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A list of presidents, from the first in 1794 to 1955, can be found on pages 308-311 of the 1956 Minutes of General Synod. The list of presidents from 1956-1969 can be found on page i of the 2002 Minutes of General Synod.

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* Indicates serving a final term
GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL

David Schutt .................................................................2005 VP, GS
* Carol Simon .................................................................2005 AT-L
Hung Yong Song ..........................................................2003 QUE
* Deborah Swanson .......................................................2004 AT-L
Robert Terwilliger .........................................................2003 SWM
Pacia Vamvas ...............................................................2003 ALB
Andrea Van Beek .........................................................2004 ES
William Vermilyea .......................................................2005 MINN
* Robert White ...............................................................2004 SCNY
Pedro Windsor ............................................................2004 CHI
Vacant.............................................................................2005 CP

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ACTS AND PROCEEDINGS

THE GENERAL SYNOD OF THE REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA CONVENED IN ITS ONE HUNDRED NINETY-SEVENTH REGULAR SESSION ON THE CAMPUSES OF WESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY AND HOPE COLLEGE IN HOLLAND, MICHIGAN, ON FRIDAY, THE SIXTH OF JUNE, A.D. TWO THOUSAND THREE, AT 8:15 A.M., EASTERN TIME.

I. FORMATION OF THE SYNOD

OPENING OF SYNOD

The General Synod opened on Friday morning, June 6, 2003, with a worship service held in Dimnent Chapel. Participants in the service were the Rev. Elzie Richardson, pastor of Park Hills Community Church in Los Angeles, California, who preached the Word; the Rev. John Chang, president of General Synod; and the Rev. Anna Jackson, pastor of Queens Reformed Church in Queens Village, New York, who served as liturgist.

Ms. Linda Strouf, director of music at Third Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan, and adjunct assistant professor of music at Hope College, served as music coordinator for worship at the synod. Dr. James Bultman, president of Hope College, and the Rev. Dr. Dennis Voskuil, president of Western Theological Seminary, welcomed the body.
WORSHIP

Friday Morning
Opening Worship Service—The Rev. Elzie Richardson
    The Rev. Anna Jackson, liturgist
Closing Prayer—The Rev. Roger Beukelman

Friday Afternoon
Opening historic hymn led by the Rev. James Brumm
Closing Prayer—Elder Harold Vander Weide

Saturday Morning
Opening Worship—The Rev. Samuel Kwon
    The Rev. Byung Kim, liturgist

Sunday Morning
General Synod participants worshiped with the following Holland classis congregations:

- Beechwood Reformed Church (Holland)
- Calvary Reformed Church (Holland)
- Crossroad Reformed Church (Holland)
- Crosswinds Congregation (Saugatuck)
- First Reformed Church (Holland)
- Maple Avenue Ministries (Holland)
- Trinity Reformed Church (Holland)

Sunday Evening
The synod celebrated the 375th anniversary of the RCA at Christ Memorial Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan, through worship and song. Participants included the Rev. James O’Connell and Pam Klein as cohosts; the RCA Singers Gospel Choir from Cambria Heights Community Church in Brooklyn, New York; the Japanese Trio; Scripture reader Elizabeth Brown; the Celebration Choir; and presenters Elder Sara Smith, the Rev. Edwin Mulder, the Rev. Fumihito Andy Nakajima, the Rev. Irving Rivera, and the Rev. John Chang.

Monday Morning
Worship Service—Ina Montoya
    Esa Attocknie, liturgist
    Rosalie Attocknie, liturgist
Opening historic hymn led by the Rev. James Brumm
Greetings—Mayor Al Mc Geehan
Closing Prayer—The Rev. Carson Culp

Monday Afternoon
Opening Prayer—The Rev. Bradley Langstraat
Opening historic hymn led by the Rev. James Brumm
Closing Prayer—The Rev. Kathryn Roberts

Monday Evening
Opening Prayer—Elder Anna Assink
Opening historic hymn led by the Rev. James Brumm
Closing Prayer—Elder Mary Linge
Tuesday Morning
Worship Service—The Rev. Irving Rivera
The Rev. Carlos Rivera, liturgist
Opening historic hymn led by the Rev. James Brumm
Installation of General Synod Professors
Closing Prayer—The Rev. Dr. John Coakley

Tuesday Afternoon
Opening Prayer—The Rev. Nathan Brownell
Opening historic hymn led by the Rev. James Brumm
Closing Prayer—The Rev. Rong Hu Lu

Tuesday Evening
Opening historic hymn led by the Rev. James Brumm
Closing Prayer—The Rev. Carlos Rivera

Wednesday Morning
Opening Prayer—The Rev. Michael Van Hamersveld
Installation Service for New Officers

An installation service for the new officers of General Synod and a Communion service were held on Wednesday, June 11. Participants in the service included the Rev. John C. H. Chang, president of General Synod; the Rev. David D. Schutt, vice president of General Synod; the Rev. Steven J. Vander Molen, vice president–elect of General Synod; the Rev. Paul Janssen, moderator of the Commission on Worship; and the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, general secretary of the Reformed Church in America.
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CHRISTIAN ACTION

Moderator: Sally Alderink (Muskegon)
Vice Moderator: Miranda Rand (Schenectady)

Ministers:
Christine Battjes (Montgomery)  Stephen Mathonnet-Vanderwell
Nathan Brownell (New York)  (Central Iowa)
Victor Folkert (Regional Synod of the Barbara Pekich (North Grand Rapids)
Far West)  David Siepplinga (Holland)
Angelo Forleo (Orange)  Gregory Van Heukelom (Southwest
David Henion (Central Plains)  Michigan)
Michael Hooker (Rochester)  Leigh Van Kempen (Holland)

Elders:
Barbara Albright (Zeeland)  Blanche Holtaling (Columbia-Greene)
Howard Bekins (Muskegon)  Edward Kroese (Central Plains)
Wilson Bethard (Delaware-Raritan)  Jake Roobol (Ontario)
John Bradley (California)  Sharon Schramel (Chicago)
Judie Butin (Central Iowa)  Catherine Stevenson (Queens)
Gene Dyksterhouse (Southwest Michigan)

Corresponding:
Mary F. Linge (Regional Synod of New York)

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AND DISCIPLESHIP

Moderator: Nathan Busker (Rocky Mountains)
Vice Moderator: Carolyn Wolz (Mid-Hudson)

Ministers:
Frank Boerema (Dakota)  Barton Keefer (Canadian Prairies)
George Brown (Western Theological Dick Klaver (Muskegon)
Seminary)  Kevin Kleinheksel (Zeeland)
Timothy Custer (Zeeland)  James Lester (Illiana)
William Donkersloot (Illiana)  Terry Nyhuis (California)
DuWayne Hanke (West Sioux)  Marlin Vis (Zeeland)
Gerald Hekhuis (Florida)

Elders:
Larry Bolt (Illiana)  Benjamin Koerselman (West Sioux)
Wayne Carey (Rocky Mountains)  Alton Kooyers (Holland)
Halghma Cumberbatch (Brooklyn)  Jacquelyn Schumacher (Illinois)
Richard Follette (New Brunswick)  Deborah Swanson (North Grand Rapids)
Byron Hayunga (Minnesota)  Harold Vander Weide (East Sioux)

Corresponding:
James Bultman (Hope College President)  David Roe (Central College President)
Bruce Murphy (Northwestern College Nancy VandenBerg (Regional Synod of
President)  Canada)
G. Oliver Patterson (Commission on Race Martha Wing (Synod of the Great Lakes
and Ethnicity)
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CHRISTIAN HERITAGE AND COMMUNICATIONS

Moderator: Barbara Fillette (Delaware-Raritan)
Vice Moderator: Scott Rees (Illiana)

Ministers:
- David Crump (Chicago)
- Robert Mitchell (Mid-Hudson)
- Carlos Rivera (Brooklyn)
- Ruth Robbins (Delaware-Raritan)
- Kevin Schutt (Muskegon)
- Solomon Tivade (Greater Palisades)
- Rick Vollema (Lake Erie)

Elders:
- Anna Assink (Cascades)
- Joan Avery (Greater Palisades)
- Howard Avink (Zeeland)
- Ronald Bolenbaugh (Lake Erie)
- Robert Brunner (Rockland-Westchester)
- Terry Davenport (North Grand Rapids)
- Beverly Feindt (Rochester)
- Delbert Hoffman (Zeeland)
- Richard Morano (Rochester)
- Deborah Pierce (Passaic Valley)
- Robert Schroeter (Nassau-Suffolk)

Corresponding:
- Jaime Bouw (Regional Synod of Canada)
- James Brumm (Commission on History)
- Audrae Philips (Regional Synod of the Heartland)
- Christina Van Eyl (Church Herald)
- Harlan Van Oort (Church Herald)

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CHRISTIAN UNITY

Moderator: John Schmidt (Zeeland)
Vice Moderator: Klaire Jameson (New Brunswick)

Ministers:
- Greg Alderman (West Sioux)
- James Anderson (Columbia-Greene)
- Kim Donahue (Orange)
- John Heeg (Albany)
- Donald Heringa (Rockland-Westchester)
- Mark Hofstra (Southwest Michigan)
- Anna Jackson (Queens)
- Clarence Liang (Illinois)
- Daniel Meeter (Brooklyn)
- F. Scott Petersen (Passaic Valley)
- James Reid (Nassau-Suffolk)
- William Sacher (Mid-Hudson)
- Robert Williams (New York)

Elders:
- Irene Chen (Nassau-Suffolk)
- Ivan Compagner (Holland)
- James Cummings (Illinois)
- Donald Engold (Passaic Valley)
- Glen Hesselink (Wisconsin)
- Ron Nyhoff (Zeeland)
- Robert Ontjes (Pleasant Prairie)
- Germaine Safford (Rockland-Westchester)
- James Spangler (Cascades)
- Martha Stanton (Synod of Albany)

Corresponding:
- David Baak (Commission on Christian Unity)
- Karen Riehs (Synod of the Mid-Atlantics)
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Moderator: Craig Hoffman (Schenectady)
Vice Moderator: William Peake (Pleasant Prairie)

Ministers:
Donald De Glopper (Central Iowa)  Gene Poll (Southwest Michigan)
Albert Elswick (Albany)  Arvin Schoep (Columbia-Greene)
Dennis Hietbrink (East Sioux)  Stanley Seagren (Wisconsin)
Diane Maodush-Pitzer (North Grand Rapids)  Timothy TenClay (Zeeland)
Nolan Palsma (Montgomery)  Robert Wierenga (Florida)

Elders:
Irvin Boersen (Muskegon)  Russell Ripma (North Grand Rapids)
Robert Miller (Minnesota)  Ralph Spyker (British Columbia)
Peter Pageray (Mid-Hudson)  Jack Stegeman (Lake Erie)
Robert Pittman (Rocky Mountains)  Gerald Swart (Wisconsin)
Alvina Pool (California)  Harris Van Oort (Synod of the Heartland)
Itake Prins (Albany)  Brian Vlieg (Albany)

Corresponding:
Paul Janssen (Commission on Christian Worship)  Marlys Ritzma (Regional Synod of Mid-America)

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CHURCH ORDER

Moderator: Dwayne Jackson (Queens)
Vice Moderator: Richard Veenstra (Muskegon)

Ministers:
Roger Beukelman (California)  Walter Jones (Rochester)
Robert Grysen (Illiana)  Rong Hu Lu (Greater Palisades)
Jim Clagget (Dakota)  James O’Connell (Red River)
John Coakley (New Brunswick Theological Seminary)  Reindert Opmeer (British Columbia)
Thomas Johnston (Rockland-Westchester)  Dean Wolbrink (Delaware-Raritan)

Elders:
Linda Andersen (Delaware-Raritan)  Randy Kooy (Illiana)
William Bouwman (West Sioux)  Andrew Nielsen (Central Iowa)
Janet Dick (Schoharie)  Dennis Norman (Southwest Michigan)
Mary Dobrovolec (Montgomery)  Richard Pitkin (Central Iowa)
Marcia Elgersma (Zeeland)  Betsy Simpson (Columbia-Greene)
Douglas Hoekstra (South Grand Rapids)  Bob Van Der Schaaf (Central California)

Corresponding:
Faith Link (Synod of the Mid-Atlantics)  Carol Myers (Commission on Church Order)
ADVISORY COMMITTEES

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CHURCH VOCATIONS

Moderator: Nelson Murphy (Passaic Valley)
Vice Moderator: Sophie Mathonnet-Vanderwell (Central Iowa)

Ministers:
Timothy Brown (Western Theological Seminary)  Bradley Langstraat (South Grand Rapids)
Leon Draayer (Minnesota)  Jacob Marvel (Schoharie)
Roger Eernisse (North Grand Rapids)  Thomas Ondra (Schenectady)
Paul Fries (New Brunswick Theological Seminary)  Rick Oppenhuizen (South Grand Rapids)
Dirk Kramer (Ontario)  Eric Titus (Mid-Hudson)
Bradley Langstraat (South Grand Rapids)  Michael VandenBerg (Canadian Prairies)

Elders:
Donald De Young (Wisconsin)  Reggie Padin (Holland)
Donald Hoover (Passaic Valley)  Judy Spencer (Red River)
Wilbur Jones (New York)  Norman Van Horn (South Grand Rapids)
David Osterhouse (Southwest Michigan)  

Corresponding:
Lee Andrews (MFCA)  Angie Mabry-Nauta (WTS)
Christine Dyke (Commission for Women)  Christopher Poest (WTS)
Marisol Ferrer (NBTS)  Steven Vander Molen (WTS Board of Trustees)
Carolyn Jones-Assini (NBTS Board of Trustees)  Dennis Voskuil (WTS President)
Norman Kansfield (NBTS President)  Larry Williams (NBTS Board of Trustees)
Bradley Lewis (MFCA Board of Trustees)  Debra Yurk (Regional Synod of the Great Lakes)
Carolyn Lewis (NBTS)  
Jeffrey McIlrath (MFCA)

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON EVANGELISM AND CHURCH DEVELOPMENT

Moderator: Peter Semeyn (Northern Michigan)
Vice Moderator: Clair Coddington (Mid-Hudson)

Ministers:
Daniel Beyer (Southwest)  Mark Schwarz (East Sioux)
Carson Culp (Ontario)  Brian Taylor (Wisconsin)
Kyle De Young (South Grand Rapids)  Dean Ulmer (Central Iowa)
John Foster (California)  Douglas Van Aartsen (West Sioux)
Byung Chul Kim (New Brunswick)  Mark Vanderson (Southwest Michigan)
David Kool (Holland)  Jeff Wenke (Central California)
John Ornee (Zeeland)  Stephen Wing (Northern Michigan)
Timothy Rotman (Cascades)  James Zinger (South Grand Rapids)

Elders:
Avis Beninga (Dakota)  Albert Spaa (British Columbia)
Erica Carr (Orange)  Daniel Swart (Northern Michigan)
Gerald Hamstra (Illinois)  Kenneth Viening (South Grand Rapids)
Andrew Ridderhoff (Chicago)  Billye Wilda (Southwest)
Bernard Ryan (Southwest)  Willem Zwiep (Canadian Prairies)

Corresponding:
Thelma Ellis (Regional Synod of New York)
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Moderator: Danita Branam (New York)
Vice Moderator: Arlan Van Roekel (Central Iowa)

Ministers:
E. Wayne Antworth (New York)          David Sikkema (Minnesota)
Joseph Cusack (Passaic Valley)         Jacquelyn Wagenmaker (Nassau-Suffolk)
Stanley Hagemeyer (South Grand Rapids) Everett Zabriskie (Passaic Valley)
David Jansen (Lake Erie)               Kenneth Zuithoff (Illinois)
G. David Korsen (Cascades)

David Sikkema (Minnesota)

Elders:
Wilbur Adams (Pleasant Prairie)        Gary Te Stroete (West Sioux)
Lee De Master (Wisconsin)               Laurie Toyberg (Delaware-Raritan)
Vivian Johnsen (Dakota)                 David Tubbs (Schenectady)
Scott Kling (Holland)                   Robert Woods (New Brunswick)
Carl Leu (Florida)                      Clair Zak (New York)
Robert Munschauer (Greater Palisades)

Corresponding:
Robert White (Board of Benefits Services)

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THEOLOGY

Moderator: Carol Williams (South Grand Rapids)
Vice Moderator: Keith Krebs (Southwest)

Ministers:
David Bailey (Holland)                 Todd Krygsheld (Zeeland)
Randy Blumer (Minnesota)                Mark Mast (Holland)
Anthon Bouw (Ontario)                   Joan Mitchell (Mid-Hudson)
Scott Christiansen (Central Plains)     Neil Ooms (Pleasant Prairie)
Derek DeJager (Schoharie)               Kathryn Roberts (Red River)
William Godwin-Stremler (California)    Ronald Sanford (Chicago)
Vernon Hettinga (Wisconsin)             David Vandervelde (British Columbia)

Elders:
Michael Andres (East Sioux)            Paul Petersen (Orange)
Jill Frederick (California)             Melvin Vander Meer (Minnesota)
Sharon Hayes (Brooklyn)                 Dirk Vermeulen (Ontario)
Steve Jellema (Illiana)                 Ruth Webb (Canadian Prairies)

Corresponding:
Lynn Taylor (Regional Synod of the Far West)
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON WORLD MISSION

Moderator: Madeline Fuentez (Wisconsin)
Vice Moderator: Earle Hall (Central California)

Ministers:
Edward Baker (California)            Peter Van Dyke (California)
Harmen Heeg (Illinois)                Michael Van Hamersveld (West Sioux)
Douglas Van Bronkhorst (South Grand    Arlin Vande Zande (Dakota)
    Rapids)

Elders:
Rosalie Attocknie (Red River)         James Ludens (Southwest Michigan)
Merrill Badman (Montgomery)           Richard Oosterhoff (Illiana)
Sherwin Boersen (Zeeland)             Annie Lee Phillips (Queens)
James Croff (Northern Michigan)       John Prins (East Sioux)
Evan De Boer (West Sioux)             Beverly Przybylo (Schoharie)
Judith Hazleton-Burns (Florida)        Elliot Tanis (Holland)
Larry Kleymeer (South Grand Rapids)   Willard Te Kolste (Central Plains)
Simon Lin (Central California)

Corresponding:
Nancy Folkert (Regional Synod of the Far
    West)
MINUTES AND JOURNAL

The Acts and Proceedings of the 196th 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 Breen, and Robert Terwilliger were appointed tellers. The following seminarians were also appointed as tellers:

- Michael Brost
- Margaret Hoekstra
- Don Hoover
- Ann Kansfield
- Kevin Karhoff
- Hak Ryong Kim
- Kurt Kruger
- Rick Kruid
- Michael Meyer-Veen
- Sherri Meyer-Veen
- Jean Mulder
- Christopher VandeBunte
- Patric Weatherwax

SCHEDULE

The General Synod approved a schedule based on the agenda of General Synod prescribed in the Special Rules of Order (BCO 2002, Chapter 3, Part II, Article 1).

The privilege of the floor was granted to Russell Paarlberg, parliamentarian, and RCA staff, as resource persons.

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
- Welcome—Friday morning
  
  Dr. James Bultman, president of Hope College, and the Rev. Dr. Dennis Voskuil, president of Western Theological Seminary, welcomed delegates, guests, and staff.

- Forums—Friday evening
- 375th RCA Anniversary Celebration—Sunday evening
Introduction of Ecumenical Delegates and Guests and Mission Partners—Monday morning

**Ecumenical Delegates:**
- The Rev. Johan Nicolas Gara, Christian Evangelical Church in Minahasa, Indonesia
- The Rev. Paul Schreck, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
- The Rev. Leonard T. Lin, Presbyterian Church in Taiwan
- The Rev. Soon Kwon Kim, Presbyterian Church of Korea
- David Salthangvunga, Reformed Evangelical Church in Myanmar
- The Rev. Noboru Takemae, United Church of Christ in Japan
- Bishop Elmer Bolocon, United Church of Christ in the Philippines

**Ecumenical Guest:**
- Rev. Arthur Schoonveld, Christian Reformed Church in North America
- Dr. Bertrice Wood, Churches United in Christ

Ecumenical Luncheon—Monday noon
An ecumenical luncheon was held on Monday noon in honor of the ecumenical delegates to General Synod.

Mission Reception—Monday evening

**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.

**PRESENTATION AND REFERRAL OF NEW BUSINESS**

No new business was accepted by the synod.
REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT

The Rev. John C. H. Chang

“I am not ashamed of the gospel.”
Romans 1:16

Introduction: My Thanksgiving

By God’s grace and his providence, I was elected by the General Synod in the year 2001 to be the first Asian American vice president. Last year I was affirmed again by the General Synod and became its president. As an adopted son of the RCA, I have been overwhelmed by this great honor and blessing. It is just like what the apostle Paul says: “But by the grace of God I am what I am”; then I pray from my bottom heart that “his grace toward me has not been in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:10a).

These past two years, I have learned a lot about how to be a leader in the RCA. I have been blessed by being involved in the decision-making process in our denomination. I also have been granted many opportunities to travel and visit many places locally and globally on behalf of the Reformed Church in America.

Before making my presidential report, let me take this opportunity to express my personal gratitude to the following people and groups. First, I owe thanks and appreciation to my two churches: the Grace Christian Church in Staten Island and in Flushing. Their unserved prayerful support is very precious to me. Furthermore, some were raised up as my personal intercessors (they are prayer warriors! I am also grateful for the countless godly people that I have met; their ceaseless prayers have been my source of strength and encouragement.

I also would like to thank the officers who are also my sister and brothers in Christ. Elder Carol Mutch is my predecessor as president, and I have learned a lot from her about the importance of equipping the laity of the Reformed Church. The Rev. Steve Brooks, my immediate predecessor as president, is such a man of God and prayer. Because of him I have learned how to encourage and organize prayer teams for our denomination. The Rev. David Schutt, a dear brother in Christ, has a strong passion for church renewal and new church planting. I pray that this coming year, when he becomes president of the General Synod, our denomination may launch a new possibility tied in with the ten-year goal so that our church may move toward a new phase of development. Praise the Lord for choosing such a man of God to lead our church. The Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, our general secretary, is a visionary and a tireless worker for the kingdom of God. I have learned a lot from him regarding how to lead a whole denomination in the right direction for the kingdom of God.

Finally, I am always indebted to my family, especially my wife, Su, and my two sons, Campbell and Jeffrey. Their unconditional love and support emboldened me to move forward without reservation for the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ alone. May our God bless all of them who have been my best friends to support my presidential work this year!

These past two years within our denomination, I have visited more than twenty local churches, including one Native American church, several ethnic churches, and several Caucasian churches. I have also visited eight classes, five regional synods, one seminary (New Brunswick), and two ethnic councils and attended numerous meetings.
REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT

From the east to the west I have met and talked with hundreds of RCA people in different settings and constituencies. Ecumenically, I have visited Hungary, Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Myanmar, Taiwan, and China.

In all these places I have seen the mighty hand of the Holy Spirit at work. Now let me report to you what I have seen and what we should do in the future for the kingdom of God.

1. Who are we? What are our roots?

Each time I left home on a journey, this is always the question I have to ask myself in my prayer: Who am I? What do I represent? It seems silly to ask such simple questions. However, they are very important if I am to do my job well. I know that each time I attend a meeting and see people, I am always a servant of the Lord, an ambassador of Jesus Christ. But more precisely, this year I represent the RCA as president. When people see that I am Asian, a common question that people ask has been: What and who is the RCA? Why? Because traditionally the RCA is predominately white European people, but what in the world has happened?! Now this denomination has elected someone who is not white, not black, but a yellow one—an Asian—to be their president! What is going on? Of course, people like to know. I have learned what the RCA was in the past, and what the RCA is now. Hopefully, I may predict what the RCA may become in the future.

By God’s grace we all know that the RCA and the Presbyterians share the same root, which can be traced back to the Reformation time in the sixteenth century in Geneva, Switzerland. Our founding fathers were John Calvin and other great reformers in Europe. Our ethnic roots are in Holland. The Presbyterians, on the other hand, trace their ethnic roots back to Scotland. But more importantly, our spiritual roots are in the fundamental principles of our Reformed faith. These are as follows:

Sola Scriptura (by Scripture alone): We believe that the Bible is the Word of God, the only perfect doctrine of salvation, rejecting all doctrines contrary thereto! We believe that we need to preach and teach through the Bible and act it out in our daily lives.

Solus Christus (by Christ alone): We believe that without Christ we are doomed. In Christ we are saved and restored to relationship with God the Father. Therefore, Christ is the center of our life and he is the only indispensable Son of God to us. He is our Lord and Savior.

Sola Fide (by faith alone): We believe that by faith in Jesus Christ alone we are justified (Romans 5:1). It is not by doing good deeds or other means that we may be saved and become children of God.

Sola Gratia (by grace alone): We are saved through faith, and this is not our own doing; it is the gift of God, not the result of works, so that no one may boast (Ephesians 2:8). Grace is a precious and free gift of God to us. Without the grace of God we will be condemned for eternity.

Soli Deo Gloria (only for the glory of God): This is the highest reason and purpose for us Christians to live. Whatever we do, we only seek for his glory, but not for others.

Building upon these principles, the RCA has welcomed into the Reformed family anyone who shares this faith basis. These open doors to all especially become a reality over a hundred years ago, after the denomination changed its name from the Dutch Reformed Church to become the Reformed Church in America. The RCA since then has intentionally recruited different ethnic groups into this big family. Praise the Lord! It is not skin colors, back-
grounds, or cultures that integrate and shape us to be who we are, but it is because of what we believe in Jesus Christ.

We have four ethnic councils (African American, Asian Pacific, Hispanic, and Native American) actively participating and involved in the RCA church life, ministries, and overseas missions. This active inclusion of diverse ethnic groups based on common commitment to Jesus Christ and our Reformed faith has created a very beautiful, vivid, and colorful picture within the Reformed Church for the kingdom of God.

Praise the Lord for what he has done among us. We give thanks to our Lord for the past of the RCA. We are very proud of God’s grace which has been with the RCA in the past 375 years. We are the oldest denomination in North America, yet we are still very spiritually alive and are giving a clear witness to Jesus Christ in the world today.

2. What have we missed?

Although we have a good heritage and tradition in our Reformed family, we somehow still have something missing from the past that is preventing us from effectively responding to the challenges of the present and the future. We can all see that the world is changing and moving rapidly into the age of postmodernism and post-denominationalism. From within even the traditional Reformed denominations there is the growing and pervasive influence of secularism, liberalism, and universalism. From without, Western culture and the church are being challenged by various religions, including the New Age movement, Eastern mysticism, and Islam. The traditional churches and denominations are not prepared for such a shock and are being shaken to their faith roots. The major denominations are in distress. For example, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), which has the same Reformed faith basis as we do, seems to be experiencing a pervasive loss of spiritual vitality, a diminishing of effective witness, and a disengagement from world missions. This once great denomination that had world missionary impact continues to cut back on missionaries and has for over two decades been losing members at the rate of between 20,000 and 40,000 per year. Unfortunately, the Reformed Church in America is part of this overall situation of denominational decline. The RCA is standing firm on our Reformed faith, not swerving from the authority of Scripture and the centrality of Christ. So why are we also sharing the same situation of decline? What have we missed?

Let’s go back to examine what we have. I love our five basic faith principles that have defined our Reformed faith. However, in these five principles, there is no mention of our responsibility for evangelism and no recognition of the work of the Holy Spirit.

It may be because of this neglect of evangelism and the Holy Spirit that as a denomination in the past two centuries we have lost several crucial opportunities for evangelism in North America. When America was expanding its territory and people, we did not keep up. When the Great Awakening started, we were there as starters, but when the revival began to expand, we somehow got lost.

Fortunately, we did a good job in overseas mission. For example, we sent the first missionaries to Amoy, China, and Japan and worked in partnership with the Presbyterians in Korea. However, in North America we did not keep pace with the Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists in revival and evangelism. The result is that they have become much bigger denominations than the RCA in terms of size and church capabilities for doing ministry.

Furthermore, since we neglected the work of the Holy Spirit traditionally, we have avoid-
ed the Pentecostal movements in North America. Of course, that saved our church from the errors of confusion. Yet we missed a lot of power of the work of the Holy Spirit. Although the theology and expression of faith among the Assembly of God churches are different from us, yet, so far, they are the most effective and dynamic denomination in the world for advancing the gospel of Jesus Christ. Why?

I am convinced that our Reformed theology is the best in the world, but why are most of our churches still weak? What do we miss? The problem might be that we include the Holy Spirit in our doctrine but do not really honor him as the third person of the Triune God. Namely, we rarely ever invite him to lead the church and our church’s ministry. We have our own way to “define” or “control” the work of the Holy Spirit. We Reformed people are very “orderly” and so are sometimes scared to death if anything goes wrong or out of control. And since “Sola Scriptura” is our basic faith principle, we would rather talk more Bible, the Word of God, than the Holy Spirit. Now it seems that in the traditional church in our actual practice the “Trinity” is the Holy Father, the Holy Son, and the Holy Bible.

This fear of talking about the work of the Holy Spirit has caused us to miss many opportunities to know him more, and to experience his work. We have missed the modern movements of the Holy Spirit that were empowering and directing the church to fulfill the Great Commission in our age. The result is that the RCA has lacked the spiritual vitality and vision for missions to be the church in our modern world.

Let’s repent! Let’s never be afraid of the Holy Spirit because of other people’s confusion. Let’s come to him, for he is the gentlest God and Lord. Some people may fear that if we seek the Holy Spirit too much, we will lose the balance with God the Father and the Son, Jesus Christ. No, I do not believe so. Because when the true Holy Spirit comes, he will always point to our Lord Jesus Christ. That is part of his job. Our Lord Jesus Christ indicates that when the Holy Spirit comes, “He will glorify me” (John 16:14). The Holy Spirit will never lead us to glorify anyone in the world except Jesus Christ. And because of that, when we are truly led by the Holy Spirit, we may begin to know our Jesus Christ as Lord, and will confess that he is the only Way, the only Truth, and the only Life, and the only way to God the Father (cf. John 14:6).

The Holy Spirit will also only speak and work in ways that are consistent with God’s truth as revealed in Scripture. John Calvin taught that we cannot separate the Holy Spirit from the Word of God. Jesus made it clear that the Holy Spirit can also not be separated from himself. When these are held together, we do not need to be afraid of the Holy Spirit. We will not fall into apostasy or confusion. But we will have vital churches and power for evangelism and missions. When the church welcomes the ongoing fulfillment of Acts 1:8 then we will become more effective witnesses to Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God will become real “to the ends of the earth.”

In summary, according to the revelation of the Bible no one can affirm that “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3). This means that our whole Christian life and the very existence of the church in the world is all dependent upon the Holy Spirit.

Are we too late to learn how to follow the Holy Spirit and cooperate with him? No, it is never too late. We still have many opportunities to move on before the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Then what shall we do at the present moment?

3. What shall we do?

Before I make any suggestions, I should say that in the past ten years the RCA is changing. We are very grateful that we have already started trying to change. First of all, we
already have a good mission and vision statement, which was accepted by the General Synod in 1997. That statement has described why we exist in the world. It has provided us a new diagram for our church to guide its future mission. It also indicates a new direction for how to function as a denomination in each level within our structure (local congregations, classes, regional synods, and the General Synod).

Furthermore, in the past few years in our General Synod meetings our general secretary, Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, kept reminding us how to become a healthy church and to grow in faith and mission. Our two immediate past-presidents of the General Synod did similar things. Elder Carol L. Mutch challenged us to pay attention to equipping laypeople to do ministry. The Rev. Steve Brooks called our churches to become houses of prayer. We ought to listen to their timely and prophetic messages.

Their leadership, the wonderful leadership of many others within our denomination, the hard work of the staff, and the hard labors of the General Synod Council members have resulted in at least three important and crucial items to be discussed during this General Synod meeting. They are commissioned pastors, the ten-year goal, and the restructure of the General Synod Council. Hopefully, through our prayers, by working together, and by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we may mold and pass these issues. I hope these positive, concrete, and applicable measures for our churches will be implemented as soon as possible. Now, allow me to say a few words about each of these important items.

**Commissioned Pastors**

In our Statement of Mission and Vision we read:

> 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.

I am convinced that the original concept of the commissioned pastor is never intended to lower our quality or standard for the pastors, especially the ministers of Word and sacrament, but to help each of our congregations to equip more people to get involved in the ministry for the kingdom of God. According to our mission statement, doing ministry is not just the job of the professional ordained clergy. It is every Christian’s job. We hope through the system that we build for the commissioned pastors, those who are gifted will be mobilized and equipped to get involved in the actual work of ministry.

Please do not limit the label “pastor” to those who have graduated from seminaries and earned the degree. Anyone who has been called by God to take care of his sheep can be called “pastor.” From a human standard, we may think some people are not qualified because they do not have strong academic credentials. Nevertheless, I believe that when God calls them to fulfill his work, God will qualify them. Let me give a living example. If we took the standard for one to be a pastor in the RCA and use that to measure the actual pastors in China one would find that ninety percent or even higher would not be qualified to be called “pastors.” But let me tell you, the fastest-growing church in the world is in China. Not only that, even beyond our imagination, amazingly, more than 60 percent of the ordained clergy are women with practically no formal, by RCA standards, theological education. Nonetheless, they lead and shepherd many great congregations everywhere in the country. Most amazingly, many of their churches have thousands of members! How is this possible? I do believe that the prophecy spoken through the prophet Joel is continuously being fulfilled from the Day of Pentecost until today, everywhere in the world. China is
one of the living examples of this fact. Listen to the prophecy that St. Peter quotes from the prophet Joel:

“In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, In those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy” (Acts 2:17, 18).

According to the clear witness of the Scripture and of Jesus himself, it is the Holy Spirit who builds the church and extends the gospel to the whole world. I would like to urge the delegates to begin to pray and ask the Lord’s guidance for this issue.

The Ten-Year Goal

The General Synod Council spent the last two years in prayer and meetings seeking for guidance from the Lord concerning the ten-year goal. After a very careful discernment process it is recommended that the General Synod approve this ten-year goal. The essence of the goal is twofold: to revitalize the existing congregations and to do new church planting through the works of discipleship, leadership, and mission, so that the RCA may really engage in global mission and evangelism for the kingdom of God.

I believe that these two goals are like two tracks of a railroad that will move our church on the right way under the movement of the Holy Spirit. I believe that when this ten-year goal gets approval we may implement it immediately. I remember two years ago, during the General Synod meeting, after seeing the necessary need of new transformation for the RCA, the delegates boldly supported and passed a recommendation that the RCA may become the fastest growing denomination in North America. I do believe and foresee that the implementation of the ten-year goal will serve the purpose of fulfilling that recommendation.

Restructure of the General Synod Council

The main purpose of the restructure of the General Synod Council is to reduce its membership, which will make this body function more efficiently and effectively. Of course, there are always challenges and risks whenever change occurs. Every year the General Synod meeting will be more responsible to elect the right persons to participate in the membership of the council. May the Lord bless our new change and challenge! I would like to urge the delegates to pray and support this new structure idea. Let us try a new way for moving our church into a new possibility.

4. An echo to the call, “Let my house be a house of prayer!”

Last year our past-president, the Rev. Steve Brooks, urged all the RCA congregations to respond to the call of our Lord Jesus Christ when he says to us, “Let my house be a house of prayer!” (Matthew 21:13). Because of this call of our Lord, many local churches began to organize prayer meetings and some classes and regional synods started to organize training programs.

One of the most exciting and successful gatherings was the “Prayer Fire, Igniting Our Churches” event, which was held on November 1 and 2, 2002, at Fairhaven Ministries in
Hudsonville, Michigan. About five hundred people took part in this event. It was a great event. I do appreciate the leadership of the Rev. Sherwin Weener, executive minister of the Synod of the Great Lakes. Praise the Lord that Sherwin has a great staff and a wonderful team who could create and make this event happen successfully. I believe that this event blessed and inspired many churches and RCA people.

Not long ago, on April 27, 2003, another wonderful event, called “Sacred Assembly,” was held by the Zeeland Classis in Grand Rapids, Michigan. We do appreciate the leadership of classis minister the Rev. Steve Smallegan, who organized and orchestrated well with the pastors and congregations in his classis. That Sunday morning, more than eight thousand people gathered to worship God and honor our Lord Jesus Christ. When the church and God’s people did that together, the power of the Holy Spirit was manifested there mightily. It was wonderful to see that just one classis within the Reformed Church in America could do such a wonderful job. I am impressed. Praise the Lord!

Of course, I am sure that many other significant activities and events were also held in different places and settings by different RCA groups in this past year. I just could not, because of limitations of time, attend them all. I am sorry! However, I believe that whatever the event, if the main purpose was to equip people to do the kingdom’s work and to exalt our Lord Jesus Christ they would also have equal value in the sight of the Lord. They are all the works of making the house of the Lord shine for the glory of our Father God.

The Rev. Steve Brooks, during his presidency, in order to fulfill his vision that he received from the Lord, founded a prayer team called the H.O.P.E. Team (the House of Prayer Equipping Team). I was honored to be included in this team. I have seen this team work very hard in the past two years, not only gathered together to pray but also dispersed in different settings to train, to equip, and to mobilize their constituencies to pray. Praise the Lord for such a good and faithful servant of the Lord. I believe the work of prayer is the basis for the RCA continuing to be able to listen to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and welcoming Jesus Christ to be the Head of our church.

Since 1996 until now I have taken part in the process of discerning and implementing the Statement of Mission and Vision, which has included the commissioned pastor program, the ten-year goal, and the movement of calling every congregation to become a house of prayer. I am so grateful to the Lord for his guidance of the RCA, step by step moving toward what he wants us to be.

For all this I give thanks; but to be honest, I am still struggling. My struggle is how to let the calling from God that is discerned in the mission and vision statement, commissioned pastor concept, ten-year goal, and House of Prayer movement be owned by the local congregations. If congregations just physically hear what we say, or just mentally adopt them in principle, but they have not been awakened by the Holy Spirit and have not moved into obediently following Jesus Christ, then I believe that no matter how many great plans we adopt or meetings we have or how much energy we spend, all these plans will be in vain. These visions, decisions, and movements all need to practically sink into the grassroots and be owned by each and every congregation; then they will work and become fruitful someday.

The urgent question is, what do we do to make them work? I believe it is the work of the Holy Spirit, for it has been beyond our ability and human efforts to make these things happen. If we reflect back on history, we already realize that we have missed many excellent opportunities of evangelism and some great movements of the Holy Spirit have passed us by. We recognize now that we cannot afford to repeat the same mistakes. We desperately need the Holy Spirit, the Giver of Life who gave birth to the church of our Lord Jesus
Christ on the first Pentecost Sunday after our Lord’s ascension, and who still keeps nurturing the church to grow and empowering the church to fulfill the will of our Father God. We humbly need to learn how to cooperate with the Holy Spirit.

Again, one may ask, how do we learn to work with the Holy Spirit? My immediate response is, let us keep praying first. Prayer is essential! Remember, before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Acts the disciples were in prayer together (Acts 1:14). The great revivals of the past, such as the Great Awakening and the revivals in China and Korea, were all prepared for by Christians earnestly doing the work of prayer. The RCA structure, it seems, has never officially called or provided any staff position at the General Synod level to take seriously this work of prayer. We need someone called by God and gifted by the Holy Spirit to lead the whole denomination into participation in the worldwide movement of prayer. We need someone who could provide training programs in the prayer movement and help set up special prayer events. I am convinced that now is the right time for us to create such a position and call such a person. Of course, I need your spiritual discernment. Here is my first proposal:

P-1
To instruct the General Synod Council to study and develop plans that will enhance and expand the emphasis on prayer and spiritual life initiated after the General Synod of 2001 by:
• considering the feasibility of creating a self-funded staff position called, “Minister for Prayer and Spiritual Life.”
• helping the 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 leadership to come together for times of prayer and spiritual renewal.
• networking with ecumenical and mission partners to support prayer conferences and other events.

[Upon recommendation by the Committee of Reference, P-1 was referred to the Advisory Committee on Christian Education and Discipleship. See page 155.]

5. When will we dare to proclaim, “I am not ashamed of the gospel”?

As we know, the Reformed Church in America is a mission-minded denomination. We have done very well in overseas missions. After several times of traveling among Asian countries I discovered that the name of the RCA is more famous than it is in North America. The reason is because we have the best missionaries and mission programs internationally.

Let me share with you a very touching story that happened on our last trip to China. April 4 to 6, we were in Amoy in southern China, visiting our past mission field. We were brought to see at least seven churches. Most of them were past Reformed congregations. The most touching thing was, each time, after I brought greetings on behalf of the RCA, several aged people from sixty-five to eighty years old came to me to express to me that they still belong to the Reformed Church, although the denominational name has been taken away. Many of them even began to tell me the stories about our RCA missionaries: Rev. so-and-so or Miss so-and-so had treated us so well. Would you please pass our greet-
ings and appreciations to their descendents that we still remember them! I kept asking them, what were those missionaries’ English names? They answered, “These missionaries never used their English names in China.” What a powerful testimony to how well they connected with the Chinese that they are honored and remembered by Chinese Christians by their Chinese names. I do not know whom to thank, but since I promised these Chinese Christians that I would pass on their greetings and appreciations to the RCA missionaries’ descendents, I now take this opportunity to express this appreciation to those RCA missionaries who were faithful to the Great Commission! May God receive all the glory!

Although our overseas mission works are outstanding, our home-based ministries have not been as good as the mission work. There is still a lot of room for improvement of our work among our congregations in North America. As I review the state of the church at home, the urgent question becomes, “How does a congregation become a healthy and growing church?”

When I am struck by the amazing contrast between the RCA churches in North America and the rapid growth, spiritual vitality, and engagement in outreach that I have experienced firsthand in the Korean church in South Korea and the Chinese church in China, I am always curious as to why they can grow so well. On the last trip to Korea and China I learned several important principles that apply to churches in both countries.

First of all, persecution and suffering: Both Korea and China have gone through a long period of persecution and suffering, especially under the Communist regimes, and the churches were on trial always. To proclaim that Jesus Christ is the Lord sometimes means they are willing to die for the sake of Jesus Christ.

Second, the suffering leadership and sacrificial servanthood: In such a way, it is easy to bring people to know Jesus Christ, especially when the leaders are willing to pay the price for the sake of Jesus Christ. The power of their witness is clear.

Third, honor the leaders: Leaders’ dynamic faith in Jesus Christ expressed in sacrifice gains people’s respect. The title or any secular achievement does not impress people spiritually.

Fourth, visions for the church: Without vision people perish. But with vision the church moves and a congregation becomes alive.

Fifth, tithing: Korean congregations see tithing as a very serious matter. According to Korean Christians, it is very difficult to measure anyone’s spiritual growth. But tithing is one of the ways to see people’s growing and maturity in Christ.

Sixth, fervent prayer: Most of the Korean and Chinese congregations have their daily prayer meetings. Each day, usually early in the morning, people begin to walk to their churches to pray. It has become part of their daily work. And because of that, their churches maintain stability, health, and growth.

Seventh, an appreciation of the Bible as the Word of God: In Korea and China the Bible is taught and believed. In China people are hungry for the Word even through for years Bibles were almost impossible to find. The Bible was treasured in their hearts and taught in the house churches.

Eighth, a dependence on the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit: In Korea and especially right now in China the house churches do not have the support of a government or culture. They know that they have nothing to depend upon except the gifts and power of the Holy Spirit that Jesus has given them to be his witnesses and do his work.
We and our church are located in North America. We probably will never face the same persecution as the Christians in Korea and China. But we have our own contexts and situations which we need to face. We probably need to deal first with our complacency; then we may grow. As a denomination, how can we tell our congregations to proclaim, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ,” unless our people are hungry for the gospel? I have suggested previously that, by prayer and by God’s Spirit, only God can do it.

While it is God who renews, empowers, and directs the church, there are some things that we can do. I believe that we must do them if we are to be a part of God’s work in the world.

We need to provide the opportunities for our congregations to experience the movement of the Holy Spirit. Then they will experience the power of the gospel. I would like to introduce and suggest some very good Christian organizations that are centered in Jesus Christ, grounded in Scripture, and have a solid Reformed theological basis. God is already using these organizations and movements to train and equip people in the area of prayer, spiritual renewal, and missions empowered by the Holy Spirit. Two such organizations that may be especially helpful to the RCA are Lighthouse Ministries for Mission America and Presbyterian-Reformed Ministries International.

The national facilitator of Lighthouse Ministries for Mission America, its director, the Rev. Alvin VanderGriend, is a very dear brother in the Christian Reformed Church and also an excellent leader of the international prayer movement. The executive director of Presbyterian-Reformed Ministries International (PRMI) is the Rev. Dr. Brad Long, who is an internationally well-known Presbyterian leader and trainer in the movement of spiritual renewal and mission outreach.

Both organizations have the same zeal to see spiritual renewal happen again and again among our Reformed family of churches, through the power of prayer and the working of the Holy Spirit. They can help us facilitate excellent training programs. I highly recommend them to our RCA congregations. There are already many RCA pastors and people whose commitment to Jesus Christ has been strengthened through the Lighthouse movement and the ministries of PRMI.

Another movement that is helping the church do evangelism and experience renewal comes out of England. This is Alpha. I do not know the leaders of this movement personally, but as I have traveled I have found that there are many congregations in the Christian Reformed Church and apparently some of our own RCA congregations that have been blessed by the program. This program needs to be investigated to see if it could be welcomed and encouraged in the RCA.

Concerning the two movements that I am acquainted with and trust, I believe they have already developed excellent equipping programs and materials that could be of great benefit to the Reformed Church in America. Because they have a good reputation for building up congregations in the RCA, as well as in the Christian Reformed and Presbyterian Churches and in Reformed churches overseas, I urge the General Synod Council to explore liaison relationships with the Lighthouse movement and PRMI. I encourage the General Synod Council to instruct its staff to review the programs and resources of these organizations and to recommend to RCA pastors and consistories their use in congregations.

In working for renewal of prayer and spiritual life in our congregations, I have a great concern for our General Synod Council staff. They may play an important role in helping our congregations too.

Instead of only sending letters or papers to instruct us in terms of doing church ministry, our staff personally needs to use their expertise to facilitate and meet our local church
needs. Hopefully this may help to fulfill part of the Statement of Mission and Vision, especially the part called “Living Out the Vision.” It says that we will live out the vision “By synods and staff that funnel resources to the local church and keep us connected to the larger church.” Moreover, if the ten-year goal is passed, we will desperately need our synods and staff to help us to carry out the practical work of implementing the goal.

My proposal is as follows:

**P-2**

To instruct the general secretary and senior staff to reassess the priorities and objectives of all General Synod Council executive personnel so that more of the time and expertise of these church leaders can be made available for work within regional synods, classes, and congregations.

[Upon recommendation by the Committee of Reference, P-2 was referred to the Committee of Reference. See page 355.]

**Regarding Overseas Missions**

After being involved in the Mission Committee of the General Synod Council and visiting the overseas mission fields with our staff several times, I am very impressed to see what our missionaries are doing on their mission fields. I believe we have the best mission service in the world. More than that, our congregations are greatly committed to missions and very generous too. Whenever we have special needs for overseas missions, it is always easy to raise funds among our congregations, for we care about our overseas missions. Let’s commend RCA Mission Services. However, I would like to propose several ways to make our overseas missions even better. Before I make the proposals, let me explain the reasons behind them:

1. We are used to calling and sending long-term missionaries to go overseas. It is good to keep it that way. I strongly affirm the role of long-term missionaries in the RCA. However, the world now is changing very rapidly, and the interactions among the world communities are very active. Short-term mission is always a good way to build up good connections with one another and learn from each other. Especially in the Asian contexts, going overseas to teach the English language is a golden opportunity to share the gospel. Besides, by doing short-term missions, our local churches will be stimulated and learn from the other side of the world and be benefited to see how other people do the mission for the kingdom of God.

2. We, the Reformed Church, have very good “Reformed theology,” which many churches from other parts of the world are looking for to be educated and learn from it. Many times when I was traveling in developing countries, our mission partners have asked if Mission Services can seek opportunities to build connections between their seminaries and churches and our local churches and pastors in North America. They would welcome our pastors and seminary professors to go overseas to teach and share for a short period (two to three weeks). The demand for this type of short-term missionary involvement is growing rapidly. Not only will this help churches and seminaries in our partner churches, it also will help bring renewal to our churches and seminaries in North America.

3. Economically speaking, short-term mission is much cheaper than long-term mission, and many more people can be involved. For example, the financial support that we provide for one missionary family sometimes can be divided and provide for ten or even more local people to do local ministry in their own hometowns, which will be more effective than a solo foreign missionary’s work.
4. Today many governments do not welcome long-term missionaries. But short-term mission workers and teams or institutions may go as tourists or short-term teachers.

5. Our Mission and Vision Statement says, “Imagine... A denomination, locally oriented [and] globally connected.” Our mission is to actualize these two concepts in our actions.

6. When I see the mission fields and hear the people crying out, “Please come to help us,” I always weep inside of my heart. The voice of our Lord seems to challenge me again:

   “But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting” (John 4:35b).

   “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Matthew 9:37, 38).

P-3
To instruct the General Synod Council to expand the opportunities for national and international short-term mission assignments for RCA congregations.

P-4
To instruct the General Synod Council to develop resources that will encourage pastors, consistories, other church leaders, and youth to use their gifts in short-term mission opportunities; and further, to encourage consistories to release pastors to participate in short-term mission assignments.

P-5
To instruct the General Synod Council to encourage and facilitate the development of mission partnerships between congregations and classes and overseas partner churches.

P-6
To instruct the General Synod Council to expand opportunities for overseas continuing education and inspirational mission journeys that will encourage and inspire RCA leaders and pastors and enhance their ability to initiate new models for ministry and evangelism.

P-7
To encourage the General Synod Council to engage in a regular and periodic evaluation of its overseas and North American mission fields, including personnel assigned to these fields, to evaluate the continuing appropriateness and effectiveness of the ministries; and further, as necessary, to determine objectives and action steps that will strengthen the ministries.

[Upon recommendation by the Committee of Reference, P-3, P-4, P-5, P-6, and P-7 were referred to the Advisory Committee on World Mission. See pages 347–348.]

6. Let’s help Taiwan fight SARS.

On April 2, 2003, our general secretary, the Rev. Wes Granberg-Michaelson, and I, with my wife, Su, made an official trip to visit Taiwan and China. We had a great opportunity
arranged by the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan to lead an RCA delegation to visit the president of Taiwan, Mr. Chen Shui-bian, in Taipei City. Our delegation also included the RCA’s supervisor of mission programs in East Asia and the Pacific, the Rev. Dr. John Lee, and his wife, Young Ja Lee; Wes’s son, J. K.; and members of the two RCA missionary families in Taiwan, Rowland and Judy Van Es and David Alexander and his daughter, Kate.

We had a great time together with the president of Taiwan. Originally our official visit was scheduled for only thirty minutes, but by God’s grace we had a very wonderful conversation and it continued for over an hour.

During our conversation President Chen particularly mentioned one issue. He said, “Please help Taiwan fight SARS, this epidemic.” Now this epidemic is getting worse than before. Although Taiwan is a free and independent country, Taiwan is still excluded from the World Health Organization, and it is very difficult to get support from the international community. For the sake of humanitarian support and the world’s physical health, I would like to make my final proposal:

**P-8**

To instruct the general secretary, on behalf of the Reformed Church in America, to write letters to the World Health Organization, the president of the United States of America, the leaders of the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate, the prime minister of Canada, and the leaders of the Canadian Parliament, to express the concern and support of the Reformed Church in America that Taiwan may be accepted as a member country in the World Health Organization for humanitarian reasons and to enhance the welfare and the physical health of the people of the whole world.

[Upon recommendation by the Committee of Reference, P-8 was referred to the Advisory Committee on Christian Action. See page 131.]

After our conversation President Chen, who is not a Christian, expressed that he really needed help from the Heavenly God. He then invited me to lead a prayer for him and for Taiwan.

Conclusion

I am very grateful to our Lord Jesus Christ for choosing me, such an unworthy servant, to serve him in his vineyard. Particularly, he put me in such a great Reformed family to work and labor with many great gifted people for the glory of his kingdom. I will never forget what I have received from him and this wonderful church of God over these past two years of experience as vice president and president of the RCA.

I recommit myself to him and to serve him better in the future.

To God be the glory!

Respectfully submitted,
John C. H. Chang
REPORT OF THE GENERAL SECRETARY

The Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson

The Reformed Church in America continues on a remarkable journey of faith and faithfulness.

It is a journey we trace to the tip of a cold, windswept island colony then known as New Amsterdam, now New York. That first congregation, led by Domine Jonas Michaelius, was organized in 1628, 375 years ago—a Dutch church whose worship services were multilingual and multicultural. From that simple wood structure we set out—across the Hudson River into New Jersey, up the Hudson to Albany and beyond, and even in mission into Canada. Over the next 220 years, the Reformed Church organized 658 new congregations in North America, many still active in ministry.

By the time the Reformed Church welcomed a Dutch minister named Albertus C. Van Raalte, who arrived here in western Michigan in 1847, it had also already sent the Rev. David Abeel to China. The log-cabin structure established as the First Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan, was built about the same time the New Street Church in Amoy, China, began its ministry as the first Protestant church in China.

This is who we’ve been—and who we are: a church in mission, within North America and across the globe. And in our best moments, we’ve understood that it’s not our mission, but God’s—the movement of God’s Spirit in the world that beckons us to follow with faith.

As we approach four centuries of ministry in North America, the Spirit of God has been stirring the Reformed Church in America to ask anew: What does it mean to follow Christ in mission? What does this mean in a new global community? What does it mean to follow Christ, not across a vast frontier, but in the small towns and teeming cities of North America? What does this mean when only 37 percent of the population regularly attends church and 50 percent of the established congregations in this society are in a state of decline? What does it mean to follow Christ in a denomination that carries the historic strengths of a reforming tradition, and has deep geographical roots in particular locations in North America, but has been slowly and persistently declining in membership for the past thirty-five years?

