and nurturing future leaders for the church. The college is currently in the process of seeking a director for this five-year program and implementing the provisions of the grant.

Through the years Hope has received many national rankings in comparisons with the finest liberal arts institutions in the nation. Pleasing was this year's ranking from *U.S. News & World Report*, where Hope was ranked the fourth-best college or university in the country for undergraduate research and creative projects. This was particularly gratifying because the extent of undergraduate research at Hope has long been a component of the Hope experience. Others ranked in the publication were the University of Michigan (first), Massachusetts Institute of Technology (second), Stanford University (third), Furman University (tied with Hope for fourth), Princeton University (tied for sixth), Harvard University (eleventh), and Yale University (tied for fifteenth).

Granting tenure for faculty members for continuing employment at the college is always a very thorough process. It is also very enjoyable to read the portfolios of outstanding young faculty members. This year the materials presented for Dr. Maureen Dunn (kinesiology),

Dr. Timothy Evans (biology), Dr. Curtis Gruenler (English), Dr. James Kennedy (history), Dr. David Klooster (English), and Dr. Charlotte vanOyan Witvliet (psychology) were among the best ever. The college is very grateful for outstanding young women and men who are committed to the mission of Hope through teaching and scholarship.

Spiritual Life

Spiritual life at the college continues to be very vibrant. Hope provides spiritual growth opportunities in a non-indoctrinating, non-suffocating manner that is neither prescriptive nor parochial. Opportunities abound for Christian faith development through a thrice-weekly chapel program, the Sunday evening Gathering, and multiple opportunities for Christian service both at home and abroad. A recent visitor to campus indicated he thought Hope had the best chapel program in the entire country. Dimnent Chapel is filled to overflowing four times each week with voluntary student attendance.

The leader of Hope's spiritual life program since the beginning of 2001 has been Hinga-Boersma Dean of the Chapel the Rev. Dr. Timothy Brown. Dr. Brown has fulfilled this assignment while concurrently continuing his role as Bast Professor of Preaching at Western Theological Seminary. His contributions to the life of the college during this time have been exceptional. Aware that fulfilling two full-time positions was not a long-term option, it was announced with regret that Dr. Brown had reached the difficult decision to return to Western Theological Seminary on a full-time basis effective July 1, 2003. A search for the next dean of the chapel at Hope College has commenced, and suggestions and nominations are welcomed.

Student Life

Every college campus has a number of students who, through their volunteer service, make a difference for good in the world. Hope is no exception. This is a generation of college students that is interested in serving others and willing to give generously of time and talents in assisting those in need. One such activity on Hope's campus is Dance Marathon—Giving Hope to Kids. Many campus organizations, including especially sororities and fraternities, work unselfishly under the leadership of Student Activities Director Diana Breclaw in raising funds for DeVos Children's Hospital. Monies, which have exceeded \$50,000 annually in recent years, go to support families whose children face life-threatening illnesses. As the event's name suggests, participants dance nonstop for twenty-four hours in support of this cause.

Hope continues to dominate the Michigan Intercollegiate Athletic Association (MIAA) in intercollegiate sport. For the seventeenth time in the last twenty-three years, Hope has captured the coveted All-Sports Award for excellence in women's and men's intercollegiate athletics. During the 2001-2002 academic year, Hope won four MIAA titles and finished below third place in only two of the eighteen varsity sports.

Finances

For the thirty-fifth consecutive year, Hope balanced the operational budget—at \$64 million this past year. With a capped enrollment of three thousand students and a sluggish economy, balancing the budget presents no small challenge. Budget busters continue to be the rate of increase for insurance (particularly health insurance) and financial aid for needy families during this economic downturn. As the college strives diligently to more fully achieve its mission, the generous support of alumni, friends, churches, and foundations is a critical component of the revenue stream. This last fiscal year Hope received \$175,503 from RCA churches—a figure that continues to decline even as the college's overall budget continues to increase. Yet, gratefully acknowledged is the generosity of several RCA

churches, which has helped produce record gift income over the past three years—far exceeding any other three-year period in the college’s history.

Development

Hope is nearing the conclusion of its current capital campaign, *Legacies: A Vision of Hope*. Commitments towards the \$105 million goal have now reached \$96 million. The campaign supports four major initiatives: 1) the construction of a new science complex at \$36 million; 2) endowment, primarily for student scholarships, at \$30 million; 3) other campus development, including especially the Martha Miller Center for Global Communication, at \$19 million; and 4) the DeVos Fieldhouse, at \$20 million.

The science facility will be completed in time for the beginning of the new academic year, with a renovation of the adjoining Peale Science Center slated to begin immediately thereafter. The planning for the Martha Miller Center, on the former Lincoln Elementary School site, and the DeVos Fieldhouse, at the former Western Foundry location, have reached the design phase. At the January 2003 board of trustees meeting, authorization was given to complete the design phase, prepare construction documents, and seek bids for beginning construction later this year. Construction, however, will not begin until funding is totally committed. The development team is working very hard to secure the necessary commitments to allow these projects to move forward on the desired timetable.

Conclusion

The passion at Hope is to be exceptional educationally and at the same time vibrantly Christian. This goal is fully achievable. The college desires a mutually beneficial relationship with the RCA. In unity there is so much strength. Hope is fully aware of its responsibility to provide an outstanding education for those affiliated with the RCA. The college is deeply grateful to the RCA for uplifting the college in its prayers, for encouraging young people to attend Hope, and for supporting the college with its financial resources. By God’s grace and the diligent efforts of the entire campus community, Hope can become all that God intends it to be.

Report of Northwestern College

This is an exciting and intriguing moment in the history of Northwestern College. Since becoming a four-year institution in the early 1960s Northwestern has had, essentially, the same set of goals: to reach enrollment capacity, to provide programs of recognizable quality in the classroom and across the campus, to establish financial stability, to create excellent facilities, and to strengthen the Christian mission. While improvement in all of these areas is always possible and certainly continues to be a priority, it can now be argued that these goals have been met—by God’s grace and through the efforts of many people.

The question this new moment raises is, “What now?” What is the next step for Northwestern College?

This question has been prayerfully considered in light of Jesus’ parable of the talents in Matthew 22. God has given certain talents to Northwestern. The question now is what will be done with them. There is the temptation, especially in difficult times like these, to protect the talents, making certain not lose them. But the parable reminds us that when talents are given by God the only appropriate response is to risk them for his glory.

With this teaching in mind, our community was asked to take the following seven Risks of Gratitude at the beginning of the 2002-2003 school year and looking to the future of Northwestern.

1. To become a “‘house of prayer’—doing things by prayer, rather than simply praying for the things we do.”
2. To enhance global awareness among our students, faculty, and staff.
3. To introduce the rich Christian notion of vocation throughout our educational program.
4. To continue to pursue the building priorities in the master plan: theater arts center, art building, library; and to investigate the need for a new cafeteria and residence hall.
5. To explore a new pricing and financial aid strategy.
6. To strengthen an already loyal board of trustees by reducing the number of members and clarifying the commitment.
7. To cultivate a deeper level of community among faculty, staff, and students.

Guided by this vision our various departments offer the following annual reports.

Admissions

Northwestern began the 2002-2003 academic school year with 1,313 students, another enrollment record. Enrollment was intentionally limited to thirteen hundred due to housing limitations. The student body represented thirty-three states, fourteen countries, and twenty-five denominational groups.

Once again enrollment included a large group of students representing Reformed Church in America congregations. That group numbers 461 and comprises 35 percent of our student body.

Trying to address the diversification of our student body continues to be a major challenge. A new director and assistant in our Multicultural Affairs office are attracting additional international student interest. An innovative one-year English as a Second Language (ESL) program offered by the college should also attract additional interest from students around the world.

During the fall semester of the 2002-2003 academic year, Northwestern initiated new admissions standards that should better insure the academic success of students. Interest from top students remains strong. The current freshmen average ACT composite is 24.15.

Academic Affairs

This was a year of expansion. Outstanding recruits joined the Northwestern faculty and enhanced professional activity across much of the academic program.

A new Division of Art extends our nationally recognized strengths in theater to enhanced collaboration across multimedia. Karen and Jeff Barker continued to broaden our national reputation in theatre by earning Gold Medallions for service to theater in our region in January 2003 at the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival. Dr. Robert Hubbard joined us, specializing in history of theater and performance art, moving here as an associate professor from Calvin College. John Paul joined us one year ago from a film set design career in Hollywood. While our new \$8.3 million theater will provide a lovely space, the heart of the department is our gifted faculty's talent, creativity, experience, and commitment to faith-based theater education and performance. Visual art is also enhanced this year with John Paul's presence and the 3D and ceramics specialties of new art profes-

sor Karen Acker. The art faculty is looking forward to the new studios and gallery located in close proximity to the theater, providing opportunity for a great deal of crossover. Communication Studies joined the arts last year, with professor Jamey Durham bringing expertise in TV scriptwriting and production. He brought us the Snow Dance Film Festival in January and is currently commissioned to write a film script next year. The music ministry program is now in its third year with Greg Scheer, who brings interest and expertise in the electronic side of production and editing. All of these departments overlap, building a multimedia program that will prepare students to be creative leaders in mass media, graphics arts, web design, and performance.

The business department welcomed Jan Carrell, a Ph.D. candidate at Colorado and former hospital CEO, as our new management leader and Dr. Clyde Vollmers, former professor at Moorhead State, as our new marketing and agribusiness expert. Carrell and Vollmers already have been instrumental in visionary planning and in rethinking our business programs. Professor Michael Avery has worked with student leaders in creating a very successful and active student group, Students in Free Enterprise. Winning regional and national competitions, this group develops connections between classroom learning and practice by birthing ideas, implementing them, and then “distributing” them to a wider market.

Dr. James Rohrer (religion) presented papers on the life of Donald McKay, a missionary pioneer in Taiwan, at four international and national conferences, including the American Anthropological Association in New Orleans and the International Conference on Christianity and Native Culture in Toronto. Dr. Donald Wacome (philosophy) coauthored a book entitled *Science and the Soul*. Dr. Bala Musa (communication studies) presented a paper on mass communications and leadership in Africa at the Annual Third World Studies Conference. Brian Lee (music) performed eight solo piano recitals, including one at the 2002 RCA General Synod, one at Julliard School, and one at Wheaton College. Dr. Michael Kensak (English) has had two papers accepted by top national journals: “What Ails Chaucer’s Cook?” by *Philological Quarterly* and “Emerson Brown: A Recollection” by *The Chaucer Review*.