The General Synod of the Reformed Church in America has been confronting these questions very directly the past five years. In 1997, it approved a new Statement of Mission and Vision. The 2000 General Synod—built around the Mission 2000 celebration in New York—requested specifically that we as a church seek a long-term goal that would focus our commitment to faithfulness, health, and growth. The following General Synod went further, proposing that the RCA become “one of the fastest growing denominations in North America.” The General Synod Council took these General Synod actions into a prayerful process of discernment, listening for God’s leading and to each region of the church, and now brings a proposed goal that has emerged with clarity, unity, and persuasive power.

That’s what I want to share with you in this report: the fruit of this discernment, a proposed ten-year goal for the Reformed Church in America. You must decide if this gives faithful expression to God’s yearning and leading of the Reformed Church in America, at this particular point in our journey—now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century.
A Goal Rooted in Who We Are

Like all we do, and have always done, this proposed ten-year goal is built squarely on the enduring truth of Scripture, and our creeds and confessions. The Reformed tradition, which calls us to be ever reforming, provides the theological space and historical foundation for clarifying who we are as a part of Christ’s body. Within this living tradition, we seek to discover our particular call and focus for this specific time in history.

More immediately, this proposed ten-year goal finds its roots in our Statement of Mission and Vision. In 1997, after a careful, Spirit-led process, the General Synod established a guiding mission and direction for the Reformed Church in America. This is how that statement begins:

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.

Before the church is called to do anything, our statement of mission and vision acknowledges, the church is called to be—to wait upon the Spirit of God for its power; to gather, to pray, to be fed at Christ’s table. In this time of the church’s liturgical year, following Easter and on the eve of Pentecost, we yearn for the church to be recreated and filled with the Spirit, so that the power of the risen Christ can continue to take on flesh and blood in the world; so that each congregation of the Reformed Church in America can be “the very presence of Jesus Christ in the world.”

Strengthened in who we are, we are sent in mission; commanded to go forth to make disciples, with the assurance that the One who sends us will be with us always. Our mission statement puts it this way:

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.

As from our earliest days, and throughout our history, renewal and vitality have come to the Reformed Church in America when we focus freshly on God’s mission in our time. The adoption of the mission and vision statement has challenged us with new questions for a new century: How do we equip congregations to follow Christ in mission? How do we pay radical attention to the world outside our doors? How do we turn our focus away from ourselves and toward the world? From Albany, New York, to Alton, Iowa, to Altadena, California; from West Michigan to West Broward, Florida, these challenges are ever before us: to take seriously the preaching, teaching, and proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the unique settings and rapidly changing cultures in which we find ourselves.

This doesn’t occur without difficulty. Congregations that reshape their life with a new sense of mission urgency may frequently experience tension and, at times, conflict. The same is true for a denomination. Past patterns of predictability are changed, and expectations are altered. The potential for strife grows. A congregation or a denomination navigating its way through such change does so in part by holding itself accountable to common values—guidelines that will describe our behavior as we move together in our journey of mission.

As the GSC worked through the Statement of Mission and Vision and into discerning a possible goal, we began giving more attention to these common values that can undergird our journey in mission today. Here’s how we named them:
Missional Values

- We will passionately follow Jesus, making disciples, baptizing and teaching, going wherever the Spirit sends.
- We will nurture, grow, and plant congregations formed by God’s love.
- We will reach out and embrace the gifts of every person, race, and culture.
- We will live by grace, walking together in the valleys and celebrating together on the mountaintops.
- We will humbly pray, submitting to God’s will and depending on God’s power.

This needn’t be the final phrasing; further dialogue may well yield refined language. But the point is this: the proposed ten-year goal is part of an overall process. Scripture and our confessions are the starting point. The Statement of Mission and Vision clarifies our direction, and these missional values guide how we act as our efforts are faithfully launched.

Ten-Year Goal

A focus on mission and then clarity about values prepare the way for a clear and compelling goal. And why is such a goal necessary? It shows where our mission and vision should take us. It makes things concrete. It guides us in difficult decisions over where to spend our time and money. It inspires us. It focuses our actions, and it enables us to be accountable. A statement of mission and vision without a strategic goal is like faith without works.

The General Synod Council, in its two-year process to discern a goal, kept this question always before itself: To what goal, O God, would you have us commit in order to become the church envisioned in the Statement of Mission and Vision and the 2000 and 2001 General Synod directives? This is the answer it discerned:

Following Christ in mission together, and led by the Holy Spirit...we commit to become 1,100 fruitful and faithful congregations by 2013 for the glory of God.

Words alone do not capture the spirit of this goal, however. In fact, the General Synod Council only embraced this goal when its implications were spelled out, in word and picture. Their excitement and enthusiasm came in imagining what this would mean for the Reformed Church in America. Let me share with you, then, in both words and pictures, what this proposed ten-year goal might look like for the RCA.

Key Initiatives

This goal is built on two essential key initiatives—congregational revitalization and planting new churches. Not one or the other; not one more important than the other; but both, equally essential, deeply interwoven. We can’t move over ten years from 943 congregations to 1,100 fruitful and faithful ones without fostering congregational revitalization and focusing on new church plants.

Revitalization

In 1997 General Synod president Tony Vis convened a group of pastors who shared a remarkable experience: the transformation of a plateaued or declining congregation into one with a renewed sense of mission, outreach, spiritual vitality, and growth. These pastors—from a variety of regions and ethnic backgrounds—formed the core of a new movement in the RCA: congregational revitalization.
That movement has grown in amazing, grace-filled ways. It gathers pastors in small groups to follow a disciplined process of sharing their journeys and seeking for God’s direction in their lives. Then it involves other congregational leaders, and eventually the congregation as a whole, in clarifying their sense of mission, deepening their spiritual vitality, and setting fresh directions. It builds and nurtures congregational health. This is proving to be the pathway to revitalization.

Congregational health is not a mystery. A variety of tools now exist for measuring such health, and assisting congregations in their growth. One of the most widely used in the RCA is the Natural Church Development survey, developed by Christian Schwartz. His assumption is simple. Healthy congregations grow—they grow spiritually, they grow in mission, and they usually grow in membership. Based on research with thousands of congregations throughout the globe, Natural Church Development has identified eight essential qualities that characterize healthy congregations. Any congregation—using survey techniques available through the RCA’s offices—can measure its relative health in each of these areas and then design strategies for strengthening its life.

Last April I spent three days listening to twenty-five pastors from throughout the RCA share their stories of congregational revitalization. Together they summarized what makes for healthy congregations, what contributes to the lack of health, what pastors need, and how congregations move toward revitalization. We’re learning important lessons that now can be shared far more widely, and the most important is this: that every congregation in the RCA has the opportunity to examine its health, refocus its mission, and deepen its spiritual vitality. Tools and resources are readily available.

But the first step is simply making that commitment to revitalizing ministry and mission. If our ten-year goal is to become a reality, at least 400 congregations in the RCA will need to become involved in an intentional process of revitalization in coming years. Of course, the most desirable outcome would be for every RCA congregation to experience the life that such a process can lead to; someday that may be a reality. This goal challenges congregations to willingly open themselves to new work that God’s Spirit may do in their midst. Our ten-year goal expects the movement of congregational revitalization in the RCA to grow in all regions, transforming local congregations into vital centers of mission. It challenges us as a denomination to find ways to make tools like Natural Church Development available to every congregation in the RCA, and relational networks of support and growth available to every minister.

**Planting New Churches**

Revitalization is one key initiative; planting new churches is the other.

The evidence for why we start new churches is also quite clear: it is simply not enough to say, in all earnestness, to the people around us, “Come to our place and be like us.” We live in a culture where a majority of our neighbors have no place to call their spiritual home. Young people graduate from colleges and universities in North America today with no idea about the difference between Easter and Christmas, and with an image of Christianity based only on the televangelists they see and mock while surfing channels. We live in the world’s most notoriously materialistic culture, where millions find their only meaning in money while bankrupting their inner lives.

We have learned clearly over the years that new churches are the most effective means to bring new people outside of the church into the family of faith. A variety of new church models and styles relate creatively to the growing multiplicity of subcultures in North
America. We plant new congregations as a means of extending God’s love and grace in a culture filled with millions of spiritually homeless people for one simple reason: people in our land need to find their way home. They need to come home to a community that lives only by grace, that shares life like a common loaf of bread, and that celebrates love that is poured out into their lives and into the world. God’s love constantly invites people home, calling them into the community of faith, into the body of Christ, into a local church.

We’ve started new churches since we set foot in the new land. Now we need a fresh commitment to new church development if we are to take seriously our call to follow Christ in mission. That means being intentional, about both numbers of new churches and types of new churches—just as we were about churches involved in revitalization. We’ve set this as a target: 320 new churches, with one-third of those new church starts in racial and ethnic groups different from our present majority.

These new church plants will change the face of the Reformed Church in America. Indeed, this is happening already. On any given Sunday, RCA congregations in the New York area worship in more than a dozen languages. Our president, John Chang, leads two such congregations that function in three different languages. As we become more multicultural, we are becoming richer as a denomination in the gifts of the Spirit of God. Mission-minded vitality and a prayer-saturated spirituality characterize many of these congregations.

How, then, do those numbers you’ve heard—400 revitalized congregations, 320 new churches—add up? Presently we have 943 congregations. Each year we will close a few congregations—usually less than 1 percent—that, for various reasons, are no longer viable. And of those new congregations we attempt to plant, about two-thirds grow to fruition and become organized as RCA congregations. Involving 400 congregations in intentional revitalization, and starting 320 new churches, will help us reach our proposed goal.

We can do this. And the best way to do it is not by a denominational bureaucracy. Healthy, growing congregations plant new churches. This is what we’re beginning to see happen. In various ways and models, one congregation, or a group of congregations, provides the energy, vision, and commitment to plant a new congregation. The classis and/or regional synod assist. GSC staff provide additional expertise, a process for development, training, loan funds, and a means to screen and select new church development pastors.

And in doing all this, of course, we find the link between congregational revitalization and new church plants. Revitalization turns us outward to mission; healthy congregations reach out beyond themselves in a whole variety of ways. And in the right situations, new church plants are a result.

Therefore, our ten-year goal rests on these two key, interlocking initiatives—revitalizing congregations and planting new churches.

**Dynamic Foundations**

Congregational revitalization and new church plants don’t happen in a vacuum, however. These fruits won’t develop simply because we adopt a ten-year goal. Rather, they emerge only as we center our attention on three basic foundations: discipleship, leadership, and mission. These lie at the heart of what we do, every week, in every congregation. They are supported by each classis, our regional synods, and by you—the General Synod. The direction you give, and the staff and resources administered by your General Synod Council, should “equip congregations for ministry” by centering our work on discipleship, leadership, and mission.
Discipleship

Robert Wuthnow, a perceptive observer of contemporary religious life, notes that about a third of Americans say that they are very interested in “learning more about spiritual direction.” That’s not just church members, Wuthnow reports—that’s all people. Another third say they are “fairly interested.” And yet, in a country where nearly two-thirds of all people can name some spiritual yearning, just one in three Christians say they are actively engaged in deepening their own faith.

One of the ironies of contemporary society is the genuine interest found in spirituality, even when there is disenchantment with the organized church. Frankly, we as the church too often fail to meet that need. Recently I was talking with a pastor of an RCA congregation in New Jersey. He shared how the adult Bible studies were regularly offered—a class in 1 Peter or Ephesians or Mark. The turnout was modest. But then, after listening to members, they offered a course in adult spiritual growth. Suddenly twenty-five signed up, and then more and more as they offered additional classes. It touched a nerve.

There is nothing more foundational than learning and living as a disciple of Jesus—and nothing less dynamic than adult Christians who have not explored their own faith or claim to know it all. In most congregations today, the key to vitality and renewal will be adult spiritual formation. In the midst of a myriad of demands, pressures, and expectations brought by the culture, the church’s task is to invite people in, grow people up, and send people out. Centering on discipleship today asks us in new ways what it means to “grow people up” in faith, amidst a postmodern culture where congregations learn to live as centers of mission.

We’ve taken important new steps to equip congregations in nurturing the spiritual life of adults and children. Our emphasis on biblical engagement at the same General Synod that approved the Statement of Mission and Vision has had far-reaching effects. The Learning for Life resource is now in nearly two-thirds of our congregations; its online, electronic newsletter goes out to nearly a thousand people. Prayer initiatives are springing up across the church; so are groups that seek the care of creation, and the welcoming of strangers, and the welfare of our children.

But the challenge is far greater; we must do more, denominationally and locally. We need to develop new models of Christian education and faith development that are rooted in the contemporary missional context of our congregations. Such models will nurture passionate expressions of spirituality in word and deed, and encourage the discovery and expression of each person’s unique gifts for ministry. And a vibrant spiritual life among our adults will only strengthen our ability to nurture faith in younger generations.

The task of Christian discipleship is to nurture us in the grace of God’s covenant and send us in the work of God’s mission. Such discipleship seeks to follow all that our Lord said and did—his passion for justice, his care for the outcast, his seeking for God’s kingdom, and his invitation to the transforming power of God’s love in our lives.

Leadership

For the past three years in the Reformed Church in America we’ve paid particular attention to the challenges of leadership in our congregations. That’s been driven both by the shortage of ministers of Word and sacrament and by the need for a wider diversity of approaches to ministerial formation.
We’ve accomplished much in the last few years. Our entire system of ministerial training has been reviewed and revised, and is being strengthened. Models for distance learning are coming online. Our two seminaries are vital and strong, each expanding their student bodies and physical facilities. RCA students at other seminaries are being cared for and nurtured. The Approved Alternate Route to ordination is beginning to function well. The Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency (MFCA) is maturing in its important role, and the new Office of Ministry, under the leadership of the Rev. Gregg Mast, is fast becoming an effective center of advocacy and coordination for the needs of ministerial leadership in our congregations.

But as our needs for leadership continue to grow, so must our capabilities. Today, 190 RCA congregations lack a minister of Word and sacrament. Retirements of ministers of Word and sacrament, now averaging around fifteen a year, will double in the next decade. Becoming a truly multicultural denomination will require a proactive strategy in calling and training leaders from other racial and ethnic groups. And starting new churches requires pastoral leadership particularly trained and gifted for this task. That’s why we have to nurture a variety of models for training and shaping those called especially into the pastoral ministry.

In our tradition, however, congregational leadership is never limited to the minister. We’re also recovering the vision of congregations led by teams—elders, deacons, and ministers of Word and sacrament, together as the pastorate of a congregation. We say we believe theologically in this, but we’ve lost sight in practice with what this really means. Our challenge is to recover the power of this Reformed vision.

Further, the commissioned pastor, approved by last year’s General Synod, holds the promise of filling important gaps and needs for pastoral leadership in congregations. Guidelines embraced by the General Synod Council and now before this synod make clear that commissioned pastors will hold the office of elder and be given particular training to meet pressing needs for pastoral service. Already several regions are embracing this option energetically as a helpful means to strengthen the ministry of particular congregations.

Last month President John Chang, staff colleague John Lee, and I saw the power in the practice of this Reformed vision, and what it could mean for the Reformed Church. We visited the churches in the Xiamen area of China, formerly known as Amoy, where the first congregations started by David Abeel and other RCA missionaries began. Typically we were met not just by the pastor but also by the consistory of these congregations. At the “Bamboo Church,” established in 1850, Senior Pastor Chen Mei Man—a woman in her forties—explained their structure. Their deacons and elders normally serve as the heads of the church’s twenty different committees that carry out the ministry and outreach of this congregation.

The first Monday of every month is reserved for full-consistory training. Equipping visitation groups takes place on the second Monday; with twenty-nine such groups, people who are members or seekers are being visited. The congregation worships at three thousand, with two thousand members. The church has established two foundations—one to meet the needs of pastors and church leaders in remote, rural mountain areas, the other to address the needs of the poor.

Pastor Li Li Hui leads the Xiamen New Territory Christian Church. She’s thirty-seven. The Sunday we visited, three hundred new Christians were baptized, adding to the membership, now at three thousand.
The church—formerly one hundred members—moved to its present location in 1996. The story is the same. Along with pastor Li and two associates, ministry is carried out by deacons, elders, and lay leadership. They meet in retreats and classes for training and spiritual nurture. Such models of leadership are the key to their faithfulness, health, and growth.

These are but two examples—congregations born out of our own commitment to mission—that today are vitally alive, growing, and discovering how to identify and use the gifts of their members in ministry and outreach. Like many others in China, these two congregations are led by young women pastors—and in a culture that traditionally had relegated women to restrictive, narrowly prescribed roles. Meanwhile, in the RCA, some consistories still debate whether women can be elders or deacons, much less pastors.

The truth is this: God has gifted the church with the leadership required for its life and ministry. Those gifts of the Spirit are poured out richly. The question is whether we will embrace, nurture, and receive all those gifted by God for ministry, and if we will support a variety of avenues for training all those who are called. For every congregation, and for the RCA as a whole, identifying, calling forth, and training those gifted for leadership is indispensable for a healthy, growing future.

Mission

The third dynamic foundation for the ten-year goal is a steady focus on our call to mission, local and global. We’ve said this from the start, from our beginning on this continent 375 years ago: taking mission seriously changes everything.

This past year a task force, on your behalf, carried out an extensive evaluation of the various programs and services provided to congregations, asking ministers, elders, and deacons to evaluate their value and usefulness. One of the key findings was that congregations highly regard the opportunities they have through the RCA to be connected in mission partnerships, and to learn what mission means in today’s world.

Together, as a denomination, we follow Christ in mission. Not mission only as a program—mission as sending missionaries to foreign lands—but mission as a commitment, a way of living every day in our own cities and towns, and through our global partnerships. It’s an understanding of the gospel as incarnational—following the example of Jesus Christ, who took on flesh and blood in this world to express God’s love. How do we take the timeless message of God’s saving love in Christ and express it within the context of a particular cultural group or tribe or race or nation or people? How does the gospel communicate and become relevant within a particular subculture? That’s mission.

The opportunities for global connections that enable us to respond with partners to God’s mission in the world are incredible, as much as they were when the Reformed Church sent David Abeel to China in 1847, and maybe more. Today, in nearly one hundred places around the globe, we join local partner churches in proclaiming through word and deed the love of God in Christ. And increasingly, partner churches are beginning to change us as well. Mission is no longer a one-way street. Our relationships and experiences with mission partners around the world are teaching us valuable lessons as we cross cultural boundaries in mission within North America. At times their presence with us, as missionaries to the United States, is showing us how to follow Christ in mission.

This is why, today, the challenge of mission faces every congregation, globally and locally. How does a congregation in Eagan, Minnesota, share the gospel with Laotians, both halfway around the world and just around the corner? How is the gospel communicated to
upwardly mobile young professionals on Manhattan’s west side and Beijing’s west side? How can it be heard amidst the affluent teenage subculture of northern New Jersey and a poverty-ridden teenage subculture of South Africa? What shape does it take among the rapidly growing unchurched, non-Dutch population in West Michigan? How it is interpreted to illegal Mexican immigrants in southern California? That’s mission. It’s around the world and around the corner—following the dynamic of the gospel wherever God’s love beckons us to go.

Discipleship, leadership, and mission: this is where we focus our efforts. These are the dynamic foundations that enable congregational revitalization and lead to new church starts. Because of this, we expect, we hope, we pray, and we commit, to this outcome—by 2013, in ten years, 1,100 fruitful and faithful congregations following Christ in mission.

Let’s be clear about this number. This is the anticipated result of our faithfulness in discipleship, leadership, and mission. We can’t guarantee it, nor can we presume to know with certainty the workings of God’s grace. We affirm by this goal our prayer and expectation that if we are faithful in discipleship, leadership, and mission, the fruit of these foundations will be seen in the number of existing congregations experiencing revitalization and health, and in the number of new congregations that will be planted and grow.

Facing Global Threats

Let me step away for a moment from the ten-year goal to the threats we face today in the world. At times, specific world events demand that we think anew about our mission in Jesus Christ and how those events impact the way we live as disciples of Jesus; this is one of those moments. As RCA members who live in the United States and Canada, we have faced that challenge over the past few years, wrestling with our responsibilities as citizens and the callings of the gospel around our government’s responses to threats from terrorism and corrupt regimes like that of Iraq’s Saddam Hussein. It is becoming increasingly clear that both the threats of terrorism and the dominant nature of U.S. power in the world are affecting how we, the Reformed Church in America, are able to carry out our ministry and mission with our partners around the globe. In the spirit and understanding of mission and discipleship that we’ve just discussed—an understanding that must always and finally turn us outward to the world, not inward to our own preservation—we as a church have to face the moral challenges posed by this new global environment. No one who yearns for the coming kingdom of God can be morally at ease in a world where might makes right.

The Commission on Christian Action has, in this year’s Workbook, on page 111, a study of the paper “Thinking Theologically about Security.” It’s an excellent resource. I want to request and urge the Advisory Committee on Christian Action to take this work further. As the General Synod Council recommended, I encourage the advisory committee to consider how best to engage the church in a theological dialogue examining the classical theory of just war in the current context of global terrorism, humanitarian intervention, and the doctrine of unilateral, preemptive strikes, to be informed by the perspectives of our ecumenical and mission partners, and resulting in a pastoral statement to be presented to the 2004 General Synod. (GSC 03-32)

Following Christ in mission in a lost and broken world requires that we reflect as Christians on the morality of war, in the face of new threats, and the imperative of living as a community of nations upholding global justice and peace.
On behalf of the General Synod Council, I have laid out before you an ambitious, some would say impossible, ten-year goal, a goal that can be named only in the context of God’s leading and God’s blessing. And so I present it humbly, prayerfully, faithfully, always remembering the source of its power and vibrancy.

We can only do this together. Here’s where the values of our Reformed tradition become critically relevant. We believe that the gathered church, expressed here in this assembly, the General Synod, lives as a covenanted community. In our consistories, our classes, and our regional synods as well, we live our life together believing in the power of the Spirit present within the collegial community. That’s how we make decisions—neither by autocratic hierarchy nor by individualistic congregationalism, but by communities held together by covenant.

Embracing our ten-year goal will clearly challenge how we see our life together. In fact, I think we need to talk about four specific, current examples of the challenges of doing things together.

1. Cooperating as General Synod, Regional Synods, and Classes

We have a complex structure for governing our life and ministry. A General Synod, plus eight regional synods, plus forty-six classes, function with various responsibilities and powers reserved to each level of governance. A decentralized division of responsibilities certainly makes sense. But historically, we have seen how little opportunity—and sometimes, how little will—there is to foster coordination between these various levels for the sake of the whole.

Implementing the ten-year goal requires a fresh spirit of cooperation between all these levels. Certainly, this goal will be lived out with different points of emphasis and importance in the various regions of the church. The Regional Synod of Albany, for instance, has much to share about congregations striving to live in mission within their culture, but may have relatively few opportunities to plant new churches. The Regional Synod of the Heartland, by contrast, has growing opportunities to plant new churches and has made a major commitment to involve nearly all its congregations in Natural Church Development. The ten-year goal will be implemented in a variety of regional contexts. And we must do so together.

Too often in the past, the General Synod has acted like a commander-in-chief, while regional synods and classes have acted like autonomous fiefdoms protecting their territories. Thanks be to God that these dynamics are changing, and a new spirit of cooperation is emerging, resulting in part from the Statement of Mission and Vision and the ten-year goal. Implementing this goal will press us further to develop two-way bridges rather than barricades between these layers of church government.

2. Communicating Together with a Unified Strategy

Implementing the ten-year goal will require continual, coordinated communication. The stories and experiences of others can become both inspirational and instructive for all: stories of congregations searching for new ways to nurture discipleship; of the dilemmas and possibilities for providing congregational leadership; of new models that link global mission to local outreach; the drama of new church plants, the inspiration of revitalized congregations, the conflicts and problems that arise.
To be most effective and empowering, these stories and learnings need to be communicated in a coordinated, unified way—a strategy that our present structure keeps from happening. Here’s why. In 1992 the General Synod voted to distribute the *Church Herald* to every household in the RCA and to pay for this through assessment dollars. The likely alternative was to lose the magazine, since its subscription base was unlikely to sustain it. This was a wise and courageous decision. Today we are unique among denominations in having a quality magazine that reaches over 90 percent of our membership. The *Church Herald* is the flagship of our denominational communication system.

But the structure in place prior to 1992—a structure built on a history of multiple, independent, regional publications that eventually merged into one magazine—was never changed. Thus today, as then, the *Church Herald* is governed by a separate editorial council that reports directly to the General Synod. It has a separate system of finances, a separate auditor, a separate staff with its own policies, and a separate set of bylaws and incorporation. All this was appropriate for a magazine supported independently by its own subscriptions. But it makes no sense for a magazine supported by denominational assessment from the General Synod.

What this means in practice is that, despite a spirit of goodwill, developing a unified communications strategy has been virtually impossible. Our RCA website, *RCA Today*, and other print publications flow through one structure from our communications staff, accountable to the GSC. These communications vehicles are supported by assessments of about $317,000 a year. Meanwhile, the *Church Herald*, supported by annual assessments of about $913,000 a year, functions with an independent staff through an entirely separate accountability structure—the *Church Herald* Editorial Council—directly to the General Synod.

Over the past ten-and-a-half years, the General Synod of the RCA has provided the *Church Herald* with nearly $10 million in assessment support. These are funds that flow from each of our church budgets. No other single function receives a greater share of your assessment dollars. These assessments have supported a solid, well-written magazine. But as we look to the next decade, and strive to carry out a ten-year goal, we need to have all of our resources for communication utilized in an integrated, coordinated way.

That’s why the General Synod Council passed an action this spring asking for a plan to be developed so that all our communication efforts are coordinated and accountable in one place, enabling us to communicate together. This plan would include provisions to protect the appropriate editorial independence of the *Church Herald*, so that the diversity of voices in the RCA is reflected through its pages. That’s a value we all share and will uphold. Nobody wants a bland magazine of predictable content.

What we do want and need is to coordinate all our communication efforts—including those of the “official magazine of the RCA”—around our common mission and purpose. We can implement our ten-year goal only if we have a structure that enables all our communication to be done together.

3. Growing Together with Those of All Races and Cultures

Together means all of us. And together, we will look different in the future than we have in the past. We will become, in the words of the Statement of Mission and Vision, a denomination “that prays in many languages and sees the face of Christ in every face.”

We took a major step forward in 1999 when we established a new General Synod
Commission on Race and Ethnicity. At the same time, our racial/ethnic councils became directly related to the General Synod Council, and thereby were more able to utilize their gifts and resources in carrying out our shared mission.

We’ve made progress in some areas, but have been slow in others. Our ten-year goal, however, makes our commitment to become more genuinely multicultural an overriding priority. We can’t reach our goal, and shouldn’t reach our goal, any other way.

What does this mean, concretely? For example, our staff and others in the denomination have been in anti-racism training sessions. These sessions look at racism through biblical perspectives, draw us into our various experiences and attitudes toward those of different races, and provide tools for helping us address in specific settings the effects of racism. They cost time and dollars, and are worth every bit of both.

In the Classis of Greater Palisades, three new Korean congregations have been welcomed into the RCA, and others are exploring membership. It’s great news—and challenging. In the classis meeting, for instance, some of the Korean pastors and elders, whose English is not fluent, had difficulty understanding the proceedings. So the classis made a decision to purchase interpretation equipment so that simultaneous English-Korean translation could be provided. This classis is showing the commitment and cost—in this case, a literal, financial cost—required of us as we become a multicultural denomination. With many languages and races, we will be tested to live together as one body.

4. Living Together with the Whole Body of Christ

We will not achieve our ten-year goal if we are isolated and look only to our own experience as the Reformed Church in America. Rather, this goal will push us to deepen our ecumenical relationships.

It’s my privilege to meet with the leaders of other denominations on various occasions. In times of retreat and prayer, in common ecumenical work, and in private, candid conversations, we are consistently struck by the challenges and questions that we have in common. How do we establish a clear mission and common vision in a diverse denomination? How do we deal with divisive issues and conflicts? How do we make decisions? How do we train pastors? How do we nurture health in our systems? How do congregations respond to rapid cultural changes? Where is God’s Spirit moving within our denominations? What does mission mean today, in North America and in the world? How do we start new churches? What holds us back?

Neither the Reformed Church in America, nor any denomination, will find the answers to these questions alone. The Reformed Church in America doesn’t know enough, and isn’t diverse enough, to find on our own the most fruitful ways to focus on discipleship, leadership, and mission. We will only discover them together, as we share both our joy and our pain with other parts of the body of Christ.

Our ecumenical commitments are vital to our future, essential to moving toward our ten-year goal, and express the unity that we know Christ wills and provides for the whole church.

For the World

In the end, this ten-year goal is not about us. It’s about God’s mission in the world. And we have to keep that perspective clear. God won’t bless efforts whose aim is simply insti-
tutional survival. When a congregation, or a denomination, focuses only on itself, and wor-
dies only about how it can pay its bills, and aims only to maintain its organizational via-
ility, it will slowly stagnate. It takes a compelling desire to participate in God’s mission
in the world to transform a congregation, or a denomination.

It is, of course, only reasonable to ask, what will all this cost? That honest answer is this:
committing ourselves to this ten-year goal will cost a lot in terms of our time, energy, and
financial resources. As is now the case, much will be raised and spent at local levels, as
well as regionally. But these commitments to discipleship, leadership, and mission, result-
ing in congregational revitalization and new church plants, also require clear support from
the General Synod. Gifted staff leadership—under the guidance of the General Synod
Council—is making the difficult but essential choices to implement this goal. In the whole
of the RCA, we are richly blessed with resources. If we keep our focus on following Christ
in mission, we will give and gather far more than we ever imagined.

I’m reminded of a story I heard when John Chang and I discussed the proposed ten-year
goal with the Regional Synod of Albany. A dwindling congregation there, with a handful
of people left, was deciding its future. They calculated that by stretching out their remain-
ing endowment and taking other last-ditch efforts, they could survive as a congregation for
a final few years. On the other hand, they could direct what energy and resources they had
to specific needs in their community, giving themselves away in mission, even though it
would likely exhaust their remaining assets and end their ministry. They chose that latter
course. This all happened ten years ago; today that congregation is continuing in its min-
istry.

Discipleship, leadership, and mission, leading to congregational revitalization and new
church plants, is all about focusing our attention on the world, and giving ourselves away
to the movements of God’s love. We’ve got to keep looking, not at ourselves, but at the
world so loved by God.

For the Glory of God

Finally, we commit ourselves to this goal for one reason, and only this one: for the glory
of God. We know that God reigns. All of our work and effort, in the end, is simply offered
up to God, and given over to God. This is an expression of our praise. We give who we are,
what we have, and what we do back to our God. The Reformed Church in America, after
all, is not ours; its only head is Jesus Christ, and we are always and only dependent upon
the Spirit to build the church. Our commitment to discipleship, leadership, and mission,
and our aspirations for the ten-year goal, are simply gifts offered to God, to be used for
God’s glory.

The Book of Church Order instructs the general secretary “to present at each General
Synod meeting a report articulating a vision for the church, including recommendations for
the future.” This is what I have endeavored to do. But for the first time in my nine years
of service, I offer no formal recommendation.

Rather, the report comes with my singular, passionate expectation that this General Synod
will embrace with joy and hope the ten-year goal prepared by the General Synod Council,
and that you will do so for the sake of the world, and to the glory of God.
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 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 handled directly by the General Synod Office and matters addressed by the GSC in its role as the Board of Directors and Trustees of the General Synod are reported here. Second, program, mission, policy, administration, and financial matters within the GSC’s area of responsibility that require review and/or advice by the General Synod are reported through the appropriate advisory committee. Referrals from the General Synod of 2002 are dealt with throughout the report.

Regional Synod Minutes

The GSC received, and found to be in good order, the 2002 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

The following persons served for one or more meetings on the body indicated, based on the ad interim approval of the General Synod Council:

To the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency:
    Rev. Samuel Cruz

To the Commission on Church Order:
    Rev. Allan Janssen

To the Commission on Nominations:
    Ruby Johnson

To the Commission on Race and Ethnicity:
    Armando Alas Jr.

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

Referral of Business

The business of General Synod was 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 of the president of General Synod, GSC designated the 2003 General Synod offerings for the Reformed Evangelical Church in Myanmar.

The Seating of Delegates

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

The general secretary reported that all classes’ payments of 2002 and 2003 General Synod assessments were current.

Amendments to the Book of Church Order

The General Synod in 2002 adopted and referred to the classes for approval seven amendments to the Book of Church Order. The amendments are recorded in the 2002 Minutes of General Synod, pp. 349, 351-353, 357, 363, and 364.

Proposed Amendments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposed Amendments</th>
<th>Approved*</th>
<th>Disapproved*</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Mission and Ministry in the Church Order (MGS 2002, R-53 amended, p. 231) (Preamble, p. 2, paragraph 2 and p. 4, new paragraph 2; Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 2; Chapter 1, Part II, Article 2)</td>
<td>40</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Diaconal Conferences (MGS 2002, R-54, p. 233) (Chapter 1, Part II, Article 2, new Section 3)</td>
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<td>16</td>
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<td>3. Consistories and Administrative Duties (MGS 2002, R-55 amended, p. 234) (Chapter 1, Part I, Article 3, new Section 4)</td>
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<td>4. Relation of the Assemblies (MGS 2002, R-56, p. 235) (Preamble p. 3; Chapter 1, Part III, new Article 7, p. 55)</td>
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<td>6</td>
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5. **Responsibilities of the General Synod Council**
   
   (MGS 2002, R-60 amended, p. 247)
   
   (Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 7, Section 1)

6. **Substitution for Twenty-Seven-Month Period for Theological Students**
   
   (MGS 2002, R-79, p. 273)
   
   (Chapter 1, Part II, Article 8, Section 3)

7. **Conscience Clauses**
   
   (MGS 2002, R-50, p. 218)
   
   (Chapter 1, Part I, Article 5, Section 2h; Chapter 1, Part II, Article 2, Section 7; Chapter 1, Part II, Article 12, Section 15)

**The proposed amendments regarding diaconal conferences and conscience clauses (numbers 2 and 7) did not receive the required two-thirds approval of the classes and will therefore not be included in the 2003 revision of the *Book of Church Order*.**

**R-3**

To declare amendment 1 and amendments 3 through 6 to have been approved by the classes for incorporation into the 2003 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 2002 General Synod approved in first reading for recommendation to the 2003 General Synod the following amendments to the Bylaws of the General Synod and Special Rules of Order of the General Synod:

**Creation of the Commission on Christian Education and Discipleship**—BCO, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 12 (MGS 2002, R-47, p. 214).

Youth Corresponding Delegates—BCO, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 8, Sections 2 and 11 (MGS 2002, R-48, p. 215).

Reorganized General Synod Council—BCO, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Sections 1-3, 5-6; Article 7, Section 2; Article 8, Sections 7 and 13 (MGS 2002, R-58 amended, pp. 242-245).

Proposed amendments to the BCO at General Synod—BCO, Chapter 3, Part II, Article 3, Section 2 (MGS 2002, R-59 amended, p. 246).

**R-4**

To declare the above amendments approved by the 2002 General Synod in first reading to be incorporated into the 2003 edition of the Bylaws of the General Synod. (ADOPTED)

The reorganization of the General Synod Council becomes effective when the General Synod adopts R-4 above. However, new terms of office, to be voted on by this synod during the report from the Commission on Nominations (June 11), do not commence until July 1, 2003. In order to assure that there is a functioning board of directors and trustees of the General Synod empowered to make decisions on behalf of the church between June 6 and July 1, 2003, the following recommendation is proposed:

**R-4**

To declare the above amendments approved by the 2002 General Synod in first reading to be incorporated into the 2003 edition of the Bylaws of the General Synod. (ADOPTED)
R-5
To appoint the Committee of Reference (General Synod Council Coordinating Committee) to serve ad interim as the General Synod Council from June 6, 2003, through June 30, 2003. (ADOPTED)

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-6
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 Operations and Support Services, to have authority to sign legal documents for the corporation of the General Synod, it is necessary to approve the following recommendation:

R-7
To appoint the Rev. Kenneth Bradsell assistant secretary of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America. (ADOPTED)

General Synod Meeting Invitations

General Synod meetings are hosted by the Reformed Church’s three colleges on a rotation schedule. General Synod also meets periodically in other regions of the church. In order to accomplish this the General Synod Council Policy, Planning, and Administration Services committee maintains a ten-year tentative site schedule. General Synod 2004 will be hosted by the Synod of Mid-America and will be held on the campus of Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois.

General Synod 2005/Convocation on Prayer and Mission

The 2002 General Synod adopted the following recommendation in response to a proposal from the president:

To instruct the General Synod Council to utilize the House of Prayer Equipping (H.O.P.E) Team to develop a plan to train similar teams throughout the RCA and to assist in convening an RCA convocation on prayer and mission in 2004, or as soon as practical, whose purpose will be to equip congregations and their leaders to become Houses of Prayer, following Christ in mission (MGS 2002, R-28, p. 132).

The recommendation was referred to the General Synod Council’s Congregational Services Committee where it was reported that a Women’s Triennial was already being planned for 2004. The committee took the following action at the fall 2002 General Synod Council meeting:

To authorize the Office of the General Synod, in consultation with the Houses of Prayer Equipping (H.O.P.E.) team and other appropriate groups, to explore holding an RCA convocation on prayer and mission in conjunction with the 2005 General Synod, includ-
Following the fall GSC meeting the anticipated host of the 2005 General Synod meeting (the Classis of Rochester) indicated that there was growing concern within classis congregations about their ability to provide the volunteer support to host the meeting. The classis asked to be relieved of the hosting responsibility. However, the Classes of Schenectady and Albany have offered to host the 2005 synod.

R-8
To accept the invitation of the Classes of Schenectady and Albany to co-host the 2005 meeting of the General Synod. (ADOPTED)

The General Synod office staff conducted a review of the Mission 2000 planning files in order to assist the GSC in ascertaining the planning requirements and anticipated cost of operating a church-wide convocation in 2005. Because Mission 2000 was run in conjunction with the meeting of General Synod it was not possible to fully separate costs for the Mission 2000 event. However, expenses for the various planning teams organized to design and carry out Mission 2000 were $116,065. In 1999 the General Synod office also had a full-time staff member who was assigned responsibility for meeting planning and arrangements for all denominational meetings. This position is now one-third time. In 2000 the synod office augmented its staff with a professional meeting planner/coordinator in the final months of preparation for Mission 2000. The synod also used a volunteer registrar who contributed almost full-time service to support the event. The professional meeting planner contract cost approximately $15,000. With the exception of this $15,000 contract, planning committee expenses were incurred over two budget years. While there was significant recovery of expenses from registrations and special fundraising, the GSC was reminded that revenue was not sufficient to cover all of the costs of Mission 2000.

Staff estimated that planning costs for the 2005 event could be held to $50,000 per year for two years (2004 and 2005). However, contract staff would be needed to augment reduced staffing in the meeting coordination and planning area at a cost of $46,000 per year for two years—including travel, phone, office, and miscellaneous expenses. Planning expenses in 2004 would have to be met within the budget year. These one-year costs would total $96,500. General Synod would have to approve an assessment of approximately $.54 per member in 2004 to begin the planning process.

The GSC also noted that in the survey of ministers, elders, and deacons conducted in the fall of 2002 by the Frost Center at Hope College on behalf of the GSC’s Assessment Task Force, a proposed church-wide convocation was not rated highly by any of the respondents.

Based on the report, the GSC rejected any further planning at this time for a church-wide convocation. The GSC asked General Synod and regional synod staffs to consider sponsoring regional events in 2005, or simultaneous regional events linked electronically to the 2005 meeting of the General Synod. This will be discussed at an upcoming meeting of the Program Coordination Team (PACT), a staff group that includes GSC and regional personnel.

Implementing the RCA Statement of Mission and Vision

Six years ago, at its spring meeting, the General Synod Council (GSC) adopted a new mission and vision statement. A few months later, at General Synod 1997, the Statement of Mission and Vision was adopted as the denomination’s guiding document, calling us to “our shared task” of “equipping congregations for ministry—a thousand churches in a mil-
lion ways doing one thing—following Christ in mission, in a lost and broken world so loved by God.”

Since such a statement is effective only when the words are lived out, implementation of the Statement of Mission and Vision is central to the work of the GSC. Each year since 1997 the GSC has reported to General Synod on steps taken to fulfill the statement.

A Clear and Compelling Denomination-Wide Goal

Then, in 2000, the General Synod identified the need for a “clear and compelling ten-year goal for church health and numerical growth.” This goal, the synod said, should capture what is most important for us to do together over the coming ten years if we are to realize the mission and vision set forth for the Reformed Church in America. Accordingly, the synod requested that the general secretary facilitate a discernment process to establish a goal “for church health and numerical growth as the expected result of our mission and ministry together” (MGS 2000, R-68, pp. 321-322).

When the 2001 General Synod also expressed a desire for a specific goal—indeed, when it named one—the GSC’s Coordinating Committee committed to a process of spiritual discernment by which a clear, compelling, and unified denominational goal might be identified. The process, begun at the GSC’s fall 2001 meeting, yielded a proposed ten-year goal last fall that GSC tested with the churches, classes, and regional synods this past winter.

With responses from churches, classes, and regional synods in hand, GSC continued its process of discernment at its most recent spring meeting. As overwhelmingly approved by GSC, the GSC submits the following goal to General Synod for its affirmation:

following Christ in mission together, and led by the Holy Spirit,
we commit to become 1,100 fruitful and faithful congregations
by 2013 for the glory of God.

At the same time that the GSC had decided to test a proposed ten-year goal more widely throughout the church, it had also asked for a plan that might be used to implement the goal. The GSC’s assessment subcommittee contributed to the development of this plan by surveying all congregations regarding the programs most widely used and most valued, and a staff group used this input to develop the framework for such a plan. The General Synod Council had the framework of the plan available during the final stages of its discernment process and, indeed, approved the framework along with the goal. The general secretary will present this plan in more detail in his report to the General Synod, but the broad strokes are presented here.

Four Components of the Goal

Four components undergird and guide the implementation of the goal:

1. The RCA’s Statement of Mission and Vision

Any emerging plan or process for implementing the proposed ten-year goal must remain rooted in the Statement of Mission and Vision. The goal would not replace the Statement of Mission and Vision but complement and focus it. The mission statement reads as follows:

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.
2. Two Key Foundations: Revitalizing Congregations and Planting Churches

Since we are now approximately 950 congregations, and the goal specifies 1,100 congregations following Christ in mission, this goal cannot be achieved only by working to strengthen the ministries of existing congregations or only by an intensive effort to start new churches. Achieving the goal will take both. Hence the goal calls for both revitalizing congregations and planting new churches.

Revitalization—measurable objectives could include the following:

- that every congregation be involved in celebrating and strengthening their existing ministries and be intentional in initiating new outreach ministries of compassion and justice;
- that 400* congregations significantly improve their health through an intentional revitalization process.

(*The number 400 is based on the need to reduce our rate of closing churches and by current and predicted participation in Natural Church Development work and other related means for increasing congregational health and vitality.)

New Church Development—a measurable objective could be as follows:

- that the RCA together begins 320* new churches in the next ten years.

(*The number 320 is based on our current ratio of new churches started to new churches organized.)

3. Six Key Values

Values express how we expect to travel to where we want to go—the way we understand and live out those things that are most important to our behavior. The following values are either explicit or implicit in the Statement of Mission and Vision or the GSC’s work to discern the goal:

- Submission to God’s Sovereignty
  As God’s creation we live under the sovereignty of God, submitting ourselves in prayerful humility to seeking the wisdom and will of God for our lives.

- Celebration of Spirit-Given Diversity
  We embrace each person and ministry as an expression of the Holy Spirit’s contribution to our unique and diverse identity.

- Faithfulness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ
  We actively live in response to the good news of Jesus Christ, faithfully proclaiming in word and deed the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord.

- Commitment to Covenantal Community
  We willingly dedicate ourselves to live together in covenantal community, providing encouragement, mutual support, and accountability in experiencing deeper relationships of commitment to God and one another.

- Living in Response to God’s Faithfulness
  Our lives are an expression of gratitude to God for God’s faithfulness to us, reflecting love and honor in response to God’s blessing.

- New Opportunities for Engaging our World
  We seek to live as people in mission engaging our world with the gospel together, discovering new ways and places to be involved in mission—locally and globally.

4. Three Strategically Important Initiatives: Discipleship, Leadership, Mission

These aren’t new ideas—the Reformed Church in America has upheld these as key prac-
Discipleship—specific strategies could include the following:
• encourage and equip adult spiritual formation, including practices of prayer, study, and worship, in order to nurture the spiritual formation of adults, encourage the full expression of gifts, and point to expressions of passionate spirituality in both word and deed;
• develop new models of Christian education and faith formation for missional contexts that will complement faithful covenantal models;
• identify, develop, or acquire appropriate resources—both physical and people resources—and determine the “whos and hows” of delivery by those within our structure (GSC staff, regional synods, classes, “lay academies,” etc.) so that congregations might continue to grow in faith and live in mission.

Leadership—specific strategies could include the following:
• call forth new leaders in order to directly address the retirement of our baby boomer generation, the need for uniquely trained pastors of new church starts, and the revitalization of existing congregations, being especially proactive in the calling of racial/ethnic leaders and leaders for urban settings;
• build a continuum of models for ministerial formation (e.g., seminary, approved alternative route, commissioned pastor, etc.) and lifelong learning that best serves a multicultural church ministering in diverse surroundings;
• create a new and effective capacity to assess and match the gifts of pastors with the place/type of ministry that best utilizes them;
• continue and expand the participation of pastors in networks in all geographical areas and racial/ethnic groups in order to strengthen and support our current and future pastoral leadership.

Mission—specific strategies could include the following:
• plant 320 new churches, at least one-third of which would be ethnic, multiethnic, or urban congregations, and do it in a way that involves all of our congregations at levels appropriate to their abilities;
• engage in a denomination-wide discussion regarding how and when a new ministry is recognized as a church, in order to be open to and support a variety of new ministry forms;
• utilize our historic commitments to global mission and education, and our resulting relationships with the global church, to help us understand the congregational and community contexts in which we do ministry, so that mission to the world is at the heart of our life together;
• look to global mission partnerships for potential pastoral or congregational leadership, especially in unique urban or language-group settings.

Together for the Goal

As stated in the goal itself, we follow Christ in mission together. This is a principle woven through the fabric of our work: that this goal will be achieved only if it is done faithfully and prayerfully, and only if done together—synods, classes, and congregations of the RCA—as part of our common “shared task of equipping congregations.”

Challenges will arise. Issues have already been identified that will have to be dealt with during this decade. One of these issues is cost. Achieving this goal will cost a lot. It will cost money, time, and energy. Starting new churches will require a significant investment
in both personnel (pastoral leadership) and structure (land and first buildings). Revitalizing new congregations will require commitments to ministries that have a vision, a plan, and a key role to play in the church but that lack resources to begin moving.

We need to count the cost; but it needn’t deter us. There will be great opportunities for starting new congregations and revitalizing existing ones; for building strong ministries of discipleship, leadership, and mission. And doing all of this together.

Process to Discern the Ten-Year Goal

When it established the agenda and schedule for General Synod 2003, the General Synod Council (GSC) approved discussing this section of the Board of Directors Report in the eleven advisory committees to allow time for the synod delegates to discuss the goal and its implications in smaller groups. Advisory committees were not asked to provide formal, written advice on this section of the report or its recommendations. The advisory committee discussions were summarized and reported to synod when this section of the report was discussed and its recommendations acted upon during the plenary session on Monday afternoon, June 9. Members of the GSC Coordinating Committee, General Synod officers, and staff were available to each advisory committee to provide information and answer questions about the goal and the framework for its implementation.

The synod functioned as the committee of the whole, while carrying out initial discussions through discernment, which took place in advisory committees. The question before the synod was: “Do we believe God, by the Holy Spirit, is calling the RCA to embrace the ten-year goal?” Sages from each advisory committee brought a report to the synod plenary before discussion of the actual goal began on Monday, June 9.
R-9
To adopt the ten-year goal recommended by the General Synod Council; and further,

- to invite regional synods, classes, and congregations as they share in the task of equipping congregations to consider how they might contribute to accomplishing this goal; and further,
- to affirm the framework of the implementation plan for General Synod Council’s use in implementing the goal.

A motion was made and supported to amend R-9 (deletions are stricken and additions are underlined):

To adopt the ten-year goal recommended by the General Synod Council but amended to read: Following Christ in mission together, and led by the Holy Spirit, we commit to become 1,100 fruitful and faithful congregations ministries, by 2013 wherever possible in concert with our ecumenical partners, for the glory of God; and further,

- to invite regional synods, classes, and congregations as they share in the task of equipping congregations to consider how they might contribute to accomplishing this goal; and further,
- to affirm the framework of the implementation plan for General Synod Council’s use in implementing the goal.

Division of the House: Yes 118; No 114. The amendment to R-9 was adopted. The amended R-9 was before the house. A motion was made and supported to postpone voting on R-9 as amended until a specified time.

VOTED: Not to postpone voting on R-9 as amended until a specified time.

A motion was made and supported to amend the amended R-9 as follows (deletions are stricken and additions are underlined):

To adopt the ten-year goal recommended by the General Synod Council but amended to read: Following Christ in mission together, and led by the Holy Spirit, we commit to grow 1,100 fruitful and faithful congregations ministries, including other ministries, wherever possible in concert with our ecumenical partners, for the glory of God; and further,

- to invite regional synods, classes, and congregations as they share in the task of equipping congregations to consider how they might contribute to accomplishing this goal; and further,
- to affirm the framework of the implementation plan for General Synod Council’s use in implementing the goal.

VOTED: Not to adopt the amendment to the amended R-9.

A motion was made and supported to amend the amended R-9 as follows:

... wherever possible in accordance with the implementation plan in concert with our ecumenical partners...
The delegate who made the motion moved to withdraw the motion:

**VOTED:** To withdraw the amendment to the amended R-9.

A motion was made and supported to present a substitute recommendation for the amended R-9.

**R-9 (substitute)**

To adopt the following goal:

Following Christ in mission together, led by the Holy Spirit, and working with all the partners God provides, we believe that God is calling the Reformed Church in America over the next ten years to focus its efforts and resources on

- starting new congregations and
- revitalizing existing congregations,

thereby empowering fruitful and faithful ministries for the glory of God; and further,

...to affirm the framework of the five missional values and three dynamic foundations of discipleship, leadership, and mission for the implementation of the goal; and further,

...to invite regional synods, classes, and congregations, as they share in the task of equipping congregations, to consider how they might contribute to accomplishing this goal; and further,

...to direct the General Synod Council to formulate specific strategies and measurable objectives in both areas identified in the goal, for inclusion in the GSC’s report to next year’s General Synod. (ADOPTED)

A motion was made and supported to amend the substitute for R-9 as follows (deletions are stricken and additions are underlined):

...focus its efforts and resources on

- starting new congregations, and
- revitalizing existing congregations, and
- developing and supporting efforts to care for the poor and seeking to create greater justice in our world

thereby empowering fruitful...

**VOTED:** Not to adopt the amendment to the substitute for R-9.

**Reorganization of the General Synod Council**

**R-10**

To refer the section of the Board of Directors Report titled “Reorganization of the General Synod Council” to the following advisory committees for advice and report back to this meeting of the General Synod: the report “Provisional Bylaws” and recommendations R-11, R-14, and R-15 to the Advisory Committee on Church Order; R-13 to the Advisory Committee on Christian Heritage and Communications; and R-12 to the Advisory Committee on Financial Support. (ADOPTED)
Introduction

The 2002 General Synod adopted in first reading revisions of the Bylaws of the General Synod in the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 3, Part I (*MGS 2002*, R-58, p. 242). The revisions were proposed by the General Synod Task Force to Study the Relationship Between the General Synod and the General Synod Council. The revisions provided for the reorganization of the General Synod Council into a smaller board and a redefinition of its responsibilities as the program agent, the board of directors, and the executive committee of the General Synod. The assistant secretary formed a working group of GSC members, staff, and representatives of the Task Force to Study the Relationship Between the General Synod and the General Synod Council to prepare a reorganization plan for the General Synod Council in accordance with the proposed changes adopted by the General Synod in June 2002. The members of the working group were: Kenneth Bradsell (facilitator); Susan Converse; Daniel Gillett; Jeffrey Japinga; Bradley Lewis; Toni Macon; Gregg Mast; Deborah Morris; Deborah Swanson; and Carl Ver Beek. The group met at the RCA’s offices in the Interchurch Center (New York City) on December 16, 2002, and January 28, 2003.

The working group reviewed the report to General Synod. It also reviewed the various background reports and documents used by the task force to formulate that report. These documents included an audit report of the GSC prepared in 2001 by Dr. Van Gelder, a consultant with Church Innovations.

Guiding Principles

The working group kept before it the primary purpose of the General Synod Council as stated in the “responsibilities” approved by the 2002 General Synod:

To act as the agent of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America to enable its participation in God’s work in the world and to equip congregations and assemblies for mission and ministry (*MGS 2002*, R-58, p. 244).

In establishing the primary responsibility for the GSC and in approving the other changes in the church order to reorganize the GSC, the 2002 General Synod also affirmed five key proposals for change identified in the task force report (*MGS 2002*, pp. 239-240). These proposals remained key organizing principles for the working group. They are:

*Elect the GSC Primarily from the General Synod*

First, it is proposed that the General Synod Council evolve into a body that is elected primarily from the minister and elder delegates of the General Synod. It is through these two offices that the church has been historically governed. Thus all of the representatives on the council will be ministers or elders and most will be classical delegates to General Synod. It is believed that this organic relationship between General Synod and the General Synod Council, which will serve as the General Synod’s executive committee, will serve the church well.

*Establish a More Workable Size for the GSC*

Second, it is proposed that the number of representatives on the General Synod Council be changed from the present sixty-seven to twenty-seven. It is believed that a smaller, more intimate council will function more like a governing board rather than a mini-assembly. Further, it is expected that the role of each representative will be enhanced in respect to accountability and effectiveness as the council assumes greater responsibility for its agenda.
Enhance Communication with Classes by Using the Elected Delegates from Classes

Third, it is proposed that General Synod delegates be encouraged to understand that they serve as delegates from the time of their appointment until their successors are appointed. Therefore the General Synod, through its executive committee (the GSC), will communicate regularly throughout the year with the delegates, who in turn will share communications with their respective classes. In addition, classes may communicate throughout the year to the General Synod Executive Committee through their General Synod delegates.

Establish Clear Communication and Coordination between the GSC and the Commissions of the General Synod

Fourth, it is proposed that all the commissions of the General Synod and the General Synod Council meet together each fall in the same venue and at the same time. It is hoped that this coordinated meeting will not only receive a common report of the previous General Synod, but will develop a style of leadership and consultation in service of the priorities, mission, and ministry of the church. In fulfillment of its responsibility to propose the agenda for the General Synod, the GSC will invite to its spring meeting a representative from each commission that has business before the subsequent General Synod. This collaboration will enable the synod to give maximum time to the most crucial issues before the church.

Empower More RCA Members to Serve on Teams, Committees, and Work Groups that Advocate for and Carry Out the Mission and Ministry of the RCA

Fifth, it is proposed that the General Synod Council work with existing teams, committees, and task forces wherever possible, and that it be empowered to form appropriate bodies as may be needed to carry out particular work of the church in fulfillment of its mission. These groups would be made up of persons from across the church with expertise in and a commitment to particular programs and ministries and the mission needs of the church, and would not be limited to deacons, elders, and ministers.

Principles of Governance

The working group established principles of governance based on the recommendations adopted by the General Synod of 2002. These principles, listed below, were then used to develop a structural outline for the new GSC and the provisional bylaws.

- The GSC is the executive committee of the General Synod. It is also the Board of Directors of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, Inc. (MGS 2002, R-58, p. 244). As such, its charge is to:
  1. Administer the affairs of the synod between meetings.
  2. Implement decisions and policies and programs of the synod through proper channels and agencies.
  3. Set and oversee financial and personnel policies for the corporations and agencies of the General Synod.
  4. Coordinate the work of the commissions, boards, institutions, and agencies of the church.
  5. Set the agenda and schedule for the annual meeting of the General Synod.

The working group concluded that these responsibilities mean that there must be a clear reporting linkage to and through the new GSC for all corporations, institutions, and agencies of the General Synod and for all work groups, task groups, and committees, etc. established from time to time by the synod.
• One Staff. Staff employed for service on behalf of the General Synod and its subsidiary corporations will be staff of the GSC unless otherwise specified by the General Synod.

This principle of organization was established initially with the creation of the General Program Council in the late 1960s and has been reaffirmed by various restructure teams, committees, and task forces ever since. Presently the seminaries and the *Church Herald* are the only agents of the General Synod other than the GSC that serve as the employers of record for their personnel.

• The GSC will oversee and have fiduciary responsibility for a common and unified income and expense budget for the mission, ministry, and operational functions of the church.

This principle is clearly stated in the responsibilities for the GSC adopted in the 2002 proposed changes. The GSC is the only entity of the General Synod empowered to “propose an assessment” (Article 3, Section 5c) on behalf of all the corporations and agencies that utilize assessment funding. While the General Synod has assigned responsibility for aspects of the ministry and mission of the church to various corporations, it is finally the GSC that is responsible for preparing a budget “to sustain the established priorities, ministry, and mission of the Reformed Church in America” (Article 3, Section 5c). The GSC has a clear responsibility for fundraising and the development of funding sources for the church. It also must work closely with the RCA Foundation, Inc.; the Building and Extension Fund, Inc.; and the Board of Benefits Services to assure that funds for mission and ministry are being raised and otherwise secured for the work of the church. Exceptions to common budgeting at this time are the seminaries; the Board of Benefits Services; the RCA Foundation, Inc.; the Building and Extension Fund, Inc.; and the *Church Herald*. However, as the board of directors and executive committee of the General Synod, the GSC sets the financial policies for all of the corporations and agencies of the General Synod, and has responsibility for the financial audit of all corporations and agencies of the General Synod.

• The GSC will oversee on behalf of the General Synod the common and unified mission for the Reformed Church in America as established from time to time by the General Synod.

This is an understanding that was clearly stated in the GSC’s primary responsibilities prior to the 2002 action of synod, and it is unchanged in the reorganization. This function implies continued emphasis within the new GSC on those tasks associated with both long-range and strategic planning.

• The GSC will be the governance entity that will oversee an overall integrated communication strategy that encompasses the different programs, agencies, and entities of the denomination.

This principle is grounded in the primary responsibility of the GSC and related responsibilities also approved by the General Synod stating that the GSC shall “support, strengthen, and coordinate the work of the commissions, boards, institutions, and agencies of the Reformed Church in America, thus seeking to increase the effectiveness of the mission and witness of the church” (*MGS 2002*, R-58, p. 245). At its fall 2002 meeting the General Synod Council also directed the working group to examine the governance of communications and consider the following four principles as it works toward realigning the GSC, specifically with respect to its relationship to the *Church Herald* (GSC 02-83):
1. Maintain the independent voice of the Church Herald.
2. Provide a governance entity that will oversee an overall integrated communication strategy that encompasses the different programs, agencies, and entities of the denomination.
3. Clarify fiduciary responsibility and accountability for the Church Herald.
4. Clarify the role of the GSC as the executive committee of the General Synod in relationship to the other corporations and agencies of the General Synod.

Provisional Bylaws

The working group believed that the new GSC will need time to determine how best to organize its work. Therefore, it proposed that the initial bylaws be provisional with the understanding that the new board revise them within two years. In the process of developing new bylaws it also discovered that when the General Synod Council was organized in 1993 the original Certificate of Incorporation for the former General Program Council was amended by action of the Secretary of State of the State of New York to allow the new GSC to assume the responsibilities for the former General Program Council and General Synod Executive Committee. The church’s legal counsel, following this meeting of the General Synod, is prepared to undertake a full review of the 1972 Certificate of Incorporation and apply to the New York Secretary of State either for a new certificate or a fully amended document. At its spring 2003 meeting the General Synod Council voted to request the 2003 General Synod to set aside the present bylaws of the General Synod Council and to adopt provisional bylaws for up to two years. The recommendation follows:

R-11
To suspend the current bylaws of the General Synod Council and to adopt the following Bylaws of the General Synod Council as provisional for up to two years; and further,

- to instruct the General Synod Council to begin immediately a review of the Certificate of Incorporation of the Trustees of the General Program Council of the Reformed Church in America as amended on February 9, 1994, and to draft revisions to these bylaws so they are in agreement with the amended or new Certificate of Incorporation. (ADOPTED)

PROVISIONAL BYLAWS OF THE GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL (GSC) OF THE REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA, INC.

ARTICLE I NAME

The name of this body shall be “General Synod Council of the Reformed Church in America, Inc.”

ARTICLE II PURPOSE

As more particularly set forth in the provisions of the Church’s Book of Church Order (BCO), Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 6, the General Synod Council (GSC) shall: be the program agent of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America to participate in God’s mission to the world in Jesus Christ and to enable and equip the Church to be a sign of the Kingdom. It shall establish and review policies for, and through its staff seek to implement and administer, such programs as fulfill these purposes. It shall work with other
agencies to which the General Synod assigns specific responsibility and make use of such service offices as General Synod directs.

a. Serve as the Executive Committee of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, as the Committee of Reference at meetings of the General Synod, and as the Board of Trustees of the General Synod as may be required by law.

b. Act as the agent of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America to enable its participation in God’s work in the world and to equip congregations and assemblies for mission and ministry. As such it shall establish and review policies for such programs as fulfill these purposes; General Synod Council staff shall implement and administer such programs. It shall work with other agencies, commissions, institutions, and offices of the church to which the General Synod assigns specific responsibility, and as the General Synod directs.

ARTICLE III MEMBERSHIP

The GSC shall have no membership within the meaning of New York Not-for-Profit Corporation Law Section 601.

ARTICLE IV BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The Board of Directors of GSC shall have sixty-seven members who shall be elected or appointed. The General Synod Council serves as the Board of Directors of the General Synod (Corporate Bylaws of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, Article III, Section 3.01, 3.02) and as its Executive Committee. It shall have twenty-seven members, who shall be elected or appointed pursuant to the Reformed Church in America Book of Church Order, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Sections 1, 2, and 3. The Book of Church Order is hereto made a part hereof. Eligibility for membership on the board, the method of election or appointment to such membership, and the term of office for directors shall be as provided for the GSC in the aforesaid provisions of the Book of Church Order.

ARTICLE V MEETINGS OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL

Regular meetings of the Board of Directors General Synod Council shall be held as prescribed in the Reformed Church in America Book of Church Order, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 5. Notice of regular meetings shall be sent electronically or by mail to each member at least thirty days in advance of the meeting. Notice of special meetings shall be sent electronically or by mail to each member at least ten days in advance of the meeting. A meeting may be held without notice if all members are present or if those not present waive due notice of the meeting. When convened, a majority of the members shall serve as a quorum.

ARTICLE VI OFFICERS

The immediate past president, the president, and the vice president of the General Synod, and secretary of GSC shall be elected annually by the Board of Directors and shall be respectively, the moderator, the first vice moderator, and secretary, second vice moderator of the GSC as the latter are elected pursuant to the Reformed Church in America Book of Church Order, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 4. The general secretary, assistant secretary, and treasurer of the General Synod shall be respectively the secretary, assistant secretary, and treasurer of the GSC. If any of these persons are not able to serve, the Board of Directors may elect such other persons as the directors shall
in their discretion select, provided that the office of president and of secretary shall not be occupied by the same person. The treasurer of GSC shall be elected by the Board of Directors at the same time as the other officers and shall be the treasurer of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America or such other person as the directors in their discretion shall select. Elections will be held at the meeting following the new term of membership (July 1).

2. b. The duties and responsibilities of the officers of GSC shall be such as are assigned from time to time by the Board of Directors.

ARTICLE VII    COMMITTEES

Section 7.01.

a. The board GSC shall have the following committees, whose term and composition shall be as hereinafter set forth and all of which, to the extent provided herein, shall have all the authority of the board except that no such committee shall have authority as to the following matters; amending the Certificate of Incorporation, adopting an agreement of merger or consolidation, sale, lease or any of the corporation’s property and assets, or amending the bylaws of the corporation.

b. The GSC shall have a Steering Committee, two standing committees (Ministry and Mission; Finance and Administration) and a Personnel and Evaluation Operations Committee. The standing committees may operate through sub-committees as needed or assign work to teams, work groups, and advisory committees made up of non-GSC members as needed (Section 7.04). The GSC will generally operate as a committee of the whole to carry out its responsibilities for long-range and strategic planning, communication, and development. The GSC may assign tasks at its discretion to one of its standing committees, to a special committee, to a task/working group or to a committee, council, or agency made up of non-GSC members.

Section 7.02.    COORDINATING STEERING COMMITTEE

a. Membership

1. The Coordinating Steering Committee shall have fourteen members as follows: a) the president, vice-president, and the immediate past president of General Synod, and the chairs of the two standing committees.
   b) The committee moderators for the Mission Services Committee, Evangelism and Church Development Services Committee, Congregational Services Committee, Ministry and Personnel Services Committee, Finance Services Committee, and Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee.
   c) One representative from each racial/ethnic council of the General Synod Council.

2. d) The general secretary shall serve ex officio and without vote.

b. Term of Office

The terms of office of members of the Coordinating Committee shall be coextensive with their terms of office on the GSC.
b. Moderator

The past president of the General Synod shall serve as moderator of this committee.

c. Meetings

1. The Coordinating Steering Committee shall meet at least three times each year. Additional meetings shall be scheduled as needed. Notice of regular meetings shall be sent electronically or by mailed to each member at least thirty days in advance of the meeting. Notice of special meetings shall be sent electronically or by mailed to each member at least ten days in advance of the meeting. Any meeting may be held without notice if all members of the Coordinating Steering Committee are present or if those not present waive due notice of the meeting. When convened, a majority of the members shall serve as a quorum.

2. The past president of the General Synod shall serve as the moderator of this committee.

d. Duties and Responsibilities

1. The Coordinating Steering Committee shall coordinate the agenda and schedule for regular and special GSC meetings.
2. The Coordinating Committee shall serve as the Committee of Reference at General Synod meetings.
3. The Coordinating Steering Committee shall process matters of concern, propose the assignment of business to more than one of the six standing committees when necessary.
4. The Coordinating Committee shall advise the general secretary on matters of broad concern.
5. The Coordinating Committee shall approve terminations of employment as designated in Section 8 below.

SECTION 7.03. STANDING COMMITTEES

a. The General Synod Council shall have six two standing committees, as follows:

2. Evangelism and Church Development Services Committee.
3. Finance Services and Administration Committee.
5. Mission Services Committee.
6. Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee.

b. Term of Service

Committees shall be appointed annually by the GSC upon recommendation of the moderator at the first meeting following the new term of membership (July 1).

c. Membership

The membership of the GSC shall be divided among between its six two standing committees. Each of the six standing committees shall have a minimum of five members.
Standing Committee Moderators

Upon recommendation of its moderator, the GSC shall elect the moderator for each standing committee at the first meeting following the new term of membership (July 1).

e. Standing Committee Meetings

1. The standing committees shall meet as determined by the agenda and schedule for regular and special meetings of the General Synod Council.

2. The standing committees may meet at such other times as may be necessary or helpful to carry out their duties and responsibilities.

3. Notice of regular meetings shall be sent electronically or by mail to each member at least thirty days in advance of the meeting. Notice of special meetings shall be sent electronically or by mail to each member at least ten days in advance of the meeting. A meeting may be held without notice if all members are present or if those not present waive due notice of the meeting. When convened, a majority of the members shall serve as a quorum.

4. Each committee shall present its recommendations for action to the entire GSC in plenary session.

f. Duties and Responsibilities

1. Ministry and Mission. This committee is formed to assist the GSC with oversight and continuing development of the RCA’s local and worldwide mission programs. The committee will give direction and support to the Ministry and Mission staff clusters. It will provide liaison with the RCA seminaries and the General Synod Commissions on Theology, Christian Action, Race and Ethnicity, Christian Unity, Women, Christian Education, and Worship. MFCA and the racial and ethnic councils will relate primarily through this committee.

2. Finance and Administration. This committee is formed to assist the GSC with oversight of the financial, legal, and administrative governance, business, and other affairs and concerns of the church. The committee will give direction and support to the Finance and Operations and Support staff clusters. It will provide liaison with the General Synod Commissions on Church Order, Nominations, Judicial Business, and History. Issues of governance and financial oversight, constitution and bylaws concerns, and risk management for all corporations and agencies of the General Synod will be addressed in this committee.

SECTION 7.04. COMMITTEE FUNCTIONS

a. The committees function within the context of the GSC. Each committee of the GSC shall supervise a particular programmatic or operational/administrative category of services for the RCA. Each committee shall present its recommendations for action to the entire GSC in plenary session.

b. Particular areas of responsibility shall be as follows:

1. Congregational Services Committee. This committee shall provide RCA congregations various forms of program assistance, including education programs. This committee shall also provide an integrated program of communi-
cation for the church under the philosophy of communication adopted by the Reformed Church in America in 1989 (MGS 1989, R-2, pp. 150-51) and as this philosophy shall be revised, updated, or changed by future meetings of the General Synod or the General Synod Council of the Reformed Church in America.

2. Evangelism and Church Development Services Committee: This committee shall focus on outreach through evangelism and church development and related financing programs.

3. Finance Services Committee: This committee shall provide financial services, establish and coordinate budgets, review legal matters, manage investments and property, and provide benefit services for RCA clergy and RCA lay employees (insurance and pensions).

4. Ministry and Personnel Services Committee: This committee shall focus on theological education, professional development, and support/placement services for RCA clergy and RCA lay employees.

5. Mission Services Committee: This committee shall provide opportunities for people to be involved directly or through financial support in the RCA’s mission at home and abroad.

6. Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee. This committee shall facilitate the operations of the General Synod, the committees, commissions, and agencies of the General Synod, and the General Synod Council, and the coordination of the various activities that expedite governance. These responsibilities shall include providing computer services. This committee shall facilitate the work of the racial/ethnic councils in cooperation with the executive committee of each racial/ethnic council.

SECTION 7.0604. ADVISORY COMMITTEES AND/OR SUB-COMMITTEES, SUBCOMMITTEES, TEAMS, WORK GROUPS, ADVISORY COMMITTEES

a. Number and Designation: Each The GSC committee and its standing committees may establish, upon approval by the GSC, advisory and/or subcommittees, teams, work groups, and advisory committees to focus on highly specialized aspects of the GSC committee’s concerns and responsibilities.

b. Size and Membership: The size and membership of the advisory and/or sub these committees must be approved by the GSC. Members of subcommittees, and/or teams, work groups, and advisory committees do not have to be members of the GSC; but unless specified in the action authorizing formation, they must be confessing members of the RCA.

c. Terms of Office Service: The terms of office shall be for three years, beginning on July 1, and no person may be appointed for more than two terms. These committees shall be established for a term of service specified in the recommendation for their formation. Members shall be appointed by the moderator of the GSC or by the moderator of the recommending standing committee. The maximum term of service shall be four years. Appointees shall be ineligible for two years after they have served.

d. The GSC action authorizing an advisory committee and/or the formation of a subcommittee, team, work group, or advisory committee shall specify the responsi-
bilities or task and the size and the source of funding for the committee’s operation.

SECTION 7.05. PERSONNEL AND EVALUATION COMMITTEE

a. Membership: The membership shall include one member appointed by the moderator of the GSC and one member elected by each GSC standing committee. These members shall serve two-year terms renewable for up to two years or until the member’s term on the GSC expires. The Commission on Nominations will nominate two members from the church who have demonstrated expertise in the human resources field. Nominees from the Commission on Nominations need not be members of the GSC. They will serve a four-year term and may be nominated for a second four-year term. Committee members will be ineligible for appointment or election for two years after they have served. The general secretary will serve *ex-officio* and without vote. The personnel director will provide staff support to the committee.

1. The committee shall have four members appointed from within and by the GSC upon nomination by its moderator.

2. At least one of the members shall be a layperson skilled in personnel matters.

b. Term of Office: The term of office for members of the Personnel and Evaluation Committee shall be coextensive with their terms on the GSC.

c. Duties and Responsibilities: This committee shall oversee personnel policies, salary ranges, and performance review and present its recommendations for action to the entire board in executive session.

1. Provide support, counsel, and direction for the general secretary.

2. Conduct the performance evaluation of the general secretary and report to the GSC.

3. Review and make recommendations to the GSC concerning salary ranges and benefits for denominational staff and missionaries.

4. Oversee and make recommendations to the GSC concerning personnel policies and the staff performance review process.

5. Review and approve newly created position descriptions and major revisions to existing position descriptions for executive staff and report these to the GSC.

6. Review and approve staff sabbaticals according to personnel policies and report these to the GSC.

SECTION 7.07. AD HOC COMMITTEES

The GSC shall authorize and appoint such ad hoc committees as necessary. The ad hoc committees shall not be constituted as subcommittees or advisory committees, but shall report directly to the board. Each ad hoc committee shall serve only until the function for which it was appointed has been completed. The action authorizing an ad hoc committee shall specify task, size, and source of funds.
ARTICLE VIII  AGENCIES

SECTION 8.01

a. The General Synod Council may have agencies. Agencies shall be permanent bodies formed by the GSC to carry out certain responsibilities of the GSC that require special skills, expertise, and a level of ongoing oversight not possible within the GSC itself. Agencies shall have bylaws that are reviewed and approved by the GSC.

b. Name, Purpose, and Membership: The enabling documents of GSC agencies shall include articles stating the name, purpose, membership, terms of service and provisions for meetings, reports to the GSC, and bylaws and amendments.

c. Funding: The sources of funding will be defined in the enabling documents of GSC agencies. If required, agencies will have budgets approved annually by the GSC.

d. Personnel: The GSC staff may be assigned to support the work of one or more of its agencies. Agencies will not retain staff independent of the GSC.

SECTION 9  ARTICLE IX  EMPLOYMENT AND TERMINATION

SECTION 9.01  THE GENERAL SECRETARY

a. The general secretary shall be employed by the GSC upon recommendation of its search committee and in consultation with the Personnel and Evaluation Committee. Employment of the general secretary requires the approval of the General Synod.

b. The search committee shall consist of twenty-one persons, including the president moderator of the GSC, who shall recommend members for appointment by the board GSC, which shall also name the chairperson. Included shall be the president and vice president of General Synod, a representative of each of the racial/ethnic councils, a representative from the editorial council of the Church Herald, the president of Reformed Church Women's Ministries, both the president of New Brunswick Theological Seminary, and the president of Western Theological Seminary, the four members of the Personnel and Evaluation Committee, and six at-large members to provide a committee broadly representative of the Reformed Church in America.

c. The Personnel and Evaluation Committee is responsible for the general secretary’s performance. Employment may be terminated by the General Synod Council in consultation with the Personnel and Evaluation Committee.

SECTION 9.02  STAFF

a. The directors Directors of the six GSC standing committees who are cluster facilitators shall be employed by the general secretary in consultation with the Personnel and Evaluation Committee and with the approval of the board GSC. The general secretary is responsible for the performance of these committee directors with the right to terminate employment in consultation with the Personnel and Evaluation Committee and with the approval of the GSC Coordinating Committee and immediate report to the board.
Executive staff accountable to the directors with major budget area authority, including staff assigned to other corporations and agencies of the General Synod, of the units shall be employed by the directors of the units with the approval of the general secretary, who will consult with the moderator of the appropriate General Synod Council committee, or the appropriate corporation or agency of General Synod and the Personnel and Evaluation Committee, and report immediately to the board GSC. The directors, Directors of the units, are responsible for their performance and have the right to terminate employment with the approval of the general secretary, who will consult with the moderator of the appropriate General Synod Council committee, or the appropriate corporation or agency of General Synod and Personnel and Evaluation Committee and report immediately to the board GSC.

c. The racial/ethnic council staff Executive staff who oversee and give direction to the RCA’s racial and ethnic ministries are accountable within the Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Operations and Support Cluster. The director of Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Operations and Support Services, working in consultation and cooperation with the executive committees of each council, shall provide supervision for, and shall be responsible for the performance of, the racial/ethnic council executive staff executive staff who oversee and give direction to the RCA’s racial and ethnic ministries.

d. Newly created position descriptions and major revisions to existing position descriptions for executive staff accountable to the directors of the units shall be proposed by the unit director, be approved by the general secretary after consultation with the other unit directors and the moderator of the appropriate General Synod Council committee, and be submitted to the Personnel and Evaluation Committee for its approval, with report to the next regular meeting of the General Synod Council.

e. The policies described in paragraphs 8c and 8d 9.02b and c will be followed when the GSC is employing, terminating employment or redefining the position descriptions of executive staff who oversee the work of the racial/ethnic councils executive staff except that the executive committees of the racial/ethnic councils will coordinate the executive search process, and will be fully involved in the development and revisions of position descriptions. The appropriate racial/ethnic council executive committee will also be fully involved in decisions about terms of employment and employment termination of any racial/ethnic executive staff who oversee and give direction to the RCA’s racial/ethnic ministries.

ARTICLE VIII X CORPORATE FUNDS

All funds of the corporation are to be deposited with such financial institutions as the board GSC may select and shall be subject to withdrawal by checks signed as directed by the board GSC.

ARTICLE XI CORPORATE SEAL

The seal of the corporation shall carry its name and such other legend as the board GSC may direct.

ARTICLE XII FISCAL YEAR

The fiscal year of the corporation shall begin on October 1 and end on September 30.
ARTICLE XI XIII AMENDMENTS

Amendments to any of the provisions of the Reformed Church in America Book of Church Order that are incorporated by reference in these bylaws shall become amendments to these bylaws. In all other cases the bylaws may be amended at any duly constituted meeting of the board GSC by a majority vote, provided that the substance of the proposed amendments shall have been presented to the board GSC with the notice of meeting.

GSC MEMBERSHIP QUALIFICATIONS

Serving on the General Synod Council should be viewed as a calling from God to be of service in this important area of kingdom work. Persons nominated should be concerned Christians deeply committed to serving the Lord as they are led by the Holy Spirit. A vital relationship to Christ should be evidenced by their personal devotional life and daily walk with God.

In addition to this Christian commitment and the essential investment of time and energy to attend and prepare for meetings, persons nominated for the General Synod Council require certain abilities and commitments if they are to participate effectively. Some of the key membership roles with related commitments and abilities are:

Church Member RCA Minister of Word and Sacrament or RCA Elder:

Strengthens the body of Christ through active participation in the mission and ministry of a local Reformed Church congregation.

Policy Maker: Searches for general principles to shape the life and mission of the church.

Creative Thinker: Develops optional strategies for using GSC resources and staff.

Personal Contributor: Facilitates the work of the body through free exercise of personal gifts, education, and training.

Easy Dissenter: Disagrees openly and freely with staff recommendations and opinions of other members without creating an adversarial relationship.

Effective Communicator: Communicates concerns and interests of sending body and other related groups and persons to the General Synod Council and vice versa.

Independent Delegate Decision Maker: Acts on opinions formed in personal study, prayer, and group discussion without commitments to special interests.

General Synod Council Agencies

In addition to adopting new bylaws for the General Synod Council, in order to implement the principles outlined above (pp. 73-75), it is necessary to create two new GSC agencies. According to the bylaws above, agencies are “permanent bodies formed by the GSC to carry out certain responsibilities of the GSC that require special skills, expertise, and a level of ongoing oversight not possible within the GSC itself” (Section 8.01). Since the GSC bears responsibility for development of funding sources and fundraising, as well as for an overall integrated communication strategy, and since the GSC will generally oper-
ate as a committee of the whole to carry out these responsibilities, an agency that works in each of these areas is desirable.

The GSC, at its March meeting, took actions to begin planning for the creation of both a development council and a communications council:

To direct the general secretary and senior staff to draft plans for the formation of a development council (a new GSC agency) inclusive of structure, responsibilities, accountabilities, and budget, for review and action by the General Synod Council not later than November 2003 (GSC 03-41).

and

To direct the general secretary and senior staff to draft plans for the formation of a communications council (a new GSC agency) inclusive of structure, responsibilities, accountabilities, and budget, for review and action by the General Synod Council not later than November 2003 (GSC 03-39).

Because there are General Synod corporations with responsibilities in both fundraising and communications, it is necessary to review how the existing corporations will function in relation to the GSC’s development council and communications council. Specifically, the RCA Foundation (a corporation of the General Synod) oversees and initiates planned giving, various fund drives, and fundraising on behalf of the GSC. Given the GSC’s responsibilities to oversee the common and unified mission for the RCA and for overseeing a unified budget, the GSC recommends developing a plan to transfer the responsibilities of the RCA Foundation to the new GSC development council.

R-12
To authorize the officers of the General Synod, the General Synod Council, and the RCA Foundation together with the general secretary, the director of the RCA Foundation, and appropriate senior staff to develop a plan for the transfer of the responsibilities of the RCA Foundation to the General Synod Council’s development council. (ADOPTED)

Similarly, the Church Herald is the “official magazine” of the RCA and is to “seek to work with the General Synod Council and its members and staff, to provide the news and information about the Reformed Church and its member congregations, and to promote programs approved by the Reformed Church in America, in order to help the RCA create a sense of identity, build community, and provide for the spiritual needs of its individual members” (Bylaws of the Church Herald, Articles I and II, Section 1).

The GSC cannot carry out its responsibility to oversee an overall integrated communication strategy that encompasses the different programs, agencies, and entities of the denomination if it has no ability to coordinate the various means of communication utilized within the RCA, including the church’s primary communications vehicle, the Church Herald.

Thus, the GSC recommends developing a plan to transfer the responsibilities of the Church Herald Editorial Council to the new GSC communication council, while also preserving the editorial independence of the Church Herald.

R-13
To authorize the officers of the General Synod, the GSC, and the Editorial Council of the Church Herald together with the general secretary, the editor of the Church Herald and appropriate senior staff to develop a plan for the transfer of the responsibilities of the Church Herald Editorial Council to the General Synod Council’s Communications Council; and further,
to assure that the plan fully protects the editorial independence of the *Church Herald*.

The advisory committee recommended the following substitute:

**R-13 (substitute)**

To instruct the officers of the General Synod Council and the executive committee of the Editorial Council of the *Church Herald* to work together with the *Church Herald* editor, the general secretary, and appropriate senior staff to develop a coordinated denominational communication plan to fulfill the Statement of Mission and Vision while assuring that any plan fully protects the editorial independence of the *Church Herald*, for report to the 2004 General Synod. (ADOPTED)

**Reasons:**

1. This allows for possible structural changes without presuming the outcome.
2. This instructs the appropriate parties to build on these two shared values: coordinated communication and editorial independence.
3. A specific report date underscores the pressing need for coordinated communication.

**Further background for R-13 and the Need for an Integrated and Comprehensive Communications Strategy**

Through various conversations of the GSC (e.g., the GSC’s assessment subcommittee with the *Church Herald* Editorial Council and the general secretary with the Editorial Council, and conversations of the GSC’s Communication Strategy Task Force, a staff group charged with communication strategy, the GSC committee with responsibility for redesigning CAPS, and the GSC’s Policy, Planning, and Administration committee), the following values have been consistently affirmed:

- We value the shared task of implementing the mission and vision of the Reformed Church in America, equipping congregations to follow Christ in mission.

Ideally, communication strategy builds on a shared understanding of mission. Thus, the GSC’s communications strategy paper states that “The purpose of denominational communication is to foster an understanding of, commitment to, and participation in the mission and vision of the Reformed Church in America.”

- We value an integrated and coordinated communications strategy that furthers this mission, and enables our rich diversity of communication vehicles to complement and reinforce each other toward that end.

The General Synod Council (in response to the General Synod) adopted a policy three years ago calling for integrated and coordinated communication, including the *Church Herald* and other vehicles. Structural challenges have hindered implementation. Over the past year the GSC has directed a serious restructuring effort within its own communication and production services. However, the *Church Herald* functions with a separate board, staff, personnel policies, and financial systems, and this continues to create a barrier to effective coordination of communication efforts toward the denomination’s mission.

- We value the strength and quality of the *Church Herald* as the centerpiece of our communication effort, and its unique ability to “equip congregations for ministry” as we “follow Christ in mission.”

The *Church Herald* is unique among denominational magazines in that it reaches about 90 percent of denominational members, is supported in about 90 percent of its budget from
direct denominational assessments, and is widely appreciated for its quality. These are remarkable strengths on which to build so that together we might better communicate the RCA’s mission of equipping congregations to follow Christ in mission.

- We value the editorial autonomy of the *Church Herald* that enables it to be a place where the variety of voices within the RCA can be heard.

Maintaining the editorial independence of the *Church Herald* is a primary consideration, both for the GSC and the *Church Herald*’s Editorial Council and staff. Initial discussions have pointed to at least two steps that could be taken to assure editorial independence:

1. An agreed upon policy that both defines the meaning of editorial independence and provides clear parameters to guide staff actions.
2. A specific provision whereby the editor of the *Church Herald* could be hired or dismissed only with the approval of the communication council or a specific group of governing body members.

- We value utilizing the considerable resources provided by the General Synod for communication in the most effective means possible to support the RCA’s mission of equipping congregations to follow Christ in mission.

At times these values may be in tension with one another. But they are not mutually exclusive. The GSC believes these values are all important, are complementary, and can be held together in ways that will strengthen the RCA. Further, the GSC believes that the present arrangement, which maintains the *Church Herald* as a fully autonomous organization separated from the GSC (in terms of budget, personnel, thematic content, and governance) seriously inhibits the ability to fulfill all of these values.

**Other Recommendations Related to Reorganization of the GSC**

During its review, the GSC reorganization working group discovered that Reformed Church Press—a separate General Synod 501(c)(3) corporation formed many years ago—does not have a functioning board or officers and has not met for several years. While the name continues to be used on specific RCA resources, at the present time publishing agreements are authorized, reviewed, and signed by the assistant secretary in consultation with the originating office or agency. The working group advised the GSC through its Policy, Personnel, and Administration Committee to initiate steps to “wind up and dissolve” the separate corporation and to assign responsibility for oversight of publications under the name Reformed Church Press to the General Synod Council.

R-14

To authorize the officers of the General Synod, the general secretary, and senior staff to wind up and dissolve Reformed Church Press as a separately incorporated entity of the General Synod. (ADOPTED)

Currently the bylaws of the Board of Benefits Services, the Building and Extension Fund, the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency, the RCA Foundation, and the RCA Foundation Canada call for one or more members to be drawn from the membership of the GSC. Since GSC will now be a twenty-seven-member board (rather than sixty-seven members), it is impractical to continue to require formal overlap in membership. Because the bylaws of these corporations and agencies cannot be amended without General Synod approval, the following recommendation allows these boards to set aside their bylaws, but requests that they then propose appropriate amendments to their bylaws.

R-15

To authorize and request the corporations and agencies of the General Synod and the General Synod Council to set aside requirements in their bylaws that
call for membership on their corporate boards from the General Synod Council; and further,

To request the corporations of the General Synod to amend their bylaws as soon as practical to remove requirements for membership on their boards by members of the General Synod Council. (ADOPTED)

Supervision

Personnel and Evaluation Committee

The Personnel and Evaluation Committee is comprised of four members from the General Synod Council. The members are elder James Marvel, chair; elder Irvin Boersen; the Rev. Toni Macon; and the Rev. Robert White.

The Personnel and Evaluation Committee functions within the approved GSC policies and 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.

1. Oversight and Evaluation of the General Secretary

The annual performance review for the general secretary was completed in September 2002. The committee closely monitored the general secretary’s sabbatical proposal and at the conclusion of his sabbatical reviewed with him the report in detail.

2. Review and Recommendations of Personnel Policy

a. Position Descriptions and Staff Changes

From July 2002 to March 2003, the Personnel and Evaluation Committee approved the hiring of five executives: Gregg Mast, Duncan Hanson, Brígido Cabrera, Cornelis Kors (formerly MFCA), and Don Vander Stoep. During this time there were two executives whose service ended as General Synod Council staff: Paul Nulton and Kim Baker.

b. Staff Classification and Salary Ranges

Since 1994 the RCA Staff Salary Structure has been based on the average clergy salary (ACS) of full-time ministers serving in local congregations. Originally the ACS was appropriately inserted as the minimum for Classification 3B. However, based upon the salary information gathered for 2003, a more appropriate location for the average clergy salary is at the midpoint of Classification 3B. This location of the ACS within the salary structure better reflects the correlation of executive positions with clergy serving local congregations.

Adjusting the location of the ACS in the salary structure required a lowering of the midpoint formula since the base number is now a midpoint number and not the minimum in Classification 3.
The salary structure reflects an overall 2.5 percent COLA increase for FY2004, which keeps amounts comparable to last year.

**RCA STAFF SALARY STRUCTURE FY2004**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Mid</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>130%</th>
<th>Midpoint</th>
<th>Highpoint</th>
<th>Lowpoint</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>95,031</td>
<td>118,789</td>
<td>142,547</td>
<td>154,426</td>
<td>ACSx2.05</td>
<td>midx1.20</td>
<td>midx.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>75,562</td>
<td>94,452</td>
<td>113,342</td>
<td>122,788</td>
<td>ACSx1.63</td>
<td>midx1.20</td>
<td>midx.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3A</td>
<td>62,582</td>
<td>78,227</td>
<td>93,873</td>
<td>101,695</td>
<td>ACSx1.40</td>
<td>midx1.20</td>
<td>midx.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3B</td>
<td>46,357</td>
<td>57,946</td>
<td>69,535</td>
<td>75,330</td>
<td>ACS+COLA</td>
<td>midx1.20</td>
<td>midx.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>34,304</td>
<td>42,880</td>
<td>51,456</td>
<td>55,744</td>
<td>ACSx.74</td>
<td>midx1.20</td>
<td>midx.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>30,595</td>
<td>38,244</td>
<td>45,893</td>
<td>49,718</td>
<td>ACSx.66</td>
<td>midx1.20</td>
<td>midx.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6A</td>
<td>23,178</td>
<td>28,973</td>
<td>34,768</td>
<td>37,665</td>
<td>ACSx.50</td>
<td>midx1.20</td>
<td>midx.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6B</td>
<td>20,861</td>
<td>26,076</td>
<td>31,291</td>
<td>33,898</td>
<td>ACSx.45</td>
<td>midx1.20</td>
<td>midx.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

c. Salary Adjustments

The Personnel and Evaluation Committee voted to extend the suspension of the salary adjustment policy for the 2004 fiscal year. The original suspension was for the 2003 fiscal year only, pending a review of the use of the merit block grant approach vs. across the board COLAs. By including the COLA percentage, again set at 2.5 percent with a 1 percent merit, a larger pool of dollars is available for merit raises. The use of the larger block was well received among supervisory staff reporting on the application of the block grant approach. Responses to inquiries to the Formula of Agreement churches, indicate that the RCA is the only one of the four giving an automatic COLA. As a precaution, an additional year is needed to study the application to be certain there are no unintended consequences. The personnel office is compiling statistics for the review, with a report and motion expected at the spring 2004 GSC meeting.

d. Sabbaticals

The sabbatical policy as outlined in the *RCA Employee Handbook* (p. 30) states:

Executive staff, (classifications I-III) may be eligible for a three-month paid sabbatical leave after five years of full-time service or six months after ten years of full-time service in which no previous sabbatical has been taken.

A detailed plan of the proposed sabbatical is submitted at least six months prior to the requested effective date. The proposal must include a description of the manner in which the sabbatical will be used, a plan for covering work responsibilities during the absence, and a statement of the relevance of the sabbatical to future responsibilities within the Reformed Church.

The following staff completed sabbaticals in the past year:

- **Betty Voskuil**
  - June 15, 2002 - September 15, 2002
- **William Mason**
  - July 8, 2002 - September 15, 2002
- **Wesley Granberg-Michaelson**
  - September 25 - December 31, 2002

The committee has approved the following staff sabbaticals for 2003:

- **John Paarlberg**
  - March 1 - May 30, 2003
- **Joaanne Fernandez**
  - July 1 - September 30, 2003
- **Cornelis Kors**
  - July 14 - October 14, 2003
- **Debra Braaksma**
  - September 1 - November 30, 2003
e. Clergy Housing Allowances

The committee voted to approve the staff clergy housing allowances as they were presented.

The committee reminds all ministers that clergy housing allowances must be approved and documented by the church/denomination/organization that pays the ordained minister. Also, the approved amount is to be the lesser of the fair rental value including utilities and the actual cost of housing.

3. Mission Personnel

The mission office presented no recommendations for changes in mission personnel salary or benefits.

4. Salary Approvals

All staff salary adjustments for FY2003 were presented by the general secretary and reviewed and approved by the committee at its August 2002 meeting.

General Synod Council Subcommittee on Assessments

In April 2002 the GSC instructed its moderator to appoint a subcommittee to accomplish six tasks (GSC 02-18). The members of the subcommittee were Tom De Vries, Toni Macon, Karyn Ratcliffe, and Robert Terwilliger. The following staff met with the committee: Kenneth Bradsell, Shari Brink, and Susan Converse. The work done by the subcommittee with respect to the six assigned tasks is as follows:

1. Outline how the assessment funds are being utilized by the General Synod and the General Synod Council to support the mission and ministry of the RCA.

In order to meet the need for information regarding RCA finances, the brochure Our Shared Task: Financing the Ministry and Mission of the Reformed Church in America was finalized and sent to all congregations in January. The piece has been well received; additional copies are available through the RCA Distribution Center. An updated version will be printed for release shortly after General Synod and, it is anticipated, annually thereafter.

2. Conduct a survey to determine 1) the value that the RCA congregations, classes, and other assemblies place on the services the denomination provides; and 2) what additional services are still needed.

The subcommittee retained the Carl Frost Center for Social Science Research at Hope College in Holland, Michigan, to send a survey to three individuals from every congregation: the minister, the vice president of consistory (an elder), and the chair of the board of deacons. The survey was a sixty-question evaluation of denominational services wherein respondents were asked to indicate whether or not their congregation has used various programs, and to rate the value of those programs on a scale of “no value” to “much value.” The survey listed programs currently in place, other current initiatives, and possible new initiatives. Of the 2,904 surveys sent out, 731 were returned, a 25.2 percent response rate. Though the response was strong across the various regional synods, response from both elders and deacons was low. As a result, comparison between the responses of the various synods was possible, while comparison between the perspectives of ministers, elders, and deacons was not.

Results of the survey have been distributed widely throughout the denomination (including to GSC members), so that as many groups as possible might use the information to
make decisions about future programming. The results are also available on the RCA web-
site (www.rca.org). A summary of the results is appended to this report.

3. Assess the reasonableness of a communications budget that constitutes approximately
one-quarter of the total assessment budget.

The assessment subcommittee, after meeting with the *Church Herald* Editorial Council,
recommended that the relationship between GSC and the *Church Herald* be clarified and
that the GSC work toward a governance entity to oversee an integrated communication
strategy. In addition, based on results of the survey and a focus on the cost-effectiveness
of communications vehicles, the GSC at its spring 2003 meeting voted (GSC 03-16):

To direct the general secretary working with staff with budget area responsibility to:
1. Define the kinds of communication pieces that are to be integrated into a coordi-
nated communication strategy.
2. Clearly identify the expenses associated with those activities.
3. Consider pooling these funds in a communication fund within the communication
budget.
4. Determine how best to measure the cost-effectiveness of these funds.

4. Devise a plan that will work toward directing the assessment funds toward the expressed
needs of the RCA congregations, classes, and other assemblies.

5. Outline financing implications associated with the above plan.

The assessment subcommittee spent considerable time interpreting the results of the sur-
vey of congregations, in order that the resources of the denomination might be directed
toward the expressed needs of congregations. As the committee discussed the survey
results, each of the current programs was sorted into one of four categories:

- programs that should be continued
- programs that should be re-envisioned before the 2005 budget is developed and
 approved (with the program being continued until then)
- programs that should be re-envisioned, with the current approach ending at the
 beginning of the 2004 fiscal year (i.e., October 1, 2003)
- programs that should be discontinued

The assessment subcommittee’s conclusions were discussed with staff (through the
Leadership Advisory Team and the Program Coordination Team), and the conclusions
reported were endorsed by both the assessment subcommittee and staff. At its spring 2003
meeting the GSC voted to have the staff act on the proposals for discontinuing and re-envi-
sioning (GSC 03-17).

6. Report back its findings to the fall 2002 GSC meeting.

The assessment subcommittee concluded its work and offered its final report to the GSC
at the spring 2003 meeting.

RCA Distribution Center and TRAVARCA

At its November 2002 meeting the GSC passed a five-paragraph action relative to the work
and finances of the RCA Distribution Center and TRAVARCA. This report comments on
each of the five parts of that action.

1. To direct the treasurer to pay off the total overdraft in the RCA Fund for the RCA
Distribution Center, TRAVARCA, and video production, which totaled $1,008,943 on a
preliminary pre-audit basis as of 9/30/02. The first source of funding is positive cash balances in Communication and Production Services (CAPS). The second source of funding is GSC unrestricted funds in the RCA Investment Program, which totaled $872,006 as of 9/30/01 (balance at 9/30/02 is not available yet). If the unrestricted reserves are inadequate to repay the overdraft, a third source of funding will need to be identified by the treasurer in consultation with the general secretary.

The overdraft for the RCA Distribution Center, TRA VARCA, and video production totaled $1,006,357 at 9/30/02 (post-audit). This overdraft was repaid from the following sources:

a) A transfer of available cash from the Production, Communications, and Information Technology (IT) budget area RCA Fund accounts, totaling $129,980, and
b) A transfer of $876,377 from the GSC unrestricted fund balance in the RCA Investment Program.

2. To direct the general secretary (cluster facilitators during the General Secretary’s sabbatical), in cooperation with the director of Communication and Production Services, to immediately reduce the cost structure of the RCA Distribution Center and TRA VARCA, develop a balanced fiscal year 2003 cash flow budget for the RCA Distribution Center and TRA VARCA, and put procedures in place that will ensure that the RCA Distribution Center and TRA VARCA will operate within budget.

Staff took a variety of measures to prepare a balanced fiscal year 2003 cash flow budget, including:

- Adjustment of revenue streams such that they are more realistic;
- Shortening of billing terms by 20 days;
- Changes in purchasing policies to reduce the amount of inventory on hand;
- Production of a smaller catalog;
- Elimination of the CAPS bookkeeper position and transfer of financial functions to the Office of Finance in New York;
- Adjustment of internal postage and shipping charges to levels that are more reflective of costs;
- Reallocation of the CAPS director’s salary and office costs among the CAPS budget areas along with reductions in IT staffing; and
- Actions that have resulted in improved cash flow, such as pulling down funds from the lockbox on a more frequent basis.

Now that a monthly cash flow budget has been prepared for CAPS, it is possible to better monitor and control CAPS’ cash position and financial condition.

3. To direct the general secretary and the treasurer to report any overdraft in the RCA Fund for CAPS to the Finance Services Committee, and further, to provide a copy of the revised Fiscal Year 2003 Distribution Center and TRA VARCA budget to the Finance Services Committee along with monthly cash flow reports, through March 2003.

Per GSC action in spring 2003, periodic reports will be made to the continuing members of the GSC Finance Services and Policy, Planning, and Administration Committees.

4. To direct the general secretary (cluster facilitators during the general secretary’s sabbatical) to immediately begin the process of redesigning and restructuring the RCA Distribution Center and TRA VARCA by appointing a GSC working group, including one member each from the Congregational Services/Evangelism and Church Development Services Committee, the Mission Services Committee, and the Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee, 1) to review the ways in which the GSC currently resources its congregations with products, programs, and personnel, 2) to explore ways the
GSC could more effectively resource its congregations and clarify how financial resources are best used to fulfill the RCA Statement of Mission and Vision to equip congregations for ministry, and 3) to present a business plan, including adequate funding sources, to the March 2003 GSC meeting.

a) Consultant: In order to gain a better understanding of the current operational effectiveness, strengths, and weaknesses of the RCA Distribution Center and TRAVARCA, the cluster facilitators arranged a working agreement with a management and marketing consultant. The consultant spent several days at the regional center in Grand Rapids, analyzing the strategy, sales and marketing practices, product portfolio, facilities, technology, organizational structure, and finances of CAPS. The consultant was asked to look “with a telephoto lens” at the Distribution Center and TRAVARCA, but “with a wide angle lens” at the other functions of CAPS (communication, production, and information technology).

b) Redesign Group: Meanwhile, the GSC working group with responsibility for redesigning and restructuring the RCA Distribution Center and TRAVARCA was formed. Members included Toni Macon (Congregational Services Committee), Steve Breen (Evangelism and Church Development), Bob Terwilliger (Mission Services), and Carol Simon (Policy, Planning, and Administration). The consultant made both an oral and a written report of his findings to this redesign group and responsible staff.

The redesign group sought to generate possible directions to be explored that would be in line with current technology and that would best support the RCA’s mission to equip congregations for ministry. The group’s initial concern was “function,” not “form.”

The redesign group’s task, as laid out for it by GSC, was to look at the RCA Distribution Center and TRAVARCA. In addition to the consultant’s report, the group had available to it the results of the recent survey of congregations. The survey (and the firsthand experience of members of the group) substantiated the high value placed on the personal and knowledgeable service customers receive through the RCA Distribution Center and TRAVARCA. Thus, the group determined a desire to retain our ability to support congregations by researching the materials most helpful to congregations; recommending those materials; and, in the process of doing so, building relationships. The group recommended closer alignment of the congregational support function with the program parts of the organization.

While the group expressed a desire to retain the ability to support congregations by researching and recommending resources, the group advised exploring other ways to market and distribute resources. In particular, order-fulfillment and warehousing might be outsourced (to a business entity or done in conjunction with ecumenical partners), or limited to a small line of RCA-produced resources.

The group concluded early in its work together that, due to the interconnected nature of the various parts of CAPS, redesigning one part necessitated looking at the others. As it looked at communications, it determined a need for a coordinated and integrated communication function. The redesign group envisions integrating the GSC communication vehicles (bulletin inserts, ministry report, newsletters, Servant Leaders, etc.), the website, and the Church Herald into one coordinated strategy. In such an integrated strategy, each vehicle would be designed with a particular audience in mind and make its own unique contribution. (The Church Herald, for example, would continue to provide a forum for two-way communication between the denomination and its members.) However, each vehicle would be an integral piece
in helping the RCA to communicate and live out its mission of equipping congregations to follow Christ in mission. A coordinated approach would build on the relationship that has developed with the *Church Herald* over the past ten years of assessment revenue to the magazine.

In order to achieve a coordinated approach, a new job description for a director of communications would be necessary. The director would take the lead in developing an integrated strategy that uses a full range of vehicles. A director of communications with these responsibilities would also need access to production services for writing, editing, and graphic design. The GSC currently employs individuals with these responsibilities.

As the redesign group considered Information Technology, it recommended making a clear distinction between managing and designing the website and the technical aspects of information technology. Staffing changes have already made this distinction possible. As a result, management of the website will continue as a part of the communication function, while the technical aspects of IT have been moved to the Operations and Support cluster.

c) Business Planning Team: In order to make more concrete the ideas laid out by the GSC redesign group, two business planning teams were formed, one to work on how order fulfillment and warehousing might best be accomplished, and the other to work on communication and production. Each group was made up of a cluster facilitator, the consultant, an outside expert, two members of the CAPS staff, and a member of the GSC. As a result of the work of the two teams, recommendations were made to GSC at its spring meeting and the following recommendation was adopted (GSC 03-45).

To redesign and restructure the current CAPS unit into three areas with purpose statements as follows:

1. Business Entity
   *Purpose:* To make selected resources (print and video) available to congregations as effectively and efficiently as possible on at least a break-even basis.

2. Communications
   *Purpose:* To develop and implement an integrated and comprehensive communications strategy that fosters an understanding of, commitment to, and participation in the mission and vision of the RCA.

3. Congregational Support
   *Purpose:* To help congregations identify and connect with the best resources and services for ministry in their context.

GSC began discussions about how best to carry out these functions, particularly through the use of e-commerce, the importance of retaining an ability to support congregations in the selection of quality materials, how the three functions might best be integrated into the organizational structure, and necessary revisions of staff responsibilities and/or reporting relationships. Procedures for approving revisions to three job descriptions were approved: a business manager, a director of communications, and a congregational support specialist.

In order to accomplish the detailed redesign of the business portion of the existing CAPS unit, staff was authorized to contract with an interim business manager. The interim business manager will explore alternative technologies and vendor relationships, develop the new systems and procedures required, and determine such things as the most effective means for order fulfillment and maintaining data integrity, procedures for resource selection and marketing, staffing requirements, and a business plan (including funding for congregational support) for report to the November 2003 meeting of the GSC.
5. That the moderator of the GSC appoint a working group, to include members from the Finance Services Committee and one member from the Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee, with advice from the Investment Advisory Subcommittee as needed 1) to review current financial policies related to the RCA Fund, 2) to report the current practices related to borrowing from the RCA Fund, 3) to propose additional policies and procedures to insure that short-term cash needs don’t result in long-term overdrafts and to insure that overdrafts are repaid, for report back to the March 2003 GSC meeting.

The proposed working group has not been assembled as yet, pending completion of work on items 1, 2, 3, and 4 above, which have consumed a large amount of staff time. In the meantime, Finance Services has begun sending a monthly report on RCA Fund balances to all budget area managers. Previously, they received a quarterly report.

2002 Statistical Report of the RCA

PRELIMINARY SUMMARY OF THE STATISTICAL REPORT OF THE REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA FOR THE YEAR ENDING 12/31/2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>Increase or (Decrease)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Churchs</td>
<td>939</td>
<td>942</td>
<td>943</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Church Households</td>
<td>111,898</td>
<td>111,484</td>
<td>110,625</td>
<td>(859)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Confessing Members</td>
<td>181,163</td>
<td>177,293</td>
<td>175,207</td>
<td>(2,086)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Inactive Members</td>
<td>38,976</td>
<td>40,442</td>
<td>39,416</td>
<td>(1,026)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Baptized Members</td>
<td>75,527</td>
<td>73,563</td>
<td>72,684</td>
<td>(879)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Total Membership</td>
<td>295,666</td>
<td>291,298</td>
<td>287,307</td>
<td>(3,991)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Adherents</td>
<td>47,288</td>
<td>47,493</td>
<td>48,395</td>
<td>902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Average Worship Attendance</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Received on Confession</td>
<td>7,996</td>
<td>7,455</td>
<td>7,670</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Received on Certificate</td>
<td>4,225</td>
<td>3,802</td>
<td>3,958</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Transferred</td>
<td>3,699</td>
<td>3,609</td>
<td>3,418</td>
<td>(191)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Deceased</td>
<td>3,033</td>
<td>2,897</td>
<td>2,959</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Other Removals from Roll</td>
<td>5,741</td>
<td>5,852</td>
<td>6,366</td>
<td>514</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Infants Baptized</td>
<td>3,811</td>
<td>3,829</td>
<td>3,652</td>
<td>(177)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Adults Baptized</td>
<td>1,192</td>
<td>1,270</td>
<td>1,416</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Sunday Church School</td>
<td>88,011</td>
<td>85,826</td>
<td>85,278</td>
<td>(548)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 New Membership Classes</td>
<td>11,377</td>
<td>10,473</td>
<td>10,737</td>
<td>264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 Other Educational Programs</td>
<td>93,322</td>
<td>92,709</td>
<td>96,197</td>
<td>3,488</td>
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<tr>
<td>19a RCA Assessments</td>
<td>$10,575,129</td>
<td>$10,836,587</td>
<td>$11,111,280</td>
<td>$274,693</td>
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<tr>
<td>19b RCA Contributions</td>
<td>$14,349,730</td>
<td>$14,326,709</td>
<td>$14,596,509</td>
<td>$269,800</td>
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<td>19c Other Contributions</td>
<td>$13,017,931</td>
<td>$14,921,934</td>
<td>$14,458,480</td>
<td>($463,454)</td>
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<td>20 Congregation Purposes</td>
<td>$230,495,739</td>
<td>$232,602,295</td>
<td>$232,776,369</td>
<td>$174,074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>$268,438,529</td>
<td>$272,687,525</td>
<td>$272,942,638</td>
<td>$255,113</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Organized/Received
New Life Evangelical Reformed, Toronto, Ontario (2/02) Classis of Ontario
Prairie Ridge Church, Ankeny, Iowa (3/02) Classis of Central Iowa
RiverTree Community, Wyoming, Michigan (4/02) Classis of South Grand Rapids
East Hills Community, Riverside, California (10/2) Classis of California
Disbanded/Released
Lakeview Heights, Clifton, New Jersey (6/02) Classis of Passaic Valley
New Song Community, Hiawatha, Iowa (12/02) Classis of Pleasant Prairie

New Start Congregations: In the 46 new church starts (having a denominational plan on file with the RCA), there are approximately 3,392 attending worship in 43 congregations for an average worship attendance of 79.