The list is much longer, but the most noteworthy comment to make in the context of citing the outstanding scholarship accomplished by faculty is that while doing this work, they earn the highest levels of commendation from their current students, not only for their scholarship but for their enthusiastic and life-changing teaching. God has truly blessed us with gifted professors who are committed to Jesus Christ and his kingdom, as represented by the students at Northwestern College.

Student Development

As Northwestern has grown over the past decade, so has the Student Development division. During the 2002-2003 academic year the division has been looking at how it functions and trying to create a vision for the future. With more student services and more staff within the division there was a need to evaluate how to communicate, how often to meet, how to create a sense of common mission, and how to encourage professional development. In 2003-2004, strategies will be implemented to address those areas.

Many of the departments within the division of Student Development introduced new programs. In the important realm of leadership, this fall a group of eight Northwestern College students organized and planned the first-ever Northwestern College/High School Leadership Conference. The students worked over a year to develop a mission statement and plan the conference. Many high school students from several schools and three states participated in the two-day event. In the years to come we hope to increase the number of participants.

Residence life had several highlights this year. The quality of the resident director (RD) staff continues to remain the top highlight. Their commitment to each student in the hall is very evident, and as a result there is a great impact on students' lives through this basic but vital interaction. The leadership of a stellar group of resident assistants has led to a very warm spiritual climate in which many of the big questions are being discussed.

The establishment of new innovative programs further enhanced the year. Project Serve involves the resident assistants working with the Campus Ministry office to set up a local service project. Many Northwestern students are being presented with the opportunity to better serve the surrounding community. Another highlight is a second semester commitment to make an effort to integrate the faculty into the residence halls, and vice versa. Dr. Keith Anderson led the RD staff in a retreat that focused on creating a campus aura of spiritual mentoring; the acknowledgment of the importance of this integration became a rallying point. Three "theme" housing communities were created this year: Servant Leadership House, Spanish House, and the Tamar House. Each house has a faculty or staff advisor that meets weekly with the members for a study on their theme. Each house also participates in weekly meals together and performs a service to the campus or community. Finally, in the area of housing, the full-capacity enrollment (over eleven hundred students on campus) was accommodated and, with the addition of two new apartments in fall 2003, the housing crunch for the time being has been alleviated.

A Lilly Grant award has offered some exciting opportunities, specifically for the Career Development Center (CDC). The office will be expanding by adding a career counselor to the staff. A much more directed and concentrated effort will be focused on freshman and sophomore students who are undeclared and unsure of their major. In the past year there has been a marked increase in the number of classroom presentations and the number of students taking the Myers-Briggs Personality Indicator (MBPI) and Strong Interest Inventory. This past year there have been eight classroom presentations that would include over one hundred students taking the MBPI. More effort is being put into academic departments and the CDC working together. The numbers of students taking part in internships and off-campus programs is increasing. Ten years ago thirty-eight students had participated in internship and off-campus programs at this point in the year. This year there are sixty-four who have participated. CDC has implemented a career management website. This site offers students the opportunity to register and upload resumes and search for open positions. The employers have the opportunity to register, search student resumes, and post open positions. This site offers the staff the opportunity to manage student resumes and forward them to employers who choose not to register. Resumes are reviewed before being posted to ensure quality (this alone is increasing senior traffic in the office). There is an alumni/mentor function on the site as well. Contacts are being made with alumni, asking them to participate in this function. There is a strong positive response.

Northwestern athletics continued to uphold a strong winning tradition. The top-ranked men's basketball team clinched its third straight Great Plains Athletic Conference (GPAC) championship, earning a place in the national tournament. The men's and women's track teams saw a number of individuals compete on the national scene. Nick Scholten and Jon Paulsen garnered All-American football honors, while more than fifteen athletes received NAIA Scholar-Athlete accolades. Highlights for Northwestern's athletic department included not only the ongoing success of several programs but also state-of-the-art renovations to the Bultman Center and DeValois Field. Changes in the Bultman Center included the addition of four offices and the remodeling of the training room. A new halftime facility was built north of DeValois Field and now houses two spacious locker rooms and a concession stand. The track was resurfaced with a red polyurethane finish, and new field event venues were added. Now boasting one of the premier track and field facilities in the Midwest, Northwestern hosted the GPAC Championships in May.

The combination of excellence and innovation in the Student Development division is having an impact. Over the past five years Northwestern has begun to experience greater success in retaining students. At the beginning of the 2002-2003 academic year it was reported that the freshman to sophomore retention rate was at 75.7 percent. This reflects a gain of over five percentage points since the mid-1990s. The five-year graduation rate has also been climbing. For 2002 the five-year graduation rate was 59.2 percent. This number is up approximately seven percentage points over the previous five-year average.