Appendix
## Has Your Congregation Used...
### (Percent Used and Mean Scores by Descending Percent Used)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current Programs</th>
<th>Percent Used</th>
<th>Total Sample Mean</th>
<th>Albany</th>
<th>Canada</th>
<th>Far West</th>
<th>Great Lakes</th>
<th>Heart-land</th>
<th>Mid-America</th>
<th>Mid-Atlantic</th>
<th>New York</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New church development</td>
<td>41.5%</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>2.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resourcing congregations in the use of spiritual gifts</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>3.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stewardship education including Consecrating Stewards and Giving Magazine</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>2.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revitalization programs</td>
<td>36.5</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>3.16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supporting women in leadership</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>3.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing a prayer network</td>
<td>35.1</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>3.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialized interim ministers</td>
<td>33.6</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>3.04</td>
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<tr>
<td>Making loans to churches to buy, build or improve facilities</td>
<td>33.6</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>3.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training in evangelism</td>
<td>31.2</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>2.96</td>
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<tr>
<td>Resourcing congregations in social concerns</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>2.37</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>2.84</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assisting candidates attending non-RCA seminaries</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>2.51</td>
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<tr>
<td>Training congregations to welcome new members</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>3.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban ministry resources</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>2.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making investment opportunities available to congregations</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>2.77</td>
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<tr>
<td>Planned giving services for RCA members</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>2.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for racial/ethnic congregations and their pastors/leaders</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>2.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training discernment leaders</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>2.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training in conflict resolution and mediation skills</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>2.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital campaign consulting services for congregations</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>2.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping congregations establish an endowment fund</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>2.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REPORTS ON JUDICIAL BUSINESS

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 2003 General Synod. That appeal was submitted by the Rev. Timothy Van Heest, from a decision of the Regional Synod of Mid-America. (In the interest of brevity, the appeal may be referred to herein as the Van Heest appeal.)

The CJB met by telephone conference call on March 18, 2003, and March 24, 2003, to consider the appeal.

The parties did not waive their respective rights to a hearing (which right is provided pursuant to the Book of Church Order (BCO), Chapter 2, Part III, Article 2, Section 5). Accordingly, a hearing was held on May 20, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois. The CJB met in conference before and after the hearing, on May 19, 2003, and May 20, 2003.

A. The Parties to the Appeal

The appellant in this appeal is the Rev. Timothy Van Heest (Van Heest). The respondent is the Regional Synod of Mid-America (Regional Synod or RS). The Classis of Chicago (Classis) 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. The appellant represented himself, while the Regional Synod was represented by a member of its Overtures and Judicial Business Committee, the Rev. Cary Winn, and the Classis was represented by its Stated Clerk, the Rev. Ron Sanford.

B. The Nature of the Van Heest Appeal

The Van Heest appeal arises out of the action taken by the Consistory of Christ Community Church of Palos Heights, Illinois, to dissolve the pastoral relationship between Van Heest and the church on January 28, 2002. Van Heest requested a suspension of that action from the Classis. The Classis, on February 26, 2002, determined not to suspend the Consistory’s action, and instead approved the dissolution of the call between Van Heest and Christ Community Church.

Van Heest filed a Complaint against the action of the Classis on April 2, 2002, on which a hearing was held by the Regional Synod’s Overtures and Judicial Business Committee on September 13, 2002. The Regional Synod affirmed the decision of the Classis on January 7, 2003, and the present appeal followed. All filing and notice requirements for the appeal have been met, and a Pre-Hearing Order was entered, pursuant to which the hearing on May 20, 2003, was held. Written briefs were submitted by all parties (including Van Heest, the Regional Synod, and the Classis), prior to the hearing.

C. The Factual Background

The facts and history surrounding the basic dispute between the parties are found in the record provided to the CJB, comprising pages 100001-100071, and pages 500001-500177. For convenience, pages in the record will be referred to as “Record at [page number].”
1. The History of This Case

The Christ Community Church of Palos Heights, Illinois, began exploring the dissolution of its call to Van Heest in 2001, beginning with a vote of its Administrative Board in February 2001. In July of that year, the Consistory voted to change his job description to “full-time search for a call elsewhere.” Van Heest filed a Complaint against that action, resulting in a failed attempt by the Classis to pursue a process of conciliation. That Complaint is not at issue in the present appeal. However, on January 28, 2002, the Consistory voted to request from the Classis a dissolution of the pastoral relationship between Van Heest and the church. Van Heest timely filed a Notice of Intent to Complain with the Classis, and then requested that Classis suspend the action of the Consistory, pursuant to the BCO, Chapter 2, Part II, Article 1, Section 5.

The Classis declined to approve a suspension of the Consistory’s action at its meeting on February 26, 2002, on the basis that sixteen votes (out of forty-six members determined to be present at the Consistory meeting) were required to meet the one-third requirement of the BCO (Chapter 2, Part II, Article 1, Section 5), and only fifteen votes were submitted in support of the request for suspension. Later in the same meeting, the Classis approved the request for dissolution.

On March 7, 2002, Van Heest filed a Complaint against the action of the Consistory taken on January 28, 2002 (which is not the subject of the pending appeal, and has not yet been the subject of a Classis hearing), and on April 2, 2002, he filed a Complaint against the action of the Classis taken on February 26, 2002 (which is the subject of the pending appeal).

2. The Action of the Regional Synod

The Van Heest complaint against the Classis was heard by the Overtures and Judicial Business Committee of the Regional Synod. Briefs were requested from the parties, and a hearing was held on September 13, 2002. The Committee’s opinion was issued on December 10, 2002, and was adopted in its entirety by the Regional Synod on January 7, 2003. The Regional Synod, in the course of its report and recommendation, made a number of findings of fact. Some of those specifically relevant to the allegations against the Classis are as follows:

a. The Regional Synod found that the Classis failed to suspend the action of the Consistory when it properly should have done so: “Based on the erroneous information it had, we agree that the classis acted incorrectly in not suspending the dissolution, however we disagree with Van Heest’s conclusion that the suspension should therefore remain in effect until all possible claims have been resolved.” (Record at 500011).

b. The Regional Synod found that Classis had the authority to immediately act on the request for dissolution, whether or not the request for suspension was granted: “Here, classis acted to approve a permanent dissolution shortly after it ruled on the suspension. Had classis properly ruled on the suspension, the effect would have been the same—approval of a permanent dissolution at the same session.” (Record at 500011).

c. The Regional Synod found that the Classis did not violate the BCO in failing to state “sufficient cause” in support of the dissolution: “We agree that classis made no specific finding of ‘sufficient cause’ with regard to the dissolution, but disagree that Van Heest is thereby entitled to reinstatement. Critical to this decision is our analysis of BCO 1, II, 12, 8 on this point. Simply put, this section does not establish an objective standard with regard to dissolution of the pastoral relationship. Rather, the BCO imposes on the classis an obligation to follow the established procedure, and adopt a reasoned analysis for its decision,
free from error which would create grounds for appeal under BCO 2, III, 1, 2.” (Record at 500012).

d. The Regional Synod found that the Classis followed the appropriate BCO procedure in voting to dissolve the pastoral relationship: “In this case, we note that classis followed the appropriate procedure as outlined in BCO 1, II, 12, 8. In addition, no convincing evidence was presented to us that classis made its decision without first adequately considering the merits of this case. We perceived no irregularity, refusal of reasonable indulgence, manifest bias, prejudice, or injustice. To the contrary, it appears that classis was reasoned in its determination. As such, we are compelled to accept the classis decision on this issue.” (Record at 500012).

D. Grounds of Van Heest Appeal and Discussion

Van Heest assigned ten allegations of error in his appeal. However, at the hearing held on May 20, 2003, Van Heest withdrew all allegations but two, which are discussed below.

1. Allegation Five: The Regional Synod, in addressing allegation one of the underlying complaint, misapplied the BCO to the facts of the case, resulting in a manifestly unjust decision.

This allegation referred back to allegation one of the underlying complaint against the Classis, which states:

“The Classis of Chicago violated the Book of Church Order (Chapter 2, Part II, Article 1, Section 5) by failing to grant a suspension requested by the complainant. Although the request for suspension was accompanied by fourteen signatures, more than the required ‘one-third of the members of the assembly complained against who were present when the action was taken...’, neither the Classis of Chicago nor the Stated Clerk granted the suspension.” (Record at 500075).

The BCO, Chapter 2, Part II, Article 1, Section 5, states as follows:

Sec. 5. 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.

Van Heest’s argument in this allegation takes two parts: first, the definition of the term “members” cannot include those who participated in the Consistory vote as members of the “Administrative Board,” as they were never properly ordained as elders or deacons pursuant to the BCO. Because (he argues) they were separately installed as members of the Administrative Board, rather than as elders and deacons first, they do not meet the definition of Consistory members found in the BCO, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 1, Section 1.

Second, Van Heest argues that the Classis counted forty-six members present at the January 28, 2002, consistory meeting, during which meeting one member left, and that therefore only forty-five members were “present when the action complained against was taken.” On this basis, he argues that the Classis was in error when it required sixteen sig-
natures to support the suspension, and ruled improperly. (Record at 500076).

With respect to the second argument, the facts have become clearer since the Classis meeting of February 26, 2002. All parties now agree that the meeting began with forty-seven members present, not forty-six (the number “forty-four” was used twice on the consistory’s roll call sheet), and one member left prior to the relevant vote, so that forty-six members were present when the vote to request dissolution was taken. Sixteen votes were therefore required to obtain a suspension of the request, and it is undisputed that sixteen votes were not filed with the clerk of the judicatory.

With respect to the question whether the church’s Administrative Board members constituted “members” for purposes of calculating the one-third requirement, the findings of the Regional Synod indicate that the mathematical calculations were the basis for its conclusion that the Classis had acted on the basis of “erroneous information.” Further, the Regional Synod’s findings did not take issue with the Classis finding that the Administrative Board members were to be recognized as members of the consistory. It therefore appears that, although no direct finding was made on the issue, the Regional Synod impliedly accepted the Classis’ finding that the Administrative Board members were properly counted as consistory members.

Finally, it is not disputed by any of the parties that the Administrative Board members are elected by the congregation of the church along with the pastoral care elders and pastoral care deacons, and that they are listed in the church bylaws as the “Administrative Board elders” and the “Administrative Board deacons” along with the “Pastoral Care Elders” and “Pastoral Care Deacons” and the “Pastoral Staff” as the “Consistory.” (Record at 100047 through 100054). The argument that they were not installed elders or deacons is based upon the fact that the liturgy used for their installation differed in some respects from that found in the liturgy of the RCA. Although this distinction in liturgical language, acknowledged by the parties, is troubling, we cannot find that the Administrative Board members are not elders and deacons as a result.

Van Heest takes the position that the Brief filed by the Regional Synod, in which the concession is made that “there were sufficient votes to grant the suspension,” is binding for purposes of this appeal. However, the BCO, Chapter 2, Part III, Article 2, Section 10, states: “The judicatory hearing the appeal shall give deference to the decision of the lower judicatory, particularly in the matter of credibility of witnesses, and shall uphold the decision of the lower judicatory if it is supported by substantial evidence in the record when the record is viewed as a whole.”

Viewing the record as a whole, we are compelled to find that there was substantial evidence to support the finding that the Administrative Board members were properly counted as members of the consistory. Further, we find no evidence to support the proposition that there were sufficient votes to grant the request for suspension.

Based upon the finding that the Classis was not required to suspend the January 28, 2002, action of the consistory, we conclude that the Classis had the authority to act upon the request for dissolution at the Stated Classis meeting held on February 26, 2002. Although the Classis may have been imprudent in proceeding with a dissolution hearing when it knew that a Notice of Intent to file a Complaint had been filed, and that a Complaint was apparently going to be filed, it nevertheless had the authority to do so. There is substantial evidence in the record that the hearing was fairly conducted, in accordance with the requirements found in the BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 12, Section 8.
2. Allegation Eight: The Regional Synod failed to consider allegation one of the underlying complaint and failed to decide on the merit of that allegation, an irregularity in the process.

This allegation is similar to Allegation Five, above, but addresses it from the point of view of the Regional Synod’s alleged failure to make findings of fact and recommendations with respect to allegation one, quoted above. We disagree. Although the Regional Synod could have provided more detailed findings, there is sufficient discussion, and ample support in the record, for the recommendations made by the Regional Synod.

Based upon the foregoing findings, the CJB makes the following recommendation:

R-16
That the General Synod affirm the decision of the Regional Synod of Mid-America dismissing Van Heest’s complaint against the Classis of Chicago. (ADOPTED)

(During his service on the Commission on Judicial Business Mr. Daniel Vande Zande, representing the Regional Synod of Mid-America, recused himself and did not participate in this Appeal. In addition, the Rev. Janet Johnston-Fries, representing the Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics, and Mr. Mark Schouten, representing the Regional Synod of the Heartland, were unable to attend the oral hearing on May 20, 2003, and therefore did not participate in the decision of the CJB.)
The African American Council (AAC) has had an exciting year in the ministry of the Lord as one of the racial/ethnic councils of the Reformed Church in America. The council’s work continues around the prophetic ministry of the church, as well as the revitalization of its member churches.

The AAC meets twice during the year and its executive committee meets more often to carry out the vision and mission of the RCA in the context of the council. The council is comprised of twenty-six members who represent four regions of the country. The culmination of their efforts is manifested in the AAC Annual Caucus gathering of member churches of the AAC and members of the African diaspora from other RCA churches. This gathering is a time to celebrate through worship and fellowship, to assess ministries, and to learn through workshops, seminars, and guest speakers.

The AAC Annual Caucus took place on the second weekend in October 2002. The theme for the caucus was “Revitalizing Ministry in the Twenty-First Century.” The above scriptural text from the book of Nehemiah gave focus to the gathering. Many in attendance have commented that this was one of the best conferences of the AAC. Members were elated by the information received about the RCA. The Rev. Gregg Mast, the new director of the Office of Ministry Services, spoke to the council on Thursday night and addressed questions from members concerning the new “commissioned pastor” ministry designation and other leadership-related issues. On Friday morning the Rev. Bruce Menning, director of Mission Services, dialogued with members of the council concerning the relationship of RCA urban ministry and its African American churches. That evening the Rev. Kenneth Bradsell, director of Operations and Support Services, spoke and entertained questions from an overflow crowd of council members and delegates concerning the new structure of the General Synod Council.

The B. Moses James Colloquium speaker at the caucus was Dr. Peter Paris, professor of ethics at Princeton Theological Seminary and a renowned author of books on the Black church. Following his challenging speech, the caucus participants convened in workshops designed to further enhance their ministries. On Saturday evening the council experienced a historic occasion by having the first Asian president of the RCA, the Rev. John Chang, as its annual banquet guest speaker. At this sold-out event, the Rev. John Chang and AAC retired pastors the Rev. Wilbur Washington and the Rev. Samuel Williams were presented with plaques of appreciation for their pioneering work in ministry by AAC chairperson Annie Lee Phillips. The gathering ended on Sunday morning, with the Rev. Samuel Williams as the celebrant of the Lord’s Supper.

The council saw an increase in its membership with attendance at the caucus of the Rev. Jeffrey Huff, pastor of Angel Ministries, a new church start in Holland, Michigan; Denise Greer and Jennifer Jones of Maple Avenue Ministries in Holland, Michigan; and African Americans from other predominantly White churches.

In its ongoing work in the area of prophetic ministry, the AAC continues in solidarity with its sisters and brothers in South Africa in their efforts for justice. In response to a request
from the Rev. Dr. Seth Pitikoe, deputy secretary of the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa (URCSA) and a guest speaker at last year’s General Synod, the council and its member churches have raised more than $9,000 for a legal defense fund to help URCSA pay off a debt of $182,000 incurred from a lawsuit against the Dutch Reformed Church of Southern Africa, involving the repossession of several URCSA church buildings.

During this past year the council has seen the Holy Spirit move in its midst in a mighty way. The installation of six pastors in its member churches brought a tremendous ray of hope to the AAC. Pastoral leadership in African-diaspora communities is of high importance. The pastor of a local church is not just a pastor to that congregation, but a leader to and for the wider community, and is required to address issues of poverty, drugs, unemployment, and under-employment, racism, AIDS, and other issues.

At the end of December 2002, the AAC gave thanks to God for the following persons who were installed in New York as full-time RCA pastors: the Rev. James Seawood, Brighton Heights Reformed Church, Staten Island; the Rev. Marc Kellar, First Reformed Church of Jamaica; the Rev. Derrick Jones, Cambria Heights Community Church, Cambria Heights; the Rev. Douglas Banks, Grace Reformed Church, Brooklyn; the Rev. Patricia Singletary, Elmendorf Reformed Church, New York City; and the Rev. Delafayette Awkward, New Lots Community Reformed Church, Brooklyn.

The council remains grateful to its executive director, the Rev. Glen C. Missick, for his efforts in recruiting new pastors and for his ongoing work in the transitioning of these pastors into the life of the RCA. He continues to work on various committees of the General Synod Council (GSC) and seeks to help the council revitalize member churches and address issues in the area of prophetic ministry to the wider community and the world.

The AAC celebrates the appointment of racial/ethnic staff who relate to Asia and Latin America and encourages Mission Services to expand on this strategy as it makes future appointments by considering African American candidates for African-diaspora countries.

In order to achieve the goal of the Decade Freed from Racism (MGS 1998, R-9, p. 131), the AAC feels it is necessary to develop competent spiritual leadership in racial/ethnic communities in order to meet the neglect that has occurred over the years. The AAC offers the following recommendations:

**R-17**
To instruct the General Synod Council’s Office for Ministry Services to consult with racial/ethnic executive staff and racial/ethnic councils as it develops strategies to identify pastoral leadership for future ministry needs for the RCA. (ADOPTED)

**R-18**
To direct the General Synod Council’s Office for Ministry Services to consult with racial/ethnic pastors serving RCA congregations with non-White members, racial/ethnic executive staff, and the racial/ethnic councils as it develops programs to assist church members who may be called into the role of elder or deacon. (ADOPTED)

**R-19**
To encourage classes to be sensitive to the racial and cultural contexts of ministry needs within their bounds in the training and assignment of commissioned pastors. (ADOPTED)
The GSC made a commitment that “racial/ethnic persons will fill a minimum of 15 percent of GSC executive positions” (MGS 2001, p. 393). Members of the AAC have expressed concern that this mandate has been slow in the making and that GSC does not reflect the diversity in its hiring practices of African Americans in executive leadership positions. The AAC offers the following recommendation:

R-20
To direct the general secretary to instruct the Personnel Office to develop an intentional executive search procedure to assure that African American persons are considered for executive positions as they become available. (ADOPTED)

A motion to amend R-21 as follows was defeated (deletions are stricken and additions underlined):

to urge the director of Mission Services to hire an African American person of color in an executive position for Urban Ministries.

R-21
To urge the director of Mission Services, in consultation with the African American Council, to hire African American staff persons as the RCA expands its partnership with Africa and African-diaspora countries; and further,

to urge the director of Mission Services to hire an African American person in an executive position for Urban Ministries. (ADOPTED)

[The Report of the African American Council was considered by the Advisory Committee on Church Vocations.]

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

Supporting the Vision of 2013

“Where there is no prophecy, the people cast off restraint, but happy are those who keep the law” (Proverbs 29:18). That is why the Council for Hispanic Ministries is in support of the revitalization of existing churches and planting new congregations and ministries in order to reach our goal for 2013: 1,100 healthy churches following Jesus in mission.

Regardless of what the Lord could do for his church, the Bible gives us a challenge: “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” (Matthew 28:19). “And he said to them, ‘Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation’” (Mark 16:15). In 1985, at a congress in the Crystal Cathedral, one of the speakers said: “If something is going to happen, I have to do it,” meaning that the church has a responsibility to carry out the vision of Jesus our Lord.
FOLLOWING JESUS IN MISSION IN:

Dover, New Jersey

The new millennium brought a great challenge to the Rev. Juan (Joe) Colon, Hispanic Church Developer for the Passaic Valley Classis. In February 2000, Colon saw that there was no Reformed Hispanic representation in the town of Dover, New Jersey. Colon began to walk the streets of the little city trying to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit about the city of Dover. He found First Memorial Presbyterian Church in the downtown area and went to present his vision to the pastor, then the pastor went to the presbytery with the same vision and all agreed that Dover needed a Hispanic Reformed representation. After that, a luncheon invitation was sent to the mayor, the city council, and the school board superintendent. Those community leaders were asked about the Hispanics in the area and information was provided about how two churches, united under the Formula of Agreement, had joined together with the vision of opening a new ministry in the city. After many meetings discussing which strategy to use, Carlos Lesameta, a member of Bethel Reformed Church, came into the picture and voluntarily started visiting the area, speaking with people, and distributing some literature. Finally the day approached when the ministry in Dover would start. On January 18, First Memorial Presbyterian Church in Dover, New Jersey, opened its doors for this new ministry, which has great potential.

Keyport, New Jersey

The consistory of Keyport Reformed Church terminated its contract with the pastor, and the project of starting a new ministry in Keyport is stopped at the present time. Other churches from other communities want to explore the possibility of continuing the project, but it is too soon for an answer.

Lodi, New Jersey

After some meetings with Pastor Rey Germoso and together with his working team, a decision was made to submit an application to the RCA for Iglesia La Casa del Alfarero de Lodi to be received into the denomination. This work began with the Rev. Luis Perez and the Rev. Juan (Joe) Colon and now it is only a classis matter to finish the negotiations. La Casa del Alfarero is a very healthy and growing church with a very dynamic leadership. The pastor is a veteran church planter and very well known in his community. Attendance at the church is seventy-five to eighty adults and thirty to forty children.

Study Center in New Jersey

With the approval of the 2001 General Synod for commissioned pastors comes the need for preparation of many of our people. They will need some kind of theological education in order to be able to perform their duties as pastors in the different congregations that will ask them to serve. For this reason, two new study centers were started in February and March 2003, one in New Jersey and the other in Washington, D.C. The two centers will be similar to the one in Toronto at La Senda del Amor Reformed Church under the accreditation of Florida State through Miami International Seminary. Different traveling professors will be teaching in Spanish with the help of some pastors from the area. This type of center is hosted by local churches and tries to overcome all the obstacles that people have for not studying. The lecture time for each course is fifteen hours, plus thirty hours of homework in addition to reading the textbook, and three hundred other pages on the same topic. A final exam is given and a book report of fifteen pages is also required.
Washington, D.C.

A new ministry is starting in Washington, D.C., with the vision of becoming a church. So far Francisco Abraham Rodriguez, one of the students from the center in Toronto, is the leader and is working with a total of three home cells (Bible studies). The plan is to have a group of five home Bible studies and then start a worship service on Sunday with fifty or more adults. The people are very happy and willing to work for the Lord.

Pomona, California

Lincoln Avenue Community Church in Pomona officially started to celebrate worship under the leadership of the Rev. Felipe Gonzalez. The Anglo congregation is very happy about the new ministry taking place in their facility and the Hispanic families from the neighborhood who are getting together for service to the Lord. This new ministry is the result of the Classis of California, Lincoln Avenue Community Church, Iglesia La Senda from Corona, and the Council for Hispanic Ministries working together to follow Jesus in mission.

Hemet, California

In the midst of cactus and dry hills, the San Jacinto Valley gives life to the city of Hemet, where there is a baby congregation called Iglesia El Calvario, under the leadership of Pastor Santos Gonzalez. A local church, Calvary Community Church, and its pastor, the Rev. Edward N. Baker, had opened the door for a new Hispanic ministry with the vision of having only one church worshiping in two languages: English and Spanish. Some other churches in other classes want to start a ministry in that way because of changes in their communities and their willingness to serve the Lord in mission.

Corona Radio Station “Radio Impacto”

This is the most important tool that Iglesia La Senda in Corona is using to reach the unchurched with the message of salvation. This radio station brings to the community twenty-four hours of non-stop preaching, Bible study, prayer, and counseling—all in Spanish. So far, because of the absence of an antenna, broadcasting has been with only 50 Hz, a weak signal available only to those located near the radio station. Radio Impacto already has received permission to raise an antenna in the San Jacinto Valley, and after that the radio will be working with 5 kilos or 5 kHz. With this type of signal, the broadcast will be heard in all the vicinity of San Jacinto and parts of Arizona. This radio station will continue to be used for the same cause with the hope of planting more churches in the radio vicinity.

Phoenix, Arizona

The executive committee of the Council for Hispanic Ministries; the Rev. Bruce Laverman, minister of evangelism; and the Rev. Kenneth B. Petty Jr. met at Longview Community Church in Phoenix, Arizona, with the purpose of exploring new ministries in that area. Longview Community Church is located in a very changing community where more than 60 percent of the people are Hispanic. The church is willing to serve the community, but the language barrier is one of their problems. With the arrival of the executive committee, their prayers were fulfilled and now the door is open to start a new ministry, hopefully before the end of 2003. A meeting with the consistory and the classis is booked for February 25, 2003, with the plan of having more conversation about the matter.
Nicaragua

The last trip in November was the fifth in a series of missionary trips to the Republic of Nicaragua. There are a lot of limitations in the area of finance for conducting this mission because support is coming from only one church in Toronto, Canada (La Senda del Amor, which initiated the project). There has been a little support from the Council for Hispanic Ministries, which has not been sufficient help for a community that is in deep need and which has brothers and sisters from our denomination (because they don’t know any church other than the RCA).

So far the project in Nicaragua has not qualified to be considered a missionary field because of the RCA’s method of doing mission in partnership with sister churches in other countries, but the brothers and sisters from there are very convinced that the RCA will help them to be a community with dignity and with hope.

What is the Nicaragua project? It is the dream of a community called Amayo in Diriamba, only forty-two kilometers south of Managua, the capital city of Nicaragua. It’s a community with no cemetery, no streets, no school, no running water, no electricity, with houses in very poor condition having dirt floors and no sanitary system. There is no medical service in the whole community. Many families have more than ten children and from that group maybe one or two know how to read. The most beautiful building that the community has is the new church that the brothers and sister from Toronto, with the little assistance from the council, helped them to build. The building has a capacity for one hundred twenty people, with the hope that it can be used not only for church, but a medical center on a temporary basis, a school, and a community center.

Five days a week a group of people who are both spiritually and physically hungry get together in the new facility to worship the Lord. All the people have to walk about one mile and more through difficult paths, with their children, in order to worship the Lord. When we were there, they sang for us Hispanic songs such as “Alabaré” and many others. A group of about sixty-five children came to the platform to sing and to say, “Bienvenidos hermanos de Estados Unidos.” (“Welcome brothers and sisters from the United States.”)

It’s very hard to see this group of children singing and not to cry, for the majority of them were dressed in secondhand clothes from North America, taken to them from the visiting brothers and sister from the group mentioned above. After the worship service was over the people came to the visitors to thank them for their words of hope and encouragement and to ask for special prayers for family members sick or in jail. They never ask for help for themselves but for others that are not there.

To understand more about the project Nicaragua you have to go there and see with your own eyes the suffering and their happiness in serving the Lord with almost nothing. The dream is to help to develop a community with a future for the children and young people always following Jesus in mission.

Ecumenical Encounter in the Dominican Republic

In July 2002 the executive committee of the Council for Hispanic Ministries, accompanied by the director of Operations and Support, Kenneth Bradsell, met in Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic. Our plan was to have our regular meeting there and at the same time visit some of the historical churches in the country. The meeting was a blessing. Saturday night a group of Christian leaders from the country came to the hotel where the group was staying and shared with each other their visions. Part of the group was from Iglesia Evangelica Dominicana (Dominican Evangelical Church); their executive secretary, the Rev. Alejandro Figueroa, together with the president and other leaders from the north side of the country, the Rev. Bienvenido de Jesus Acosta; the Rev. Guillermo Castro from
Magazine 99; the Rev. Emil Antigua Acta from Post Media; the Rev. Rafael Martinez Martinez from Radio Vida, Lic.; Lorenzo Mota King, the executive director from Dominicans Churches Social Service, and other members of different committees, along with the secular media, were there to speak with our group about the RCA visiting the Dominican Republic. An invitation was given from Iglesia Evangelica Dominicana for us to address their assembly last January, because they have a very important ministry going on with the Haitian people living in the country. The Haitians suffer in extreme human and social conditions, living in ghettos similar to slaves, with no support from any institution or the government or social agencies. Iglesia Evangelica Dominicana is open to establishing a partnership program with the RCA, especially in what they call the “Haitians Pastoral” (pastoral care of Haitians). This is currently being explored by the Mission Services staff.

**Advocacy and Concerns**

Advocacy issues are always a concern of the council. There are segments within the denomination that do not understand Hispanics. The RCA will be left behind in a timely harvest if those in leadership overlook the promising growth that Hispanics can bring to the denomination. The Hispanic minority is the fastest growing community in the United States, and many states have a large Hispanic population. The council welcomes invitations for discussion with various assemblies of the RCA to foster better evangelization and understanding of Hispanics in the RCA.

**Revitalization Team**

Many Hispanic congregations, like others from our denomination, are growing and very focused in the denomination’s mission plan, but others are in transition and need more attention from classes and different agencies of support within the RCA. That is why the new executive joined the Revitalization Team, hoping to be equipped and able to pass the vision on to the congregations in need of revitalization, because the vision has to be following Jesus in mission.

**Anti-Racism Team**

Racism is a problem that affects all societies and communities, no matter what language the people speak, or the color of their skin. It is the responsibility of every member of the body of Christ to eradicate racism from our churches and societies. The Anti-Racism Team is making a great effort in this area and some of our Hispanic pastors are receiving the training, not only to learn how to defend ourselves but also to learn how we could be fostering racism among ourselves and to others.

Language is not a problem in following Jesus in mission, because RCA Hispanic congregations are receiving in their own language the RCA Mission and Vision Statement, the Consistorial Report, the *Book of Church Order*, RCA Today, and many other materials.

[The Report of the Council for Hispanic Ministries was considered by the Advisory Committees on Evangelization and Church Growth and World Mission.]
Report of the General Synod Council’s Council for Pacific and Asian American Ministries

Our work

In 2002 and 2003 the Council for Pacific and Asian American Ministries (CPAAM) framed its work priorities in accordance with the RCA’s Statement of Mission and Vision. The work of CPAAM and its congregations and ministries is reported here following the acronym RENEWAL:

- 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

At its 2002 annual consultation, the CPAAM invited the Rev. Steven Brooks, General Synod president, to lead a workshop on “Houses of Prayer.” Many congregations already have prayer ministries, but this provided an opportunity for other churches to learn about the transforming power of prayer for congregational life and service.

Congregations of CPAAM recognize the effectiveness of weekend revival services as a means to spiritually revitalize people. These congregations plan such revivals as annual events. Many often join with other congregations to have area-wide revivals. The Korean churches in the New York metropolitan area sponsored a revival for Korean-speaking people in May 2002.

Establish new churches

In December 2002 Han Sung Church in Cresskill, New Jersey, was organized by the Classis of Greater Palisades. In April 2003 the Classis of Queens organized Kew Gardens Sung Shin Reformed Church in Kew Gardens, New York. In April 2003 the Classis of Greater Palisades organized Glory Christian Church in Hackensack, New Jersey.

One of the goals of CPAAM is to move developing ministries toward organization. In conversations with classis church development committees, it hopes to establish guidelines within the classis that outline the steps from reception as a ministry plan to the point of church organization.

Nurture the gifts of the laity

Training elders and deacons in their understanding of their roles is an ongoing concern for the churches. Essential to this task is the need for a current Book of Church Order (BCO) in the language of the church. The Chinese/Taiwanese translation of the BCO is current. Efforts are being made to update the Korean translation of the BCO.

The training of elders and deacons is essential to the development of leadership for mission congregations, in order that they can be organized. CPAAM continues to focus on this aspect of leadership empowerment.
Healthy and vital churches need all their saints to be actively involved in ministry. Discernment and development of gifts is one way to achieve this goal. As congregations are made aware of lay ministry, there will be continuing challenges to equip these congregations for lay involvement in ministry.

Engage the city

In its last report to the General Synod in 2002, CPAAM reported that it has new ministries in Jersey City, New Jersey; Los Angeles, California; and Orange County, California. Ministry in these contexts remains challenging, especially among traditionally non-Christian people like Asian Indians and Pakistanis. Evangelism often means costly conversion. Cultural and family traditions are formidable barriers. CPAAM covets the prayers of the whole church as its pastors seek to proclaim the gospel in these communities.

Welcome all people

Congregations continue to intentionally welcome people from their communities. Small-group ministries that seek to invite friends, neighbors, and acquaintances to group meetings in homes have grown.

In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, many antiterrorist measures enacted by the U.S. government have affected Asian immigrants in RCA congregations. Applications for permanent residency status are delayed. Indonesian congregations report that many of their members are being asked to register with the government. The level of anxiety for many church members is inordinately high.

Announce the good news

A television Christmas program produced by an RCA Asian Indian pastor, the Rev. Christudoss Theodore, was telecast over Dravidian TV in the Tamil language. Tamil is spoken by more than 70 million people. There is a large population of Tamil-speaking Asian Indians in the New York/New Jersey area, and also in Illinois, California, and Texas.

Holiday and cultural festival celebrations are occasions for churches to carry out ministries of outreach. In May 2003 the three great festivals, “Mupperum Vizha,” were celebrated by Asian Indians. The “Moon Festival” for Chinese communities, and also Thanksgiving and Christmas, were opportunities for proclaiming the gospel to non-Christians. CPAAM churches are challenged to creatively welcome people in their community so the good news can be shared.

Learn to call forth leaders

In 2002, and again in 2003, CPAAM staff and representatives participated in meetings discussing the RCA process for recruiting, training, and empowering those called to ordained pastoral leadership.

The Classis of Greater Palisades ordained Jimmy Seong G. Lim and En Young Kim as ministers of Word and sacrament in December 2002. Both are graduates of New Brunswick Theological Seminary. In addition the classis installed the Rev. Kyu Hyun Kim as pastor of the Reformed Church of Closter in New Jersey.

Several Korean ministers in California have presented themselves for membership into the RCA. The leadership pool is gradually growing.

Pomin Wang, a deacon from Christ Church of the Bay Area in San Mateo, California, has
enrolled with Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency (MFCA) and is attending Fuller Theological Seminary. Felix Theonugraha (Chu) enrolled with the MFCA and is attending Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois.

Referrals from General Synod

Consultation on Racism

The 2002 General Synod adopted the following recommendation:

To instruct the General Synod Council, in consultation with racial/ethnic council staff, to identify RCA staff with significant portfolios concerned with race, ethnicity, inclusion, and cross-cultural activities, and to invite them, along with other RCA-interested parties, to attend a consultation on racism (*MGS 2002*, R-24 amended, p. 113).

The consultation has not been convened. When it is called, CPAAM staff will participate.

Commitment Freeing the Denomination from Racism

The 2002 General Synod adopted the following recommendation:

To instruct the General Synod Council, in consultation with members of the Commission on Race and Ethnicity and the racial/ethnic councils, to survey the church on attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs about the commitment of the RCA toward freeing the denomination from any forms of racism and those barriers that inhibit the achievement of this goal (*MGS 2002*, R-25 amended, p. 113).

CPAAM has not been notified about this survey. When this survey is prepared, CPAAM will eagerly participate in the process.

Educational Consultations and Multicultural Resources

The 2002 General Synod adopted the following 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).

The CPAAM executive committee met with the minister for education and faith development to discuss how the Office of Christian Education can determine the needs of the Pacific and Asian American constituents of the RCA.

Worship Styles in the RCA

The 2002 General Synod adopted the following recommendation:

To instruct the General Synod Council in consultation with representatives from the Commission on Worship, the Commission on Theology, the racial/ethnic councils, new
church development pastors, and persons reflecting our generational and church-size diversity, to experience and reflect on the various worship styles in use in RCA churches, and to bring to the 2003 General Synod strategies and recommendations that will equip churches to lead worship in ways that are consistent with Reformed theology and responsive to the local mission (MGS 2002, R-41 p. 208).

CPAAM is not aware that such a consultation was held.

**Centennial of Korean Churches in North America**

The year 2003 is a very special year for the Korean American Churches in the United States. It marks the centennial of the arrival of 102 Koreans in Hawaii. From this small beginning a Christian church was organized. Subsequent immigration has led to the growth of many churches all across the United States and Canada. Today the Reformed Church in America has fifteen organized Korean churches and thirteen developing ministries. There are thirty-eight ministers of Word and sacrament of Korean ancestry.

To commemorate this anniversary, there will be a worship celebration in September 2003. The Rev. Robert Schuller and the Rev. Sam Hwan Kim have been invited to preach. In addition, the Presbyterian Church in Korea has invited two representatives to attend a seminar in July 2003 to represent the Reformed Church in America. The CPAAM, in consultation with the Korean churches, is arranging for delegates to attend this event.

**R-22**

To adopt the following resolution:

WHEREAS 2003 marks the centennial of the arrival of the first Korean Christians to North America; and

WHEREAS the faithfulness of Korean Christians has resulted in the growth of many Korean churches, including congregations within the Reformed Church in America; and

WHEREAS the evangelical zeal and disciplined prayer life of the Korean Christians have been a blessing and gift to the Reformed Church;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting on the ninth day of June 2003 in Holland, Michigan, expresses its gratitude to God for the faith of Korean Christians in North America and its congratulations to the Korean churches and ministries in the RCA on the centennial of the establishment of Korean American churches in North America. (ADOPTED)

In response to the resolution the following address was presented by the Rev. Jae Hong Han.

**One-Hundredth-Year Anniversary of Korean Immigration**

The Rev. Jae Hong Han

I am honored today to have this opportunity to share this significant event in Korean history. The year 2003 commemorates the one-hundredth year of Korean immigration to the United States. Throughout these years, Koreans have contributed to a portion of the American history. What Korean immigrants have done in the past one hundred years has
been noteworthy, but in the next one hundred years, we hope to accomplish even more. We hope that you will look forward to even greater achievements as you continue to support us in prayer.

Korean immigration began with a core number of devout Christians. One hundred and two people left the port of In-Chun on December 22, 1902, aboard the vessel Galik. On the dawn of January 13, 1903, they stepped on to the pier of Honolulu, Hawaii with hopeful dreams in this new world. However, their dreams began with strenuous labor in the Hawaiian sugar cane plantations, and through this work, they contributed to the American economy. They received a meager monthly wage of $18 but donated $3 every month to the Korean Independence movement against Japanese oppression. They were able to persevere a life of toil, sweat, tears, and homesickness—only because of their faith and trust in God. Some of them even resorted to marriage through pictures that were sent back and forth from their hometowns because they could not find anyone in Hawaii.

Regardless of their struggles, they held firmly onto their faith, enabling their descendants to live under the grace and blessings of God as well. They also established roots of faith and nationalism in this new country. Among the immigrants aboard that first ship to America, there was a preacher. So upon their arrival in Hawaii, they established a place of worship. Just as the 102 Puritans arrived in 1620 to start their new life of faith in the New World, Korean historians were amazed to find that the number of the first Korean immigrants was 102 as well. Out of all the ethnic groups of immigrants from Asia, Koreans have always been among the first to establish churches wherever they went. So eighteen years after having received the gospel from American missionaries on the Korean peninsula, a Korean church was established here in America.

Korean immigration to the United States came to a standstill in 1910 due to the Japanese oppression of Korea. During World War II, Korean Americans joined in the battle against U.S. enemies. Koreans used badges to avoid being mistaken for Japanese. In 1943, Military Order 45, was issued; it exempted Koreans in the U.S. from enemy alien status. Then in 1964, President Kennedy signed a special law on immigration. This law opened the doors to immigration once again. Koreans were able to enter America and they did so in great numbers. Today, there are more than two million Koreans and over three thousand Korean churches in the United States. We have been able to grow to this capacity because of God’s abundant blessings and strong faith instilled in us by the church. Through the church, Koreans have been able to mature in faith, keep our national identity, and pray for this country. As a result, we have been able to abide in God’s blessings wherever we go and have become an ethnic group that has prospered in this country.

The foundational denomination of Korea is Presbyterian, established by Horace Underwood—an alumnus of New Brunswick Theological Seminary and the first missionary to Korea. We are the fruits of his missionary passion and fervor. Currently, Korean Christians are the second-ranking group in the world for sending out and supporting the most number of missionaries in various countries. Many of the Korean churches in the U.S. make this missionary endeavor possible.

Our past accomplishments are important but we will not cease to strive for a better future and the continual evangelization of the world. Korean churches are diligently planning the next one hundred years and we are determined to be an instrument of growth for the RCA denomination. Therefore, I have come up with the acronym B-E-S-T to apply to the advancement of RCA.

The first letter, “B,” stands for the Bible. Everything we do should be based on the Word of God. However, we easily put the Bible aside, and try to do things according to our own thoughts, standards, and methods. Of course, this is not the correct way. We must realize
that we cannot do anything apart from God and his Word. God’s Word should be at the core of all that we do. It is only then that we will be able to realize God’s heart and become a denomination that will bring God’s plans to realization here on earth.

The second letter, “E,” of the acronym stands for two great words: Ethics and Emotions. In our present day society, the standard of ethics has fallen greatly and the intellectual way of thinking has led to diminished passion in our hearts. However, the gospel can only flourish and thrive when Christians have the correct mindset and hearts of compassion and zeal. Thus, we must seek to restore the standard of ethics and break down the selfish and hardened hearts of the people in order to attain a society that is overflowing with love and compassion for one another.

The third letter, “S,” stands for the Spirit. A true church cannot stand without the guidance and leading of the Spirit. Today our desire for comfortable and demand-free living has led us astray from God and made us devoid of spirituality. Therefore, we must look to the early Christian church described in the Bible and be reminded of how powerfully the Holy Spirit works—in ways far beyond scientific facts, knowledge, and our expectations. Scripture tells us that if we abide in the Word of God, we will experience the power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the church must persistently seek the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

The fourth letter, “T,” is for tradition. Christianity has two thousand years of tradition and history, and this tradition should serve as a foundation for the true church and upright faith. The RCA denomination keeps a very important faith tradition that was passed down via Calvin’s words to “always reform.” This statement has influenced many achievements of the past, affects the current attitude of our denomination now, and should lead to continual spiritual awakening in our churches.

Moreover, the 2000 Census has made me aware of the increasing numbers of minority ethnic groups in the U.S. In order for our denomination to move forward and increase membership, we must listen to the needs of these minority ethnic groups. We can deduce this from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). They succeeded in drawing more than five hundred Korean churches into membership because of their strategy to focus on minority ethnic groups. They were able to appeal to many Korean churches that sought to affiliate themselves with a respectable denomination. Likewise, the RCA could also attract hundreds of additional churches into the denomination by focusing on such churches and convincing them of our denomination’s Christ-centeredness.

In conclusion, we must be ready to open wide our doors to all the peoples of this world and listen closely to their cries in order to be witnesses to the ends of the earth. Diversity in the church is necessary. However, in our differences we must remain centered on the Word of God. The church must also strive to exemplify spiritual integrity. It must not become so infused with the world that it loses its sense of purpose. Moreover, when we make every effort to display the power of the Spirit of the living God working in us and through us, I firmly believe that the RCA denomination will prosper greatly. Let us eagerly anticipate that day.

May the love and blessings of God be upon our denomination now and always!

Conclusion

The Christian church in North America has been reminded by scores of writers and speakers that there is a great spiritual hunger in our society. Among Pacific and Asian Americans, people are striving to fill that need through community. This is especially so for immigrants. The church is a place where the sojourner finds warm welcome. We pray that CPAAM can continue to welcome those who are searching for a genuine community, to
feed their spiritual hunger, and to empower them through the love of the gospel to fully participate in God’s mission for the church.

[The Report of the Council for Pacific and Asian American Ministries was considered by the Advisory Committee on Evangelization and Church Growth.]

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

The Native American Indian Ministries Council (NAIMC) has not met since May 21, 2001.

At the spring 2000 meeting the General Synod Council (GSC) directed the Native American Indian Ministries Council to form a task force on the future of the RCA’s Native American Indian Ministries. The task force was asked to provide an interim report in the spring of 2001 and a final report one year ago. Delays in finding meeting dates, changes in NAIMC leadership and staff changes made it impossible to meet this original schedule. The task force was made up of a representative from each of the RCA Native American churches and three members of GSC. In April 2001 the task force decided to retain a consultant, the Rev. Stanley Jim of the Christian Reformed Church. The consultant was to visit each of the six RCA Native American Indian congregations, interview the pastors, consistory and membership, and consider the context of each ministry. The task force asked the consultant to provide a written assessment of the strengths, weaknesses, and needs of each congregation. The visits were to be completed by January 2002.

Rev. Jim was unable to complete his assignment. He began his visits in late 2001 and was able to visit only three congregations. He was unable to deliver any written report of his assessment.

The task force met via conference call on October 2, 2002, and decided that it needed to report to the GSC that it was unable to complete its task as assigned. The task force provided a report to the fall meeting of the GSC. Following discussion in the GSC’s Policy, Planning and Administration Services Committee in November 2002 the committee proposed and the GSC adopted the following recommendation:

That the GSC request the General Synod Office, the Office for Ministry Services, and the Mission Services staff to work cooperatively with RCA Native American Indian congregations to develop and implement plans for equipping the consistory and other church leaders of the RCA’s Native American Indian congregations; and further,

that these offices work with representatives of the RCA’s Native American Indian congregations to convene annual leadership training events for Native American Indian leadership, and use such other means as may be helpful to equip and support Native American leader development (GSC 02-92).

A leader-training event proposed for the spring of 2003 could not be scheduled to accommodate leadership from all of the Native American Indian congregations. Efforts to schedule an event later in the year will continue. Staff of the named offices are in consultation to seek alternate ways to equip and support Native American Indian leadership and congregations.
R-23
To urge the General Synod Council to explore possibilities for working with Comanche Reformed Church in Lawton, Oklahoma, in developing a new model for a ministry with the RCA’s Native American Indian congregations. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. The RCA historically has had a ministry among Native American populations and this action will enable the RCA to develop new ways of expressing this commitment.
2. This ministry in Oklahoma is a model of a self-supporting indigenous congregation.

[The Report of the Native American Indian Ministries Council was considered by the Advisory Committee on Church Vocations.]
ENERGY-USE CHOICES AND CHRISTIAN FAITHFULNESS

A growing commitment to environmental stewardship has emerged in the recent history of the Reformed Church in America. As with many areas of Christian faithfulness, believers do well to refresh their commitment to care for God’s creation. In light of current national and global events, the acquisition, use, and byproducts of various energy sources becomes an increasingly important area of decision-making for members of the RCA. Energy issues are at the root of much of the national and international conflict in recent decades and the growing concern about pollution and global warming, along with many of the difficult personal and corporate environmental decisions RCA members face. So then, it is vital to draw attention to the importance of energy conservation once more.

General Synod has addressed energy and related issues such as climate change, global warming, and general commitment to environmental stewardship in several reports in the years 1970, 1977, 1980, 1982, 1993, 1997, 1999, and 2001. The papers referred not only to God’s instilling in humanity the responsibility of tending the garden of creation, but also to God’s relationship with nature throughout the biblical witness and to Christ’s role in the inception and sustaining of creation. They emphasized the reality that environmental destruction, the use of energy, and the economic factors that surround environmental issues strongly contribute to the societal injustice and abuse of the poor that Christians are called to transform. The papers also demonstrated in detail the scope of environmental degradation and the negative and positive possibilities for the future. Also, each paper calls for actions that apply to individuals, church leaders, congregations, and the church as a whole.

The papers were made available to RCA churches and are becoming integrated into the church’s self-understanding as it seeks to be faithful today. The purpose of this brief paper is to renew the church’s commitment to environmental stewardship and to invite special focus on issues relating to energy.

Fossil Fuels and Faithfulness

The development, use, and by-products of fossil fuels contribute to the environmental crisis as much as any aspect of modern life. The financial profit associated with exploration, mining, and development of fuels encourages continued compromise of natural habitats and resources. The burning of fuels in the production of energy continues to be the single greatest cause of environmental degradation. The paper “Global Warming” asserted, “The chief contributor to global warming is carbon dioxide, which is produced by the burning of fossil fuels” (MGS 1993, p. 98). The paper called RCA members and congregations to review and change their lifestyles in order to be better stewards of creation.

The effects of global climate change are already being felt. Rising sea levels are forcing the residents of the island nation of Tuvalu to abandon their homeland and move to New Zealand and Australia. Eleven thousand people are due to become environmental refugees. Seven million people live on other low-lying islands around the world. Twenty million people live in low-lying areas of Bangladesh. Some have predicted that by the year 2050
as many as 150 million people could be displaced by rising sea levels caused by global warming.

The Red Cross recently reported that natural disasters caused by climatic change created by greenhouse gases are increasingly devastating the developing world. Their report says, “Recurrent disasters from floods in Asia to drought in the Horn of Africa to winds in Latin America are sweeping away development gains and calling into question the possibility of recovery.” Blaming the trend on global warming, Roger Bracke, head of disaster relief operations for the Red Cross, says, “These are also the most deadly events; it is probable that these kinds of disasters will increase even more spectacularly. There is a natural limit somewhere to what humanitarian assistance can do; we are afraid that there will be a point where we can no longer provide assistance” (World Disasters Report, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, as reported in the London Guardian on Friday, June 29, 2001).

While developed nations are responsible for the bulk of the greenhouse gas emissions, it is the poor who will suffer the most. Changing our lifestyles to better care for creation is a way of living out Christ’s command to love our neighbors as ourselves.

One Faithful Response for the Congregation

The steps a congregation could take toward greater environmental responsibility are numerous, and previous papers have suggested many. This paper focuses on buildings, one particular asset held by most churches. Stewardship encourages the responsible use of buildings, inviting churches to use as much of their space as possible as often as possible and to make their buildings available to others so that the energy used to heat, cool, and maintain the space isn’t wasted. Congregations are also encouraged to have energy audits of their facilities performed so that they can discover inefficient aspects of the buildings and improve upon them. In building, repairing, and equipping facilities, congregations are encouraged to value energy efficiency as they decide what materials and appliances to purchase. Most church buildings are large structures that have the potential to waste or conserve a large amount of energy. In making their facilities as efficient as possible, congregations demonstrate their environmental stewardship and set examples of how members might become more responsible in their homes and places of business.

One Faithful Response for the Individual Believer

Environmental experts throughout the decades have asserted that the only way out of the global environmental crisis is for environmentally destructive cultures to change their lifestyles. To effect such a change will require continuing education and changes in values, as well as improved technologies and public policies that protect creation and encourage responsible environmental stewardship. Individual choice is also an important and powerful factor in shaping a more creation-friendly culture. The decisions individuals make about how to live, what to value, how to vote, and what to buy are immensely important.

In light of the popularity of sport utility vehicles (SUVs) and recent international conflict in areas that provide most of the world’s oil, the discussion of transportation choice has become somewhat controversial. The recent publicity campaign “What Would Jesus Drive (WWJD)” by the Evangelical Environmental Network is a memorable example.

Transportation is the single largest contributor to global warming and North America is the greatest consumer of energy for transportation. According to a United Nations environmental report, over half of the increase in fossil fuel use in North America in the last decade resulted from the growing numbers of vehicles in the “light truck” category—SUVs (United Nations Environmental Program, “North America’s Environment: A Thirty-
Year State of the Environment and Policy Retrospective,” 2002:21). According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, one of the most important things you can do to reduce global warming pollution is to buy a vehicle with higher fuel economy. This is because every gallon of gasoline a vehicle burns puts twenty pounds of carbon dioxide (CO₂) into the atmosphere. Scientific evidence strongly suggests that the rapid buildup of CO₂ and other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere is raising the earth’s temperature and changing the earth’s climate, with potentially serious consequences. Choosing a vehicle that gets twenty-five rather than twenty miles per gallon will prevent ten tons of CO₂ from being released over the lifetime of the vehicle (Fuel Economy website, Department of Energy and Environmental Protection Agency, www.fueleconomy.gov/feg/climate). Passenger cars and trucks account for about 20 percent of all U.S. CO₂ emissions (“Light-Duty Automotive Technology and Fuel Economy Trends 1975 through 2000,” www.epa.gov/otaq/fetrends).

The RCA’s *Caring for Creation* newsletter quoted Bill McKibben, who said, “The SUV is mostly a machine for burning gasoline. Say you switched from a normal car to a big SUV and drove it for one year. The extra energy you use would be the equivalent of leaving the door to the fridge open for six years or your bathroom light on for three decades” (“Driving Global Warming,” *The Christian Century*, May 16, 2001). A vehicle’s tailpipe emissions also play a significant role in the destruction of creation.

Individual Christians can be responsible stewards of creation by considering their own transportation choices. Whenever possible people ought to seek alternative forms of transportation (walking, biking, carpooling, or taking public transportation) rather than driving personal passenger vehicles. When those options are unavailable, Christians ought to take special care in choosing the type of vehicle they will own and drive regularly. One should choose the most fuel-efficient vehicle with the lowest emissions that will meet one’s needs. Christians might also consider making sacrifices in power, luxury, and status when choosing a vehicle, for the sake of their Lord’s creation. In addition, Christians ought to advocate in their personal and public life for greater fuel economy, increased public transportation, more stringent standards for pollution, and alternative fuel source technology.

As the call to care for creation becomes more urgent, may the reflections and reminders noted above inspire congregations and believers to lifestyle change. And, as issues surrounding the acquisition and use of energy become more important personally, nationally, and globally, may the church and its members demonstrate to the world the power of thoughtful and faithful living through the wise stewardship of resources.

**R-24**
To encourage RCA congregations and institutions to review the energy efficiency of their facilities through energy audits and other tools; and to actively pursue higher levels of efficiency by repairing and replacing inefficient aspects of facilities and appliances and by optimizing the use of their space. (ADOPTED)

**R-25**
To instruct the Office of Social Witness to make available information and guidelines for helping congregations improve the energy efficiency of their facilities. (ADOPTED)

The advisory committee recommended an amendment to the recommendation:

**R-26**
To encourage RCA members to purchase and use vehicles with high fuel-efficiency and good emission ratings, to avoid the
purchase of inefficient vehicles beyond their needs, such as sport utility vehicles, large trucks, and others, and to consider vehicle choice an area of faithfulness. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

Reason:
It is sufficient to encourage RCA members to avoid purchasing inefficient vehicles beyond their needs. It is not necessary to specify particular vehicles since a person’s transportation needs depend upon the context.

R-27
To encourage RCA churches to make the paper “Energy Use Choices and Christian Faithfulness,” and other papers mentioned in the report or excerpts from these papers, available to their members by printing them in bulletins or newsletters, by posting them in the church, or by any other means they deem appropriate. (ADOPTED)

R-28
To encourage RCA churches and individuals to make use of resources available through the Office of Social Witness, the RCA Distribution Center, or other sources (like websites: www.fueleconomy.gov, www.epa.gov/greenevehicles, and www.greenercars.org) as they make decisions with important environmental impact. (ADOPTED)

THINKING THEOLOGICALLY ABOUT SECURITY:
FOLLOWING CHRIST IN AN AGE OF TERROR

Many remember sitting in front of the television that night in 1989 when the Berlin Wall fell to the ground. It seemed, on that night, that all the world had agreed to put an end to war. A new world security was experienced. At least on some level, the Cold War was over. There was hope that a new day had begun, in which we could move forward in peace, instead of posturing nation against nation for the sake of security. In the wake of September 11, 2001, that hope is gone.

Since September 11, “security” has become the prevailing theme of U.S. public discourse and policy. U.S. President George W. Bush has made security his central platform. People have been thankful for this focus. His popularity ratings reflect, in large part, the fact that citizens want their government to focus on security issues.

Security measures have increased in the airports, at train stations, and at ports. People have more or less accepted the additional hassle of body searches and a level of increased scrutiny of our private lives in order to insure that the government can do its job of protecting them from terrorists. In the U.S. extra money has been spent on defense and there has been relatively little discussion about the costs and the appropriateness of the creation of the largest new federal department since the Truman years—the Department of Homeland Security. Congress has not presented significant challenges to most of President Bush’s security measures.

Webster’s dictionary definition for security includes freedom from danger, freedom from fear or anxiety, freedom from harm, freedom from want or deprivation (Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary. Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 1990, p. 1,062). Basic safety is another way of speaking of security. Security defined as such is a good thing. In order for humanity to thrive security needs to be in place, providing a framework within which creativity and progress can be nurtured.
We acknowledge that one of the central functions of government is to provide security. However, while some aspects of this focus have been necessary and good, some of the actions and policies carried out in the name of security have been troubling. Troubling too is the extent to which security matters have become the singular concern of the public. The public seems so anxious and confused about security that it may not always be thinking critically about some of the policies that are proposed in the name of security.

**Jesus Christ Brings Security**

Jesus Christ was and is the ultimate source of security. He cares about basic safety. While on this earth he healed the sick, releasing them from harm and deprivation. He fed the hungry, releasing them from want. He invited tax collectors and prostitutes to be part of the kingdom of God. He brought security and he taught his disciples to do likewise.

Jesus’ promise of a kingdom of security and newness, guided by principles of unrelenting love, was put to the test when he was struck down by those in power and hung to die on a cross. In his death it seemed that he had failed to deliver on his promises of security. But after Jesus refused to bend to the compromising powers of this world, God raised Jesus from the dead. Through this self-emptying act Christ gained for us, by the power of God, eternal security, victory over the powers of even death itself. Through Christ’s death and resurrection he was able to make promises such as, “I am going to prepare a place for you” (John 14:2) and “God so loved the world that God sent God’s only son to give eternal life” (John 3:16). The Heidelberg Catechism speaks to the biblical witness about security in response to the question, “What is your only comfort in life and in death?” The Catechism answers, “That I am not my own, but belong, body and soul, to my faithful savior Jesus Christ” (Q&A 1). Jesus Christ never stopped emphasizing security grounded in God’s mercy.

**Jesus Christ’s Inclusive Security**

Both in his earthly ministry and in the promises connected to his resurrected power, Jesus Christ extends his security to all people. Jesus wasn’t exclusive in who he healed. He came to be the physician of “the sick,” all in need. He didn’t only free some from danger and want; he freed Jews and Gentiles alike, and he commanded his disciples to extend the same securities to every nation.

Jesus was committed to creating a kingdom that was secure now and forevermore. He quickly gathered followers who could extend security to further reaches than he could on his own. He invited others to be the light and salt of his message of security to the world. He told his disciples to “go into all the world making disciples” and bringing them the security that is found in trust in the Triune God (Matthew 28:19).

His apostles and those who followed him after his resurrection continued extending security in ever increasingly inclusive ways, in the form of both eternal promises and earthly care, to people of every nation and ethnicity. Paul insisted that the message of Christ, the freedom from sin, from want, disease, and every other insecurity, was for Jew and Greek, male and female, slave and free (Galatians 3:28).

**Christ’s Security—A Threat to Those with Worldly Wealth and Power**

Many who had power and material wealth felt threatened throughout Jesus’ ministry because he challenged social systems that benefited their small, privileged group at the expense of security for all. The laws, regulations, and traditions of faith and politics had been interpreted by the powerful for the benefit of the powerful, and Jesus challenged their assumptions. Almost from the beginning of his ministry, powerful people wanted to kill Jesus because he was a threat to their special interests.
Christ’s Security—A Foundation for Faithful Living

Security is only the beginning of Jesus’ gospel message. Jesus brought security to lepers by freeing them from disease, but that freedom simply set the stage for a new life full of possibilities (Luke 17:11-19). Jesus brought security to Zacchaeus, but then Zacchaeus had choices to make (Luke 19:1-10). Security was not the fulfillment of people’s lives; rather, it laid the foundation for meaningful lives. God’s kingdom is at hand when people realize Christ has given them security, setting the groundwork for a world where truly new life can thrive.

The Implicit Vulnerability in Christian Discipleship

Jesus said, and his disciples soon found this to be true, that the security he offered would lead to their personal peril, in the same way it led to his. Even as they encouraged true security in their human community and promised eternal security, those who feared the believers imprisoned, insulted, and tortured them. Yet the security they knew in Christ could not be taken from them. They continued, during vulnerable times, to live lives made new by Christ’s security. At Pentecost, when Peter and those touched by the Holy Spirit were susceptible to the backlash of angry nonbelievers, Peter quoted King David, saying, “I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand, so that I will not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad and my tongue rejoiced” (Acts 2:25-26). Being “in the Lord” is to have security for the journey. The apostle Paul, writing from prison, in a place of human weakness, still expresses the higher qualities of beauty, truth, justice, peace, unity, and belonging. Paul’s security is so certain that his spirit is untouched by threats.

In the book *The Rise of Christianity*, Rodney Stark argues that Christianity grew largely because of the way Christians dealt with crises. Stark cites evidence that during the great epidemic of 260 C.E. Christians ran towards trouble, caring for the sick and dying, rather than running away from it. This was definitely different from the actions of those who did not have a sense of security from Jesus Christ. Stark shows as well that during epidemics, Christians were committed to all people, not only their own group. One hundred years later this was still a distinguishing feature of Christian community. Stark quotes the pagan emperor Julian in 360 C.E. complaining that the Christians were much better at charity than were pagans. It appears that these Christians who truly embraced Christ’s message accepted that their security was in Christ and that they had nothing to fear. They also accepted their vocation of giving basic security to others (Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*. San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1997, pp.73-94).

The 1980 paper “Christian Faith and the Nuclear Arms Race” identified Christian security not as the absence of a threat, but rather as “the presence of One who is ‘our only comfort in life and death,’ whose love casts out fear, whose power overcomes the powers of this world” (*MGS 1980*, p. 121). Peter, Paul, and the early church all exemplify for us that knowing Christ as the source of security made them more prepared to share security with the world in which they lived. Christian response in different crises is guided by the truth that is true in every situation; “because the Lord is at my right hand I shall not be moved” (Psalm 16:8).

The Risks of Preoccupation with Security

1. Jeopardizing Social Well-Being

The nation state has a legitimate and God-given role to play in establishing security, but the nation state that treats security as the all in all is a hindrance to the kingdom of God. When security becomes the sole focus of existence it actually hinders human development.
In their book *Toward a Human World Order, Beyond the National Security Straitjacket*, Gerald and Patricia Mische talk about the debilitating character that security has when it is treated as the highest good. Referring to Abraham Maslow’s Theory on the Hierarchy of Human Development, the Misches show that security is actually one of the most basic of human needs, an aspect of life that need be firmly in place before a person can lift off to the higher basic human needs of belongingness, love, respect, self-esteem and self-actualization. Beyond those basic needs are endless “meta needs,” needs ranging from playfulness to uniqueness. In other words, psychologists are restating what we know about security through Jesus Christ. Security is a starting point, not the ultimate goal. The Misches argue that when a basic good becomes the ultimate goal, truly higher goals are denied (Gerald and Patricia Mische, *Toward a Human World Order, Beyond the Security Straitjacket*. New York: Paulist Press, 1977).

The United States is currently in a “security straitjacket” of sorts. Security is an important ground for higher human needs. The government wants to provide security. Yet whatever security measures it takes, the government seemingly cannot convince itself or the public that it has done enough. Being preoccupied with security, the U.S. risks jeopardizing other aspects of social well-being. Today we use the word “spartan” to describe an austere, joyless approach to life, referring to the ancient Greek civilization of Sparta, where security and warfare became the sole focus of a society. In the present-day concern for security, we risk becoming a spartan society. In states across the U.S. funds are being cut from social welfare, housing vouchers, public education, and state universities.

2. Preoccupation with Security Has Revitalized the Potential for Nuclear War

An obsession with security has the potential to trap humanity in the “security straitjacket,” but there is another threat, one that poses even more severe dangers. The proliferation of weapons that could destroy the planet in minutes is much more of a security threat. A return to the nuclear security concerns of the 1970s and ‘80s is underway. Proliferations treaties are being ignored and some have even been publicly revoked by the U.S. and other nations. The 1980 Commission on Theology paper “Christian Faith and the Nuclear Arms Race” spoke of the dangers of nuclear proliferation. Even in 1980 the United States had enough explosive force to blow up the world twelve times over. The paper stated that nuclear proliferation is a “false security” and that with escalation of these weapons the world was becoming progressively less secure (*MGS* 1980, pp. 118, 120). Richard Barnet, in his 1981 publication *Real Security*, wrote that “not just the new nations but also dissident groups and terrorist organizations...have the power to make their presence felt” (Richard J. Barnet, *Real Security*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981, p. 91). Little did Barnet know, little did anyone know, just how available these capacities would be not only to small rogue nations but also to terror groups and extremists from various sectors. Unlike in years past, when the greatest threats were nation-versus-nation, now the greatest threats can come from anywhere at any time about anything. There is no way to counteract all groups, or “out-proliferate” the enemy.

On Thursday, December 12, 2002, in an Associated Press article entitled “Nuke Threat Mostly Backed,” U.S. President Bush presented a new document stating that the U.S. may respond with overwhelming force—including nuclear weapons—to any attack with weapons of mass destruction against the United States or its friends. Not only did Bush say it, but few in the U.S. Congress responded with anything other than approval. The language of nuclear proliferation has even infiltrated discussion of preemptive war, as the president has said that in such a war the U.S. could include the use of weapons of overwhelming force.
3. Preoccupation with Security and the Notion of Preemptive War

Preoccupation with security has led the U.S. government to consider being the aggressor against a nation thought to be planning an attack against the U.S. This notion of preemptive strikes is unprecedented in U.S. foreign policy. Preventive war, another type of intervention, is also being considered. Preventive war would justify a strike against any nation that might have future capability or desire to attack the U.S. International outrage at these notions is leading to U.S. isolation from the international community. This has been exacerbated by a growing unilateralism among some U.S. policy makers. U.S. withdrawal from participation in the Kyoto Protocol, the land mines treaty, and the International Court of Justice are recent examples. In a New York Times column on March 9, 2003, Thomas Friedman quoted President George W. Bush as saying, “When it comes to our security, we really don’t need anybody’s permission.” Preoccupation with security has led to uncharted military strategy and discord with global partners. Christians should also be concerned that many of the just war criteria that have governed warfare for generations have now been bypassed.

Christians see and act on the security crises looming large in the world from a unique perspective. Having received the blessing of security from God, Christians are also called to bless others by being a prophetic voice for the nation and for the world during times of insecurity. To that end the commission offers the following principles for thinking theologically about security:

1. God, Not “Security,” Is Named All-in-All

Security is a starting point for full life; it is not the greatest good, and certainly not our God. Freed by Christ, believers do not bow down before Security as if it were a merciful idol. As Christians we need to encourage governments to focus on growth in other areas of life.

2. Inclusive Security

A Christian understanding of security recognizes that Jesus Christ is for the entire world. God wants security for Nineveh and Jerusalem. God wants security for Baghdad and New York, Palestine and Israel. Jesus Christ came as a physician for all who needed one, that all the world might be “healthy.” He did not differentiate by race, gender, age, nationality, or ethnicity. God has secured a place for all people within God’s love and care. A Christian approach to security has to be global in nature. In a world quite literally connected, economically, environmentally, militarily, and through communication, security must be understood globally. There can be no “homeland security” unless there is security for all. The paper “Christian Faith and the Nuclear Arms Race” urged the church to “call the nations to forge new, non-violent security systems based not on narrow nationalism but on the vision of global community and world order” (MGS 1980, p. 123). Today this call is as timely as ever.

3. Distinguishing Global Security from National Self-Interest

Any action by a powerful group or nation against another that serves a purpose other than protecting global security is not truly an act on behalf of security. A “war on terror” may be appropriate if it is truly a war designed to serve the security of the world. If it is a war that seeks to protect people from danger, harm, want, or deprivation against forces that deny these things, then it may be justified. However, if it is a war that seeks to protect a nation or group’s rights and privileges beyond those securities, then it is no longer a war about security. It is a war about self-interest.
Christians must recognize the dangers of confusing healthy security with protecting national special interests.

4. Holistic Security

A Christian approach to security is holistic. It looks at all the ways that security is denied around the globe. Jesus addressed the security concerns of hunger, poverty, exploitation, racism, unjust laws, and disease, as well as promising deliverance from guilt, sin, and fear of death. Security needs to be sought in every realm of every society for all people. Where there is hunger, security will come when a plan is created for eradicating it. Where there is strife, security will come when a plan is carried out for resolving it. Where there is injustice, security will come about when it is unveiled in a context where change can accompany the unveiling. Where people don’t know the security of Christ’s peace, it will come about when the good news is proclaimed.

Christians should be encouraged by the fact that the U.S. government has been expressing concern for some holistic security issues. Through the creation of the Millennium Challenge Account the U.S. government is showing that it cares about extending security for the basic needs of people in the poorest nations of the world. Through the increased financial commitment to fighting AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa, the U.S. government has shown concern for their security.

5. Security Is Brought About Primarily by Lovers, Not Superpowers

The great giver of security, our Lord Jesus Christ, was an itinerant, homeless preacher. He brought security not through worldly strength, but rather through offering the most self-giving and legitimate love that one could offer. Christians challenge the assumption that the great powers are always able to discern security needs for the world of the poor, a world of which they are not a part. A Christian understanding of security remembers that security does not come from the top down, through the strongest worldly powers, but rather through the most real loves—wherever they are found. Real security comes by following in the path of Jesus Christ, who, though he had all the power of God, humbled himself, taking the form of a servant, and offered his life for the sake of the world.

R-29
To direct RCA Communication and Production Services to make the paper “Thinking Theologically About Security: Following Christ in an Age of Terror” available on the RCA website and, by request, in print, for study and reflection within congregations.

The advisory committee recommended a substitute for the recommendation:

R-29 (substitute)
To refer the paper “Thinking Theologically About Security: Following Christ in an Age of Terror” to the Commission on Christian Action for further development and revision; and further,

to invite RCA members, consistories, and classes to send comments and critiques of the paper to the Commission on Christian Action by January 15, 2004; and further,
to instruct the Commission on Christian Action to bring a revised paper to General Synod 2004. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. The commission lacks adequate knowledge of security threats in order to make some of the specific pronouncements in the paper.
2. The language of the paper could be interpreted as unduly critical or divisive.
3. The paper needs to focus more strongly on abuses in the name of security, both domestic and international.

A motion was made to instruct the Commissions on Theology and Christian Action to work jointly on recommendation R-29.

VOTED: not to adopt the recommendation.

R-30
To encourage the general secretary, other staff, and officers of the Reformed Church in America to use the paper “Thinking Theologically About Security: Following Christ in an Age of Terror” in assessing participation in ecumenical efforts dealing with world security issues. (NOT ADOPTED)

Reason:
The paper needs further revision and development before it can be used as a guide for assessing participation in ecumenical efforts in addressing world security issues.

Other Work

As directed by the 2002 General Synod (MGS 2002, R-14, p. 100), the Office of Social Witness, in conjunction with the Commission on Christian Action, held a forum for discussing the paper “The Creation and Use of Embryonic Stem Cells” at Taiwan Union Christian Church in Astoria, New York, on Saturday, March 15, 2003. The attendance was gratifying and the conversation very helpful. The Commission on Christian Action expresses deep thanks to the Taiwan Union Christian Church for their warm hospitality in hosting this event. Discussion is underway to hold similar forums in the Synod of Albany; Holland, Michigan; and Orange City, Iowa, in the future.

In December 2002 the Commission on Christian Action mailed a pastoral letter for Advent to every congregation in the Reformed Church in America, urging prayers for peace in Iraq:

Advent 2002

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

As we move toward the joyful celebration of Christ’s birth at Christmas, there is also a looming sense that the nations of this earth are moving toward war in Iraq.

As Christians, as followers of the Prince of Peace, who believe that peacemakers will be called children of God (Matthew 5:9), we must lift up our voices, devote our energies, and offer prayers for the sake of peace.

We realize that world affairs are complex. We realize that Christians have been and still are divided about whether war is ever a justifiable act for Christians. We realize that there is evil in the world and that evil must
be taken seriously. Yet our Scriptures call us to pray for our enemies and overcome evil with good. However much we are tempted to look at the world through the lenses of partisan politics, national interest, and pragmatic necessity, Jesus calls us to see differently. For us peacemaking is a matter of faithfulness to Christ.

In many places, even many churches, there seems to be a grim resignation to war. To pray for peace and speak out against a war are thought to be hopeless, too late, or even unpatriotic. As Christians we believe it is never too late and never hopeless. Prayer is able to bring change. As Christians, we speak out against war hoping to change hearts and minds. But we must also speak for peace in order to bear witness to Christ; we must be faithful even if we are not successful.

In this season of Advent, we urge all Reformed congregations and their members to pray:

- For world leaders and their advisers, that they might find ways to resolve conflicts without resorting to war; that a desire for peace may prevail over national pride, politics, or personal glory.

- For the people of Iraq, that they might be protected should war come, and that their lot in life might improve. Especially remember our 650,000 Christian brothers and sisters in Iraq, some of whom are the fruit of Reformed Church missions to Iraq.

- For those in the militaries of the various nations, that they be kept safe in body, that their souls would be preserved from hatred, and that they might be soon reunited with their loved ones.

- For the United Nations and the weapons inspectors in Iraq, that their work might be fruitful and help lessen tensions between nations.

- For the congregations and members of the Reformed Church in America, that we might dare struggle with the complexities of the issue and dare to voice unpopular beliefs; that we might not give in to despair or perceive war in Iraq as inevitable; that we might be kept faithful and strong in prayer and learn to see the world as Jesus sees.

In this Advent season, may this be our prayer:

Eternal God, in whose perfect kingdom no sword is drawn but the sword of righteousness, and no strength known but the strength of love, so guide and inspire, we pray, the work of all who seek your kingdom, that nations may find their security not in force of arms but in that perfect love which casts out fear, and in that fellowship revealed to us by your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

May the peace of Christ be with you,

The Christian Action Commission of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America; the Rev. Stephen Mathonnet-VanderWell, moderator

Along with the letter a sample bulletin insert for “An Advent Appeal for Peace” from Churches for Middle East Peace was included, as well as a link to the RCA website with
comments from the 2002 General Synod address of the Rev. Dr. Riad Jarjour, general secretary of the Middle East Council of Churches. Reaction to the Advent pastoral letter was very positive.

The Commission on Christian Action also adopted a letter to be included in a packet sent to congregations inquiring about building loans through the Reformed Church Building and Extension Fund. The letter encourages congregations to consider energy efficiency and use of “green” building supplies in any construction, as a sign of environmental stewardship.

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

**REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF SOCIAL WITNESS**

*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 social witness 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 Evangelization and Church Growth; this is the detailed report of the work in social witness.

Barbara Brown Taylor writes about how Christians sometimes reduce the rich biblical concept of salvation to “going to heaven”:

> While Isaiah might have agreed that salvation comes from heaven, I doubt that he would ever have agreed to leave it there. As far as the Hebrew Bible is concerned, heaven is only interesting insofar as it comes to earth. Salvation is not about earthlings going up but about heaven coming down, and any notion of salvation that does not include just rulers, honest judges, an equitable economy, and peace among the nations would have made Isaiah scratch his head. Heaven may be God’s test kitchen, but the pudding is intended for earth.”

—“Easter Preaching and the Lost Language of Salvation,” *Journal for Preachers*, volume 25, number 3 (Easter 2002)

The psalmist too, proclaims the coming of God’s salvation, and then begins to sketch a rather “earthy” picture of what that salvation entails:

> Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other. Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky. The Lord will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase.

—Psalm 85:10-12
Much of the work of the Office of Social Witness involves helping to equip the church to be a sign and witness of the coming salvation of God, where righteousness, justice, and peace come together and creation will flourish.

Advocating for Righteousness and Justice

The General Synod has several times encouraged Reformed Church congregations to participate in Bread for the World, a Christian citizens movement that helps hungry people by writing, calling, and visiting U.S. decision-makers about legislation that addresses hunger and its causes. The Office of Social Witness continues to encourage congregational participation in Bread for the World’s annual Offering of Letters and in the Covenant Church program.

Thanks to the efforts of organizations like Bread for the World real progress has been made in reducing hunger and poverty. Yet today there are still 800 million people around the world who are undernourished; 1.2 billion people do not have access to clean drinking water; 40 million people are infected with HIV/AIDS.

There is hope. The United Nations has a new initiative to alleviate poverty, and U.S. president Bush recently pledged to increase development assistance to poor countries. This year, through Bread for the World’s 2003 Offering of Letters campaign “Rise to the Challenge: End World Hunger,” churches across the country will be receiving offerings of letters asking members of congress to fully fund this initiative and to ensure that foreign aid will be directed at alleviating poverty. The Office of Social Witness helped to sponsor regional Offering of Letters workshops and facilitates RCA participation in the Bread for the World national gathering in June.

The Office of Social Witness also helps to facilitate the church’s witness in the marketplace. (See the 2001 General Synod report “A Witness for Christ in the Marketplace” (MGS 2001, pp. 67-71). The 2002 General Synod instructed the office to raise greater awareness of socially responsible investing among RCA members and churches (MGS 2002, R-17, p. 105). An informational brochure has been prepared (also posted on the RCA website at www.rca.org/disciple/care/invest.php) and brief presentations and workshops are planned for some classes and synods. The minister for social witness also represents the denomination in the Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility, serves on the board of Oikocredit, USA (an ecumenical agency that provides loans to enterprises owned and operated by monetarily poor people around the world), and provides staff assistance to the denomination’s Socially Responsible Investment Committee, which is charged with the responsibility of maintaining a continuing dialogue with the custodians of the assets of the denominational corporations regarding the implementation in the marketplace of biblical values (MGS 2001, pp. 70-71).

The 2002 General Synod directed the Office of Social Witness to plan and convene several gatherings across the denomination for the purpose of discussing the Commission on Christian Action report, “The Creation and Use of Embryonic Stem Cells” (MGS 2002, R-14, p. 100). The first of these forums was held in Queens, New York, in March. Additional forums are planned or anticipated for Albany, New York; Holland, Michigan; northwest Iowa; and other regions of the church.

In February the minister for social witness began what is hoped to be a series of conversations with the “church and society desks” of the RCA full communion partners, exploring the possibilities of “mutual cooperation and admonition” by working together in developing study papers on social and ethical issues.
Witnessing for Peace

For the past two decades Reformed Church in America congregations have been encouraged to observe Peace with Justice Sunday as a special time to pray for peace and focus the church’s attention on God’s call to witness and work for peace and reconciliation for those who are far off...and to those who are near (Ephesians 2:17). During the past year much of the church’s peace witness has been focused on the conflicts in the Middle East.

At the direction of the 2002 General Synod the Office of Social Witness prepared resources to assist congregations in receiving an annual “peacemaking” offering in conjunction with Peace with Justice Sunday, designating half of the offering for peacemaking ministries in the local congregation or community and half for a denominational peacemaking program to be named each year by the General Synod Council (MGS 2002, R-21, p. 109).

The 2002 denominational peacemaking offering was designated for a program of Muslim-Christian dialogue sponsored by the RCA’s ecumenical partner, the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC). Under the direction of the MECC, Arab Christians and Arab Muslims will gather in up to four different countries for information-gathering, discussion, and interreligious dialogue on how to work together to build a peaceful and constructive society. The Reformed Church’s support for this “people-to-people” peacemaking ministry is an important source of encouragement and hope to those who are struggling to maintain a Christian presence in a very troubled region during an extremely difficult time.

Last year the general secretary of the Middle East Council of Churches, the Rev. Dr. Riad Jarjour, addressed the 2002 General Synod:

In the Middle East, we are opening our hearts and minds in dialogue, and extending our hands in a ministry of compassion even to those who think they are our enemies. We also insist, in this dialogue, that truth must be spoken bluntly and clearly, and that those who have sincere religious convictions should not stop short of being critical of their social, cultural, and political institutions. We hold to the conviction that only truth and justice will bring reconciliation and peace.

It is the gospel that inspires Christians in the Middle East with this vision...We Christians make our confession in an extremely varied social and cultural environment, respecting those who differ from us while, at the same time, exhibiting why we hold fast to the hope that is in us (MGS 2002, p. 410).

The 2002 General Synod also instructed the RCA’s general secretary, on behalf of the Reformed Church, to advocate for an end to the embargo against Iraq and to urge government authorities to use all possible political and diplomatic means in pursuing U.S. policy goals, rather than using violence (MGS 2002, R-126, p. 413.) The General Synod instructed the Office of Social Witness to provide resources and information to churches to help them participate in the World Council of Churches initiative “The Decade to Overcome Violence” (MGS 2002, R-20 amended, p. 108).

During the past year as the U.S. was preparing for war, the Office of Social Witness received numerous requests from RCA members and congregations seeking guidance and resources for reflecting on issues of war and peace and justice in the Middle East. Through the Office of Social Witness the RCA is represented on the board of Churches for Middle East Peace, maintains an informational and action alert network of “RCA Middle East Peace Makers,” and in February participated in the ecumenically sponsored Advocacy Days on issues related to Africa and the Middle East in Washington, D.C.

In late February the minister for social witness was part of a small delegation from the World Alliance of Reformed Churches who visited Amman, Jordan, and Baghdad, Iraq.
The purpose of the visit was to affirm our fellowship and solidarity with Iraqi Christian brothers and sisters and their Muslim neighbors with whom they live, and to signal to the Iraqi people—Christians and Muslims both—commitment of care and compassion, whether or not there would be war; to affirm that, for our churches, the current international conflict with Iraq is not a battle between a “Christian West” and a “Muslim East”; and to express our continued prayer and hope that war could be averted and peace achieved. The Middle East Council of Churches facilitated the trip.

Caring for Creation

Writing in the October 17, 2001, issue of the Christian Century, Walter Wink called attention to some of the perils that threaten the very viability of life on earth today:

Global warming, the ozone hole, overpopulation, starvation and malnutrition, war, unemployment, destruction of species and the rainforests, pollution of water and air...these dangers threaten to “catch us unexpectedly, like a trap.”

Terrible as it was, the destruction of the World Trade Center was not an apocalypse. That horror will slowly recede. Other acts of infamy may take place. But we can anticipate a time when terrorism will decline. Nor are we helpless. We have the means to stop at least many, perhaps most, of the terrorist attacks hurled at us...

The threats to our very survival that I listed above, however, will not go away. They could spell the end of humanity, and even of most sentient life. This is the awful truth that we have yet to recognize: We are living in an apocalyptic time disguised as normal, and that is why we have not responded appropriately...So while we are understandably preoccupied with terrorism, and must do everything to stamp it out, we must at the same time wake up to these more serious threats that could effectively end life on this planet.

With the assistance of Robin Hoy, associate for social witness, the Office of Social Witness continues to enlist and equip additional “Caring for Creation Coordinators.” More than eighty coordinators are now serving as resource persons for congregations by providing resources and learning opportunities about environmental issues and the biblical theology of creation, helping churches and families with ideas for more creation-friendly lifestyles, and providing information about important legislation on environmental issues. A newsletter by and for coordinators is published periodically and posted on the RCA website. Several RCA Caring for Creation Coordinators from the eastern synods participated in a retreat in March 2003. Some RCA coordinators will also be able to participate in an ecumenical conference, “Enough for All: Sustainable Living in a Global World,” to be held at Seattle University on June 20-23. The conference, sponsored by the Environmental Justice Working Group of the National Council of Churches, will examine the spiritual, ethical, and theological implications of living in a global economy.

Earth Day Sunday resources on the theme “Waters of Life: Enough for All” were developed in cooperation with the National Council of Churches of Christ Environmental Justice Working Group and posted at www.webofcreation.org. Additional resources for study, discussion, and action developed in cooperation with other denominations are also posted at www.webofcreation.org.

In July 2002 the minister for social witness presented a paper and participated in the discussions at an international forum on global climate change. Sponsored by the Ausable Institute in the United States and the John Ray Initiative in Great Britain, the forum brought together evangelical Christians in the fields of science, industry, government, and the church to address the issue of climate change, particularly as it affects the lives of the poor in the developing world.
The minister for social witness also provides staff support for the Commission on Theology’s “Earth Ethics” work group. This work group was established to help guide the denomination’s response to the World Alliance of Reformed Churches’ call for a theological and faithful response to the interrelated issues of ecological degradation and economic injustice.

Overtures

Advocating for Insurance and Health Care Reform

1. The Classis of Montgomery overtures the General Synod, through its Commission on Christian Action, to address the escalating costs of medical insurance and health care in the United States by advocating for insurance and health care reform at a national level. Areas of action may include:

   • Dialogue with other denominations for unified advocacy.
   • Dialogue with the federal government in the executive and legislative branches, encouraging the development of a more inclusive approach to health care.
   • Encouragement of classes, consistories, congregations, and members of the RCA to advocate for insurance and health care reform.

Reasons:
1. Escalating health care costs have an impact on people beyond the immediate area of our own denomination and its congregations.

2. Our understanding of community as a covenantal relationship indicates that the church has a responsibility for addressing issues that relate to the welfare of our neighbors as well as ourselves.

3. The instructions of Jesus Christ demand that we demonstrate a practical concern for the poor and oppressed. The current situation of insurance and medical costs places an especially heavy burden on those in lower income that is not being adequately relieved through the present state and federal social service systems.

In response to Overture 1 the advisory committee made two recommendations:

R-31
To instruct the Office of Social Witness and the general secretary to pursue avenues for advocacy for more affordable health care in the United States. Areas of action may include:

   • Dialogue with other denominations for unified advocacy.
   • Dialogue with the executive and legislative branches of the U.S. government, encouraging the development of a more inclusive approach to health care. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. Escalating health care costs have an impact on people beyond the immediate area of our own denomination and its congregations.

2. Our understanding of community as a covenantal relationship indicates that the church has a responsibility for addressing issues that relate to the welfare of our neighbors as well as ourselves.
3. The teachings of Jesus Christ demand that we demonstrate a practical concern for the poor and oppressed. The current situation of insurance and medical costs places an especially heavy burden on those with lower incomes that is not being adequately relieved through the present state and federal social service systems.

A motion was made to amend R-32:

**R-32**

To encourage classes, consistories, congregations, and members of the RCA to advocate for insurance and health care reform in the United States. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

**Reasons:**

1. Escalating health care costs have an impact on people beyond the immediate area of our own denomination and its congregations.
2. Our understanding of community as a covenantal relationship indicates that the church has a responsibility for addressing issues that relate to the welfare of our neighbors as well as ourselves.
3. The teachings of Jesus Christ demand that we demonstrate a practical concern for the poor and oppressed. The current situation of insurance and medical costs places an especially heavy burden on those with lower incomes that is not being adequately relieved through the present state and federal social service systems.

**Reinstatement of the Position of Minister for Social Witness and Worship**

2. The Regional Synod of Albany overtures the General Synod to instruct the General Synod Council to rescind its action, which reduced the position of minister for social witness and worship to a part-time and divided position, and to reinstate the position to full-time.

**Reasons:**

1. The action taken by the General Synod Council (GSC 03-07) reflects a trend toward a diminished commitment to values always held central and dear to our reformed tradition, namely that we are called by our God to “do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God” (Micah 6:8).
2. Linking the work of doing justice and planning worship was an ingenious and vitally important move on our denomination’s part. It bore testimony to the fact that laboring for justice is rooted in the very core of our reformed identity—namely that we are a people grounded in our worship of God. Doing justice is worshipful work; in Micah’s imagery, it is linked with walking humbly with God.
3. Budgets reveal priorities and commitments; we spend money on what is important to us, and we withdraw expenditures from matters deemed less important. This budgetary cutback for social justice and worship reveals a shocking reduction in commitment to what is central in the biblical definition of faithfulness to God and God’s kingdom. “A worthless witness mocks at justice” (Proverbs 19:28).
4. By cutting back the Office of Social Witness and Worship, current programs so vital to our life as a denomination including those of evangelistic importance—such as the catechumenate orientation program—will likely be eliminated or suffer from benign neglect.
5. The hope the other commissions and staff will do the work of “doing justice,” is vague and sounds too much like wishful thinking. When a task is left to “somebody” to do, it usually means that “nobody” winds up doing it.
6. Citing the fact that the other commissions and staff are now doing the work of Social Witness is more a testimony that the Office of Social Witness is inspiring such work and is a strong reason to keep the office functioning and not a reason to eliminate or shrink that office. Our opinion is that others in our denomination are working for justice because of the work and inspiration of the Office of Social Witness, not instead of it.

7. The current world situation—with the war in the Middle East, the increasing gap between the rich and the poor, the defilement and abuse of the earth’s ecosystems, the deepening mistrust between people of different faiths, the rising horror of terrorism and its root causes, and the challenges of an expanding technological revolution in communication, surveillance, and biological and genetic engineering, to name only a few issues challenging this generation—cries out for the church’s leadership and guidance through such days of fear and moral confusion.

In response to Overture 2 the advisory committee recommended:

**R-33**
To instruct the General Synod Council to rescind its action that reduced the position of minister for social witness and worship to a part-time and divided position, and to reinstate the position to full time. (NOT ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. The action taken by the General Synod Council (GSC 03-07) reflects a trend toward a diminished commitment to values always held central and dear to our Reformed tradition, namely that we are called by our God to “do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God” (Micah 6:8).

2. Linking the work of doing justice and planning worship was an ingenious and vitally important move on our denomination’s part. It bore testimony to the fact that laboring for justice is rooted in the very core of our Reformed identity _ namely that we are a people grounded in our worship of God. Doing justice is worshipful work; in Micah’s imagery, it is linked with walking humbly with God.

3. Budgets reveal priorities and commitments; we spend money on what is important to us, and we withdraw expenditures from matters deemed less important. This budgetary cutback for social justice and worship reveals a shocking reduction in commitment to what is central in the biblical definition of faithfulness to God and God’s kingdom. “A worthless witness mocks at justice” (Proverbs 19:28).

4. By cutting back the minister of social witness and worship, current programs so vital to our life as a denomination including those of evangelistic importance—such the catechumenate orientation program—will likely be eliminated or suffer from benign neglect.

5. The hope that other commissions and staff will do the work of “doing justice” is vague and sounds too much like wishful thinking. When a task is left to “somebody” to do, it usually means that “nobody” winds up doing it.

6. Citing the fact that the other commissions and staff are now doing the work of social witness is more a testimony that the Office of Social Witness is inspiring such work and is a strong reason to keep the office functioning and not a reason to eliminate or shrink that office. Our opinion is that others in our denomination are working for justice because of the work and inspiration of the Office of Social Witness, not instead of it.

7. The current world situation—with war in the Middle East, the increasing gap between rich and poor, the defilement and abuse of the earth’s ecosystems, the deepening mistrust between people of different faiths, the rising horror of terrorism and
its root causes, and the challenges of an expanding technological revolution in communication, surveillance, and biological and genetic engineering, to name only a few issues challenging this generation—cries out for the church’s leadership and guidance through such days of fear and moral confusion.

Budget implications: The restoration of this office to a single full-time position will be approximately $70,000 based on benefits for full-time staff, office and related expenses and 50 percent of salary and benefits for secretarial support.

In response to P-8 from the report of the president (p. 42), the advisory committee recommended:

R-34
To instruct the general secretary, on behalf of the Reformed Church in America, to write letters to the World Health Organization, the president of the United States of America, the leaders of the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate, the prime minister of Canada, and the leaders of the Canadian Parliament to express the concern and support of the Reformed Church in America that Taiwan may be accepted as a member country in the World Health Organization for humanitarian reasons and to enhance the welfare and the physical health of the people of the whole world. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. Taiwan’s membership in the World Health Organization will help Taiwan better address public health issues.
2. The RCA has previously advocated for Taiwan’s membership in the United Nations.

A “friendly amendment” was offered and accepted by the vice president to the effect that the letter to the prime minister of Canada be written by the Regional Synod of Canada executive. Because the amendment was not voted upon, the recommendation could not be amended. It is understood that the general secretary will consult with the Regional Synod of Canada executive.
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

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.

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 Chistian 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 inex-
tricably 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 recruit-
ing 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 admis-
sions 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 develop-
ing 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 creden-
tials, 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 expe-
rience 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 dimen-
sion. 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 cur-
rently 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 coun-
try 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-Atlantics 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-
Atlantics); 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 sim-
ply 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 avail-
able on the RCA website.

• Through an intentional pursuit of possible programs or ministries with and for per-
sons 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 commit-
tee. 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 denom-
inations 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 enlist-
ing 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 over-
sees 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:
  - *Called to Serve: Deacons and Elders Together*, a twice-yearly newsletter resource specifically targeted to elders anddeacons.
  - Branches on the Vine, a consistory training workshop that can be self-led in congregations.

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 required 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 educational 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.
REPORTS ON CHRISTIAN HERITAGE AND COMMUNICATIONS

Report of the Commission on History

The Commission on History was established in 1966 and is responsible for advising the General Synod on the collection and preservation of official denominational records and for informing the RCA of the relevance of the denomination’s history and traditions to its program. Through its oversight of the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America, review of historical resources, and the creation of a “virtual history center” (in cooperation with the Office of Historical Services), the commission promotes research and reflection on the history and tradition of the RCA, its classes, and its congregations.

At the spring meeting of the commission, Russell Gasero shared a perfect example of why this is important. He told the story of a congregation that wanted to sell a portion of its property, only to discover that they do not legally own the property but had sold it to the General Synod almost seventy-five years ago. The records of the congregation, its classis, and the General Synod did not immediately yield an explanation of what had happened or why. As of the writing of this report, the results of further historical research were pending.

This is why every congregation—not just the very old ones—every classis, and every synod needs to be involved in the collection and preservation of records and research and reflection on history and tradition. Sociologists tell us that the collective living memory of any group of people stretches back about seven years; anything that has gone on longer falls into the category of “we’ve always done it that way.” Our history directly affects our present and our future. In the Liturgy, we refer to this as “remembrance, communion, and hope.”

The Commission on History met on November 1, 2002, in Holland, Michigan, and on January 27, 2003, in New Brunswick, New Jersey. Its work was concerned with three aspects of RCA life: remembrance, communion, and hope.

Remembrance

In 2002 the commission appointed Lynn Japinga and Russell Gasero to serve on the committee that has planned the celebration of 375 years of Reformed Church congregations in North America. Through them, the commission has watched the work of this dedicated group with interest and offered help and suggestions where possible. The results of that good work will be on display at this synod, and the commission joins the whole RCA in thanking them for their efforts.

In 1968, the RCA’s 340th anniversary year, this commission introduced the first volume of the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America. Over the past thirty-five years, the series has produced at least forty-one volumes on countless aspects of the denomination’s life and mission but has had only one general editor. Donald Bruggink’s tireless volunteer efforts and expert scholarship have made this endeavor possible.

R-38
WHEREAS for the past thirty-five years the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America has been enriching our life and mission in the present by opening us to the past; and

WHEREAS more than forty volumes have been published by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, covering the history of
Reformed Church in America missions, education, biography, and theology; and

WHEREAS for the past thirty-five years each volume has been carefully edited, lovingly nurtured through the production process, and gracefully promoted in the Reformed Church in America by the Rev. Dr. Donald J. Bruggink; and

WHEREAS the Rev. Dr. Donald J. Bruggink has served faithfully without remuneration or compensation for those thirty-five years;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-seventh regular session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the ninth day of June, 2003, gives thanks to God for the Rev. Dr. Donald J. Bruggink and his tireless service over thirty-five years in developing the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America and prays God’s blessings upon his continued ministry among us. (ADOPTED)

The RCA celebrated its 350th anniversary in 1978, and in that same year hired its first full-time archivist. Just as the theological professorate in its early days was embodied in John Henry Livingston, the Office of Historical Services has for the last quarter century been embodied in Russell Gasero. The commission notes this significant anniversary with heartfelt thanksgiving.

R-39
WHEREAS the Reformed Church in America has been significantly blessed by the work of Elder Russell L. Gasero as archivist for the Reformed Church in America for the past twenty-five years; and

WHEREAS he has used his expertise and gifts to establish the Office of Historical Services and the RCA Archives on a professional basis to support the work of the Commission on History, to assist the publication of the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America, and to teach local congregations and individuals about the stewardship of their own memory and records; and

WHEREAS he continues to be instrumental in pioneering new fields of ministry for the RCA Archives through the Gerald and Jeanne De Jong Internship program with Northwestern College, electronic publication, and research into new ways to support local congregations in their records management;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-seventh regular session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the ninth day of June, 2003, gives thanks to God for the life and ministry of Elder Russell L. Gasero as archivist of the Reformed Church in America and prays God’s blessings on his continued ministry among us for many years to come. (ADOPTED)
Communion

In order to bring the lessons of the past to the service of the present, informing the ministry of the General Synod and the whole church, regular reports are received from the Office of Historical Services and the Center for Reformed Church Studies at New Brunswick Theological Seminary. The commission notes with particular interest the production of RCA History on CD computer disks by the Office of Historical Services, which make available to local congregations, at a very nominal cost, scanned images of historical documents, pictures, monographs, a timeline, and even the 1992 edition of the RCA Historical Directory.

Lynn Japinga, a member of the commission, participated in the Standing Seminar series of the Center for Reformed Church Studies during this past year. Several members of the commission took part in the colloquium on “Spirit, Ministry, and Office” sponsored by the General Synod professors of theology on Reformation Day 2002.

During the past year Dutch Chicago: A History of the Hollanders in the Windy City, by Robert Swierenga, became the forty-first volume of the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America. The commission hopes that Iowa Letters: Dutch Immigrants on the American Frontier, edited by Dr. Swierenga, will be ready in time for General Synod, along with By Grace Alone: Stories of the Reformed Church in America, by Donald J. Bruggink and Kim Nathan Baker. Assuming that these forty-second and forty-third volumes of the series are ready, there will be formal autograph parties at the synod meeting in Holland. The commission also notes that several authors of Historical Series volumes will be present, prompting the following offer: any delegate or guest who gets all of the Historical Series authors present at this General Synod meeting to sign their books will be eligible to receive one copy of any available volume published prior to the year 2000.

As synod notes the thirty-fifth anniversary of the Historical Series and the 375th anniversary of Reformed Church ministry in North America, the importance of our collective history comes to the forefront once again. The commission reminds the General Synod of the value of the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America as a resource for the whole of the RCA; this is the largest and longest-running series of its type. These books, however, are only of value to the church if they are disseminated and read.

That the one hundred ninety-seventh regular session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, commends the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America to every RCA congregation and encourages every congregation to purchase a complete set of all available volumes for its church library. (ADOPTED)

Hope

Proper stewardship of our past and present necessarily leads to concern for our future. In that spirit, the commission has devoted time and attention to the future well-being of its ongoing work as well as to ways to serve the church better.

Policies that have accrued over the past thirty-five years regarding the Historical Series have been collected and compiled into a single document, along with recommendations for updating these policies to better insures the long-term health of the series. These are being reviewed by commission members and GSC staff, with an eye toward finalizing this policy document at the fall commission meeting. The commission is also exploring the possibility of grant sources for funding publication of some volumes in the series and, with the assistance of Russell Gasero, is experimenting with electronic publication (on CD-ROM) of out-of-print volumes. If that experiment is successful, it could lead to other electronic publications of historic texts, such as Corwin’s Digest of the Reformed Church in America.
When the General Synod Council reviewed the work of this commission in 2000, the reviewers recommended that “the commission should be prepared to offer an historical perspective, either orally or in writing, on matters being presented to the General Synod” (MGS 2000, p. 427). The commission has struggled with answering this call, which it agrees is central to its purpose, as papers take time to develop and there has been no precedent in the General Synod or the GSC for suggesting or requesting such work from the Commission on History as with other commissions. This year the commission proposed for its report an excellent paper on the historic cycles of ministerial shortage in the RCA, written by General Synod Professor of Theology George Brown of Western Theological Seminary. The commissioners felt this paper would lend important and needed perspective to some of the discussions before the delegates. The paper was withdrawn when staff in the General Synod Office were concerned that such a report would confuse delegates, add too much length to the General Synod workbook, and set inappropriate precedents. The office also was concerned about whether the commission has the authority to report on something it was not specifically assigned by the General Synod. The paper has been available through other venues, however, and the commission encourages all delegates to read it; copies should be available through the commission’s corresponding delegate at this meeting for delegates to review. The commission intends to review correct procedures for including such papers with the assistant secretary of the General Synod this fall, and would appreciate any other guidance the synod or its delegates might give.

It has been thirty-five years since the inauguration of the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America as a means of putting RCA history in the service of individual members and local congregations. At the time, resources for such an endeavor were scarce, and the prospects for success seemed dubious, at least to some. It is time for this commission to seek new ways to promote historical research, reflection, and interest. Resources are still scarce, but history has proven God’s providence for this work.

- The commission is currently planning a series of seminars to be held in cooperation with the General Synod local host committees for alternate years (when the synod is not meeting at one of the RCA colleges). These would include a brief presentation on some aspect of the history of the RCA in that area and guidance on how to set up and maintain local church archives. The working title is “Fun with RCA History.” These seminars would be open to General Synod delegates and local church members and would help connect local churches to RCA history with minimal additional cost, using people already traveling to that area for synod.

- Members of the commission will be helping the Office of Historical Services prepare a set of bulletin inserts on various aspects of RCA history. These will be available for free download from the RCA website and reprinting by local congregations.

- The commission commits itself to continually seek new ways to make historical resources available to the whole church.

A motion was made from the floor:

R-41
To have the Commission on History offer a historical perspective, either orally or in writing, on matters being presented to the General Synod. (ADOPTED)
From the Report of the General Synod Council’s Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee

REPORT OF THE RCA ARCHIVES AND THE OFFICE OF HISTORICAL SERVICES

“The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; I have a goodly heritage”
(Psalm 16:6).

Purpose for the Archives

Archives are documents of the past that exist for the future of the church. The archival task is to preserve the essential documentation of the life and ministry of the Reformed Church in America. This is a stewardship responsibility—a program designed to assure tomorrow that it has a yesterday. Archives are the primary resources for documenting the RCA’s 375 years of life and ministry, with records that begin with the correspondence of the Dutch dominies in New Amsterdam with the Classis of Amsterdam in the 1630s and continue through to the present-day records of denominational staff, agencies, regional synods, classes, and congregations.

All assemblies maintain records as remembering instruments. In fact, careful record-keeping is one of the most important aspects of a successful ministry. The archival task was implicit in the historical context of the Old Testament and God’s command to Moses to preserve his words for his people. This is what makes the archival task the stewardship of our heritage.

Archival Responsibility

The most important task of the archives is to preserve materials that are the most important part of our memory and dispose of routine documents that do not significantly offer evidence about the daily life and ministry of the RCA. The archivist must select those documents that adequately serve as our long-term memory and provide legal, financial, administrative, and historical information when needed.

To that end, the archives acquires the papers of staff, agencies, regional synods, classes and congregations. The office continues to appraise and acquire records that meet the needs mentioned above. Resource materials, as well as other “finding aids,” are available which list the holdings of the archives and make it easier to access the proper records to answer questions posed by researchers.

Knowing what to keep is only half of the task; the other half involves knowing what to throw away. This office develops retention schedules for records of denominational offices and has provided a retention schedule for congregational records that is available on the RCA’s website.

A second task of the archives is to make this information available to staff and other researchers for their use. Last year the archives answered over three hundred queries for information ranging from genealogical data in congregational records to lengthy reports providing background information on RCA missions. In addition to receiving mail and telephone inquiries, the archives hosts researchers from around the world who visit to study both RCA history and the history of the larger worldwide church. Some materials from mission areas provide information not found in the national archives of various countries.

This office has been working to make more records available electronically on CD-ROM and on the World Wide Web. RCA History on CD continues to grow and now includes
more than 150 megabytes and over twelve hundred pages of documentation reflecting various aspects of RCA history. This material provides resources for courses in RCA history, from seminary-level studies through congregational education in church history; it also offers valuable resources for private researchers.

The office also regularly updates the *Historical Directory of the Reformed Church in America* and maintains this information in a database. In addition, the archivist continues to compile the *Digest and Index of the General Synod Minutes* and is working on a project to make previous editions of the *Digest* from 1789 to the present available on CD-ROM. Since 1984 the archivist has also provided layout, design, and typesetting services for the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America.

**Storage and Staffing**

The image of archives is usually dusty rooms filled with old, musty paper. The reality is that the documents are stored in acid-free boxes in climate-controlled rooms on clean metal shelving. The RCA’s formal archival program began twenty-five years ago with twelve shelving units of records. Today the archives includes more than one hundred shelving units and nine ranges of movable shelving on three levels at the Gardner A. Sage Library of New Brunswick Theological Seminary, together with a regional repository at Camp Shalom in Ontario, Canada.

The office is staffed solely by the RCA archivist and comes under the Policy, Planning, and Administration Services Committee of the General Synod Council. The regional repository in Canada has been staffed by two volunteers, the Rev. and Mrs. John Drost. They have been diligently gathering records relating to the RCA in Canada for the last three years. Their commitment and assistance have brought the Canadian archival collection into existence.

The archives also offers the Gerald and Jeanne De Jong Internship in the RCA Archives in cooperation with Northwestern College. This provides an opportunity for a student to work during the four months of the spring semester full-time at the RCA Archives as he or she learns about archives and prepares to enter that field. It is an intensive and rewarding experience. Last year, Melissa Slaton served as the De Jong intern; she is now in graduate school preparing further for entry into this career.

A new volunteer opportunity is being developed through RCA Volunteer Services. Volunteers may work in the archives for an extended period of time on a variety of tasks that will help the RCA Archives and be personally rewarding to the volunteer. The first volunteers, Marlene and Ernie Bruns, began working in January 2003.

**Larger Program**

The RCA Archives also partners with New Brunswick Theological Seminary’s Center for Reformed Church Studies as it seeks to reflect on, study, and disseminate information about the history of the Reformed Church. The seminary assists the archives by graciously providing housing for the De Jong intern as well as the archive volunteers. The RCA Archives assists with the center’s Smith Fellowship and Standing Seminar on RCA History series.

This year the archivist has also provided advice and training to the archival program at Northwestern College as the school seeks to expand and strengthen that program. A week of training was provided for staff working on the college’s archives.

Preserving our memory is an important task so that we can assure tomorrow that it has a yesterday. It is also a process of thanksgiving as we grow out of yesterday into tomorrow.
The Reformed Church gives thanks for all those who have worked tirelessly for the kingdom throughout the 375 years of our life and mission, especially those who have departed this life in the past year.

NECROLOGY REPORT

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Elmer Bert Bonte

Elmer Bert Bonte was born on March 10, 1922, in Ackley, Iowa. His undergraduate education was received at Central College, from which he graduated in 1943. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1946.

He was licensed by the Classis of Pleasant Prairie in 1946 and ordained by the Classis of Monmouth the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Old Brick, Marlboro, New Jersey, from 1946 to 1949; Christ, Newark, New Jersey, from 1949 to 1953; and Levittown, Pennsylvania, at which he was the founding pastor, from 1953 to 1956. He was dismissed to the Presbyterian church in 1956.