Spiritual Life

The 2002-2003 academic year has been a year of important and major transition in the area of campus ministry and spiritual formation. Dr. Keith Anderson has served as interim chaplain in this time of change and new directions, leading chapels, preaching weekly, providing pastoral care, and guiding the staff through a process of program assessment and vision-casting for the future. A search committee recommended and the college selected board member and Orange City RCA pastor Harlan Van Oort as its next chaplain. Van Oort will begin his work on May 1. At that time, Dr. Keith Anderson will assume his new duties as the Dean of Spiritual Formation and Director of the Lilly Grant. In that role he will continue to give overall leadership to campus ministry and to integrate the work of spiritual formation and vocation into all aspects of the life of the college.

Chapel themes this year communicated the theology of spirituality at work on campus. In the fall, "Biography" was the theme as numerous members of the community, including faculty, students, staff, and alumni, told their stories of faith and the spiritual journey. The spring theme was "Equipment for the Journey" and included classical understandings of spiritual development through important writings such as *The Spiritual Exercises*, *The Imitation of Christ*, *Pilgrim's Progress*, and *Life Together*. Chaplain Anderson is preaching through the Lord's Prayer as an essential element of our equipment for the spiritual life.

Global and community awareness continues to develop on the campus, even in the aftermath of the September 11 tragedy. Two hundred forty-three people are scheduled for Spring Service Projects (SSP) at fourteen sites. Three SSP sites are international (Brazil, Nicaragua, and Amsterdam) and eleven are domestic, including New York City; Seattle; Oklahoma; Washington, D.C.; New Hampshire; Chicago; Arkansas; Mississippi; and New Orleans. Throughout the year student groups regularly work in local soup kitchens and assist in regional Habitat for Humanity projects. Other outreach projects include food banks, ESL, prison ministries, and McCrossen Boys Ranch. During the Christmas season the campus community participated in the Angel Tree gift program for children of prisoners.

Two spiritual life retreats were held this year. The fall retreat was led by Dr. John Brogan and his wife, Kathy, and the spring contemplative retreat was led by Dr. Keith Anderson, who also led an evening seminar on spiritual mentoring. Small-group Bible studies continued in residence areas, led by student leaders, and in addition to monthly prayer chapels, many small groups met regularly for prayer.

The strong leadership of Campus Ministry was highlighted by new positions for Barbara Dewald, who will become the associate dean of Spiritual Formation, and Jill Erickson, who will become the director for Missions and Outreach. Greg Scheer continues to give leadership to the worship ministry of chapel and church music outreach.

Financial Affairs

From a financial standpoint, the 2002-2003 school year will be another memorable one for Northwestern College. After limiting enrollment for this year, strong student numbers will still result in record revenue for the year. This has enabled Northwestern to continue adding quality to our existing programs, add new programs, and reward our dedicated faculty and

staff. The continued support of individuals and churches, along with another balanced budget, allow us to continue providing students with the Northwestern experience.

Our campus has been a hotbed of construction activity during this year. The track renovation was completed last spring and was the site of several high school meets. This spring Northwestern College hosted the Great Plains Athletic Conference meet, a very fitting regional debut for this first-class facility. Next door, the construction of the theater arts center continues on schedule. The facility is taking shape and the theater department will move into their new quarters this fall. Completing the arts focus on the east side of campus is the new Thea Korver Visual Arts Center, the new home for our art department. The mild winter has aided the construction of this facility as the various studios take shape. The art faculty plan to start classes in this building next fall.

Our final construction project on campus is nearing completion. The final two buildings of our three-building apartment complex are being readied for the delivery of furnishings this summer. These units will be well received by our students and make housing arrangements less complex for student affairs. This summer Smith Hall will be renovated, making it more attractive to our women students.

One of the valuable additions to the Financial Affairs office this year was a human resources coordinator. These duties had been split between several people in the past. With the growth in employees at the college and the growing complexity of employment issues, it became apparent there was a need to advance in this area as well. Northwestern strives to provide quality for our employees as well as our students. God graciously provided a devout woman, Debra Sandbulte, with years of human resources experience.

Development

God has continued to bless Northwestern College with substantial gift income. In fiscal year 2002 the college received over \$4.7 million in gifts, the second-highest year of contributions. The percentage of alumni giving was 35 percent, compared to a national average of 19 percent for all colleges and universities.

Church giving, mostly from RCA churches, represented nearly \$440,000 of the above total. Thirty-two percent, or 301 of the 942 RCA congregations, financially supported Northwestern College last year:

Synod of Albany	27%	of the 107 churches
Synod of Canada	7%	of the 41 churches
Synod of Mid-America	47%	of the 106 churches
Synod of Mid-Atlantic	23%	of the 143 churches
Synod of New York	19%	of the 149 churches
Synod of the Great Lakes	20%	of the 167 churches
Synod of the Heartland	72%	of the 150 churches
Synod of the Far West	22%	of the 79 churches

In addition to the above gifts, Northwestern College was the recipient of a \$2 million grant from the Lilly Endowment in fiscal year 2003 to help prepare a new generation of leaders for church and society. The grant will enable the college to implement over thirty initiatives aimed at helping students reflect on how their faith commitments are related to their career choices, and what it means to be “called” to lives of service.