Elmer Bert Bonte died at Mansfield, Ohio, on February 18, 2002. Elmer was seventy-nine years old.

Derrick Warren Bluschke

Derrick Warren Bluschke was born on May 28, 1938, in North Bergen, New Jersey. His undergraduate education was received at Rutgers University, from which he graduated in 1959. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1962. Mr. Bluschke was licensed and ordained by the Classis of Metropolitan Jersey in 1962.

Derrick Warren Bluschke died at San Antonio, Texas, in April 2002. Derrick was sixty-three years old.

**John H. Hoekstra**

John H. Hoekstra was born on December 18, 1918, in Roseland, Minnesota. His undergraduate education was received at Central College, from which he graduated in 1941. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1944.

He was licensed and ordained by the Classis of West Sioux in 1944. He pastored the following congregations: Bethel, Lester, Iowa, from 1944 to 1948; Aurora Center, Stickney, South Dakota, from 1948 to 1952; Nooksack Valley, Nooksack, Washington, from 1952 to 1956; Alexander, Iowa, from 1956 to 1961; Stout, Iowa, from 1961 to 1968; and Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin, from 1968 to 1975. He was engaged in specialized interim ministry from 1976 to 1982 and served as minister of calling at Central Reformed Church in Sioux Center, Iowa, from 1978 to 1982.

John H. Hoekstra died at Sioux Center, Iowa, on April 19, 2002. John was eighty-three years old.

**Wilbur Ray Ringnalda**

Wilbur Ray Ringnalda was born on March 26, 1921, in the Netherlands. His undergraduate education was received at Pepperdine College, from which he graduated in 1949. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1952.

He was licensed by the Classis of California in 1952 and ordained by the Classis of Muskegon the same year. He pastored the following congregations: First, Fremont, Michigan, from 1952 to 1957; Third, Pella, Iowa, from 1957 to 1965; Eighth, Grand Rapids, Michigan, from 1965 to 1975; Pine Grove, Muskegon, Michigan, from 1975 to 1982.

Wilbur Ray Ringnalda died at Grand Rapids, Michigan, on April 25, 2002. Wilbur was eighty-one years old.

**John Dykstra**

John Dykstra was born on July 17, 1917, in Detroit, Michigan. His undergraduate education was received at Central College, from which he graduated in 1941. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1944.

He was licensed by the Classis of Kalamazoo in 1944 and ordained by the Classis of Ulster the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Gardiner, New York, from 1944 to 1948; Hurley, New York, from 1948 to 1954; North Marbletown, New York, from 1948 to 1950; Locust Valley, Long Island, New York, from 1954 to 1971; and Catskill, New York, from 1971 to 1979. He also served as chaplain at the United Presbyterian Residence in Woodbury, New York, from 1979 to 1984.

John Dykstra died on May 4, 2002. John was eighty-four years old.
Lloyd Alan Arnoldink

Lloyd Alan Arnoldink was born on July 27, 1933, in Grand Rapids, Michigan. His undergraduate education was received at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1955. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1958.

He was licensed by the Classis of North Grand Rapids in 1958 and ordained by the Classis of California the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Longview, Phoenix, Arizona, from 1958 to 1962; Zion, Grandville, Michigan, from 1962 to 1968; Winding Way, Carmichael, California, from 1968 to 1971; Immanuel, Grand Rapids, Michigan, from 1971 to 1975; Green Oak, Oak Lawn, Illinois, from 1975 to 1986; and Ferry Memorial, Montague, Michigan, from 1986 to 1998.

Lloyd Alan Arnoldink died at Grand Haven, Michigan, on May 15, 2002. Lloyd was sixty-eight years old.

John Albert Hamersma

John Albert Hamersma was born on April 30, 1923, in Paterson, New Jersey. His undergraduate education was received at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1959. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1962.

He was licensed by the Classis of Passaic in 1962 and ordained by the Classis of Muskegon the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Atwood, Ellsworth, Michigan, from 1962 to 1964; Fairfield, New Jersey, from 1964 to 1981; and North Brunswick, New Jersey, from 1981 to 1986. He served as the minister for visitation at Pinelands Reformed Church in Toms River, New Jersey, from 1987 to 1996.

John Albert Hamersma died on June 21, 2002. John was seventy-nine years old.

John Chapman Hanse

John Chapman Hanse was born on June 8, 1922, in Paterson, New Jersey. His undergraduate education was received at Bloomfield College, from which he graduated in 1948. His theological education was received at Biblical Seminary, from which he graduated in 1951. He also studied at Berkeley Baptist Divinity School in 1959.

He was licensed by the Presbytery of New York in 1951 and ordained by the Classis of Paramus the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Wanaque, New Jersey, from 1951 to 1954; Oakland, California, from 1954 to 1959; People’s Park, Paterson, New Jersey, from 1959 to 1967; and Bentheim, Hamilton, Michigan, from 1967 to 1990.

John Chapman Hanse died at Holland, Michigan, on July 15, 2002. John was eighty years old.

William C. Bennett

William C. Bennett was born on September 2, 1921, in Hoboken, New Jersey. His undergraduate education was received at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1949. His theological education was received at Biblical Seminary, which he attended from 1949 to 1950; at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, which he attended from 1951 to 1952; and at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1952.
He was licensed by the Classis of Palisades in 1952 and ordained by the Classis of New York the same year. He pastored Elmendorf Reformed Church in New York City from 1952 to 1956 and Athenia Reformed Church in Clifton, New Jersey, from 1956 to 1965. He served as associate pastor at First Reformed Church in Pompton Plains, New Jersey, from 1965 to 1982.

William C. Bennett died at Grand Rapids, Michigan, on July 20, 2002. William was eighty years old.

**Evelyn Louise (Mead) MacNeill**

Evelyn Louise (Mead) MacNeill was born on July 15, 1923, in Newark, New Jersey. She studied at Union Junior College from 1945 to 1946, at Kennedy School of Missions from 1956 to 1957, and at Union Theological Seminary in 1962.

She served as a missionary nurse for the RCA in the Middle East from 1950 to 1965. She also served with the World Council of Churches and Church World Service.

Evelyn MacNeill died on August 1, 2002. She was seventy-nine years old.

**Herman J. (Bud) Ridder**

Herman J. Ridder was born on July 28, 1925, in Lansing, Illinois. His undergraduate education was received at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1949. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1952. He also received the Th.M. from Chicago Theological Seminary in 1967 and doctor of divinity degrees from Hope College in 1965 and Central College in 1970.

He was licensed and ordained by the Classis of Illiana in 1952. He pastored the Reformed Church in Homewood, Illinois, from 1952 to 1956 and First Reformed Church in Pella, Iowa, from 1956 to 1960. He served as the RCA's minister of evangelism from 1960 to 1963 and as president of Western Theological Seminary from 1963 to 1969 and of both Western and New Brunswick seminaries from 1969 to 1971. He was executive minister of preaching at Central Reformed in Grand Rapids, Michigan, from 1971 to 1983; president of the congregation at the Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, California, from 1983 to 1988; contract pastor of First Reformed in Holland, Michigan, from 1990 to 1992; and pastor of Lost Tree Chapel in North Palm Beach, Florida, from 1994 to 1999. With his wife, Lenora DeBoer Ridder, Bud founded the Ridder Leadership Conference at Western Seminary.

Herman Ridder died at Grand Rapids, Michigan, on August 8, 2002. Herman was seventy-seven years old.

**Dennis Jay Van Wyk**

Dennis Jay Van Wyk was born on May 29, 1947, in Hackensack, New Jersey. His undergraduate education was received at Central College, from which he graduated in 1969. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1972.

He was licensed and ordained by the Classis of Paramus in 1972. He pastored the following congregations: Brick, Montgomery, New York, from 1972 to 1987, and Old Brick, Marlboro, New Jersey, from 1987 to 2000. He served in specialized interim ministry from 2000 to 2002.
Dennis Jay Van Wyk died at Englishtown, New Jersey, on August 30, 2002. Dennis was fifty-five years old.

**Gary H. Vande Kamp**

Gary H. Vande Kamp was born on December 10, 1934, in Hollandale, Minnesota. His undergraduate education was received at Central College, from which he graduated in 1956. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1962.

He was licensed by the Classis of Pella in 1962 and ordained by the Classis of California the same year. He began his ministry as assistant pastor at Bethel Reformed Church in Bellflower, California, from 1962 to 1966. He pastored the following congregations: First, Rock Rapids, Iowa, from 1966 to 1970; Calvary, Des Moines, Iowa, from 1970 to 1978; Adventure-Life, Altoona, Iowa, from 1978 to 1995; and Bethel, Sheldon, Iowa, from 1995 to 2000.

Gary H. Vande Kamp died at Altoona, Iowa, on September 21, 2002. Gary was sixty-seven years old.

**Ethel (Beth) Scudder Thoms Dickason**

Ethel (Beth) Scudder Thoms Dickason was born on May 17, 1904, at Kodaikanal, India. Her undergraduate education was received at Oberlin College, from which she graduated in 1926. She also studied at the University of Michigan.

She served as a missionary in India from 1926 to 1930, in Bahrain from 1931 to 1937, and in Oman from 1937 to 1970.

Ethel Dickason died at Kalamazoo, Michigan, on October 14, 2002. Ethel was ninety-eight years old.

**Richard Munn Suffern**

Richard Munn Suffern was born on January 17, 1913, in Suffern, New York. His undergraduate education was received at Haveford College, from which he graduated in 1935. He undertook further graduate study and received a Ph.D. from Johns Hopkins University in 1941. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1944.

He was licensed by the Classis of Paramus in 1944 and ordained in 1945. He served as an instructor at the Biblical Theological Seminary in New York City from 1941 to 1945 and as professor from 1945 to 1961. He pastored the following New Jersey congregations as interim or stated supply: Wanaque, 1948; Preakness, Wayne, 1949; Church of the Covenant, Paterson, 1957 to 1970 and 1975 to 1976; Trinity, Midland Park, 1970 to 1975; and English Neighborhood, Ridgefield, 1976 to 1978.

Richard Munn Suffern died on October 20, 2002. Richard was eighty-nine years old.

**Jerome Bernard De Jong**

Jerome Bernard De Jong was born on March 29, 1920, in Boyden, Iowa. He began his undergraduate studies at Northwestern Junior College in 1939 and completed them 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 further
graduate study and received a Ph.D. from New York University in 1954. He also received an STM from Union Seminary and a doctor of divinity degree from Northwestern College in 1983.

He was licensed by the Classis of East Sioux in 1944 and ordained by the Classis of Passaic the same year. He pastored the following congregations: First, Lodi, New Jersey, from 1944 to 1946; Second, Paterson, New Jersey, from 1946 to 1952; First Englewood, Chicago, Illinois, from 1952 to 1958; Immanuel, Grand Rapids, Michigan, from 1958 to 1971; Faith, South Holland, Illinois, from 1971 to 1979; and Bethany, Grand Rapids, Michigan, from 1979 to 1985. He was a visiting professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School from 1971 to 1979 and served as president of the Particular Synod of Chicago in 1958 and of the Particular Synod of Michigan from 1962 to 1963 and in 1967.

Jerome Bernard De Jong died at South Holland, Illinois, on October 25, 2002. Jerome was eighty-two years old.

Lester Arthur Ter Louw

Lester Arthur Ter Louw was born on April 29, 1925, at Pella, Iowa. He received his undergraduate education at Central College, from which he graduated in 1950. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1967.

He was licensed by the Classis of Pella in 1967 and ordained by the Classis of Chicago the same year. He pastored the following Illinois churches: Gano and Trinity in Chicago from 1967 to 1972, and United (Chicago) and Richton Park from 1974 to 1977. He then served Faith Reformed Church in Pompano Beach, Florida, from 1977 until his retirement in 1983.

Lester Ter Louw died on November 5, 2002, at Cantril, Iowa. He was seventy-seven years old.

John William Mongin

John William Mongin was born on January 1, 1934, in the Bronx, New York. His undergraduate education was received at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1955. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1958. He also studied at New York Seminary, from which he received an STM in 1973.

He was licensed by the Classis of New York in 1958 and ordained by the Classis of Orange the same year. He pastored the following congregations: St. Paul’s, Callicoon Center, New York, from 1958 to 1968; Community, Youngsville, New York, from 1958 to 1968; and Comforter, Kingston, New York, from 1968 to 1995. He was president of the Classis of Orange in 1958 and served as stated clerk of the Classis of Mid-Hudson from 1987 to 2000.

John William Mongin died at Kingston, New York, on November 24, 2002. He was sixty-eight years old.

John Edward Buteyn Sr.

John Edward Buteyn Sr. was born on December 22, 1916, in Alto, Wisconsin. His undergraduate education was received at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1936. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1939.
He was licensed by the Classis of Wisconsin in 1939 and ordained by the Classis of Chicago the same year. He began his ministry as pastor at Bethel, Phoenix, Illinois, from 1939 to 1946, and then at First, Rochester, New York, from 1946 to 1956. He went on to serve the larger church as field secretary for the RCA's Board of World Missions from 1956 to 1961. He then served as the board's executive secretary from 1961 to 1968. When the General Program Council was established in 1968, he served as the secretary for world ministries with particular responsibilities for the Middle East and Africa until his retirement in 1982. Following his retirement, he served interim ministries in several congregations.

John Buteyn Sr. died at Plano, Texas, on November 22, 2002. He was eighty-five years old.

Harry Paul Morehouse

Harry Paul Morehouse was born on May 20, 1924, at Cambridge, New York. He began his undergraduate education at Houghton College in 1941 and completed it at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1948. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1951.

He was licensed by the Classis of Holland in 1951 and ordained by the Classis of Rochester the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Second, Marion, New York, from 1951 to 1957; Catskill, New York, from 1957 to 1962; Second, Rotterdam, New York, from 1962 to 1974; Meadow Hill, Newburgh, New York, from 1974 to 1980; and Community, Whiting, New Jersey, from 1980 to 1987. He served as president of the Particular Synod of Albany in 1960 and as stated clerk of the synod from 1971 to 1974. Paul Morehouse died at Whiting, New Jersey, on December 2, 2002. He was seventy-eight years old.

Doris Alice Wells

Doris Alice Wells was born at Springfield, Massachusetts, on December 2, 1908. She was the daughter of William J. Wells. She received a B.S. from Boston University in 1930 and an M.A. from Teachers College, Columbia University, in 1945. Doris served as a missionary in India from 1930 to 1964.

Doris Wells died on December 9, 2002. She was ninety-four years old.

Alfred Gerrit Pennings

Alfred Gerrit Pennings was born on February 23, 1925, in Orange City, Iowa. He began his undergraduate studies at Northwestern Junior College and completed them at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1948. He studied medicine at Northwestern University and received his M.D. in 1952.

He served as a missionary in Oman, Kuwait, and Bahrain from 1957 to 1980. He spent most of his career as a doctor and chief medical officer at the American Mission Hospital in Bahrain. Following retirement he served with Lifecare Practitioners as medical director of hospice.

Alfred Pennings died in a hospice in Wisconsin on December 28, 2002. He was seventy-seven years old.

Dorr Leonard Van Etten

Dorr Leonard Van Etten was born on October 1, 1913, at Harrison Valley, Pennsylvania. His undergraduate education was received at Pennsylvania State University, from which he
graduated in 1935. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1942.

He was licensed by the Classis of Passaic in 1942 and ordained by the Classis of Orange the same year. He was a student pastor at Spotswood, New Jersey, from 1939 to 1942, and pastored the following RCA congregations: Kershonkson, New York, from 1942 to 1943; Woodbourne, New York, and Grahamsville, New York, from 1943 to 1946; Talmadge Memorial, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, from 1946 to 1950; Preakness, Wayne, New Jersey, from 1950 to 1956; and New Prospect, Pine Bush, from 1968 to 1978. He served Presbyterian congregations from 1956 to 1967 and was dismissed to the Presbyterian Church in 1978.

Dorr Van Etten died on December 29, 2002. He was eighty-nine years old.

Robert James Van Zyl

Robert James Van Zyl was born on February 22, 1923, at Grandville, Michigan. His undergraduate education was received at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1948. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1951.

He was licensed by the Classis of Holland in 1951 and ordained by the Classis of Kalamazoo the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Faith, Kalamazoo, Michigan, from 1951 to 1956; Rehoboth, Lucas, Michigan, from 1956 to 1963; Newhall, Grand Rapids, Michigan, from 1964 to 1974; and Conklin, Michigan, from 1975 to 1991.

Robert Van Zyl died at Coopersville, Michigan, on January 14, 2003. He was seventy-nine years old.

Richard Mark Borst

Richard Mark Borst was born on June 4, 1949, at Grand Rapids, Michigan. His undergraduate education was received at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1970. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1974.

He was licensed and ordained by the Classis of South Grand Rapids in 1974. He began his ministry as associate pastor at Peace Reformed Church, Middleville, Michigan, from 1974 to 1978. He then pastored the following congregations: Mason County, Scottville, Michigan, from 1978 to 1981, and Oakview, Grand Rapids, Michigan, from 1981 to 1990.

Richard Borst died at Jenison, Michigan, on January 17, 2003. He was fifty-four years old.

Frances Belle Bogard

Frances Belle Bogard was born on March 2, 1908, at Pella, Iowa. Her undergraduate education was received at Central College, from which she graduated in 1930. She received an M.A. from Iowa State University in 1943 and an M.A. from the University of Michigan in 1954. She was a member of the Order of the Sacred Treasure.

She began her teaching career as a high school teacher and principal in Iowa from 1930 to 1936. She then served as a missionary for the RCA in Japan from 1936 to 1943. During World War II she served in Baghdad, Iraq, from 1944 to 1947. She then returned to Japan and served from 1948 until her retirement in 1974.

Frances Bogard died on January 19, 2003. She was ninety-five years old.
Report of the Office of Communication and Production Services

In 2002 Communication and Production Services (CAPS) included the RCA Distribution Center, the TRA V ARCA video library, production services, communication, and information technology services. Each area strived to be responsive to the diverse needs of RCA congregations, classes, and regional synods and to be supportive of General Synod Council (GSC) committees and staff.

CAPS identified three main objectives, each of which arose out of the RCA Statement of Mission and Vision’s primary focus of equipping congregations to follow Christ in mission:

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 fosters an understanding of, commitment to, and participation in the mission and vision of the Reformed Church in America.

3. To assist GSC committees and staff in reaching their objectives by providing high-quality editorial, design, production, and distribution services.

Beginning in 2002, and continuing today, CAPS has been undergoing a significant redesign process. This process has involved a GSC-appointed committee that, at the time of the writing of this report, was still at work.

2002 Financial Results

In fiscal year (FY) 2002 over 70 percent ($2,163,125) of Communication and Production Services income came from the sale of products and services. In FY 2002 Communication received approximately $302,500 from assessments for denominational communication projects, including the RCA’s website. Information Technology received just over $405,000 from assessments. Resources (the RCA Distribution Center and TRA V ARCA) received approximately $28,000 in investment income as a program grant for TRA V ARCA to supplement income from membership fees and nonmember usage.

In FY 2002 Communication and Production Services had a net loss from operations of $300,000, due primarily to a net operational loss in Resources of $314,000.

The RCA Distribution Center had sales of literature and shipping expense recovery of $1,195,055 and TRA V ARCA membership fees totaled $160,000. Due to a change in accounting methods for recognizing revenue in FY 2002, TRA V ARCA had deferred revenue of $130,000, which will be recognized in FY 2003.

Production had a net loss from operations of $28,680. Communication had a net income from operations of $28,500 and Information Technology had a net income from operations of $14,500. Video Production, which ceased operations in FY 2001, incurred a loss of $3,700 due to the write-off of uncollected accounts receivable.

It is partially because of these losses that the GSC implemented the redesign process for the CAPS area. An initial step in the redesign process was to forgive the accumulated debts of the CAPS area, including a revolving loan fund initially designed to allow the Distribution Center to hold products on its shelves. With its debts cleared, CAPS began operations in fiscal year 2003 with a cash flow budget, necessitating sufficient income to meet expenses.
The RCA Distribution Center and TRA V ARCA


TRA V ARCA continues to be recognized as one of the best ecumenical video and DVD lending libraries in North America. The operation currently serves 457 members, consisting of 276 RCA congregations, 90 Christian Reformed Church (CRC) congregations, 83 non-RCA/CRC congregations, and 8 institutions. It houses over 2,500 titles and shipped 6,738 orders in 2002. Each TRA V ARCA resource contains a study guide for use in educational settings. TRA V ARCA is supported through annual membership fees.

Both the RCA Distribution Center and TRA V ARCA produce catalogs and updates containing detailed descriptions of each resource. Currently orders are received by email (orders@rca.org), toll-free phone (1-800-968-7221), fax (1-616-698-6606), and mail. A resource specialist is available on the RCA Helpline during business hours to answer questions about any resource or to suggest print, video, and electronic resources to support any Christian program being used in the local congregation.

Communication and Website

The purpose of denominational communication is to foster an understanding of, commitment to, and participation in the mission and vision of the Reformed Church in America. “Following Christ in Mission,” the current denominational slogan, continued to be utilized throughout communication vehicles in 2002.

The Reformed Church in America is a diverse denomination. Spread across North America, with missionaries and mission partners throughout the world, the denomination recognizes theological, social, cultural, national, political, gender, and age differences within its family of churches, organizations, agencies, and institutions. With these insights, the Communication Strategy Group developed ways in 2002 to effectively communicate with and serve specific target audiences, including congregations, members, visitors and inquirers, donors, leaders, ecumenical and mission partners, the general public, religious and secular news media, and others.

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.

The RCA website was given a major overhaul in October 2002, keeping its most popular areas while refocusing other areas to provide even more resources to church leaders and members. New sections on discipleship, evangelism, and leadership are designed to assist in the missions and ministries of congregations, as well as members’ own spiritual journeys.
The average number of visitors to the site has continued to be over twelve hundred per day. Among the most-visited areas of the site are mission, about us, churches, General Synod, and seasonal resources.

Production Services

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 writing, 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 (Word on the Street, Called to Serve, Together, etc.), news releases, educational materials, and study books.

Communication and Production Services has primary writing responsibility for a variety of educational and promotional materials produced by Mission Services. These include profiles in mission, mission brochures, The Reformed Church in Mission, and the components of the Mission of the Month program. Mission of the Month materials include Mission Today, an information and resource sheet, a poster, kids’ activity pages, and offering envelopes.

Communication and Production Services writes and produces several publications for the entire denomination. These include RCA Today, Prayerline, and the RCA Plan Calendar. Additional responsibilities include coordinating, designing, and producing displays and providing writing and editorial services and news coverage for General Synod.

Information Technology

The main responsibilities of information technology (IT) include technical support for staff computers, maintenance of databases, upgrades of current systems, and the deployment of new technologies.

Three specific areas of responsibilities include:

- Establishing Raiser’s Edge as the primary database for the denomination. This is used by the Church Herald for its subscribers, by Operations and Support to maintain church and clergy address information, and by Mission Services to track donations to missionaries, among others.
- Planned, periodic upgrades of computer systems throughout the organization, ensuring that staff have adequate systems to meet the demands of their jobs.
- Support for the Internet needs of the staff, including the email server, Web servers, and Internet connections to the various offices (as well as for staff who travel).

IT is funded through a portion of the assessment income. It receives guidance from the Information Technology Strategy Group, a cross-section of staff members, which also sets technology policies for the denomination.

IT was a part of the CAPS group through March 2003, when the aforementioned reorganization placed it back under the operations and support area.

The advisory committee recommended:

R-42
WHEREAS the Reformed Church in America recognizes the significant contribution Kim Baker has made to the life of the
church through communication, print production services, and
the RCA Distribution Center and TRA VARCA; and

WHEREAS Kim Baker creatively and faithfully communicated
the ministry and mission of the RCA, thereby increasing the
church’s understanding of and passion for Christ’s reign;

THEREFORE be it resolved that the Reformed Church in
America expresses its appreciation to Kim Baker for his years of
service to the Reformed Church in America and prays that the
gifts God has given him will continue to be used for God’s glory.
(ADOPTED)

Reason:
To commend Kim Baker for his years of faithful service.

Report of the Editorial Council of the *Church Herald*

In the year 2002, the *Church Herald* continued its mission to serve members of the
Reformed Church, offering a broad range of articles from news reports to daily devotion-
als in order to keep members informed and to assist them on their spiritual journeys.
Through Platform and Flak and Flattery, the magazine provided a forum for RCA mem-
bers to express their thoughts on all manner of topics, and by employing a variety of
authors from all of the denomination’s regions, the magazine reflects some of the denom-
ination’s diversity.

The magazine

In 2002, the *Church Herald* offered in-depth features on Islam, Christian education, and
RCA members in military service. The magazine also reported on the ongoing impact of
September 11 and provided insight into the life of the denomination through reports on
General Synod as well as other meetings and gatherings. The year concluded, as it has for
several years, with daily readings for the season of Advent, authored in 2002 by members
of Emmanuel Reformed Church in Woodstock, Ontario. In conjunction with the RCA’s
website administrator, daily readings through Epiphany were available online, a practice
begun in 2000 that will continue in 2003.

The magazine reflects a more diverse authorship than at any other time in its history.
Writers include more laypeople and more women than ever before, most of them submit-
ting their writing unsolicited, and the goal is to continue to expand the pool of contributors
to the *Church Herald*. More churches are sending in news items, and letters continue to
come in from across the denomination, many of them from first-time writers. Clearly the
*Church Herald* speaks to its audience.

In 2002 the *Church Herald* was presented with awards by both the Associated Church Press
and the Evangelical Press Association for work done in 2001, including awards for best per-
sonal experience article; humor; letters to the editor; and two columnists, Phyllis Palsma and
Louis Lotz. The number and range of the awards are an indication of the number of ways
the magazine seeks to reach and serve all the members of the Reformed Church.
The staff

The Church Herald has been blessed with another year of consistency in terms of staffing. Shannon Bolkema White, who for two years worked half-time for the magazine and half-time for the RCA’s Office of Communication and Production Services, moved fully under the Church Herald in October. Brenda Addie, bookkeeper; Kathy Dykhuis, administrative assistant; and Sue Stevens, subscription manager, handle many of the business functions of the office. Terry DeYoung, in his ninth year as managing editor, took a three-month sabbatical in 2002, during which time he studied the issue of public journalism and considered how this discernment-like process might influence the ministry of the magazine. Proofreader Linda Vanderhyde has completed over ten years of service, and typist Nancy Graham has been on staff for twenty years. Editor Christina Van Eyl has served in that capacity for more than five years. The staff’s experience helps them to work efficiently, while the need to create a new product each month helps to keep the staff fresh in their focus.

Endowment fund

In the year 2000 the Church Herald began the process for establishing an endowment which would allow the Church Herald
- to fund workshops on writing, photography, and art
- to fund the art for major projects (e.g. seasonal devotions)
- to commission pieces from established writers and artists
- to develop and support an internship program.

This fund, being raised with the support and assistance of the RCA Foundation, will allow the Herald to implement new programs and incorporate new energy into existing projects.

Finances

Although the Church Herald underspent its 2002 budget, because investments did not yield returns, the Church Herald ended the year in the red for the first time in eight years.

When the Church Herald was introduced into the assessment budget in 1993, it accounted for nearly 25 percent of the General Synod assessment. In the face of increasing costs in other areas of the denomination, the Church Herald has consistently reduced its assessment income, and now assessment dollars allocated for distribution of the magazine to every member represent about 18 percent of the assessment budget. The Church Herald controls costs and uses its resources prudently.

Communications strategy

The Communication Strategy Group, a team of communicators from the denominational staff, continued its work in 2002. The Church Herald, as one of the denomination’s primary communication vehicles, has participated in the meetings and will play a role in the coordinated strategy developed by this group. By being consistent and calculating in the way communication vehicles work together, the denomination’s communication can improve without a dramatic increase in dollars.

At its most recent meeting, General Synod Council voted to recommend to General Synod that the Church Herald and the GSC enter into discussions that will bring the Church Herald into the governance of the General Synod Council. The discussions at the GSC fall and spring meetings, and conversations between the general secretary, the editor of the Church Herald, and the Church Herald Editorial Council indicate a belief that an integrated communication strategy will require that the editor of the Church Herald be accountable to the yet-to-be-appointed director of communications, who will be responsi-
ble to the general secretary. If this plan is adopted it is likely that the work of the editorial council will be assigned to a communications agency, and the budget of the *Church Herald* will be subsumed under the denomination’s communications budget. Under this proposal, the *Church Herald* will cease to exist as an independent agency of the General Synod.

The *Church Herald* Editorial Council recognizes the need for a denomination-wide communications strategy and welcomes the opportunity to assist in shaping such a plan. In meetings with the general secretary, the editorial council offered to help staff the GSC’s communications committee with representatives from the editorial council. The council is eager to welcome the new director of communications to sit on the council, as have prior communications directors. The council proposes developing policies for its editorial staff to ensure such denominational cooperation.

However, the council vehemently disagrees with the actions of the General Synod Council. It is the editorial council’s contention that the proposed unified governance and editorial independence for the *Church Herald* are mutually exclusive, and it is the firm belief of the council that a free and independent *Church Herald* is a necessary component in the health of our denomination.

With that in mind, the editorial council of the *Church Herald* urges all synod and classis delegates to this year’s General Synod to prayerfully review the proposed structural changes in the General Synod Council and to affirm the independence of the *Church Herald* by voting against that portion of the restructure that would incorporate the *Church Herald* into a structure that would limit the *Herald*’s ability to fully report the news of the entire denomination.

The *Church Herald* seeks in every way to be a magazine serving members of the Reformed Church in America.

**Report of the Editorial Board of Perspectives**

No report was received.
REPORTS ON CHRISTIAN UNITY

Report of the Commission on Christian Unity

INTRODUCTION

The Commission on Christian Unity (CCU) met once since the last session of General Synod, on December 10-12, 2002, at the offices of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in Chicago. The commission met once, for an extended time, to make it possible to meet with the Interchurch Relations Committee of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC) on December 11, 2002. We also explored whether the efficiencies produced by having one meeting a year while utilizing email would provide adequate time to complete the work of the commission. Our meeting with the CRC was very gratifying; meeting only once as a commission was less so, since two of our members were unable to attend. Much of the rest of our meeting was focused on the study of the Belhar Confession, as indicated in this report.

The Constitution of the RCA gives responsibility for ecumenical relations to the General Synod (Book of Church Order, 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. 101-102) by action of 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, implementation, and possible recommendations to General Synod.

To help summarize the scope of the ecumenical practice of the RCA, three groupings give visible expression to the RCA’s ecumenism. These are general groupings and 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 local level. It is usually prompted by a mutual desire to accomplish a specific ministry or mission goal. A few examples 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 continues to be involved in several cooperative world mission partnerships and many ecumenical involvements.
Conciliar Ecumenism

The various councils of churches (world, national, regional, state, or 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 (NCCCUSA), the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC), and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC). The RCA has a membership application pending with the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) and in addition, one regional synod and several congregations hold membership in the NAE. Through conciliar fellowship, 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, yet members remain committed to unity and the principle of acting together in all matters except those in which differences of conviction compel 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 takes 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 (FOA) 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 parties can reach a level of consensus that recognizes 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 indebted to the Rev. Douglas Fromm, the RCA associate for ecumenical relations who serves as the staff resource person for CCU. As a part-time associate, he assists the general secretary in the development, coordination, and interpretation of the ecumenical policies and relationship of the denomination and represents the RCA in ecumenical meetings and assemblies. The Rev. 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 network’s purpose 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 composed of one individual from each classis who serves as an ecumenical liaison between CCU and the classis. A member of CCU contacts each classis’ ecumenical liaison following meetings of CCU and mailings from the office of the associate for ecumenical relations. CCU has requested that each classis provide regular agenda time at stated meetings for a report from the liaison concerning updates on ecumenical matters and for receiving the information from the member churches of the classes for referral to CCU. After updating the list CCU will attempt to improve this network by means of email.

RCA ECUMENICAL APPOINTEES

In 1989 CCU established a means of reporting and accountability for all ecumenical appointees who represent the RCA in the ecumenical arena. A reporting form was developed (and is still in use) that affords a uniform 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. Every effort is made to have CCU members be the ecumenical appointees to other denominations’ synods, conferences, and ecumenical relations boards.

ECUMENICAL COUNCILS

World Council of Churches

The RCA is a charter member of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and participates in its programs. RCA General Secretary Wesley Granberg-Michaelson is a member of the Central Committee of the WCC. The Rev. Douglas Fromm is a member of the U.S. Conference Board, representing the RCA.

National Council of Churches

The RCA is a charter member of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. (NCCCUSA). RCA General Secretary Wesley Granberg-Michaelson has been active in the reformation and restructuring of the NCCCUSA. RCA delegates to the General Assembly of the NCCCUSA are: the Rev. Taylor Holbrook, Dr. Lynn Japinga, the Rev. Mark Nieusma, and the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson. The Rev. Douglas Fromm is a member of the Executive Board.

World Alliance of Reformed Churches

Hosted by the Presbyterian Church of Ghana and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches will hold their 24th General Council in Accra, Ghana, from July 30 to August 13, 2004. The theme will be “That All May Have Life in Fullness.” At the start of this new century, Reformed denominations from all over the world will gather in celebration of life and faith in Jesus Christ. During that time we will also reflect upon the threats and challenges to life and seek God’s will for our response. Members of the RCA family are invited to attend the gathering as Accredited Visitors. For more information about WARC and the General Council you may go to the website www.warc.ch or contact the Rev. Anna Jackson, who is a pastor in the RCA and member of the CCU and is also an executive committee member of WARC and program chair for the 2004 Assembly.
ROMAN CATHOLIC–REFORMED DIALOGUE

Since 1965 in the United States a series of dialogues has been held between official representatives of Reformed Churches and the Roman Catholic Church. Participating Reformed churches have been the Reformed Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (PCUSA), and the United Church of Christ (UCC).

The dialogue was initiated and conducted under the auspices of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops. At first the dialogues centered on ordained ministry issues and published reports: “Reconsideration: Theological Conversation on Scripture, Doctrine, and Ministry” (1967); “The Ministry of the Church” (1970); “Women in the Church” (1972); and “The Unity We Seek” (1977). The most recent round focused on the pastoral concern related to Catholic-Reformed interchurch marriage and families as expressed in “Interchurch Families: Resources for Ecumenical Hope” (2002).

At a meeting in New York on September 24-25, 2003, the ecumenical staff of the Reformed Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the United Church of Christ, and the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops agreed that another round of dialogue would begin in the fall of 2003. The Christian Reformed Church in North America participated in this meeting and agreed to participate in the next dialogue. The meeting was chaired by the Rev. Douglas Fromm, RCA associate for ecumenical relations. An observer from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is to be included in the next round.

The dialogue will focus on the meaning and practice of baptism, the relationship of baptism to Eucharist, and the role of both sacraments in shaping churches and drawing them toward fuller communion. The dialogue will be methodologically designed to address issues that are theological, ecclesiastical, and pastoral.

The first meeting of this next round is scheduled for September 18-20, 2003, in Louisville, Kentucky. Participants from the churches will include a mix of sacramental theologians, historians, legislative or canon lawyers, biblical scholars, ecclesiologists, systematic theologians, liturgists, and pastors.

MORAVIAN–REFORMED DIALOGUE

The intention of the RCA through the General Synod action (MGS 2000, R-15 substitute, p. 105) to enter a Moravian-Reformed dialogue has been made known to the Moravian Church. The other Reformed bodies participating are the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the United Church of Christ.

The second meeting of representatives from the participating churches was held on December 17-18, 2002, at Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. The focus of the dialogue was on mutual oversight of ministry. The Rev. Douglas Fromm, associate for ecumenical relations, was the RCA representative.

THE FORMULA OF AGREEMENT

In an action taken by the Lutheran-Reformed Planning Committee (an ad hoc committee constituted after the 1997 vote for full communion between the Lutheran and Reformed Churches), the Lutheran-Reformed Coordinating Committee was created as a permanent committee. The following action was taken:

In fulfillment of the commitment made in a Formula of Agreement, a twelve-member Lutheran Reformed Coordinating Committee— with three members appointed by each
The following understanding and factors relate to the membership and operation of the Lutheran-Reformed Coordinating Committee:

1. That the reconstituted committee begin operation June 1, 1999.
2. That one of the representatives of each of the church bodies be the primary staff person for ecumenical matters.
3. That matters which require internal legislative decision-making by the representative churches be made within the regular patterns of decision-making of the participating churches.
4. That the committee address ongoing relationship issues for the participating churches and serve to facilitate inter-church activities.
5. That the committee seek to ensure that commitments made in a Formula of Agreement be carried out.
6. That the committee engage work groups or other appropriate means for the fulfillment of specific tasks, with the reports of such work groups to be submitted to the planning committee for review and possible approval or, as necessary, for referral to the church-body heads and the legislative processes of the respective church bodies.
7. That the committee be the agent for planning national events for the participating church bodies with the agreement of the church bodies.
8. That attention be given to lay participation in the committee.
9. That each of the members of the Lutheran-Reformed Coordinating Committee serve at the will of the individual’s parent church body and that some pattern of rotation be formulated to provide both continuity of membership and change.

The RCA representatives serving on the Lutheran-Reformed Coordinating Committee are: the Rev. Louis Lotz and the Rev. Douglas Fromm, associate for ecumenical relations. Due to the resignation of elder Carol Wagner, a third member is to be appointed.

The Lutheran-Reformed Coordinating Committee met for its organizational meeting on September 28, 1999, at the Lutheran Center in Chicago, Illinois. The Rev. Lowell G. Almen, secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, was elected to serve as chair for the 1999-2001 biennium.

The following outline of committee responsibilities was adopted:

1. To ensure that commitments made in a Formula of Agreement be carried out.
2. To refer matters that require internal legislative decision-making to the appropriate decision-making bodies of the participating churches.
3. To refer matters related to programs to the appropriate units of the participating churches, encouraging them to fulfill these specific tasks, and asking for regular progress reports.
4. To address ongoing relationship issues for the participating churches and to facilitate inter-church activities.
5. To propose national events for the participating churches.
6. To report annually to the participating churches on the status of inter-church activities.

Since its organizational meeting, the committee has met two times each year. The Rev. Douglas W. Fromm, RCA associate for ecumenical relations, currently serves as the chair of the 2002-2004 biennium.
THE ORDERLY EXCHANGE OF MINISTERS

With regard to the orderly exchange of ministers among the Formula churches, a working group was established in 1998 and given the mandate to develop principles that would guide the churches. The RCA was represented by the Rev. Howard Moths and the Rev. Allan Janssen and RCA staff Vernon Hoff and Douglas Fromm. RCA staff from the Office for Ministry Services and the pension and insurance offices met with the working group as consultants. Each of the Formula churches was represented by comparable staff and representatives from church order commissions.

The result of the several meetings of 1998 and 1999 was the creation of a manual entitled “The Orderly Exchange of Ministers of Word and Sacrament: Principles, Policies, and Procedures.” The manual contains a summary of the various practices of each church with regard to ministers’ 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 an extensive format, the manual contains a question and answer section comprised of the most frequently asked questions with regard to clergy exchange among the Formula churches. The manual was mailed to every clerk of the RCA regional synods and classes in 1999. The manual is currently in revision to accommodate changes in the Book of Church Order (BCO) of the RCA adopted by the General Synod of 2001 (MGS 2001, R-88, p. 357). It will be reissued to the Formula churches and their appropriate offices and ecclesial assemblies.

MUTUAL APPOINTMENTS TO ASSEMBLIES, COUNCILS, AND COMMISSIONS

The RCA has received an invitation from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to name a permanent member to its Church Council, comparable to the RCA General Synod Council. CCU has appointed the Rev. Richard Brihn to serve.

The RCA has received an invitation 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 RCA has received an invitation from the United Church of Christ to name a permanent member to its Executive Council, comparable to the RCA General Synod Council. CCU has appointed the Rev. David Baak to serve.

In accordance with the BCO of the RCA, the Commission on Christian Unity must have one member who is “from another denomination.” For the past decade this appointment has been held by a representative from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Currently serving is the Rev. Susan Gamlin of the ELCA.

In accordance with the BCO of the RCA, the Commission on Theology shall have two ecumenical observers named by the commission; one is to be from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and one from other reformed bodies. Currently serving are the Rev. Scott Ickert of the ELCA and the Rev. Leanne Van Dyk of the PCUSA.

In accordance with the BCO of the RCA, the Commission on Christian Action shall have two ecumenical observers named by the commission. These two vacancies remain to be filled at this time.
In accordance with the *BCO* of the RCA, the General Synod Council shall have a non-voting member from the ELCA. Currently serving is the Rev. Paul Schreck.

**CURRENT AREAS OF JOINT MINISTRY**

At its most recent meeting, February 25-26, 2003, at the Interchurch Center, in the city of New York, the committee listed areas of cooperation and personnel responsible. They are noted as follows:

- **Orderly Exchange:** Craig Settlage (ELCA), Gene Kraus (UCC), Allan Janssen (RCA), Marcia Meyers (PCUSA)
- **Theology:** Jonathan Stranjord (ELCA), Ron Stief (UCC), Allan Janssen (RCA), Joe Small (PCUSA)
- **Public Policy:** John Stumme (ELCA), Ron Stief (UCC), John Paarlberg (RCA), Peter Sulyok (PCUSA)
- **Outreach:** Richard Magnus (ELCA), David Shoen (UCC), Richard Welscott (RCA), (PCUSA) person to be named
- **Evangelism:** Robert Wallace (ELCA), David Schoen (UCC), Bruce Laverman (RCA), Douglas Wilson (PCUSA)
- **Global Mission:** Bonnie Jensen (ELCA), Dale Bishop/David Vargas (UCC), Bruce Menning (RCA), Marian McClure (PCUSA)
- **Racial/Ethnic:** Fred Rajan (ELCA), Jaunita Helphrey (UCC), Ella Campbell (RCA), Helen Locklear (PCUSA)
- **Communications:** Eric Shafer (ELCA), Robert Chase (UCC), (RCA) person to be named Ann Gillis (PCUSA)
- **Ministerial Formation:** Jonathan Stranjord (ELCA), Steve Johnson (UCC), Gregg Mast (RCA), Dottie Hedgepath (PCUSA)
- **Catechumenate:** Barbara Berry Bailey (ELCA), Sidney Fowler (UCC), John Paarlberg (RCA), Martha Moore-Keish (PCUSA)
- **Worship:** Michael Burk (ELCA), Arthur Clyde/Sid Fowler (UCC), John Paarlberg (RCA), Martha Moore-Keish (PCUSA)

**FIFTH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION**

October 2003 will be the fifth anniversary of the inauguration of the Formula of Agreement. Worship resources will be developed and sent to the four churches for their use in local and regional gatherings. It is suggested that Reformation Sunday, October 26, 2003, be designated as the date for anniversary celebrations.

*R-43*

To encourage members and congregations of the RCA on Reformation Sunday, October 26, 2003, to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the Formula of Agreement, which was adopted in 1997 and which declared full communion between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the three Reformed churches:
Reasons:
1. It’s appropriate to celebrate the Formula of Agreement, which declared these churches to be in full communion and allowed for the orderly exchange of ministers.
2. This historic action allowed these heirs of the Reformation to heal the breach between the Lutheran and Reformed traditions that occurred in the sixteenth century.

CONCLUSION

In 1997 the RCA voted to declare “full communion” with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Since the adoption of the Formula of Agreement by Lutheran and Reformed churches, much has happened at all levels of church life. Staff, agencies, commissions, and councils continue to bring the Formula of Agreement into full capacity in each of the four churches.

Pastors have reported that clergy of the Formula churches have established weekly study groups focusing on the lectionary readings for the week. Pulpit exchanges, as well as joint eucharistic celebrations have been held between Lutheran and Reformed congregations. Cooperative local mission projects are in discussion and implementation. Pastors in urban and rural areas are meeting together to discern areas of joint ministry where challenges to human and financial resources are great.

One of our RCA pastors sums up the Formula of Agreement with these words: “The Formula of Agreement has given us permission to work together and prods us to do so. It has been a great and wonderful gift to the churches.”

GENERAL SYNOD REFERRALS TO THE COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN UNITY

Christian Churches Together

The 2002 General Synod voted:

To commend the general secretary for his work with other church leaders in the development of an expanding ecumenical table known as Christian Churches Together in the USA; and further,

...to instruct the Commission on Christian Unity to explore this initiative and report to the 2003 General Synod (MGS 2002, R-33, p. 157).

A decisive steering committee meeting of the Christian Churches Together in the USA (CCT) was held January 27-29, 2003, in Pasadena, California; it continued to move forward this new, ecumenical initiative. Prior exploratory meetings had been held in September 2001 and April 2002.

The meeting on the campus of Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, California, chaired by RCA General Secretary Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, brought over fifty official participants from five “families”: evangelical/Pentecostal, historic Protestant, Eastern Orthodox, racial/ethnic, and Roman Catholic.

The purpose of CCT is to enable churches and para-church organizations to grow closer together in Christ in order to strengthen the Christian witness in the world. All seek to speak to society with a common voice whenever possible. An initial draft-basis statement states the vision:
Christian Churches Together in the U.S.A. gathers together those churches and Christian communities which, acknowledging God’s revelation in Christ, confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior according to the Scripture, and in obedience to God’s will and in the power of the Holy Spirit commit themselves to seek a deepening of their communion with Christ and with one another; to fulfill their mission to proclaim the gospel by common witness and service in the world for the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Lamenting that divisions within Christian witness and service often result in distrust, misunderstandings, fear, and at times even hostility, participants envision a new ecumenical table where unity can be celebrated in the midst of diversity. A common witness is envisioned through:

- Celebrating a common confession of faith in the Triune God.
- Seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit through biblical, spiritual, and theological reflection.
- Engaging in common prayer.
- Speaking to society with a common voice.
- Promoting the common good of society.
- Fostering faithful evangelism.
- Seeking reconciliation by affirming commonalities and understanding differences.
- Building a community of fellowship and mutual support.

Participant categories include: denominations, communions, associations of churches, and national Christian organizations (not to exceed 20 percent of total participation). Another decision reached at the Pasadena meeting is that a “consensus approach” to decision-making will be the model of how such diversity can work together in unity. An organizational plan will be developed this year and submitted to denominations and Christian organizations for approval.

The advisory committee recommended:

R-44
To commend the general secretary and the Commission on Christian Unity for their work with other church leaders in the development of an expanding ecumenical table known as Christian Churches Together in the USA; and further,

to instruct the Commission on Christian Unity to continue this initiative and report to General Synod 2004. (ADOPTED)

Reason:
Christian Churches Together in the USA is an emerging, expanded, ecumenical table that brings additional partners into the ecumenical conversation (Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Evangelical, and Pentecostal) for a new level of relationship that offers a common witness for Christ to the world.

Ecumenical Addresses

Dr. Oliver Patterson and the Rev. Gretel Van Wieren addressed remarks to the synod in response to the 2000 General Synod instruction to the RCA to reflect on and study the Belhar Confession to deepen the church’s commitment to deal with racism and strengthen its commitment to URCSA and other Reformed bodies (MGS 2000, R-13, p. 100).
THE THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE BELHAR CONFESSION FOR THE REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA

Dr. Oliver Patterson

It is indeed a pleasure for me to discuss the theological implications of the Belhar Confession for the Reformed Church in America (RCA) at this 197th session of the General Synod. My first introduction to the Belhar Confession came in 1996 when I was part of a delegation led by Dr. Edwin Mulder and the Rev. Douglas Fromm. It was the first church-to-church meeting between the RCA and the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URSCA). It was during that meeting that we were requested to take the Belhar Confession seriously.

In preparing for this talk, I reread many documents, including my greetings to the General Synod of the URCSA in 1997, where the Rev. Kenneth Bradsell and I were the RCA ecumenical delegates. At that gathering I said:

As you (URCSA) move toward a new and just society, the Reformed Church in America wishes to work collaboratively with you. We are proud to affirm the centrality of the Belhar Confession, and I could not be personally prouder that this confession, which speaks to the unity of humanity, emerges from Africa. I sincerely hope that you will resist, however, the temptation to localize its message to South Africa. Clearly, the Belhar Confession is as relevant today as it was a decade ago, because it directly addresses man’s inhumanity to man: racism, ethnic cleansing, gender prejudice, language-cultural enmity, and social and economic injustice.

I still believe today that the Belhar Confession is most relevant to the work of the RCA. I agree with those who have described it as a gift. In fact, the Commission on Race and Ethnicity of the Reformed Church in America selected it to serve as the theological foundation for its work. A major problem with gifts, however, is that we often do not quite know what to do with them.

In Deuteronomy 1:7 we are given an excellent example of people given the gift of liberation, but wasting that gift due to disobedience. God had given the Israelites the Promised Land, all the land from the shores of the Mediterranean Sea to the Euphrates. It was an eleven-day walk to get to the land, but the people of Israel took forty years. Why? They were disobedient, afraid, and, of course, they angered God.

The Belhar Confession is a wonderful gift to the RCA, but it has been wandering through the denomination for nearly thirteen years. We certainly do not wish to be like the people of Israel and waste this magnificent gift because of fear and disobedience, and we clearly do not wish to anger God.

As the Rev. Gretel Van Wieren has noted, there are three central theological topics that are of great significance in the Belhar Confession for the Reformed Church in America. First, there is the affirmation that for the church of Jesus Christ the unity of humanity is an obligation. We have no choice. We are obligated to love one another, to pursue community, and to be a blessing to one another. Obviously we cannot discriminate against any group: Native American, African American, European American, Hispanic American, or Asian American.

The second major theological concept is reconciliation. The RCA is blessed because it is a peacemaker. You and I and all members who are the body of Christ are to be reconciled.
Whatever enmity, hatred, and bitterness that exist between and among groups are to be reconciled. For example, if hatred exists between and among blacks, Native Americans, and whites, there must be reconciliation.

The third major theological concept is justice. The RCA must oppose any form of injustice. We must stand where Christ stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged. Racial injustice is not to be tolerated.

The challenge of the Belhar Confession is that it is a call to action. One could rightly state that the RCA clearly affirms the theological principles of the unity of humanity, reconciliation, and justice. For example, the RCA has passed the “Decade Freed from Racism.” It has established the Commission on Race and Ethnicity and charged it to transform the RCA into a multicultural church freed from racism. The Belhar Confession, however, informs all churches that follow Christ that words are not enough. It challenges us to actively and visibly pursue and seek the unity of humanity, reconciliation, and justice.

How are we, the RCA, to move from words to action? Our mission statement does identify our task:

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.

The real issue for you and me is how do we equip our congregations to heal the broken racial and ethnic relationships that exist in each of our cities, towns, and hamlets. Before we can do anything as a denomination, we need to understand how complex and difficult this task is. Racism is a deep and ugly illness. It involves a belief system about one group’s superiority and another group’s inferiority. Moreover, it is the fusion of that belief with power that leads to institutional racism: genocide, slavery, segregation, and discrimination. Most racists truly do not believe they are racists. They are merely bit players in a complex of institutions. Again it’s in the mind. Some have described it as a type of blindness.

The problem is made even more complex because racism also infects those who are oppressed. The psychological term for this is internalized racist oppression. If you’re a black person who believes black people are ugly, stupid, and immoral you suffer from internalized racist oppression. Quite simply you’ve internalized all the negative stereotypes about black people into your belief system.

It reminds me of a joke the long-passed comedian Godfrey Cambridge use to tell. He was standing on the platform of the Long Island Railroad in his $1,000 handmade Georgio suit, bathed in $100-an-ounce Boss cologne, and supported by custom-made $500 Dexter alligator shoes waiting for the railroad to take him to his eastern shore 100-acre estate when a white man started screaming at him: “Nigger, nigger, nigger.” Astonished and shocked, Godfrey exclaimed in horror: “Where?”

I find that to be a funny story, but the brilliant researcher Claude Steele (2003) has shown the impact of negative stereotypes (i.e., stereotype threat) upon performance. Here’s a couple of examples from his research. He selected black and white students who were at the same level of math ability. When the black students were told that they were going to be compared to white students on a math test, they scored a full standard deviation below them. He repeated the experiment, but the subjects were whites and Asians. This time the white students scored a full standard deviation below the Asian students.

He and his colleagues have even measured stereotype threat on athletic performance. White athletes consistently played below their ability when competing against black ath-
letes. Some have noted that the great white basketball players in the NBA are virtually all from Europe. Could it be that the stereotype about the inability of white men to jump is held in the U.S.A. but not in Europe?

Once we realize that this is very much a mind problem, we must seek transformation by the renewal of our minds. Matthew 9:17 says, “No one pours new wine into old wineskins.” Vincent Van Gogh puts it this way: “If you hear a voice within you say ‘you cannot paint,’ then by all means paint, and that voice will be silenced.”

Sydney Harris, the author, is helpful when he reminds us that:

Most people are mirrors, reflecting the moods and emotions of the times. Some people are windows, bringing light to bear on the dark corners where troubles fester. The whole purpose of education is to turn mirrors into windows.

Here are some very practical things the RCA can do to actively and visibly pursue and seek the unity of humanity, reconciliation, and justice. These are educational experiences designed to turn us from mirrors into windows, designed to renew our minds, designed to make us into new wineskins, and designed to let the silenced voice within our spirit be heard.

**Anti-Racism Training.** The RCA has engaged the Lutheran Human Relations Association to do anti-racism training for denominational and regional staff. Those who have attended the training events have found them to be truly transformative. People have not only learned about others but have learned a lot about themselves and the roots of their stereotypes. Now we do have a problem. Many have not attended. We need as many folk to attend as humanly possible, and not just the denominational paid employees. If you have not heard of this training, please seek information about it. Keep the pressure on. The plan is to eventually train our own facilitators. We hope to have integrated teams of blacks, whites, Hispanics, Asians, and Native Americans doing these workshops at church and classis levels. But we need people who are committed to a just society to join us. We need you.