God has provided wonderful blessings, given through his people who have affirmed our mission to be a distinctively Christian liberal arts college. These gifts, and the prayers that accompany them, are a godsend as the Northwestern College community endeavors to pro-

vide Christ-centered higher education to those students entrusted to us. Ultimately, that is what these givers and their gifts make possible.

Conclusion

All at Northwestern—faculty, staff, and students—are deeply grateful for the generous and loyal support of the RCA. In these very challenging times, may God continue to strengthen our partnership as we seek to discern his will and take Risks of Gratitude.

Report of the General Synod Council’s Congregational Services Committee

OFFICE FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Obeying the command and trusting the promise, the people of the Reformed Church in America seek to be Faithful Witnesses to Christ’s resurrection, ministering 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.

The work of Christian education and faith development is part of a common effort in the Reformed Church to live out ministries of worship, discipleship, equipping leaders, and outreach in a wholistic way, as faithful witnesses to the gospel message of Jesus Christ. Faithful Witnesses, the joint summary report of Congregational Services and Evangelism and Church Development Services, is found under the heading of Evangelization and Church Growth; this is the detailed report of the education and faith development work.

Learning for Life

We have been given a remarkable gift, the gift of faith. In using this gift and in sharing it with others, we energize all of our members to share the good news of Jesus Christ and to live out their callings. We do this in part through a lifelong ministry of Christian education and discipleship: learning the faith, growing in faith, and sharing the faith.

In October 1998 the General Synod Council (GSC) approved the designation of the program year 2001-2002 as a Year for Education in the RCA, based on evidence that a vital and active ministry of Christian education is a key element in the health and growth of a congregation. The Council for Christian Education (CCE), a cooperative programmatic team made up of representatives from each regional synod, the GSC’s Office for Christian Education, and the RCA’s racial/ethnic councils, took those simple words on paper and began to plan how the church might live out this call “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.

That intentional process work of CCE continues to live in Learning for Life, a remarkable set of resources focused on the long-term support and equipping of Christian education ministries in congregations. Its components include a *comprehensive educational notebook* for equipping the education programs and the educators of local churches (described by educators both within and outside the RCA as “one of the best educational leadership resources in the last ten years”). Because of generous contributions from RCA members, the Office for Christian Education was able to offer the notebook free of charge to each RCA congregation that returned a request card mailed to them. No regular budget dollars

were used for this effort. Since the late spring of 2001, more than 625 congregations—fully two-thirds of all RCA congregations—have requested the notebook.

Support for ministries in education and discipleship also includes hands-on training, both onsite in congregations and in regional and denominational settings. Through the Council for Christian Education, the Office for Christian Education and the eight regional synods jointly planned and carried out *regionally based equipping events for Christian educators* during the 2001-2002 program year. Funding came largely from the budget of the Office for Christian Education, supplemented by regional synod funds when available and necessary; each regional synod determined the content of the events. More than five hundred educators from two hundred RCA congregations directly benefited from this training. In October 2002 eighty educators and youth ministers were brought together on the campus of Hope College for *an intensive weekend of training, equipping, and networking*, an event also planned jointly with General Synod Council staff and regional synod staff, and funded by the Office for Christian Education. During 2003 regional training events will again be held in every regional synod.

The Office for Christian Education continues its free, monthly Learning for Life newsletter. Begun in September 2001, *Still Learning for Life* offers concise learnings and resource suggestions to aid educators in congregational settings. About 75 percent of the 800-plus monthly recipients receive their copy electronically via email; the other 25 percent receive their copies by regular mail. Over the past year, circulation of *Still Learning for Life* has increased by 25 percent solely through word of mouth.

Efforts under the Learning for Life banner form the foundation of activities of the Office for Christian Education, a witness to the longstanding commitment of Reformed persons as lifelong learners.

Children's Ministry

People of faith have the awesome responsibility of passing that faith to their children and their children's children. For parents and congregations that journey begins when a child is born and is affirmed when the child is baptized. The work of the children's ministry office focuses on helping parents and congregations keep those promises of baptism by providing the best resources available and equipping and supporting the church's ministry with children.

Children and Worship provides one way of being in worship with children four to eight years of age. Each week thousands of children experience, rather than merely learn about, worship through this program in over three hundred RCA congregations.

Children and Worship training is a cooperative ministry of the Reformed Church in America (RCA), the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC), and The Presbyterian Church in Canada (PCC), with a network of nineteen trainers throughout the U.S. and Canada. Leaders are trained through basic training events, enrichment events, and specialized events, and through use of key resources, including *Young Children and Worship*, by Sonja Stewart and Jerome Berryman; *I Wonder...More Bible Stories for Children and Worship*, by Janet Schreuder; and *Following Jesus: More About Young Children and Worship*, by Sonja Stewart.

A trainers gathering for enriching and retooling the RCA, CRC, and PCC trainers occurs every eighteen months or two years. On April 24-26, 2003, trainers and supervisors gathered in Grand Rapids for training under the leadership of Jerome Berryman. A community-wide event for Children and Worship leaders with Jerome Berryman, founder of Godly Play, and June Armstrong, creator of *Worship Songs for Children* and *More Worship Songs for Children*, was held on Saturday, April 26, 2003.