**Cross-Cultural Interactions.** I’ve heard the Rev. Wes Granberg-Michaelson say that crossing cultural boundaries is often more difficult than crossing geographical ones. For the past two years, Trinity Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and First Reformed Church in Jamaica, New York, have been involved in a Youth for Understanding project. In 2001 the youth from Trinity visited Jamaica, and the youth from Jamaica visited Trinity in 2002. I was one of the hosts, and I will never forget their visit.

We greeted them in the traditional African manner, drummers, a barbeque, dancers, and prayers. Even on the first day the kids shared cultures, our kids showing them dance steps and many of the youth of both groups drumming together. We together watched the film *Remember the Titans*, starring Denzel Washington. This is a wonderful story about the reactions of all the members of a community, especially the students, to the integration of their high school football team, the Titans.

We also went to the world famous Apollo Theater and learned about the gifted entertainers who had performed there. I will never forget when kids from Trinity and Jamaica performed onstage.

The last visit was to the World Trade Center. It was a crystal clear day, and as darkness began to seep over the city the lights of New York were illuminated, from the torch of the Statue of Liberty, through Broadway, the theater district, and to Harlem; what a magnificent view of the achievements of people, all people! One month later the Twin Towers
were destroyed, a testament that the worst weapon of mass destruction is hatred.

We need more cross-cultural interactions. In Durban, South Africa, I met members of Schenectady Reformed Church, which Robert White pastors. Terrific! I hope you, through your classis, will form such contacts with churches that are culturally and racially different. You might wish to celebrate Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. day with a church not far from you. Or you might wish to share pulpits or choirs. You will find the experiences transformative.

**Racial and Social Justice Action.** It is quite clear that the struggle for racial justice is not completed in this society. My hope is not that we will create a bunch of antiracism-workshop junkies but that people who do attend the workshops will return to their churches and form social justice committees. My key issue is education. You might wish to do a reasonably simple study of the health of the agents of education in a community: 1) families, 2) schools, 3) churches, and 4) community-based organizations. Your committee should begin to ask hard questions: Why is the reading level three years below national norms? Why are the libraries closed on Saturdays? Why don’t the churches have after-school programs? Whatever your concern, you can truly be a blessing to the community and a true disciple of Jesus Christ.

I would be truly remiss if I did not mention the Isaiah 61 project that was funded by Reformed Church World Service, under the direction of Betty Voskuil. It’s a project that works with young people who have been traumatized by the events of September 11, as well as by the effects of growing up black, brown, and poor in America.

In closing, let me say that we are a great denomination. I just returned from southern Africa with Debbie Braaksma; we witnessed firsthand the utter destruction HIV/AIDS is causing there. I saw our missionaries doing wonderful work. I also saw hundreds of orphans, little ones with blank stares and empty bellies. I believe God is telling us, as he told the Israelites, “Get off the mountain. You have been there long enough.”

May you study the Belhar Confession. May you use it to inspire plans of transformation and justice. May you consider it as a standard of unity for our church. The Regional Synod of New York has already recommended passing the Belhar Confession as a standard of unity. May God continue to shower you with his blessings.

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**THE THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE BELHAR CONFESSION**

The Rev. Gretel Van Wieren

Mr. President, moderators and members of commissions, delegates, guests, and staff of this gathering, it is an honor and privilege for me to be addressing you today about the theological import of the Belhar Confession for our church and the church worldwide. It is a deeply moving and beautifully written confession, and I personally feel grateful for coming into contact with it as a member of the Commission on Race and Ethnicity and a member of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches task force on economic globalization and ecological destruction.

I have been asked to speak about the theological implications of Belhar. Before I do this, however, I would like to make a couple of general comments about the reasons we are considering Belhar in the life of our church in the first place. Why are we spending time here to learn more about it, and what makes this confession so special?

We are spending time to learn about Belhar at this gathering because its content is of fun-
damental importance to our faith. Like the three standards of unity (Heidelberg Confession, Belgic Confession, Canons of Dort), Belhar arose during a time of social, political, and ecclesiastical ferment—in its case, apartheid—and was issued as a cry of faith in order to preserve the heart of what it meant to follow and be the body of Christ. Belhar, though, lifts up several biblical-theological principles that the classical confessions do not: namely, the unity of the church, reconciliation of peoples in Christ, and God’s justice and care for the suffering and poor. Belhar is worth looking at because it lifts up fundamental biblical principles that lie at the core of Reformed faith.

Belhar is special for many reasons. The one I would like to highlight here is that it is the only confession issued from Africa and the entire Southern Hemisphere. Our classical confessions all were founded in Western Europe. Belhar comes to us and the global church as a gift from our brothers and sisters on the other side of the world. As one Uniting Church of Southern Africa congregation expressed it, “We carry this confession on behalf of all the Reformed churches. We do not think of it as ours alone.” So Belhar is worth looking at because its content is fundamental to our faith, and it is special because it is the only confession the global church has from Africa and the Southern hemisphere.

Having made these general comments, I will now turn to the three main biblical-theological principles of Belhar. I will discuss them in the order they appear in the confession itself.

Unity

Belhar begins by lifting up the principle of the unity of the church based on our reconciliation and peace in Christ envisioned in Ephesians (2:11-22). It makes two points about our unity as the community of believers in Christ. First, unity in the church is a gift from God brought about by the life and work of Jesus Christ. It is through the cross, Paul says in Ephesians, that hostility has been put to death (2:16). Christ is our peace, Christ is the one who has broken down the dividing wall (2:14). Second, unity is the hope and vision of the church. As the church is the presence of Christ on earth today, the unity we know in Christ must be visibly manifest and active. Unity is alive, states Belhar, in a variety of ways, including when we love another, in community, when we give of ourselves joyfully to bless others, in baptism and communion, when we know and bear one another’s burdens and build-up one another, when we pray together, and when we together fight against all which may threaten or hinder this unity. Unity in Christ is a gift from God that characterizes the life and activity of the church.

Reconciliation

The second biblical-theological theme highlighted in Belhar is the gift of reconciliation in God through Jesus Christ. We, all of creation, in fact, have been reconciled to and made new in Christ, and because of this, we have been entrusted with the gift of reconciliation—to bring and be the message of reconciliation for others. A true mark of the church, using the language of the Belgic Confession, then, is the presence of the ministry of reconciliation. To this end, the church is salt and light, peacemaker, and witness to the new heaven and new earth in which righteousness dwells, cites Belhar from Matthew (5:13-16; 5:9) and Revelation (21-22). Consequently, when the church intentionally or unintentionally turns its head from, or even legitimates, separation, hatred, enmity, prejudice, or fear, the experience and ministry of reconciliation is weakened and obstructed.

I would like to make one additional comment about Belhar’s message regarding reconciliation in Christ. That is, Belhar in itself is an act of reconciliation within the church. Belhar provides an opportunity for us as brothers and sisters in Christ to turn toward one another, in the liturgical action of confession, and say, “Yes, despite, or in the midst of, the separation and enmity that has taken place between people of different races and ethnicities, we
still are, and always will be, reconciled by and in God.” Using another image, Belhar provides an opening for us to turn and walk toward one another based on our shared reconciliation in Christ.

Justice

The final biblical-theological theme that Belhar affirms is God’s justice and special care for the poor and oppressed. Citing Deuteronomy (32:4), the prophets (Isaiah 1:16-17), and the gospels (John 14:27; Luke 7:22, 16:19-31), Belhar presents a fundamental thrust of biblical faith: that God brings justice to the oppressed, gives bread to the hungry, frees the prisoner, and restores sight to the blind; that God supports the downtrodden, protects the stranger, and helps orphans and the widows in their suffering. We are called as God’s people, the church, to follow and stand with God alongside those who suffer. The church, affirms Belhar, must witness against and oppose any form of injustice so that, in the words of Amos (5), justice may roll down like waters and righteousness like an everflowing stream.

This principle, God’s and the church’s justice and care for the poor and suffering, is one of the most spiritually significant and theologically compelling contributions of Belhar for our Reformed faith. It fills a glaring gap in the standing confessions. The classical confessions make no mention of the central biblical principle of God’s justice and special care for the poor and suffering. This omission does not stem from an oversight on the church of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; on the contrary, God’s, the community’s and the churches’ care for the poor was assumed and practiced, and simply was not a major issue of faith at stake. Belhar recovers and lifts up this fundamental trajectory of biblical faith for the Reformed church.

In conclusion, Belhar follows in the Reformed tradition of expressing core beliefs through confession. The theological contributions of Belhar—unity, reconciliation and justice—are solidly biblical and affirm fundamental aspects of Reformed faith. Belhar is special in that it has been issued as a cry of faith from brothers and sisters in Christ—who have suffered immeasurable oppression and pain—on the other side of the world. Because of its solid theological content and special geographical and social context, Belhar represents a profound and unprecedented gift to the broader church. I will end and open the way for Oliver’s presentation with these closing words from Belhar:

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 honor and the glory forever and ever.

Thank you, and may the Holy Spirit center us on God, each other, and those who suffer on the earth as we continue our work.

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Guiding the Study of the Belhar Confession

The 2002 General Synod voted:

That General Synod instruct the Commission on Christian Unity to continue guiding the study of the Belhar Confession by the RCA, and to report its progress to General Synod 2003 (MGS 2002, R-35, p. 175).

That General Synod encourage other parts of the church to use the Belhar Confession as they do their work, especially as it relates to dealing with racism and strengthening
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ecumenical commitment, and to explore the implications of its endorsement by the RCA for life and ministry in the RCA (MGS 2002, R-36, p. 175).

Background

The 2000 General Synod voted:

To instruct the Commission on Christian Unity to commend the Belhar Confession to the 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 of Southern Africa and other Reformed bodies (MGS 2000, R-13 amended, p. 100).

The 2001 General Synod voted:

To instruct the Commission on Christian Unity to report its progress on the study guide on the Belhar Confession to General Synod 2002 (MGS 2001, R-26, p. 93).

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 Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa (URCSA). In light of the Belhar Confession’s emphasis on Christian unity, CCU 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, p. 248).

Historically, CCU has been a participant in the long-term relationship the RCA has enjoyed with the members of URCSA. The 1995 General Synod voted:

To request the Commission on Christian Unity to consult with the appropriate offices of the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa (URCSA), with the input of the African-American Council, to develop a plan for correspondence and continuing relationships between the respective assemblies and congregations of the RCA and the URCSA (MGS 1995, R-1, p. 405).

The 1996 General Synod stated:

In light of R-1 and in concurrence with similar actions and recommendations adopted in Mission Services, a delegation of RCA representatives traveled to South Africa from February 26, 1996, to March 6, 1996, to meet with URCSA representatives (MGS 1996, p. 180).

...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:

...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 (MGS 1996, p. 182).

In the spring of 1997 Dr. Oliver Patterson and the Rev. Kenneth Bradsell represented the RCA at the General Synod meeting of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa. The RCA representatives, with other ecumenical partners of the URCSA in attendance at that meeting, helped draft a document titled “URCSA Partnership Guidelines for Parish, Presbytery, and Synod.” The guidelines provide policies and procedures for mission and program partnerships with the various assemblies and congregations of the URCSA. They
were adopted by the URCSA General Synod and forwarded to the URCSA’s ecumenical partners. The RCA has utilized the guidelines since 1997 in the development of its mission and program relationships with the Uniting Reformed Church.

On March 7, 1998, an URCSA delegation arrived in the United States for meetings with various RCA groups, including the faculty of New Brunswick and Western Theological Seminaries, RCA program staff, unit 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 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 the 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 (MGS 1998, p. 247).

The Rev. Dr. Molefi Seth Pitikoe, ecumenical representative from the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA), addressed the 2002 General Synod. He indicated the structure and content of the confession and summarized the gift that the Belhar Confession is to the church.

The confession was first drafted in 1982 by the Dutch Reformed Mission Church under the leadership of Dr. Allan Boesak and was finally adopted in 1986, after engaging for so many years with the “mother church” that did not want to listen. The church thought it necessary to take a confessional stance on this matter of great urgency.

The draft confession addresses the following three issues:

1. The unity of the church.
2. Reconciliation.
3. The justice of God.

This unity is a gift and an obligation for the church—through the working of God’s Spirit it is a binding force. It must be pursued and sought—the people of God must con-
tinually be built to attain it. Furthermore, this unity must become visible so that the world may believe. Separation, enmity, and hatred between people and groups is sin. Anything which threatens this unity has no place in the church and must be resisted. This unity of the people of God must be manifested and be active in a variety of ways.

God has entrusted to His church a message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ. The church is called to be salt of the earth and the light of world. The church must be a peacemaker. It must witness by both word and deeds. Any doctrine which sanctions—in the name of the gospel or of the will of God—the forced separation of people, is rejected.

God has revealed Himself as one who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among men. He is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor, and the wronged. He blocks the path of the ungodly. The church must therefore stand by people in any form of suffering; and as God’s possession the church must stand where God stands.

In all three articles of the Belhar Confession the positive statements are followed by a rejection of false doctrine. No explicit mention is made of apartheid, except in an explanatory footnote on the motivation for the drafting of the confession. (MGS 2002, p. 170)

**Its Gift to the Larger Church**

The Reformed churches, not only of South Africa, but of the world, would be significantly poorer without Belhar and what Belhar professes. The implications of Belhar are far wider than its original context. Our wish is that the Reformed family would recognize this and not see it as only South African.

The traditional Reformed confessions that date from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, despite their value and significance for the faith of the church, are inadequate to express the fullness of the Reformed faith. The main themes of the Belhar—the unity of the church and the reconciliation between people’s and God’s justice vis-à-vis the poor and the destitute—are not addressed in these confessions. Very little is said about the unity of the church. Reconciliation and justice for the poor are completely absent. Belhar is not only meant for South Africa.

So we have a wonderful document—a confession of outstanding quality. (MGS 2002, p. 171)

**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 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, have one calling, are of one soul and one mind; have one God and Father, are filled with one Spirit, are baptized 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 sin;

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 irreconcilation 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.

* * * * *
The CCU is implementing the direction of General Synod by using a process for the study of the Belhar Confession that will address the history (as was presented in 2002), theological principles, and practical implications of the Belhar Confession for the RCA. Thus, the confession is being introduced and commended to the church through the General Synod between 2002 and 2004 with a study document for General Synod endorsement and congregational use anticipated in 2005. The other parts of the church are encouraged to use the Belhar Confession as they do their work, especially as it relates to dealing with racism and strengthening ecumenical commitment, and to explore the implications of its endorsement by the RCA for life and ministry in the RCA, as decided by General Synod 2002 (*MGS 2002*, R-36, p. 175).

The history of the Belhar Confession and its role in the life of the URCSA and the RCA was presented to General Synod 2002 through the ecumenical breakfast (voices of the RCA) and the ecumenical presentation to General Synod (visitor from South Africa).

The theological principles of the Belhar Confession will be presented to General Synod 2003 by a panel of General Synod professors, for focused discussion by the delegates, as a way of framing the parameters of the study guide. Resource persons will be invited to both the plenary session and General Synod ecumenical breakfast in order to engage the delegates on the theological implications of the Belhar Confession.

The practical implications of the Belhar Confession, both for the URCSA and the RCA, will be explored by delegates for General Synod 2004 through discernment, presentation, experience, and discussion. This will be done with a view toward expanding the RCA’s understanding and appreciation of and dialogue on the Belhar Confession and will do so through making the study guide accessible for congregations by using an action/reflection educational process.

The CCU has also begun to write a six-week study guide on the Belhar Confession to help educate the church as a whole. One of the members of the commission, Susan Damon, took on the assignment to write the committee drafts. After a second review, the CCU will solicit response to the study guide by persons in the other councils by September 2003 in order to conclude its writing by the end of the year. It is the intent of the CCU to present the study guide to the 2004 General Synod with recommendation to present it to the church in 2005.

The advisory committee recommended:

**R-45**
To instruct the Commission on Christian Unity to continue guiding the RCA's study of the Belhar Confession, and to report its progress to General Synod 2004; and further,

**to encourage other parts of the church to use the Belhar Confession as they do their work, especially as it relates to dealing with racism and strengthening ecumenical commitment, and to explore the implications of its endorsement by the RCA for life and ministry. (ADOPTED)**

Reason:
This fulfills the mandate given to the Commission on Christian Unity by General Synod 2001 and General Synod 2002.
Greater Unity with the CRC

The 2002 General Synod voted:

To instruct the Commission on Christian Unity to enter into dialogue with the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC), exploring ways of moving toward greater unity between the CRC and the RCA in their ministry and mission, beginning with a discussion of the orderly exchange of ministers, and to report to the 2003 General Synod; and further,

to encourage the agencies of the RCA to continue to expand their cooperative efforts with their CRC counterparts (MGS 2002, R-38, p. 179).

Background

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

To encourage agencies of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America as well as the Commission on Christian Unity to maintain regular correspondence with the 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 (MGS 1995, R-5, p. 189).

In its continuing response to R-5, CCU met with the Inter-Church Relations Committee of the CRC at its February 28-29, 2000 meeting. (The two groups were also scheduled to meet in late September 2001, but that meeting was canceled because of the September 11 attacks.) In June 2002 the RCA General Synod instructed this commission and the Christian Reformed Church General Synod instructed its Inter-Church Relations Committee to explore a closer relationship between the two denominations.

The Commission on Christian Unity met with the Christian Reformed Church Inter-Church Relations Committee on December 11, 2002, at the ELCA offices in Chicago. Its discussion included 1) the respective mandates, 2) the respective ecumenical charters, 3) current (or recent) cooperative efforts between agencies or congregations of the CRC and the RCA, 4) exchange of clergy, and 5) the Belhar Confession and its relationship to both denominations.

Each group reported on the mandate given by the respective synods to engage in dialogue so that the ministry and mission of both the RCA and the CRC can be strengthened by greater cooperation. Shared ministry already in effect includes food cupboards and other neighborhood services, pulpit exchanges, small community union churches, and campus ministries. It became important to clarify where the two have comparable agencies to facilitate a move toward greater cooperation.

As a way of beginning the discussion of orderly exchange of clergy, the group reviewed the framework and experience of the Formula of Agreement between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the United Church of Christ, and the RCA. The Formula of Agreement partners began their discussion by looking at what it was that the four denominations held in common, and then surveyed
the benefits of being able to expand the spread of the gospel when they worked together. Clergy exchange is always a matter of invitation and not through personal initiative. A similar exchange of pastors could be possible between the CRC and RCA because of our experience with the union churches. A greater exchange could be the next logical step.

An additional opportunity offered by the *Formula* is increased interaction among the Formula churches through appointments to some of the others’ boards, commissions, and General Synod governing bodies. There was further discussion on the need of both denominations to involve the Canadian churches in this conversation.

The two commissions also discussed the possibility of joint work on the Belhar Confession; detailing areas of cooperation and articulating new possibilities, especially in missions; identifying current and historic obstacles; reviewing common budget concerns such as pension and benefits; and greater communication for the involvement of both constituencies.

The group concluded that a sub-group should be formed to continue the conversation with one or two of the above items as the focus and to assign top priority to further discussion on pastor exchange (including current cooperation and obstacles experienced). Tentative plans are for the sub-group to include four members from each denomination plus two staff members; resource persons or experts will be added as the discussion warrants. By February 2003 each group will have decided 1) who the members of the sub-group will be, 2) how often and where they will meet (three or four times a year?), 3) denominational steps each group needs to take toward possible pastor exchange, 4) what cooperation is required, 5) communication channels for respective synods, and 6) about preparing reports for the respective synods.

The advisory committee recommended:

**R-46**

To instruct the Commission on Christian Unity to continue in dialogue with the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC), exploring ways of moving toward greater unity between the CRC and the RCA in their ministry and mission and continuing the discussion related to the orderly exchange of ministers, with report to General Synod 2004; and further,

...to encourage the congregations and agencies of the RCA to expand their cooperative efforts with their CRC counterparts. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. The RCA and the CRC share the same confessions, a common tradition and history, and a shared mission to reach the world in the name of Jesus Christ.
2. The mission of the church of Jesus Christ would be better served by a greater unity of the two churches.
3. Providing for the orderly exchange of ministers of Word and sacrament would allow for more flexibility and more effective use of our churches’ ordained leaders.
Decision of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE)

The 2001 General Synod voted:

To instruct the Commission on Christian Unity to report to General Synod 2002 the decision of the National Association of Evangelicals regarding the RCA’s application to become a member church of the association (MGS 2001, R-27, p. 94).

As of the writing of this report the NAE has not indicated that a decision has been reached concerning the membership of the RCA.

Membership in the Reformed Ecumenical Council

The 2001 General Synod voted:

To instruct the Commission on Christian Unity to explore membership in the Reformed Ecumenical Council and to report its recommendation to the 2002 General Synod (MGS 2001, R-30 amended, p. 102).

The 2002 General Synod voted:

That General Synod instruct the Commission on Christian Unity to continue its exploration of membership in the Reformed Ecumenical Council and report its recommendation to the 2004 General Synod (MGS 2002, R-37, p. 178).

The CCU expects to have a report ready in 2004.

CONCLUSION

This concludes the report of the Commission on Christian Unity. The commission will next meet in November 2003 in concurrent sessions with other RCA commissions and the General Synod Council in Zion, Illinois.
REPORTS ON CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Report of the Commission on Christian Worship


Referral from the 2002 General Synod

Recommendation 41 of General Synod 2002 stated:

To instruct the General Synod Council in consultation with representatives from the Commission on Worship, the Commission on Theology, the racial/ethnic councils, new church development pastors, and persons reflecting our generational and church-size diversity, to experience and reflect on the various worship styles in use in RCA churches, and to bring to the 2003 General Synod strategies and recommendations that will equip churches to lead worship in ways that are consistent with Reformed theology and responsive to the local mission (MGS 2002, R-41, p. 208).

Per the recommendation, leadership in this effort was assigned to the General Synod Council. In the person of its moderator, the Commission on Christian Worship participated in a conference call with the past president of the General Synod Council on February 18, 2003, and the commission looks forward to exploring the issue further in service to the church.

Book of Worship Resources

Since the early 1990s, the General Synod, following the lead of the Commission on Christian Worship, has approved a number of new liturgies for church-wide use. Those liturgies are as follows:

Order of Worship: The Lord’s Day
Order for Profession of Faith
Order for Christian Marriage
Order for Christian Burial
Order for Commissioning Christians to the Ministries of the Church
Order for Recognition of Ministries in the Church
Order for the Ordination and Installation of Deacons and Elders
Order for Ordination to the Office of Minister of Word and Sacrament
Order of Service for Reception into the Classis and Installation of a Minister of Word and Sacrament
Order for Commissioning a Minister into a Specialized Ministry
Preparatory Service I: Before the Celebration of the Lord’s Supper
Preparatory Service II: Before the Celebration of the Lord’s Supper
The Lord’s Supper in Home and Hospital
Celebration for the Home
Service of Farewell and Godspeed for Pastor and Congregation
Worship at the Closing of a Church

The Commission on Christian Worship is monitoring the final stages of producing the new liturgies in a bound book for the church. The commission has decided to retain the name Worship the Lord: The Liturgy of the Reformed Church in America for the new volume. Its format will be similar to the pastoral edition of the Presbyterian (PCUSA) Book of Common Worship. Upon completion of a treasury of prayers, the manuscript will be complete, and a publication date is anticipated by the spring of 2004.
Eucharistic Prayers

Responding to encouragement from the church that the Commission on Christian Worship develop additional prayers for Eucharistic celebration, the commission has attempted to solicit the development and writing of new prayers that the commission might review, revise, and present to the church for use. Little response has been received from the solicitation. However, the commission notes that a number of eucharistic prayers have been approved by General Synod for occasional use, i.e., the Lima Liturgy (MGS 1986, p. 168) and the Order for Celebration of Full Communion (MGS 1998, pp. 275-283).

Renewing Worship

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), one of the partners in the 1997 Formula of Agreement, is in the process of a multi-year study of the theology and best practices of worship in that denomination. The process is called Renewing Worship. Responding to an invitation by the Worship Office of the ELCA, the moderator of the Commission on Christian Worship and its staff person attended a January 2003 meeting to monitor the progress of Renewing Worship. Also present at that meeting were the fellow Formula of Agreement partners, in addition to those communions with which the ELCA has official ecumenical relationships (i.e., the Episcopal Church in America and the North American Province of the Moravian Church). Further consultations are anticipated.

Future Work

In response to its mandated responsibilities, the Commission on Christian Worship anticipates serving the RCA in a number of areas of common interest.

The Book of Church Order charges the commission with advising “the church of changes needed in the Liturgy and the Directory for Worship,” and with creating and disseminating “worship resources for church and personal use.” The publication of Worship the Lord is a direct response to these mandates. The commission is also exploring the possibility of partnering with the appropriate agencies of the church to encourage the “Faithful Consistories” movement, for the sake of the renewal of the church in both worship and mission.

The commission is charged with recommending “standards for worship music and [being] responsible for Rejoice in the Lord, its subsequent editions and successor.” The publication of Sing! A New Creation responded to that mandate and, given the pace of change in the musical expressions throughout the church, the commission will continue to explore all appropriate avenues to fulfill its charge.

The commission is given the responsibility of advising “the church with critique of the various versions of the Bible.” In recognition of the prevalence of many different versions of the Bible, the commission has begun exploring how it might best draw upon the wisdom of the church to address this matter.

Finally, it is the task of the commission to “inform the church of current development in liturgics, hymnody, and other worship resources with appropriate critique.” The commission notes the development of the practice of “infant dedication” in the RCA, and because the practice has both liturgical and theological implications, anticipates working with the appropriate commission to address this phenomenon. Further, the commission hopes to be of service to the RCA’s liturgical life through participation with the General Synod Council, through consultation with the ELCA and partners in the Formula of Agreement, and through the development and dissemination of educational resources, in order that God alone might be glorified throughout the church.
A Word of Thanks

Finally, the commission notes with thanks the participation of the Rev. Judith Marvel, who has served ably and joyfully for two full terms.

Report of the General Synod Council’s Congregational Services Committee

REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF WORSHIP

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 the Office of Worship 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 the Congregational Services and Evangelism and Church Development Services, is found under the heading Evangelization and Church Growth; this is the detailed report of the Office of Worship.

Publication of Worship Resources

Since the Commission on Worship has recently completed revisions of several orders of worship in the RCA Liturgy, work has begun on preparing these orders and additional worship resources to make them available in both print publication and CD-ROM format. The current orders of worship are already available on the RCA web pages. Additional worship resources have also been posted on the web pages.

Sing! A New Creation was published in 2001 with the cooperation of the Christian Reformed Church and the Calvin Institute for Worship. Many congregations are finding that this supplemental hymnal affords greater access to some of the wide diversity of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs currently available. The collection includes modern hymns, songs from the world church, praise and worship choruses, and responsive and metrical psalms and canticles. Sing! is among the hymnals used in the chapels at both Western and Princeton Theological Seminaries. A leaders’ edition with musical helps, descants, instrumental parts, background and teaching notes, and additional worship resources has also been published. All the song texts, prayers, litanies, and psalms for responsive reading are also available on disk.

Ecumenical Consultations

The moderator of the Commission on Worship and the Office of Worship participated in a consultation on worship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the United Church of Christ, the Moravian Church, and the Episcopal Church. Representatives from the Commission on Worship and the Office of Worship also participate in meetings of the Consultation on Common Texts. Members of the Reformed Church in America, the Christian Reformed Church in North America, and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) are taking part in a series of colloquies on Reformed worship and Reformed theology sponsored by the Institute for Reformed Theology. These
and similar ecumenical forums and consultations provide opportunities to discuss issues and share resources and concerns. They enrich the work of both the commission and the office.

The Catechumenate: the Congregation’s Ministry of Making Disciples

The method for nurturing new Christians in the early church is summarized in the Book of Acts: “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. Today many congregations are rediscovering and adapting this practice of the early church. 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. 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. 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.

People from several RCA congregations have participated in training events and workshops in catechumenal ministry. Representatives of the RCA and Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the United Church of Christ have agreed to meet periodically to further explore a Reformed understanding of catechumenal ministry, especially as it relates to the theology and practice of the sacraments. Reformed Church members also participate in the annual conference sponsored by the North American Association for the Catechumenate. The RCA Distribution Center and TRAVARCA have a number of print and video resources for catechumenal ministry.
Report of the Commission on Church Order

The Commission on Church Order held its fall meeting on October 30 and 31, 2002, at the Haworth Center at Hope College in Holland, Michigan. The commission participated in the Symposium on Office sponsored by the Center for Reformed Church Studies of New Brunswick Theological Seminary and the General Synod professors of theology, which was held at Western Theological Seminary. The winter meeting was February 10-11, 2003, at the University Inn and Conference Center, Rutgers University, in New Brunswick, New Jersey.

One of the commission’s primary responsibilities is to “provide advisory responses to requests for interpretation of the Book of Church Order” (Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 4, b2). Such requests may be made directly to the commission through the office of the General Synod and will yield a prompt response; each year the commission responds to a number of such questions. In addition, suggestions for change received directly are given careful consideration and often provide the impetus for the commission’s work. Direct communication offers a faster and more efficient process than sending an overture. The commission welcomes direct communication from the church.

Federated Churches

The commission was asked to develop provisions for federated churches because the Book of Church Order (BCO) currently has none. The BCO does include prescriptions for forming union churches between an RCA church and a church from another Reformed communion. A federation makes a similar arrangement possible with a congregation from a non-Reformed body. The RCA includes a number of churches that have entered federated arrangements with other non-Reformed churches, including American Baptist, Moravian, United Methodist, Evangelical Covenant, Lutheran, and Quaker. In a federation two or more churches unite for the purpose of common worship and often share facilities and a pastor. However, separate membership rolls are maintained and certain financial matters may be handled separately. The church continues to participate in the life of the constituent communions that have entered the federation. The lack of guidance for federated churches has caused some confusion and made it more difficult to form such cooperative bodies. The commission drew on the experience of some of these churches in forming this recommendation:

R-47
To adopt the following revision to the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part I, new Article 8, for recommendation to the classes for approval (addition underlined):

Chapter 1, Part I, Article 8:

Article 8. Federated Churches

Sec. 1. A church of the Reformed Church in America may unite with one or more non-Reformed churches to form a federated church. The federated church shall be one religious corporation, with each of the original churches retaining its own religious corporation.
Sec. 2. The classis shall oversee the formation of the federation. The federation shall receive approval of the respective authorities of the other churches involved. The classis shall require that the following provisions be included in the incorporation and the by-laws of the federated church.

a. The continued existence of the Reformed church as a religious corporation.

b. The designation of a body within the federated church to act as trustees of the Reformed religious corporation.

c. The agreement to a common doctrine, liturgy, and government that honors the traditions of the Reformed Church in America.

d. The agreement that when the constitutions of the churches involved differ, the mandatory provisions of one shall apply in all cases when the others are permissive. Wherever there are conflicting mandatory provisions, the governing body of the federated church shall petition the assemblies (judicatories) of immediate jurisdiction to overture their respective highest courts to resolve the conflict.

e. The freedom of the federated church to call its ministers from any communion comprising the federation that it sees fit.

f. The agreement that each minister shall be subject to the discipline of the communion to which he or she is accountable and that he or she agrees to honor the confessions, liturgy, government, and discipline of the other communions.

g. The designation of which body shall exercise discipline and shall have authority over the administration of the sacraments.

Sec. 3. Complaints against the actions of the ruling body may be taken under constitutional provisions of only one communion, according to the choice of the complainant, and once a complaint is filed with one judicatory, no other communion shall accept jurisdiction in the same matter.

Sec. 4. Appeals from the judicial actions of the board of elders (or its equivalent) shall be made to only one judicatory at the choice of the member(s) filing the appeal; and all subsequent appeals shall be in the courts of the denomination where the original appeal was filed, and decisions so finally made shall be binding on all parties, including the board of elders (or its equivalent), and on members.

Sec. 5. A federated church may be dissolved by a two-thirds vote of the congregation at two separate congregational meetings, held not more than one year and not less than ninety days apart,
subject to the concurrence of the ecclesiastical authority of the communions involved. In case of dissolution of a federated church, property that was brought to the federation shall be distributed to each constituent body. All property, real and personal, acquired after the federation shall be divided according to a formula established upon federation among the constituent bodies of the communions involved in the federation. (ADOPTED)

Process for a Church to Leave the Denomination

The *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 19, has in place a thorough procedure for consideration of an application by a church to withdraw from the denomination. The process puts a great deal of emphasis on attempting to discover the true will of the congregation in such matters. Experience has shown that the true will of the congregation is more apt to be accurately determined without the influence of a minister or ministers who might be encouraging the separation. The commission is proposing an addition to the *Book of Church Order* to provide for the automatic suspension and dissolution of the pastoral relationship between all ministers and the applicant church with the filing of a petition to withdraw. It also makes provision to continue such relationship should the classis, after appropriate hearing, determine that to do so is in the best interest of Christ’s kingdom.

The advisory committee recommended an amendment to the recommendation:

a. In order that the classis may ascertain the will of the congregation, the pastoral relationship between the applicant church and all ministers serving under call or contract is suspended upon the receipt by the classis of such a petition.

b. The classis shall appoint, as soon as is reasonably possible, an interim minister or ministers to serve the church for a period of not less than the time taken by the classis to take final action upon the petition. The interim minister or ministers so appointed shall not have served the applicant church under call or contract.

Reasons:

1. The amendment adds clarity to the intent of the recommendation.
2. The term “interim” may be confused with specialized interim ministers, which was not the intent of the recommendation.

VOTED: To adopt the amendment.

The recommendation then read:

R-48

To adopt the following revision of the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 19, new subsections a and b (the remainder of the section renumbered), for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined, deletions stricken out):

Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 19:

*Sec. 19.* Application for leave to withdraw from the denomination for the purpose of affiliating with another denomination shall be made by written petition of the consistory filed with the stated clerk of classis. Said petition shall state that the applicant church proposes to withdraw from the denomination, and, if such be the
case, take with it all or part of its real and personal property free from any claim of the Reformed Church in America, or any assembly, board, or agency thereof. The classis shall deal with such a petition in the following manner:

a. In order that the classis may ascertain the will of the congregation, the pastoral relationship between the applicant church and all ministers serving under call or contract is suspended upon the receipt by the classis of such a petition.

1. The clerk shall immediately provide written notice thereof to each such minister and to the clerk of the consistory.

2. Any minister subject to such suspension, pending dissolution, may request a hearing by written application to the classis filed with the stated clerk within ten days of the date of the notice.

3. This hearing shall be held within forty-five days of the date of suspension. The president of the classis shall give ten days notice of such hearing to both the minister(s) and the consistory of the applicant church.

4. The hearing, to be conducted in open classis, shall determine whether it is in the best interest of Christ’s Kingdom to continue the relationship between each minister and the applicant church as existed prior to the filing of the petition.

5. A vote to continue the relationship between the minister(s) and the applicant church shall require a two-thirds majority of the members of classis present at the hearing.

6. If an application for hearing is not filed within ten days after the date of the notice of suspension the clerk shall notify the consistory and the minister(s) that the pastoral relationship is dissolved.

b. The classis shall appoint, as soon as reasonably possible, a minister or ministers to serve the church for a period of not less than the time taken by the classis to take final action upon the petition. The minister or ministers so appointed shall not have served the applicant church under call or contract.

c. The petition for withdrawal shall be promptly referred to either the executive committee, the Committee on Judicial Business, or a special committee, as shall be determined by the classis or its executive committee. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

(The remainder of Section 19 renumbered.)
Relationship of Non-Installed Ministers of Word and Sacrament to the Local Church

The 2002 General Synod instructed this commission “to review the relationship of non-installed ministers of Word and sacrament to the local church and to report to the 2003 General Synod” (MGS 2002, R-63, p. 252). The occasion for the instruction was an overture to remove inconsistencies in the BCO concerning those cases where ministers of Word and sacrament are elected to serve as elders in a local congregation.

At issue are two questions. The first asks whether the minister, now serving as an elder on a local consistory, can, as elder, represent that church in a classis, and further represent that classis in higher assemblies. The Book of Church Order clearly states that while a non-installed minister shall become a member of a local congregation, he or she “shall not represent that church in any classis or synod” (Chapter 1, Part II, Article 12, Section 6). Thus, although a minister elected an elder is to be “entitled to all the privileges and responsibilities pertaining to that office,” he or she is restricted in this one matter. The commission is of the judgment that this can be clarified by an editorial change in Section 6 to move the phrase, “but shall not represent that church in any classis or synod,” from the end of the first sentence to the end of the second sentence (the part to be moved is bracketed, then underlined in the new location).

A minister not serving as an installed pastor shall become a member of a local church. [but shall not represent that church in any classis or synod.] A minister remains solely amenable to the classis, but if elected an elder, shall be entitled to all the privileges and responsibilities of that office, but shall not represent that church in any classis or synod.

The second question has to do with the judicatory to which the minister is responsible for purposes of discipline. This has been a vexing question in the history of the Book of Church Order. The section cited above states that the “minister remains solely amenable to the classis.” However, this makes the minister’s membership in the congregation, and as an elder or deacon, problematic. Membership in the congregation means that one is subject to the board of elders; membership is held within the body to which one is responsible. Without this clarifying sentence in the BCO, the minister would be subject to two bodies, the board of elders and the classis. This is made doubly difficult when the minister becomes an elder or a deacon since elders and deacons are subject to the board of elders for their life and conduct as office-bearers (Chapter 2, Part I, Article 3, Section 2). A footnote to this section, however, notes that the classis has sole jurisdiction in the case of a minister serving as either elder or deacon.

While this matter could be easily made consistent by changing the BCO in such a way that ministers of Word and sacrament no longer be considered as members of the local congregation, such amendment has been proposed by this commission and has been rejected, most recently in 1990. And while this commission could propose adding phrases that stated the exceptions, we consider the matter sufficiently clear within the current wording. Ministers of Word and sacrament may serve as elders and deacons, but may not represent the church in any higher assembly and, furthermore, remain subject to the classis for purposes of discipline.

Commissioned Pastors

Upon receipt of a “Report on the Summit to Study the Concept of Lay Pastoral Ministry in the RCA,” the 2002 General Synod voted to “establish a new ministry designation of commissioned pastor in the RCA” (MGS 2002, R-85, p. 293). The synod directed the Office for Ministry Services to “develop and implement the guidelines and standards” for
this ministry designation (MGS 2002, R-86 amended, p. 297). It also voted “to instruct the Commission on Church Order, in consultation with the Office of Ministry Services and key members of the Summit to Study the Concept of Lay Pastoral Ministry in the RCA, to propose any revisions to the Book of Church Order necessary to address the ministry designation of commissioned pastor, for report to the 2003 General Synod” (MGS 2002, R-87, p. 297).

Members of this commission gathered with others at a symposium on office sponsored by the General Synod professors of theology on October 31, 2002, in Holland, Michigan. At that time, representatives from the commission also met with “key members” of the summit. On January 14 and 15, 2003, representatives from the commission were present at a meeting called by the Office for Ministry Services to fulfill its mandate and to consult concerning revisions to the BCO. The proposal this commission brings to the synod reflects the recommendations of that gathering.

This commission deems that church order revisions are necessary for one primary reason. The church order most fundamentally assists the church to shape its life around that which is essential to its life. For a Reformed church, that center emerges from Word and sacrament, where Christ is present. Hence, who preaches and who presides at font and table are to be clearly prescribed by the church order. And in fact, the BCO does precisely that when it states who a consistory is allowed to invite into its pulpit or to celebrate the sacraments.

The following proposal intends to honor the confessional commitment that the Word constitutes the church and hence that the church must be responsible as it welcomes persons to preach and celebrate the sacraments, while being sufficiently flexible to extend this invitation in specific instances to persons who have not been certified, licensed, and ordained to ministry of Word and sacrament.

A motion was made to amend R-49:

Sec. 2 A consistory may recommend an elder a member from the congregation to the classis…

Sec. 5 …training of the candidate. If not already an elder, the candidate shall be ordained to that office before proceeding. When the classis receives an invitation for a ministry…

VOTED: Not to adopt the amendment.

Division of the house: Yes 108; No 126

R-49
To adopt the following revision to the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part II, new Article 14 (renumbering subsequent articles), for recommendation to the classes for approval (addition underlined):

Chapter 1, Part II, Article 14:

Article 14. Commissioned Pastors

Sec. 1 A commissioned pastor is an elder who is trained, commissioned, and supervised by a classis for a specific ministry within that classis that will include the preaching of the Word and the celebration of the sacraments. The commission shall be valid for the period of assigned service.
Sec. 2 A consistory may recommend an elder from the congregation to the classis as a candidate to become a commissioned pastor.

Sec. 3 Upon acceptance of the consistory’s application on behalf of a candidate, the classis shall approve and supervise a training plan for that person. The classis shall satisfy itself that the candidate exhibits ministry competence in 1) maturity of faith, 2) personal integrity, 3) understanding of the Old and New Testaments and biblical interpretation, 4) Reformed theology, 5) church history, 6) knowledge of and adherence to the Constitution of the Reformed Church in America (the Government, the Standards, and the Liturgy), 7) nature and administration of the sacraments, 8) ability to preach, 9) capability to minister within the church, and 10) understanding of and adherence to pastoral ethics and practices.

Sec. 4 The classis shall employ standards established by the General Synod Council in determining a candidate’s ministerial competence.

Sec. 5 Upon satisfaction by the classis of the candidate’s ministerial competence, the classis shall identify the specific form of commissioned service appropriate to the gifts and training of the candidate. When the classis receives an invitation for a ministry it deems appropriate for the candidate, the classis shall 1) authorize the ministry, 2) approve a contract, and 3) commission the candidate to the authorized ministry to the extent of the contract.

Sec. 6 The classis shall assign a mentor for each commissioned pastor for the period of training and ministry.

Sec. 7 The commissioned pastor shall be authorized to preach the Word and celebrate the sacraments. The classis may authorize the commissioned pastor to any or all of the following functions:

a. Serve as presiding officer of the consistory, at the request of a consistory or with its consent, under the supervision of the classis supervisor.

b. Preside at the ordination and installation of elders and deacons.

c. Perform a service of Christian marriage when approved by consistory and subject to state or provincial law.

Sec. 8 The commissioned pastor shall be a temporary member of classis, but shall not serve as an elder delegate, during the period of commissioned service.

Sec. 9 The classis shall evaluate the performance of the commissioned pastor at least annually.

Sec. 10 Upon completion of the authorized ministry by a commissioned pastor, the classis shall provide to that person a written statement of the training received and the ministry that was performed.
Sec. 11 The commissioned pastor shall remain a member of a local
church, but is amenable solely to the discipline of the classis as set
forth in Chapter 2, Part I, Article 3 of the Book of Church Order,
for the period of commissioned service. (ADOPTED)

The Object of a Complaint

In response to an overture from the Classis of Chicago, the 2002 General Synod instructed
the commission to clarify whether a complaint can be filed against an officer or only
Order, Chapter 2, Part II, Article 1, between Sections 1, 2, and 3 and Section 4 was cited.

In examining these sections, the commission determined that a complaint may be filed
only against an assembly, though it may list the actions of an officer. Since officers act on
behalf of an assembly, their actions are subject to complaint. For example, if a clerk is
derelict in duty, a complaint may be filed against the assembly because the assembly is
responsible for the actions of its officers. Actions of officers may be listed as grounds for
complaint, but since the officer’s actions are subordinate to the assembly, a complaint may
only be filed against the assembly. To aid in this understanding, following approval of the
proposed change, a note will be added to the “Explanatory Notes on Chapter 2,” for Part
II, Article 1, Section 3 (new note number 31, renumbering those following). Although the
actions of an officer are subject to complaint, the complaint may be filed only against the
assembly that has direct responsibility for the officer’s actions. (See BCO, Chapter 2, Part
II, Article 1, Section 4.)

To support this conclusion, note that: 1) the remaining section of Article 1 and all of Article
2 (Process for Complaints) assume a complaint is filed only against an assembly; 2) com-
mittees, like officers, are empowered to act in the name of an assembly, and may also be
in error, yet are not listed as objects for complaint; and 3) there is redress against an offi-
cer who is guilty of an offense, rather than an error in carrying out official duties, through
the filing of a charge.

The commission offered the following recommendation:

R-50
To adopt the following revision of the Book of Church Order,
Chapter 2, Part II, Article 1, Sections 1, 2, and 3 for
recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are
underlined, deletions stricken out):

Chapter 2, Part II, Article 1:

Sec. 1. A complaint is a written statement alleging that an action or
a decision of an assembly or its 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.

Sec. 2. Grounds for complaint include any action or decision that
is harmful to the church, whether the alleged error of the assembly
or its officer is procedural or substantive, and specifically would
include, but are not limited to, irregularity in the proceedings;
refusal of reasonable indulgence to any person or entity involved
in or affected by the decision or action; manifestation of bias or
prejudice in the decision or action; and manifest injustice.
Sec. 3. A complaint may be filed only with the judicatory that has immediate superintendence of the assembly or officer.

(ADOPTED)

Time Period Regarding Filing a Complaint or Appeal

In response to an overture from the Classis of Chicago, the 2002 General Synod instructed the Commission on Church Order to “review the language regarding the time period for filing a complaint” (MGS 2002, R-64, p. 253). The phrase “this same period” is used without clearly stating whether the twenty-day period begins with the filing of the written notice of intent or with the filing of the complaint or appeal itself (Book of Church Order, Chapter 2, Part II, Article 2, Section 3 and Chapter 2, Part III, Article 2, Section 3). Since the filing of a notice of intent may not necessarily be followed by the filing of an actual complaint or appeal, it seems unwise to require the clerk of the lower body to prepare and file the record of all the proceedings in the case before the actual filing of a complaint or appeal. In addition, the clerk of the lower body can better determine which documents form the record of the case once the complaint or appeal has been received. A clear statement of the time period envisioned would be helpful for the church.

The commission offers the following recommendation:

R-51
To adopt the following revision of the Book of Church Order, Chapter 2, Part II, Article 2, Section 3 and Chapter 2, Part III, Article 2, Section 3, for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined, deletions stricken out):

Chapter 2, Part II, Article 2:

Sec. 3. Within twenty days after receiving a copy of the complaint this same period the clerk of the lower assembly shall file with the clerk of the higher judicatory the original record of all the proceedings pertaining to the complaint, including the notice of intent and any other documents bearing on the complaint. These constitute the record of the case. The clerk of the higher judicatory shall forward upon receipt to each of the parties a copy of the record of the case and all documents subsequently submitted in the case to the higher judicatory.

Chapter 2, Part III, Article 2:

Sec. 3. Within twenty days after receiving a copy of the appeal this same period the clerk of the lower judicatory shall file with the clerk of the higher judicatory the original record of all the proceedings in the case, including the notice of intent, the evidence, the arguments, and any other documents bearing on the case. These constitute the record of the case. The clerk of the higher judicatory shall forward upon receipt to each of the parties a copy of the record of the case and all documents subsequently submitted in the case to the higher judicatory. The higher judicatory shall not admit or consider as evidence anything not found in this record without consent of the parties. (ADOPTED)
Editorial Changes

Work on federated churches caused the commission to look closely at the section of the *Book of Church Order* pertaining to union churches (Chapter 1, Part I, Article 7). To improve clarity the commission changed Chapter 1, Part I, Article 7, Section 1, to read: A particular churches of this church may unite to form a union church with one or more particular churches of other reformed bodies, with the approval of the classis.

In response to a query, the commission studied the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 8, Section 7 in relationship to Chapter 1, Part II, Article 10, Section 4, regarding inconsistency as to whether a student is to be examined following the granting of a Certificate of Fitness for Ministry or only after receiving an appropriate call. To remove this ambiguity, the commission made an editorial change to Chapter 1, Part II, Article 8, Section 7: When a candidate has been granted a Certificate of Fitness for Ministry, and upon conditions set forth in 1.II.10.4, the classis shall examine the candidate for licensure and ordination.

Other Work

The commission was asked to look at the definition and accountability of specialized interim ministers (SIMs) and their status as possible temporary members of the classis in which they are currently working. It was noted that the SIM is accountable to the classis of service through the classis supervisor and the evaluation process carried out by the supervisor in conversation with the consistory and the SIM. The classis must exercise its authority to hold SIMs accountable, but other bodies, such as regional synods, may want to endorse additional guidelines and procedures. The commission determined that accountability for such ministers was adequately dealt with in the order and is not recommending a change.

The commission has undertaken a significant project in the development of a glossary for the *Book of Church Order* to make it easier to understand and use. A draft of the glossary is being distributed to stated clerks and other interested parties.

The question of office in the Reformed Church in America continues to engage the commission as well as the larger church. The commission awaits a paper from the Commission on Theology to inform further work in this area.

Editorial Report

In accordance with the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 3, Part II, Article 3, Section 2, all proposed amendments to the *BCO* which have been approved shall be referred to the corresponding delegate from the Commission on Church Order in consultation with the general secretary for final wording and report back to the synod.

An editorial change to R-90 was made for clarity’s sake by including the words “further, to provide this same” to Formulary 5 of the *Book of Church Order*.

*Appendix, The Formularies of the Reformed Church in America. 5. Call to a Minister of Word and Sacrament* (paragraph #5, p. 118)

...We also promise to pay the stipulated dues contributions to the Reformed Church Annuity Fund retirement plan and the premiums for group life insurance, long-term disability insurance, and medical insurance for the minister as offered by the Board of Benefits Services, and further, to provide this same med-
ical insurance for his/her immediate family except where the immediate family has medical coverage through a spouse’s employer sponsored group plan equivalent coverage is already in effect, as long as you continue…

An editorial change was made to R-49 adding the words “or provincial,” which amends the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part II, new Article 14, Section 7c. This change allows for the fact that provincial law, not state law, is in effect in Canada.

c. Perform a service of Christian marriage when approved by consistory and subject to state or provincial law.

VOTED: To adopt the editorial changes.

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” (Book of Church Order, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 6b). The first review under this section was conducted in 1984-85 for report to the General Synod in June 1985. The second review was conducted in 1989-90 for report to the General Synod in 1990.

At its April 1990 meeting, the General Synod Executive Committee (GSEC) voted to review at least two commissions each year, beginning in 1992, rather than review all commissions at one time every five years. A 1991-95 schedule for review of commissions was then approved at the January 1991 GSEC meeting.

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 Theology

Review Process: The review of the Commission on Theology (COT) was conducted by James O’Connell Jr. on behalf of the General Synod Council. The review process included a questionnaire completed by members of the commission, a meeting of the reviewer with the commission at its February meeting, and the study of recent Minutes of the General Synod reporting on the work of the commission.
Responsibilities of the Commission: The responsibilities of the COT as defined by the Book of Church Order (BCO) (Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 9b) are as follows: “The commission shall study theological matters arising in the life of the church and referred to it by the General Synod or initiated within the commission itself.”

Commission Membership: The composition of the commission is consistent with the direction as given in the BCO: “…ten members. The membership shall include three persons from among the Reformed Church seminary faculties, two persons from among the facilities of the Reformed Church colleges, three pastors, and two lay persons. There shall be two ecumenical observers named by the COT…one from other reformed bodies and one from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.” The lay and college components are covered by the same people. The current commissioners are: David Waanders, moderator; Michael Andres; Steven Bouma-Prediger; John Coakley; Amy Jo Hawley; Christopher Kaiser; David Landegent; Kathryn Roberts; Martin C. Wang; ecumenical observer Scott Ickert (ELCA); and Kenneth Bradsell (staff support). There is currently a vacancy in the ecumenical representation from one of the reformed bodies. Two members of the commission are about to complete their terms, and one member has resigned for health reasons.

Review Findings: The work of the commission is absolutely essential to the mission, ministry, and identity of the RCA. The commission gives the church definition and direction through its work of theological reflection on matters that arise from the life of the church, referral by the General Synod, or initiation from within the commission. It brings to bear the biblical, theological, and practical expertise of the commissioners, with issues relevant to current social and cultural contexts of the church, for mutual edification and encouragement. The commission is the forum within which the necessary theological reflection and research can be done to help answer or advise the denomination on various theological issues, and it provides an opportunity for those who have gifts of theological consideration and writing skills to use them for the building up of the body of Christ. The COT always has a full agenda and currently is working on: baptismal theology and practices, church office (commissioned pastor), economic injustice and ecological degradation as matters of confession, and a study on evangelism from a Reformed theological perspective (which is to be presented to the 2003 GS). Recently the commission has completed a number of papers: “The Crucified One Is Lord: Confessing the Uniqueness of Christ in a Pluralist Society,” with study guide; “Christian Discernment and the Use of Electronic Entertainment Media”; and “Moral Standards for Holders of Church Offices.” It has also published volume two of “The Church Speaks.” Additionally the COT has held discussions on “A Brief Declaration of Faith,” written about the “Constitutional Inquiry Questions,” and worked with the Office for Ministry Services on “Financial Support for Theological Education.” The commission also is developing an annotated list of resources on caring for the earth.

The efforts of all on this commission are a labor of love, with a sense of connectedness and concern for the way their work will impact the theological discussion of the body of Christ denominationally and beyond. The work requires rigorous attention to the way words are used, along with how they might be heard by those outside of the commission’s meetings. The COT has a great respect for the concerns of the church, sympathy for the pragmatic issues, and appreciation for the differing views of others, and it seeks to find commonality within the theological dialogue of the whole church, while retaining the integrity of the Word of God in tension with the writings of the church down through the ages. The commissioners are eager to be of service to the church in helping frame and carry forward the conversation of theology in all areas of the church. They went on the road with a symposium to help further the dialogue on the issue of “office” in an effort to listen and learn, as well as to teach and instruct. The COT is considering other ways it can bring the conversation to the local churches.
The review process indicates that the responsibilities and membership are consistent with the direction for the commission as put forward in the *BCO*, and the commission has been highly efficient and effective in fulfilling its responsibilities; therefore, no changes are needed in terms of the committee’s responsibilities, composition, or method of carrying out its work. To aid in this discipline of reflection and foundational underpinning the commission would request adequate funding to continue face-to-face meetings in appropriate accommodations.