Children and Worship International. The 1999 General Synod adopted the recommendation to explore the feasibility and need for establishing a world outreach training team for the Children and Worship ministry (*MGS 1999*, p. 142). The staffs of Congregational Services and Mission Services, 1999 General Synod President Frederick Kruithof, and Children and Worship trainers developed a proposal to bring the training program to The Gambia, Hungary, Kenya, and South Africa. The Children and Worship International program has since been expanded to include Mexico. Raising the funds for this if-raised project is an ongoing process.

The Gambia. Ruth De Haan and Jane Van Es, RCA missionaries in The Gambia, were trained by RCA Children and Worship trainers Ellen Vellenga and Marcia Floding; materials for one Children and Worship center were provided by the RCA.

Hungary. Working with missionaries David and Joy Zomer and Sarolta Nagy Fodorne, plans are underway for training events in Budapest and Nagykoros. Materials for two Children and Worship centers will be provided.

Kenya. Working with the RCA mission supervisor for Africa, Debra Braaksma, and the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, plans for a training event are dependent on raising the needed funds.

Mexico. In January 2003 Jaime and Martha Amaro, RCA missionaries in Monterrey, Mexico, and Midiam Ramos, also from Monterrey, traveled to Holland, Michigan, to participate in Children and Worship training with Sonja Stewart. Martha has translated the book *Young Children and Worship* into Spanish. The RCA will work with publishers in Mexico to print the Spanish version. In addition, the RCA has provided materials for two centers; one set of materials is for the training center and the other will be given to participants in the training. Martha and Jaime will serve as trainers in the National Presbyterian Church in Mexico.

South Africa. On September 7-8, 2002, Willa Brown and Ellen Vellenga joined Edna Pick from the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa to present Children and Worship training to thirty-five men and women in Paarl, South Africa. Participants came from several denominations, including the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa and the Dutch Reformed Church. Materials were provided for the Children and Worship center and additional materials were provided for the workshop participants. Edna Pick will continue to give leadership to this training program in South Africa.

Children in the Sanctuary: Involving Children Fully in the Worship Life of a Congregation. The RCA, as part of the Presbyterian and Reformed Educational Partnership, served on the team that developed this new video/DVD and study guide for congregational use. RCA participants in the video included George Brown, General Synod professor; Daniel Meeter, pastor of First Reformed Church in Brooklyn, New York; and the congregation of Central Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Curriculum

LiFE (Living in Faith Everyday), a Bible-based curriculum for children in preschool through sixth grade and jointly developed with Christian Reformed Church in North America, emphasizes faith nurture, faith knowledge, and faith modeling. LiFE continues to be the core curriculum used by the largest number of RCA congregations.

Walk With Me, a Bible-based curriculum being developed by Faith Alive Christian Resources (formerly CRC Publications) with the assistance of the RCA, will be available for fall 2004 as a replacement for Bible Way. This curriculum includes lesson plans for

children four years old through eighth grade. Young RCA writers from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds, led by Colleen Aalsburg Wiessner, are developing and writing the two summer units for Walk With Me. The RCA also has a team of reviewers for the curriculum who give feedback as it is developed. Reviewers are Karen Cross, Kirsty De Pree, Marcia Floding, Douglas Kiel, Marilyn Paarlberg, Steve Long-Nguyen Robbins, and Lynn Taylor. Three RCA congregations have field-tested the first unit of materials.

Living in Mission Everywhere (LIME) recognizes that children are missionaries too! This thirteen-session mission study is designed to help children in kindergarten through sixth grade understand their role in reaching out to all people with God's good news. Sessions coordinate with the Mission of the Month focuses; the following sessions are now available: "Africa," "Central and South America," "Eastern Europe and Russia," "Evangelism and Church Development," "Japan," "Mexico," "Middle East and India," "Native American Indian Ministries," "Reformed Church World Service," and "United States."

Resources: The children's ministry office, with input from the Council for Christian Education, works with the RCA Distribution Center and TRAVARCA to make available the best and most effective resources for children's ministry. In addition, each congregation annually receives two packets (Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany; and Lent, Easter, and Pentecost) that contain children's bulletins, litanies, and other worship helps, family/intergenerational ideas, and an annotated list of appropriate resources. Many of the materials found in these packets are also available on the RCA's website, www.rca.org.

Youth Ministry

The work of youth ministry, in the words of Rodger Nishioka's *Roots of Who We Are*, seeks to help young people know that they are created by God and belong to God forever; that they belong to a community of faith and must claim their place in it; that faith itself is a gift from God; that the Holy Spirit gives us what we need; that we can know God through the Scripture. This view embraces the youth and young people of the RCA, not as the future of our churches, but indeed as the church today.

The Denominational Youth Team (DYT) coordinates the RCA response to the needs of youth workers and youth ministry at the congregational level, gathering together key youth staff and representatives from the denomination, including its racial/ethnic councils and regional synods. Indeed, it is the councils and synods who provide the most programming and direct support for youth ministry; DYT serves as a coordinating and cooperative body. In addition, however, the office for youth ministry for the RCA sponsors these programs:

- Project Timothy: at eight sites around the world, fifty RCA young people explore their own faith through service to others and their commitment to God and to each other. Project Timothy is an annual summer event in which high-school-aged young people can apply to participate. Randy Wieland, the director of youth ministries at Emmanuel Reformed Church in Paramount, California, oversees Project Timothy on behalf of the RCA. The summer of 2002 saw the lowest participation in Project Timothy in many years, another fallout of the September 11 tragedy; increased promotion hopefully will bring Project Timothy to its more usual level of participation and impact on the lives of our young people.
- Compass 21: this evaluation tool helps congregations pinpoint key areas of youth ministry in which they have strength and areas in which they might seek improvement. Consultants are available through each regional synod to work with congregations in the Compass 21 process.
- Consulting and training: through regional synod staffs, local congregations can receive individualized training for youth leaders and evaluation of youth programs.
- Regional events: in gatherings like Genesis and Exodus (Regional Synod of the

Great Lakes); Spectrum (Regional Synods of Albany, New York, and Mid-Atlantic); Rocky Mountain High (Regional Synod of the Heartland); Winterfest (Regional Synod of Mid-America); and several smaller events, thousands of young people hear the gospel and find community.

- Resources: the Denominational Youth Team and the Office for Christian Education partner with the RCA Distribution Center to offer a wide variety of resources for Christian education, youth group ministry, and other relational ministries with youth. One key resource is *A Fast That Lasts*, a 24- to 30-hour hunger education retreat designed for middle- and high-school-age students.

Adult Christian Education

It is not that knowledge of faith is no longer relevant in today's society; knowledge is simply no longer enough. In a rapidly changing world, adults today face increasingly difficult circumstances and settings in which their faith engages their life and work. That is what makes the need so urgent for a multifaceted approach to the ministry of adult Christian education and faith formation. We do this in the following ways:

- By encouraging biblical engagement. Through the Year of the Bible and other resources, a strong (and increasing) number of RCA congregations are participating in intentional, ongoing, congregationally based studies of Scripture. The Office for Christian Education continues to encourage such study and provides resources to aid congregations in doing it.
- Through the identification and use of spiritual gifts. In 2001 the General Synod voted "to direct the General Synod Council, through its Congregational Services Committee, to send the spiritual gifts packet, 'Every Christian—Called by God, Gifted for Ministry,' to the board of elders of every RCA congregation" (*MGS 2001*, R-53 p. 229). This resource on gift-based ministry, developed in cooperation with the RCA Distribution Center at the urging of General Synod President Carol Mutch and church leaders across the denomination, provided congregations with a quality, usable resource that promotes a central tenet of the Reformed faith (the priesthood of all believers. In early 2003 the resource, by that time out of print, was made available on the RCA website.
- Through an intentional pursuit of possible programs or ministries with and for persons with disabilities. The Office for Christian Education is partnering with the Classis of the Greater Palisades on a survey of RCA congregations' ongoing work in ministry with and for persons with disabilities. The results of that survey will be used to explore potential new initiatives in this area, guided by a newly formed committee. Their recommendations will be made to the spring 2004 meeting of the General Synod Council. This work is being funded through a generous grant from the Classis of Greater Palisades.
- Through resources for study and growth in faith. In partnerships with other denominations and Christian ministry organizations and with the RCA Distribution Center, the Office for Christian Education has identified helpful and sound resources for adult study and spiritual growth. Those resources are available through the RCA Distribution Center.
- In the establishment of *Wind and Fire*, the RCA Prayer Network newsletter. Inspired by Mission 2000 and led by the Rev. David Muyskens, the prayer network is enlisting a growing number of RCA members as committed partners in the work of the church, through regular prayer and study. The Office for Christian Education oversees the production and mailing of the newsletter and covers its costs.

Leadership Development

In addition to the resources provided through the Learning for Life initiative, the Office for Christian Education remains intentional in recommending ongoing opportunities for con-

sistories, education committees, and other leadership groups to grow in both knowledge and action. We do this primarily through the recommendation of resources or through the resourcing of networks or teams and, when necessary, through the creation and publication of RCA-specific materials. The Reformed Church in America simply does not have the human or financial resources necessary to publish the full range of materials necessary for the diverse settings of ministry in which our congregations find themselves. Some examples of our work include:

- Discernment training: following the experience of Mission 2000, the RCA committed to pursue the art and ministry of discernment. Trained discernment leaders led the 2001 and 2002 General Synods through a process of discernment around the issue of leadership in the church; the discernment model has also been utilized in General Synod Council around the formation of a ten-year goal for the RCA. Trained discernment leaders are available for consultation in the churches through the Office for Christian Education.
- Consistory training: in 2000 a General Synod task force presented a report and an additional paper, “Faithful Consistories,” in which the concept of the pastorate—minister of Word and sacrament, elder, and deacons working together—was held up before the church as both a model and goal. That same synod approved a recommendation made by its president, the Rev. Gregg Mast, directing the General Synod Council to reconstitute its structure so that the offices of elder, deacon, and minister of Word and sacrament “are nurtured, supported, and encouraged to assume responsibility for the pastorate of the church” (*MGS 2000*, R-57, p. 297). Based on those actions, the Office for Christian Education partners with the diaconal ministry office and with staff of the Office for Ministry Services to provide a wholistic set of resources for consistories, including:
 - *Faithful Consistories*, produced out of the General Synod Task Force on Consistories (*MGS 2000*, p. 279), with a complete study guide.
 - *Called to Serve: Deacons and Elders Together*, a twice-yearly newsletter resource specifically targeted to elders and deacons.
 - Branches on the Vine, a consistory training workshop that can be self-led in congregations.
 - *The Ministry of the Elder* and *The Ministry of the Deacon* guidebooks.
 - *What’s an Elder to Be?* a new training video for elders, released in 2002.

Most significantly, the Office for Christian Education, as a part of the ministry cluster staff team, was an active participant in a March 2003 consultation on consistories and leadership training jointly sponsored by the ministry cluster and the mission cluster and led by Gregg Mast.

Certification

The process of certifying persons as associates in ministry has been one way by which the whole church has recognized the importance of both Christian education and youth ministry and recognized persons gifted and called to these areas of ministry. The 2002 General Synod voted to ask the General Synod Council to begin exploration of a new process for certification based in the GSC and not in classes, as it has been.

To instruct the General Synod Council to form a body to serve as the agent of the General Synod to develop standards and process for the certification of Christian educators to include 1) a knowledge of and commitment to Reformed understanding of Scripture, theology, and ecclesiology, and 2) proven skill in the theory and practice of Christian religious formation and education, to be implemented by 2004 with a progress report to General Synod in 2003; and further,

to develop standards for maintaining such certification, including but not limited to requisite continuing professional development; and further,

that the body serving as the agent of the General Synod include current Christian education practitioners and others representing the greater church; and further,

that the Commission on Church Order review the sections in the *Book of Church Order* which refer to “associates in ministry” (Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 5 and Chapter 1, Part II, Article 14) for possible deletion following the establishment of a process for certification and support within the General Synod Council (*MGS 2002*, R-46 amended, p. 212).

That work, because of possible connections to broader efforts around work on commissioned pastors, is ongoing. The Office for Christian Education will continue to advocate for persons committed to excellence in education and discipleship ministries—a large majority of whom are non-ordained or perhaps ordained to the offices of elder or deacon—and for their involvement in the life of the whole church.

General Synod Referrals

The 2001 General Synod, upon recommendation of its Commission on Race and Ethnicity, voted:

To urge the Office for Christian Education, in its partnership with publishers of educational materials, to advocate for the involvement of racial/ethnic people in the design, development, and editorial review processes, in an effort to make educational resources appropriate for use in all of the congregations that make up the diversity that is the RCA (*MGS 2001*, R-117, p. 390).

To instruct the Office for Christian Education, in consultation with the racial/ethnic councils, to seek Christian education materials appropriate for nurturing the faith of children, youth, and adults in churches whose members are racial/ethnic persons, to recommend these materials through denominational channels, and to distribute them through the RCA Distribution Center (*MGS 2001*, R-118, p. 390).

In 2002 the General Synod, again in response to the Commission on Race and Ethnicity, approved a follow-up recommendation:

To instruct the Office of Christian Education, working in cooperation with the staff of the racial/ethnic councils and the Commission on Race and Ethnicity, to convene education consultations in connection with the annual meetings of the councils, for the express purpose of exploring the unique educational needs of racial/ethnic communities and the types of culturally specific curriculum that could meet those needs; and further,

to instruct the Office of Christian Education and the RCA Distribution Center to explore the most cost-effective means for making the multicultural resources identified through these consultations available to all RCA congregations (*MGS 2002*, R-26 amended, p. 115).

In response to these actions, the Office for Christian Education, through its working partnership with CRC Publications and with the assistance of the RCA’s racial/ethnic councils, proposed, funded, and implemented a racial/ethnic writer’s group, for the purpose of providing trained writers for new curriculum resources being developed by Faith Alive Christian Resources. (See the children’s ministry section of this report for additional details.) In addition, staff of the office meets with the Commission on Race and Ethnicity,

continues to pursue interactions with all of the racial/ethnic councils in this area, and actively seeks means by which the educational resources of the Reformed Church in America can reflect the diversity of the church we are striving to be.

In response to P-1 from the report of the president (p. 37) the advisory committee recommended:

R-37

To instruct the General Synod Council to study and develop plans that will enhance and expand the emphasis on prayer, including but not limited to the following points:

- **considering the feasibility of creating a staff position, at minimal or no additional cost, called “minister for prayer”**
- **helping congregations, classes, and regional synods and the commissions and agencies of the General Synod to understand the spiritual essence of the proposed ten-year goal**
- **encouraging a church-wide prayer movement utilizing present prayer teams, as well as other models and resources**
- **promoting local and regional prayer events and training/equipping opportunities for church leaders and members**
- **providing opportunities for denominational leaders to come together for times of prayer and spiritual renewal**
- **networking with ecumenical and mission partners to support prayer conferences and other events**

for report to General Synod 2004. (ADOPTED)

Reason:

The advisory committee supports the General Synod president’s emphasis on prayer, but believes the General Synod Council can best evaluate possible options for implementation.