The commission is effective, efficient, diverse, connected, engaged, God-directed, and appreciative of the blessing the General Synod has given them as appointees to do theology. It is a special gift to the commissioners and to the RCA to have this commission continue, to the praise and glory of God.

R-52
To thank the commissioners for their work, and to affirm the continuation of the Commission on Theology as specified in the *Book of Church Order*, Bylaws of the General Synod, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 9. (ADOPTED)

Review of the Commission on Christian Worship

**Review Process:** Irvin Boersen conducted the review of the Commission on Christian Worship on behalf of the General Synod Council. The review process included a questionnaire completed by members of the commission and a meeting of the reviewer with the commission at its February meeting.

**Responsibilities of the Commission:** The responsibilities of the Commission on Christian Worship are defined in the *Book of Church Order* (*BCO*), Chapter 3, Part 1, Article 5, Section 11: “The commission shall: 1) advise the church of changes needed in the *Liturgy and Directory for Worship*; 2) create and disseminate worship resources for church and personal use; 3) recommend standards for worship music and be responsible for *Rejoice in the Lord*, its subsequent editions and successor; 4) advise the church with critique of the various versions of the Bible; and 5) inform the church of current development in liturgies, hymnody, and other worship resources with appropriate critique.”

**Commission Membership:** As designated by the *BCO*, the commission shall have seven members with an interest and competence in the fields of liturgics, arts, and church music. Current commissioners are: Paul Janssen, moderator; Dawn Boelkins; Samuel Cruz; Sandra Damhof; Norman Kolenbrander; Judith Marvel; and Martin Tel. John Paarlberg and Wesley Granberg-Michaelson are staff assigned to the commission.

**Review Findings:** The commission helps guide and enhance the worship of the church by developing and revising liturgies that are faithful to Scripture and rooted in our Reformed tradition. It also provides music resources for the church and assists the church and its congregations in their worship of God in a manner that is in communion with other RCA congregations. The ongoing work of this commission helps the greater church guide its worship and oversee any revisions that are needed in the liturgy. In this way, we continue to follow Christ in mission in a lost and broken world so loved by God.

Some of the major accomplishments of the commission in the past few years have been: the revision of several orders of worship, publication with the Christian Reformed Church of the supplemental hymnal *Sing! A New Creation*, and production of the video and guide *Liturgy and Life: Understanding Worship in the Reformed Church*.

**Future Work:** With these major accomplishments completed, the commission can focus on developing additional resources for pastors and lay leaders. Among these would possibly be:
1. Working with the Commission on Theology to develop guidelines, etc. concerning baptism.
2. Development of discussion/guidelines papers similar to “Theology and the Place of Music,” with possible topics being celebrating the sacraments, leading prayers, and worship space.
3. Development of a “traveling” seminar to address the topic of worship, styles of worship services, etc. that would assist and educate pastors and lay leaders in planning worship services.
4. Development of a partnership with our seminaries to help teach new pastors the value of RCA liturgy and worship.
5. Development of seasonal resources, etc. to be published on the website for church use.

The commission appreciates the opportunity to supply input during the preparation of the worship services at General Synod and trusts that this practice will continue in the future.

The commission has responded adequately to the assignments referred to it from General Synod. If more resources were available, more could be done in providing worship resources and education for congregations in our denomination.

R-53
To thank the commissioners for their work, and to affirm the continuation of the Commission on Christian Worship as specified in the Book of Church Order, Bylaws of the General Synod, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 11. (ADOPTED)

Report of the Task Force to Study the Relationship between the General Synod and the General Synod Council

The General Synod of 2001 directed the general secretary and the president of the General Synod to appoint a task force to:

a. Study the relationship between the General Synod, the General Synod Council (GSC), and the General Synod commissions to recommend any changes to the Book of Church Order to the General Synod of 2002.
b. That the task force, in consultation with classes and regional synods, be directed in its second year of life, to study the interrelationship between the General Synod Council, regional synods, and classes and recommend changes to empower our common mission in equipping congregations for ministry with a report to the General Synod in 2003. (MGS 2001, R-13, p. 66)

The task force met at the Ramada O’Hare in Rosemont, Illinois, on November 20-21, 2002. The following members of the task force were present: Kermit Campbell, Kathleen Edwards-Chase, Anna Gonzales, Allan Janssen, Toni Macon, Stephen Norden (chair), Loretta Rolle, David Schutt, and Carl Ver Beek. Kenneth Bradsell was present as staff resource person. Members of the task force unable to attend were Ronald Hartgerink, Stephen Mathonnet-Vanderwell, and Phyllis Palsma.
The following documents were distributed to and read by members of the task force:

- “Survey of Structures, Reformed Church in America” (1996)

Following great deliberation, the task force identified three possible tasks:

1. Consult with classes and regional synods.
2. Study the interrelationships between the General Synod Council, regional synods, and classes.
3. Recommend changes.

The judgment of the task force was that it could follow one of two directions:

1. Delay its work in light of the reconfiguration of the GSC that will occur after the 2003 General Synod assembly.
2. Do its work based on theoretical premises.

There is much work that can be done to review the organization of, and interrelationships between, the assemblies of the Reformed Church in America and the assignment of responsibilities to them. However, given the untested configuration that will result from the reorganized General Synod Council, it appears premature to critique the new relationships until there is some experience with them. This assignment properly must come from the General Synod or from the assemblies and the General Synod Council.

Therefore, the task force makes the following recommendation:

R-54
To direct the General Synod Council to review its relationships with other assemblies of the Reformed Church in America and to begin this review no later than January 2006. (ADOPTED)

Overtures

To Reverse the Action Designating Commissioned Pastor


Reasons:

1. The synod violated its own rules of order which according to the Book of Church Order (BCO) require that “All agencies, commissions, and committees shall consult with other bodies affected by their recommendations before reporting to the General Synod” (BCO, Chapter 3, Part II, Article 3, Section 1) when it voted to not refer R-85 to the Office for Ministry Services (MGS 2002, p. 293) and when it allowed this report to come to the floor before the Office for Ministry Services, the
Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency, the Commission on Church Order, and the Commission on Theology had been consulted.

2. None of the Scriptural citations noted in “The Biblical Foundation for This Ministry” (MGS 2002, pp. 293-294) give a clear mandate for this ministry designation. Indeed, it could be argued that the task force’s own citation of 1 Peter 4:10 (NASB)—“As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God”—would require those called to the pastoral ministry to receive the necessary training to receive a Certificate of Fitness for Ministry, thus making them eligible for ordination as ministers of the Word and sacrament. This would, arguably, be good stewardship of the gifts of those called to pastoral ministry.

3. While the use of the term “commissioning” in the task force report is consistent with its use in the Constitution of the RCA, the term “pastor” is specifically assigned (in the liturgies for the ordination and/or installation of ministers of the Word and sacrament and in the BCO, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 1, Section 4 as well as BCO Formulary 5, “Call to a Minister of the Word and Sacrament”) to ministers of the Word and sacrament who are called and installed to function as “pastor(s) and teacher(s)” of congregations. Assigning the term “pastor” to a ministry designation (analogous to an office, not a function) is inconsistent with the constitutional use of the term.

4. The term “pastor” is always used in the Constitution as part of the title “pastor and teacher.” It is both a historic and a doctrinal understanding that teaching is central to the pastoral function, and yet this ministry designation, as currently outlined, contains no substantial teaching training or function.

5. The task force report (MGS 2002, p. 295) allows for the possibility of those serving in the ministry designation to function as elder delegates if they are ordained as elders, and requires them to be ordained as elders before being allowed to administer sacraments. It is ontologically impossible for someone who is ordained (as all elders are) to be a lay (not ordained) pastor. This ministry designation is based on a flawed distinction between “ordained” and “lay” ministry where it should properly differentiate between “vocational” and “avocational” ministry.

6. There is nothing outlined under the functions of this ministry designation that could not be done by a Commissioned Preaching Elder, a designation that already exists in the Constitution. There is no prohibition against vocational elders. The creation of this ministry designation devalues our understanding of the ministries of elders and deacons and God’s call to those who find their ministry in those offices.

7. In a Reformed understanding of office, ordination does not move someone into a vocation or set someone into a higher class of Christianity. Ordination recognizes that God has set a person aside for a specific ministry, which is also what the task force report seeks for this ministry designation. The report of the Committee to Review the Church Order, received by the very same General Synod that received this report, pointed out that “in a Reformed understanding, ordination does not imply status, but function” (MGS 2002, p. 229). Since this ministry designation fulfills functions which the Constitution recognizes as belonging to ordained offices, it is logical that these ministers should be ordained to an appropriate office.

8. There is nothing in the Constitution that requires candidates for ministry of the Word and sacrament to receive a Master of Divinity degree. The Constitution requires such candidates to receive a Certificate of Fitness for Ministry (BCO, Chapter 1, Part II,
Article 9), and specifically provides a means to earn such a certificate without an academic degree. If candidates for this ministry designation are receiving training commensurate with ministers of the Word and sacrament before they are certified by an agent of the General Synod and examined by a classis, then there is no reason they should not be ordained to the appropriate office. If the standard for training for this ministry designation is lower, then this will establish a lowered quality of ministry for certain congregations based on their geographic location or socioeconomic status.

9. The local congregation has a role in discerning God’s call to those who serve in currently recognized ministries of the RCA by electing elders and deacons, by commissioning educators and musicians, and by supporting through the consistory the candidacy of those coming under care of classis to be ministers of the Word and sacrament (including those who later become professors of theology). The task force guidelines for this ministry designation (*MGS 2002*, p. 295) provide no role for the congregation in discerning a candidate’s call. This dual discernment, by both the individual and the congregation, is central to our understanding of ministry.

10. A Reformed understanding of pastoral relationships makes it incumbent upon congregations to “free [vocational ministers] from worldly avocation while [they] are dispensing spiritual blessings” (*BCO*, Formulary 5, Call to a Minister of the Word and Sacrament) and to “provide [them] with such financial and spiritual support that [they] may do their work joyfully and productively” (Liturgy for the Installation of a Minister of the Word and Sacrament). Whether a vocational minister serves in a ministry designation or in an office, the costs of financial support of that minister and her or his family at a level which fulfills the covenant obligations of a congregation and the Church at large should, logically, be fairly constant. Therefore, one of the principal reasons cited in the task force report for creating this ministry designation (*MGS 2002*, p. 292) is moot.

11. The task force report would have people serving in this ministry designation be under the direct supervision of—hence amenable to—the classes in which they serve (*MGS 2002*, p. 296), and yet, as “lay pastors,” they would be amenable to the boards of elders in the congregations where they hold membership.

In response to Overture 1 the advisory committee recommended:

**R-55**

To deny Overture 1. (ADOPTED)

Reason:

The Commission on Church Order has tied the designation of commissioned pastor to the office of elder, thereby maintaining the integrity of our tradition and our polity.


Reasons:

1. The designation and its implementation offer confusion rather than efficiency.

   a. The model, as described, is outside the theological and constitutional framework of the Reformed Church.

   b. The implementation adds new administrative duties to classes’ responsibilities, when there are already concerns of adequately addressing existing requirements with limited resources and personnel.
c. Rather than affirming the “priesthood of believers,” the designation, ironically, emphasizes specialization.

2. The biblical references cited in support of the “priesthood of believers” could be as easily employed to argue against maintaining any position of ordination or commissioning.

3. The designation does a disservice to the understanding of offices in the Reformed Church; not only to that of minister of Word and sacrament, but also to the offices of elder and deacon, and in particular to the “commissioned preaching elder.”

   a. The RCA Constitution already identifies specific ministries of compassion as being among the responsibilities of deacons.
   b. The proclamation of the Word and administration of the sacraments is already identified among the responsibilities of elders.
   c. There are no duties listed for a commissioned pastor that could not be performed by a preaching elder. In fact, the reasons used to justify the need for commissioned pastors are basically a repetition of the rationale previously given for instituting the role of preaching elder.

4. The action, presented as a response to perceived needs in the RCA, will have the ironic effect of delaying discussion on, and resolution of, issues that are crucial to the future of the Reformed Church in America in particular, and the Church of Jesus Christ in general. These include:

   a. A biblically based, theologically consistent understanding of a “call to ministry.”
   b. The necessity of identifying, encouraging, and equipping candidates for the ministry of Word and sacrament.
   c. The recognition and utilization of the gifts of men and women who are ready, willing, and able to be ordained and installed as ministers of Word and sacrament.
   d. The issues and concerns of providing adequate financial support for those called to ministry.
   e. The issue of stewardship within congregations.
   f. The issue of what it truly means for us, as individual members, a denomination and the Church, to function as a “nation of priests,” working in concert, to present the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world around us through our own lives.

In response to Overture 2, the advisory committee recommended:

**R-56**
To deny Overture 2. (ADOPTED)

Reason:

The Commission on Church Order has tied the designation of commissioned pastor to the office of elder, thereby maintaining the integrity of our tradition and our polity.

*Creation of Extraordinary Task Forces and Summit Gatherings*

3. The Classes of Albany and Mid-Hudson respectfully overture the General Synod to reexamine and curtail its recent habit of creating extraordinary task forces and summit gatherings to do the work of the Synod where there are existing commissions and committees already charged with these tasks.
Reasons:

1. While the classis acknowledges that the synod has the authority to create such extraordinary bodies, it seems a wasteful duplication of effort at a time when the church needs to maximize its human resources.

2. There are already talented and capable people serving on the existing commissions and committees with the understanding that they have been called by God’s Church and therefore by God to these ministries, who give freely of their time and talent through that understanding. To parcel out work that rightfully falls in their purview to other extraordinary groups without at least consulting the commissions and committees affected insults them and, in so doing, the synod breaks the covenant between these women and men and the whole church.

3. The limitations on meeting time for commissions and committees are generally determined by their financial resources. If the money spent by the synod on extraordinary groups were given to the commissions and committees, as needed, to expand their meeting schedules, membership, and/or staff support for expanded tasks, they should be able to answer such needs without undue additional burdens upon denominational finances.

4. When a group is assembled for a one-time summit gathering and then assigned responsibilities that have wide-ranging constitutional implications for the church, it lacks appropriate resources in areas such as relationship-building, research background, and time to allow for the discernment of God’s Spirit. Good church order cannot be built in a day (or even two), and, because the amendment process of the RCA is what it is, such actions in haste can often leave the church repenting at leisure. This is not work being done decently and in order (1 Corinthians 14:40).

In response to Overture 3, the advisory committee recommended:

R-57
To instruct the Commission on Church Order to review the bylaws of the General Synod to consider clarifying the boundaries between the work entrusted to task forces and summit gatherings on the one hand, and to existing commissions and committees on the other hand. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. While it is acknowledged that the synod has the authority to create such extraordinary bodies, it seems a wasteful duplication of effort at a time when the church needs to maximize its human resources.

2. There are talented and capable people serving on the existing commissions and committees with the understanding that they have been called by God’s church and therefore by God to these ministries, who give freely of their time and talent through that understanding. To parcel out work that rightfully falls in their purview to other extraordinary groups without at least consulting the commissions and committees affected insults them, and, in so doing, the synod breaks the covenant between these women and men and the whole church.

3. The limitations on meeting time for commissions and committees are generally determined by their financial resources. If the money spent by the synod on extraordinary groups were given to the commissions and committees, as needed, to expand
their meeting schedules, membership, and/or staff support for expanded tasks, they should be able to answer such needs without undue additional burdens upon denominational finances.

4. When a group is assembled for a one-time summit gathering and then assigned responsibilities that have wide-ranging constitutional implications for the church, the group lacks appropriate resources in areas such as relationship-building, research background, and time to allow for the discernment of God’s Spirit. Good church order cannot be built in a day (or even two), and, because the amendment process of the RCA is what it is, such actions in haste can often leave the church repenting at leisure. This is not work being done decently and in order (1 Corinthians 14:40).

Reconciliation Process for a Church Leaving the Denomination

4. The Classis of Passaic Valley overtures General Synod to amend the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Sec. 19, paragraph b, as follows (additions underlined):

b. The classis committee shall meet with the congregation, with the consistory of the church, and with representatives of the denomination with which the church desires to affiliate. The committee shall endeavor to ascertain the basic facts and conditions underlying the petition, enter into a mutually agreed upon process of reconciliation in order to endeavor to reconcile any differences of opinion within the congregation and between the church and the denomination, explore the advantages and disadvantages of a withdrawal and the needs of both the church and the denomination, and endeavor to ascertain how Christ’s Kingdom may best be served in the matter.

Reasons:

1. Recently the Classis of Passaic Valley acted on a petition to withdraw from the denomination. In the course of the procedure it became clear that many of the complaints of the congregation against the classis and denomination could have been reconciled had a process of reconciliation been a mandated step in the procedure. The current wording of Sec. 19, paragraph b, encourages the attempt to reconcile; the new working will mandate a process of reconciliation in the procedure to withdraw from the denomination.

2. Adding a clearly delineated requirement for reconciliation to the petition procedure will require that positive steps be taken to resolve any misunderstandings or differences that underlie the congregation’s petition to withdraw from the denomination.

In response to Overture 4, the advisory committee recommended:

R-58
To deny Overture 4. (ADOPTED)

Reason:

The advisory committee supported changes in the process for a church to leave the denomination (R-48) that address the concerns addressed in this overture.
Ministers Amenable to the Classis

5. The Classis of New Brunswick overtures General Synod to amend the Book of Church Order, Chapter I, Part II, Article 12, Section 6 by eliminating the first line, which states “The installed pastor shall be ipso facto a member of the church served.”

Reasons:

1. The minister is amenable only to the classis in which he or she is enrolled.

2. The minister is not amenable for discipline to the board of the elders of the local congregation.

3. The sentence is contrary to the spirit of our polity.

In response to overture 5, the advisory committee recommended:

R-59
To instruct the Commission on Church Order to examine Chapter 1, Part II, Article 12, Section 6, of the Book of Church Order and to clarify where a minister of Word and sacrament’s membership and accountability are held, while also encouraging non-installed ministers’ active participation in the life of a local church, for report to General Synod 2005. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. The minister is amenable only to the classis of enrollment.

2. The minister is not amenable for discipline to the board of elders of a local church.

3. This “dual” membership provision is contrary to the Reformed understanding of office and creates confusion regarding ministerial membership.

4. Accountability and discipline are the responsibility of the body that holds membership; one cannot be a member of a body without being subject to its discipline.

The moderator of the Commission on Church Order requested that the minutes show that the body attested to having read the report; therefore, it was not required that each recommendation be read aloud in its entirety.
REPORTS ON CHURCH VOCATIONS

Report of New Brunswick Theological Seminary

“In the same way the Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness. We do not even know how we ought to pray. But through our inarticulate groans the Spirit himself is pleading for us, and God who searches our inmost being knows what the Spirit means” (Romans 8:26-27a, NEB).

The world is much taken just now with issues of weakness and strength. Political and military actions appear to be defining the world, making it especially timely for the church to know and speak the truth. The truth is that the real world is God’s world, accessible to humanity only when humanity perceives its limited, finite, not divine, existence. It is only possible to hear God, to learn the mind of the Spirit, through full awareness of the weakness of our imagination and the weakness of the fantasy world our imagination produces. The theological task begins when we get a glimpse of God’s real world beyond the arrogance of our assertions of what is real, honest, true, and brave. The goal of theological education is a church that can perceive what is real in a world of image, mirage, and fantasy. The need for theological education, while always present, is more easily seen and more urgently needed when the culture of the age sets all its energy to work building yet another Tower of Babel.

The work of New Brunswick Seminary is theological education—in, with, by, and for the whole church. That work is clearly visible in the formation of individual students studying at the seminary. It has been hidden in recent years in the life of the church as the church has focused on action, putting to one side the theological task. The church has wallowed in the modern version of idolatry, managing for measurable accomplishments, by doing, doing, doing. We have had United Synod Advance. We have made church growth a denominational priority. We have held mission festivals to celebrate the variety of mission, and we have declared that Mission Is One. We have focused on inner-city mission. We have Crossed Cultural Barriers Reaching and Receiving. And as energy for each of these action programs has diminished, we have restructured our synods, classes, and congregations in an effort to find a way to “do it better.” On the very simplest level, one result of all this doing has been to move the RCA from 187,256 members in 1951 to 177,293 members in 2001.

The focus on doing and restructure is not unique to the modern church. The Center for Reformed Church Studies heard the Albert A. Smith Fellow for this year, Dirk Mouw, outline the same situation in his lecture on the Coetus-Conferentie Debate.

...the formation of an American classis and seminary would be the “downfall and ruination of the church.” This phrase, together with its opposite, “the maintenance and building up of the church,”...are employed by each side to describe respectively the likely outcomes of their opponents and their own proposed courses of action. Throughout the discussion about how best to order ecclesiastical government and education, one can hear strong echoes of and allusions to Article 32 of the Belgic Confession (which they simply called the “Confession of Belief”) as well as Question and Answer 54 of the Heidelberg Catechism. The goals of maintaining, gathering, protecting, and preserving the church found in these documents—documents to which every minister, elder, deacon, church member, and arguably even every parent who had presented a child for baptism had publicly given their assent—these goals are expressed repeatedly in this dialogue...Providing the church with an order best suited to its maintenance and preservation, together with the Pauline injunction to do everything in an orderly fashion seem to have been fundamental motivations of both parties, even though they disagreed on how best that was to be accomplished.
What is different in the modern church is that we no longer have “documents to which every minister, elder, deacon, church member, and arguably even every parent who had presented a child for baptism had publicly given their assent.” And it is not simply the question of assent to the documents. The presence of the confessional statements in the heart and mind of the baptized and the bearers of office created a common universe within which the whole church could live its theological task. The common universe of confessional theology has now disappeared from the RCA and we are trying to conduct the work of the church in a common universe of democratic, capitalistic management by measurable objectives. In such a universe, theology has no place and thus we are no longer attentive to our theological task. Indeed, it is now actively denied by some in the church that a theological task either exists or needs to.

New Brunswick Seminary believes that a theological task exists, that it needs to exist, and that it is the mission of the seminary to engage the whole church in that work. It is out of this fundamental perception of the mission of a seminary that the daily life of New Brunswick Seminary unfolds. The seminary has undertaken some new initiatives since our last report to General Synod that are illustrative. The conversation leading to the acquisition of the Blanton-Peale Institute has moved forward. It is a challenge requiring the seminary to think theologically and carefully about the interface between psychology and Christian faith. Should the project finally succeed, it will also require careful thought about interfaith relations. Blanton-Peale has served an interfaith constituency since its founding. Bringing it into the seminary will require the seminary to be more clearly articulate about interfaith issues than has been necessary in the past.

Theology takes time. And it takes discernment. Among the twenty to forty new students who begin each year at the seminary, there are many stories of how an inchoate sense of needing to be about the theological task drove the decision to seek theological education. A number of students are persons who have already spent years in the work of ministry. It has been out of their ministry work that they have perceived the need for theological education. Three student stories are illustrative.

The Rev. Terry Richardson is thirty-seven years old, and he’s pastor of First Baptist Church of South Orange, New Jersey. He preaches to three hundred parishioners on Sunday mornings, up from seventy-five when he came to South Orange in 1997, and his congregation is building to make room for all the new members. Four members of his flock are enrolled in various seminaries, preparing for ministry. It’s clear to all that Terry is devoted to his flock and to his family, including three young children. Consequently, it’s no wonder that church and community look at Terry and see an able, dedicated pastor—committed to the gospel of Jesus Christ and faithful in its proclamation, confident, articulate, personable, and very busy.

Church and community see an able pastor, biblically knowledgeable, and licensed and ordained by his Baptist denomination. But Terry sees a work in progress. That’s why he’s committed to his studies at NBTS, where he is just beginning his senior year as a part-time M.Div. student, expecting to graduate in 2005. Terry is passionate about the need for seminary education and its value in ministry in the church: “It’s imperative that the church be educated—the church is not just ‘out there’ responding to the world apart from its historic faith and its heritage. Seminary is the grounding place for people who minister in post-modern society. Without grounding, there’s no doctrinal conviction, and there’s too much acceptance of ‘if it feels good...’ We’re so far away from the New Testament church because we’re not committed to learning and using what the church knows through its own history.”

Junior student Beth Scibienski comes to NBTS after ten years as a staff person for Young Life, an international program that reaches out to unchurched middle- and high-school-aged teens with the good news of Jesus Christ. As a staff person, working at first in a local Young
Life program and then as a regional trainer, she found ministry exciting, and she had fun. “I worked with kids who had no idea that God loved them—especially because no adults showed it to them.” More recently, Beth has become youth minister at New Brunswick Presbyterian Church, but she is now seeking ordination, feeling called to become a pastor.

Beth is straightforward about the impact of Young Life in her experience: “If you prick me, I bleed Young Life.” And Beth is the first to admit that the Young Life ministry and its welcoming curriculum are focused on gifts and ministry for one aspect of the church. Integration of ministries such as Young Life, along with the discipling of a congregation, requires a depth and appreciation of biblical insight and pastoral skill that does not come with natural gifts and focused training. “Christians need to be asking—are asking—how to be God-conscious human beings in the presence of people who aren’t believers. [People are asking] ‘How does Christian belief translate—connect—to everyday life?’” Beth came to seminary to help her and the congregations she will pastor struggle with those hard questions theologically, to engage the theological task.

Peter Butler is also beginning his senior year and works in a Reformed church thirty hours a week as a preaching elder. He, too, could have continued in ministry without finishing a seminary education, but the needs of ministry made clear the need for theological education. He was asked why he thought theological education necessary. His immediate response was that the congregations will suffer without an educated ministry, and he made the following comments.

Seminary is made up of students and professors who, under the best circumstance, have received salvation in Jesus. However, there are disagreements within the seminary, just as there are disagreements within the Body of Christ. In seminary, one is forced to understand one’s own view and others’ views, and then be able to argue for one’s own view and against others’ views. That does not secure that the minister will be correct, but it will give some degree of surety that the minister can think. Those who hire a minister without an education may end up with a person who walks into the pulpit and delivers an interpretation of the Scripture based on the indigestion running through knotty bowels, or hangover fantasies, guised in the name of “direct revelation from the Holy Spirit.”

Seminary is necessary to help insure that the minister who walks into the pulpit will be a person of reasoned faith, community, responsibility, and humility. It doesn’t always work, but it’s safer than just picking some Tom, Dick, or Lucifer who “got the call” in a used car lot.

New Brunswick Theological Seminary is committed to providing space and advocacy for the theological task of the whole church. In doing so, it stands firmly within the Reformed tradition that has molded and shaped the RCA. Currently the seminary has a student body of approximately 270 and a faculty and staff of about 35. All 305 are grateful to God each day for the Reformed Church in America and the opportunity provided by this church to be in service to all God’s people, in these days, and in the days to come.

Nominations to the office of General Synod Professor of Theology

Upon recommendation of the president, the Board of Trustees of New Brunswick Theological Seminary acted at its January 25, 2003 meeting to request the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America to elect Renee S. House and Mark A. Kraai to the office of General Synod Professor of Theology.

WHEREAS the Rev. Renee S. House has demonstrated abilities in the teaching and practice of Christian education; and
WHEREAS she has contributed significantly to the mission of New Brunswick Theological Seminary, serving as librarian, professor of Christian education, and dean of the seminary; and

WHEREAS she has been a highly effective teacher of the whole church in leadership of conferences, seminars, and General Synod worship;

THEREFORE the Board of Trustees of New Brunswick Theological Seminary nominates the Rev. Renee S. House to the office of General Synod Professor of Theology.

R-60
To elect the Rev. Renee S. House, associate professor of practical theology, to the office of General Synod Professor of Theology. (ADOPTED)

WHEREAS the Rev. Dr. Mark A. Kraai has demonstrated by precept and example a lifelong concern for effective pastoral ministry; and

WHEREAS he has contributed, through his teaching at New Brunswick Theological Seminary as professor of supervised ministry, to new understandings for ministry for the modern world; and

WHEREAS he has effectively connected the academic study of ministry with its practical implementation;

THEREFORE the Board of Trustees of New Brunswick Theological Seminary nominates the Rev. Dr. Mark A. Kraai, associate professor of practical theology, to the office of General Synod Professor of Theology.

R-61
To elect the Rev. Dr. Mark A. Kraai, director of supervised ministries, to the office of General Synod Professor of Theology. (ADOPTED)

Report of Western Theological Seminary

During this season of anxiety over terrorism, international hostilities, and economic recession—generally a time for caution and restraint—God has been calling Western Theological Seminary (WTS) to be bold in increasing its capacity to prepare leaders for the church of Jesus Christ. The past year has been one of construction for the seminary. Implementing a strategic plan approved by the board of trustees in the spring of 2000, cornerstones have been laid, not only for a larger facility and new programs, but also for additional faculty and staff to serve a growing student enrollment. While it will be some time before the implementation process will be completed, a great deal has been accomplished since the General Synod last met.
**Building for the Future**

The most obvious project at the seminary is the construction of a beautiful new wing that sits between Mulder Chapel and Semelink Hall. While ground was broken in May 2002, and the footings were poured last summer, the major portion of the construction occurred while classes were in full swing during the fall and spring semesters. It was certainly a time of dislocation and disruption for the seminary community. Many faculty were relocated and students were crammed into small classrooms. And the beehive of activity constantly reminded the community that the seminary was a construction site. At the fall 2002 convocation, with the sound of bulldozers and cranes in the background, President Voskuil reminded the community of the challenges which Governor Nehemiah faced as he led the people of Judah in an effort to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem in the centuries before Christ. He suggested that it would be a year for “hard hats and tender hearts” at WTS.

As construction nears its projected completion in August 2003, it must be said that faculty, staff, and students faced the challenges admirably. It is with great gratitude and with excitement that the community awaits full use of this wonderful new facility, which includes additional classrooms, faculty offices, and space for the Center for the Continuing Education of the Church. It will continue to enhance the seminary’s capacity to fulfill its purpose of “preparing Christians called by God to lead the church in mission.”

**Distance Learning Master of Divinity**

While the building addition is the most obvious phase of construction at the seminary, it is not necessarily the most important. The building houses people and programs. Responding to the need of the church to provide more flexible ways of preparing people for ministry, the seminary has established a Distance Learning Master of Divinity program. More than a year ago, Dr. Meri Mac Leod was appointed as the director of this program that (through online assignments and short intensive courses in Holland, and with cooperation of local mentors) will prepare leaders while maintaining congregational ministries throughout North America.

This distance learning program poses a significant challenge for an institution that has offered a residential program since 1866. The faculty and staff are being stretched to offer pastoral training of high quality in a radical new form. The first class of this new program will be gathered late this fall (2003), and the response has been positive. By God’s grace, this challenge and opportunity will be met.

**The Center for the Continuing Education of the Church**

The foundation for another important program was laid last July when Dr. George Hunsberger assumed responsibilities as dean of the Center for the Continuing Education of the Church. Established to be a resource for the leaders of the church during a time of great challenge and change in our culture, the center reflects a new level of commitment to lifelong learning.

Based in Holland in the new wing of the seminary, the center will provide inviting space for cutting-edge events, helpful speakers, interest groups, church leader exchanges, and research in mission and evangelism. While it is located in Holland, the center will be mobile and flexible, able to resource and serve congregations and their leaders from across North America. Closely intersecting with the degree programs at the seminary, the center will draw together a small “faculty” of teachers, mentors, and leaders who will focus upon leadership and mission. One of the unique new approaches of the center is the Journey Groups program, funded for a period of three and one-half years by the Lilly Foundation. Small groups of congregational leaders are being organized around a variety of special
concerns and challenges. The Journey Groups program is just one unique facet of the center, another exciting construction project at WTS.

Financial Support

To support the building addition, increased faculty and staff, as well as the new programs for distance education and continuing education, the WTS board of trustees authorized a capital campaign, The Campaign for Western: Leadership—Challenge and Change. The campaign was launched just a week before the terrorist attacks of September 2001. Considering the economic turmoil that followed those attacks and continues today, remarkable progress has been made toward a campaign goal of $15 million. Under the leadership of the director of Advancement, Kenneth Neevel, and through the dedicated efforts of the advancement team and hundreds of volunteers across the church, the goal is within reach and the strategic plan for which the campaign was launched is being implemented. WTS is deeply grateful to the many persons who have supported the campaign with gifts and prayers. A special note of gratitude is expressed to campaign co-chairs Kris and Barbara DePree and Karen and Larry Mulder, who have been persistent, positive, and encouraging.

In addition to the $814,746 Lilly Grant, the campaign was boosted by a $350,000 matching grant from the Kresge Foundation that contributed funds toward the completion of the building.

New Staff Appointment

In January, Laura DeVries joined the Advancement staff. An experienced fundraiser for Christian causes in Southern California, Laura has moved to West Michigan with her husband, Tom, and their three children. The seminary is very pleased to have Laura join its community of faith and learning.

Retirement

In December 2002 Dr. Sonja Stewart retired as a member of the Western Theological Seminary faculty after thirty-one years of dedicated service. Since 1972 Sonja has anchored the Christian education programs at WTS as a teacher and as director of the Master of Religious Education (MRE) program. She was also deeply involved in the program for continuing education at the seminary during the 1970s and 1980s. Sonja has also been a guiding hand in the development of the widely used Children and Worship program, having led many workshops and written two books for this program, Following Jesus and Young Children and Worship. The seminary is deeply grateful for Dr. Stewart’s commitment to the ministry of the seminary and indebted to her creative efforts in Christian education. While Sonja has been battling cancer during the last two years, she expects to be associated with the Center for the Continuing Education of the Church through the Children and Worship ministry.

R-62
To adopt the following resolution:

WHEREAS Dr. Sonja Stewart has faithfully served the Reformed Church in America through thirty-one years of teaching at Western Theological Seminary, and

WHEREAS she has blazed a trail for women’s leadership in theological education in the Reformed Church in America, serving as the seminary’s first female full professor, and
WHEREAS she contributed significantly to the advancement of Christian education in the Reformed Church and in the wider church through the development of an innovative in-ministry MRE degree at Western, and

WHEREAS she has contributed greatly to the whole church through the development of the Children in Worship program, a program that has opened up the mystery and wonder of worship to thousands of children around the globe, and

WHEREAS her passion for the ministry of all God’s people, her concern for justice, her love of children, and her commitment to the worldwide ecumenical church have deepened and enriched the seminary and the Reformed Church in America,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America gives thanks to God for the teaching ministry of Dr. Sonja Stewart, and prays for many more years of joyful renewal and fruitful ministry in her retirement. (ADOPTED)

Student Enrollment

Overall enrollment has continued to climb, especially in the M.Div. program: 122 of a total enrollment of 172 students are enrolled as M.Div. students. The last three M.Div. classes have exceeded forty-five incoming students, creating considerable pressure on classroom space. The new addition will provide more and larger classrooms.

While it is difficult to know how the Distance Learning M.Div. program will affect residential enrollment, continued growth is expected. By God’s grace, WTS will continue to meet the needs of the church for called, gifted, and trained leaders.

Nomination to the Office of General Synod Professor of Theology

The Rev. Dr. Dennis N. Voskuil joined the Western Theological Seminary faculty in 1994 as president and professor of church history. In light of recent changes in the role of General Synod professors in the life of the RCA, and in light of Dr. Voskuil’s remarkable leadership at the seminary, the Western Theological Seminary board of trustees believes it is both wise and fitting to nominate Dr. Voskuil to the office of General Synod Professor of Theology.

WHEREAS the Rev. Dr. Dennis N. Voskuil has demonstrated wise and effective leadership in the church, in seminary administration, and in the classroom, and

WHEREAS he has contributed significantly to the creation of a caring, collegial, and fertile learning environment at Western Theological Seminary, strengthening in many ways the vitality of the school, and

WHEREAS he has been a highly effective liaison between the seminary and the churches of the Reformed Church in America, deepening the relationship between the church and the seminary community,
THEREFORE, it is fitting and proper that the Board of Trustees of Western Theological Seminary nominates the Rev. Dr. Dennis N. Voskuil, President and Professor of Church History, to the office of General Synod Professor of Theology in the Reformed Church in America.

R-63
To elect the Rev. Dr. Dennis N. Voskuil, President and Professor of Church History, to the office of General Synod Professor of Theology, as provided for in the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 8, Section 3. (ADOPTED)

Dispensations

Western Theological Seminary received and granted one petition for dispensation:

A petition from the Classis of South Grand Rapids for a dispensation from the biblical languages requirement of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry for Harry Koops.

Western received a psycho-educational evaluation report from Steven Johnson, a licensed clinical psychologist, who found a learning disorder involving impaired storage and recall of verbal information. Dr. Johnson concluded that Koops’ ability to master a second language, such as Greek or Hebrew, would be “extremely difficult, if not nearly impossible,” and recommended that the biblical languages requirement for Harry be waived. The Classis of South Grand Rapids concurs with this assessment and petitioned for the dispensation. The board of trustees voted to grant the petition.

Petition to Substitute a Period of Supervised Ministry for Part of the Twenty-Seven-Month Requirement

The Classis of South Grand Rapids petitioned the General Synod through the board of trustees to substitute a period of supervised ministry for the twenty-seven-month requirement of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry for Kent Frens. Reasons for the petition are: 1) although Kent has been a candidate for the M.Div. degree at Western Seminary since the fall of 2000, classis officially enrolled him as a candidate under their care and supervision on January 27, 2003, which means that under the twenty-seven month requirement he would not be eligible for ordination until April 27, 2005; and 2) since Kent has been a candidate for the M.Div. degree at Western since the fall of 2000, there has been ample opportunity to assess his fitness for ministry through his performance in teaching church assignments. As the agent of the General Synod, the Western Seminary Board of Trustees recommends:

R-64
To approve the petition from the Classis of South Grand Rapids to substitute twenty-three months of supervised ministry for Kent Frens for part of the twenty-seven-month requirement of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry under Chapter 1, Part II, Article 8, Section 3 of the *Book of Church Order*. (ADOPTED)

Holland Classis petitioned the General Synod through the board of trustees to substitute a period of supervised ministry for the twenty-seven-month requirement of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry for Burton Bolt. Reasons for the petition are: 1) although Burt has been a candidate for the M.Div. degree at Western Seminary since the fall of 2000, Holland Classis officially enrolled him as a candidate under their care and supervision in January 2002, which means that under the twenty-seven-month requirement he would not be eligible for ordination until March 2004; and 2) waiting until March 2004 would create a sub-
stantial hardship because it would prevent Bolt from candidating or being considered as a potential candidate by churches seeking to fill pastoral positions. Since Bolt has been a candidate for the M.Div. degree at Western since the fall of 2000, there has been ample opportunity to assess his fitness for ministry through his performance in teaching church assignments. As the agent of the General Synod, the Western Seminary Board of Trustees recommends:

R-65
To approve the petition from the Classis of Holland to substitute fourteen months of supervised ministry for Burton Bolt for part of the twenty-seven-month requirement of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry under Chapter 1, Part II, Article 8, Section 3 of the Book of Church Order. (ADOPTED)

Terms of Board of Trustees Members

The Constitution and Bylaws of Western Theological Seminary stipulate that members of the board of trustees “may serve two consecutive full terms (a full term is three years), but shall be off the board for two years before becoming eligible again for re-election to the board.”

Following extensive discussion of membership terms, the board of trustees at its February 2003 meeting voted to recommend the following change to the constitution and bylaws. Article IV, Section 2: “members may serve three consecutive full terms, but shall be off the board for two years before becoming eligible again for re-election to the board.”

Such a change would allow for more continuity for board membership, at least for those who would choose to serve three consecutive three-year terms before going off the board.

R-66
To adopt the following revision to the Constitution and Bylaws of Western Theological Seminary, Article IV, Section 2, effective July 1, 2003 (addition underlined, deletion stricken out):

Article IV. Membership
Sec. 2. The Board shall consist of a minimum of twelve and a maximum of twenty-four members who shall be elected for a term of three years beginning the first day of July following their election by the General Synod and continuing until the end of June when their successors have been elected. Members may serve three consecutive full terms, but shall be off the Board for two years before becoming eligible again for re-election to the Board. (ADOPTED)

Report of the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency

General Synod exercises oversight of ministerial formation, the standards for preparation for ministry, and the coordination of theological education through the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency (MFCA).

The Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency of the Reformed Church in America possesses a deep commitment to developing faithful, educated, and evangelical Reformed
leaders. Its purpose is the preparation of men and women for the ministries of Christ and his church—most specifically those called to the office of minister of Word and sacrament.

It is also the intent of the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency to complement and support the mission of the Reformed Church in America:

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.

Toward that end we seek:

1. To equip present and future leaders by providing accessible, affordable, and effective preparation in a hospitable environment to diverse people.

2. To assess the changing needs of church and society and design innovative policies and programs to meet those needs.

3. To improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the MFCA board, administration, and staff in fulfilling the mission of MFCA and the Reformed Church in America.

Given those purposes, the MFCA board has developed a strategic plan for its meetings and day-to-day operations. These are:

- The oversight of standards for the preparation for ministry.
- The calling and equipping of the church with ministers of Word and sacrament.
- The granting of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry process.

With the appointment of Gregg Mast as director of the Office for Ministry Services, the board has been blessed with a second executive-level staff position and both new challenges and some new resources. With Mast’s arrival, Cornelis Kors has been able to concentrate on candidate care and on his work with Mast and others in the implementation of such initiatives as the Reformed Church Theological Studies Centre, annual workshops for classis care committee members, and enriching the possibilities for use of the Approved Alternate Route. The MFCA is grateful for Gregg Mast’s presence both among us and in a key position in the denominational structure. We are excited by the opportunity to play a strategic role in the RCA in the future in areas so crucial to our denomination’s well-being.

Governance: the Board of Trustees

At the present time the General Synod elects 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 the Office for Ministry Services, the general secretary of the RCA, the presidents of New Brunswick Theological Seminary and Western Theological Seminary, and the minister for candidate care and certification are ex-officio members, without vote.

MFCA originated from a concern for new approaches to ministerial formation to respond to new dynamics within the denomination—needs of racial/ethnic minorities in ministry, the need for coordination of theological education in the denomination, and a need to define the standards for ministerial formation and implement programs to achieve the standards. A task force was formed to explore the shape such a new approach should take. That effort came to fruition with General Synod’s approval of the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency in June 1998.
After five years of serving the Reformed Church in America, it has become clear to the board that there is a need to increase the size of the board. To represent the various ethnic and racial groups of our denomination, and to utilize the varying gifts of individuals, the board requests that there be twelve members elected to the MFCA Board of Trustees and that the Commission on Nominations provide guidance in the appropriate definition of membership. Thus the following change to the bylaws is recommended:

R-67
To adopt the following revision to the Bylaws of the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency, effective July 1, 2003.

ARTICLE III
MEMBERSHIP OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Sec. 1 The Board of Trustees shall consist of twelve voting members, all of whom shall be confessing members in good standing of the Reformed Church in America. The trustees shall reflect the diversity of the Reformed Church in America and demonstrate an understanding and knowledge of theological education and ministry formation. (ADOPTED)

Board Members

Two MFCA board members are completing terms of service. These individuals have been with the board since its inception. Christina The, a member at New Life Community Church in Artesia, California, came to the board as a Theological Education Agency board member. She has served as secretary for the last two years. Carol Wagner from Palos Heights, Illinois, had served on the Western Theological Seminary (WTS) Board of Trustees for many years. As moderator she gave remarkable leadership at WTS; she served with the same distinction on the MFCA board. A special word of recognition and thanks is extended to these two board members for four years of faithful service.

Annual Workshops for Equipping Care Procedures

The General Synod of 2002 adopted a recommendation to encourage classis student care committees to attend and participate in annual workshops hosted by the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency. MFCA scheduled numerous regional events inviting the chairpersons of the student care committees and stated clerks of classes. Scheduled events were held in Newburgh, New York, on November 14, 2002; Garden Grove, California, on February 13, 2003; Glenwood, Illinois, on March 10, 2003; and Byron Center, Michigan on April 3, 2003. The workshop material was also presented in Orange City, Iowa; Des Moines, Iowa; and Monarch, Alberta, as part of other meetings in October 2002.

The workshops were well received and revealed a significant need for information on the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry process and the classis procedures in guiding students of theology. The Approved Alternate Route (AAR) has been presented as a viable and friendly alternative for many candidates in the Reformed Church in America. Attempts were also made to connect the AAR process to the commissioned pastor process as we dream of seamless procedures between the commissioned pastor and AAR processes. A new series of events will be scheduled for 2003-2004.

Reformed Church in America Theological Studies Centre

The MFCA Board of Trustees has for several years considered the need for an “affectional center” for the western part of the denomination to be crucial to the future of theologi-
cal education and ministry formation. The fact that both RCA seminaries are located in the Eastern time zone, and that Holland, Michigan, is the furthest point west for organized theological education, caused the board to move toward the creation of a center in the west.

This past year the Robert Schuller School for Preaching extended an invitation to the MFCA to rent space in their facility in the Robert Schuller Center on the campus of the Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, California. The board of trustees eagerly accepted the invitation and opened an office on the fourth floor of the Robert Schuller Center on November 1, 2002.

Numerous events have already occurred at the new West Coast location, including meetings of the Certification Committee, the MFCA board of trustees, and a regional workshop for classis committees. At its February 2003 meeting the board also approved a series of inaugural events offered in conjunction with the Classis of California and the Regional Synod of the Far West. A schedule will be available at the meeting of the General Synod.

**Awarding of Certificates of Fitness for Ministry**

The MFCA Board of Trustees awarded sixteen certificates of fitness for ministry during the 2002-2003 session:

- Patricia Allen, Classis of Chicago; Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois
- Peter Bai, Classis of California; Trinity Evangelical Divinity School/Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California
- Kevin DeYoung, Classis of South Grand Rapids; Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, Massachusetts
- Robert Harrison, Classis of Cascades; Regent College, Vancouver, British Columbia
- Cathy Gumpert, Classis of Red River; Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, New Jersey
- James Long, Classis of Queens; Alliance Theological Seminary, Nyack, New York
- Deb Mechler, Classis of East Sioux; Bethel In-Ministry, Bethel Theological Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota
- Jason Medina, Classis of California; Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California
- Doug Nieuwstraten, Classis of Ontario; Tyndale Seminary, Toronto, Ontario
- Keith Poppen, Classis of Central California; Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, New Jersey
- Richard Ruch, Classis of New Brunswick; Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, New Jersey
- Clyde Teel, Classis of Dakota; North American Baptist Seminary, Sioux Falls, South Dakota
- Katie Van Veldhuizen, Classis of West Sioux; North American Baptist Seminary, Sioux Falls, South Dakota

**Approved Alternate Route**

- Roelof Oomen, Classis of South Grand Rapids
- Abner Pinedo, Classis of California
- Michael Talaga, Classis of Illiana
Twenty-Seven-Month Requirement

The Classis of Illinois petitioned General Synod through the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency to substitute a period of ministry for part of the twenty-seven-month requirement for Jeffrey McIlrath (BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 8, Section 3).

Reasons:

1. Before entering McIlrath’s final semester at Wheaton College in the fall of 1995, he was enrolled as an “inquirer” with East Iowa Presbytery. He maintained this status during a three-and-a-half-year period while he worked full-time on the staff of a large Presbyterian church in Aurora, Illinois, and attended seminary part-time in the Chicago area.

2. In the fall of 1999, McIlrath became a full-time seminary student at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary (UDTS) in Dubuque, Iowa. It was also at this time that McIlrath relocated to Morrison, Illinois, where he began part-time work as the director of youth ministries at Emmanuel Reformed Church under the supervision of Dr. Norman Kolenbrander. What ensued was three years of seminary at UDTS and two and a half years of supervised ministry and mentoring from Dr. Kolenbrander before Kolenbrander’s retirement in February 2002.

3. In the fall of 2000 McIlrath continued his education and preparation and became a candidate for ordination in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). This time was spent in an RCA setting where McIlrath celebrated the confessional heritage of the RCA and furthermore put it into practice. As McIlrath looked more closely, he saw an emphasis in the RCA on approaching ethical and ecclesiological issues in a theological way that he found both challenging and appealing. He was affirmed in his journey by the Rev. Dr. Lyle Vanderbroek, a professor at UDTS and an ordained member of the RCA.

4. McIlrath began to pray about the possibility of moving his call process from the PCUSA to the RCA. This resulted in a meeting with his home church pastor at Bettendorf Presbyterian Church, the Rev. Troy Winder, in which McIlrath was blessed by his insight and in which the Rev. Winder affirmed his sense of call to serve in the RCA. McIlrath then drafted a letter to the full session of Bettendorf Presbyterian Church and the Committee on Preparation for Ministry of East Iowa Presbytery. In those letters he shared the sense of call that he felt to serve in the RCA and received their blessing and affirmation with a sense of regret for their loss of a candidate for ministry.

5. While McIlrath has only been officially under the care of the Classis of Illinois since January of 2002, he has certainly had a vital and formative relationship with the RCA since the beginning of his employment at Emmanuel Reformed Church in Morrison, Illinois, which began July 15, 1999.

The MFCA Board of Trustees recommends:

R-68
That the General Synod approve the request of the Classis of Illinois that Jeffrey McIlrath be allowed to substitute his past ministry experience in order to fulfill the twenty-seven months required for the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry. (ADOPTED)
The Classis of South Grand Rapids petitioned General Synod through the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency to substitute a period of ministry for part of the twenty-seven-month requirement for Jean Chit Mulder (BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 8, Section 3).

Reasons:

1. Mulder received her master of theology degree from Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan, in May of 1996. She received her doctor of ministry from San Francisco Theological Seminary in San Anselmo, California, in May of 1999. She also graduated in May 1999 from Princeton Theological Seminary in Princeton, New Jersey, with a master of arts in counseling with emphasis in pastoral care and counseling, ministry to the bereaved, families in pain, developmental psychology, and pastoral counseling; a specialized ministry in the church.

2. While at Western Theological Seminary, Mulder served in various capacities of leadership in local RCA churches.

3. Mulder is strongly encouraged by her pastor and the consistory and the members of the classis committee overseeing students. These individuals have observed her and participated in her ministry at Hope Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. She has served on staff as coordinator for children’s ministries since January 2002.

4. Mulder sensed that she is called by God to serve his ministry as a full-time minister wherever God calls her.

The MFCA Board of Trustees recommends:

R-69
That the General Synod approve the request of the Classis of South Grand Rapids that Jean Mulder be allowed to substitute her past ministry experience in order to fulfill the twenty-seven months required for the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry. (ADOPTED)

Report of the Commission for Women

The Commission for Women is charged with a mandate to advocate for the full inclusion of women in church and society. At the same time that the denomination is focused on developing leaders and seeking to eliminate all barriers for using one’s gifts for ministry, the Commission for Women continues to receive reports from women who are prevented from entering the approved process for the call to ministry of Word and sacrament.

One of the first formal steps in the process leading toward ordination as a minister of Word and sacrament in the RCA is to receive the recommendation of the consistory of the church of which one is a member. Women have reported that although an inner call to ministry is confirmed by others, there are cases where they are prevented from entering the process leading toward ordination because of the beliefs regarding women’s ordination held by their consistories and/or members of the classis.

The Commission for Women therefore offers the following recommendation:
R-70
To direct the Office for Ministry Services, in consultation with the Commission on Church Order, to propose an alternate means of access to the process of ordination and alternate agents of care for gifted and called women whose pastors, consistories, and/or classes are opposed on principle to the ordination of women, for report back to General Synod 2004. (ADOPTED)

An example of an alternate means might include the opportunity for women whose pastors and/or consistories are opposed in principle to the ordination of women to obtain a recommendation from the student care committee of classis to come under care of the classis. Another example might be for women to come before a special committee appointed at the regional or national level for the purpose of directing the woman to another classis.

At its meeting in October 2002, the Commission for Women met with Barbara Nauta, a representative of the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency (MFCA), to discuss the needs of women who seek to fulfill the requirements of ordination through the MFCA process. The commission has established a system of contact and prayerful support for newly ordained women and meets annually with seminary students.

The commission sponsored a retreat for theologically trained women in February 2003, bringing together both women seminary students and ordained women. A primary focus for the commission will be to develop a process of mentoring students seeking ordination. In order to mentor all women in the RCA, the commission is collecting stories of women whose living and working provides role models for ministry.

There are currently 168 ordained women serving as ministers of Word and sacrament: 40 senior and solo pastors, 23 associate pastors, 17 copastors, 20 chaplains, 65 specialized ministers, and 3 missionaries. Thirteen ordained women are currently without charge and twelve ordained women are retired from active ministry.

The commission is proud to have on display at this year’s synod paintings by artist Liz DeBraber—a very exciting project that combines portrait painting and embroidery to celebrate women in ministry.

Report of the General Synod Council's Ministry and Personnel Services Committee

OFFICE FOR MINISTRY SERVICES

A significant new direction was set for the Office for Ministry Services this past year. The term “ministry” in the title was understood to include the ministry of the local offices of minister, elder, and deacon. In other words, the local consistory now has a denomination-al office to nurture and care for it. Although the full transfer of financial and human resources will not be accomplished until the beginning of the next fiscal year (October 1, 2003), the new mandate has set in motion a number of new visions. With each of the three themes that guide the Ministry Office—the calling of people to ministry, the formation of people for ministry, and the nurture of people in ministry—all three offices are at the center of our focus.
Calling People to Ministry

The discernment of call, especially for young leaders, is very important as the church begins to commit itself to a new vision of growth while at the same time facing the retirement of those born in the decade following World War II. Children and young adults need to see ministry as a calling, a vocation worthy of their gifts and one honored by the church if not the culture. It is expected that new programs, which will encourage high-school and college-age students to consider a call to ministry, will be initiated in congregations and classes, and with camps, conference centers and colleges.

It is worth noting that the long and reflective path that one must walk to enter the ministry of Word and sacrament is almost nonexistent in most congregations that recruit or even draft members into the office of elder or deacon. The Office for Ministry Services will pay particular attention to how local congregations can assist members who may be called into the role of elder or deacon. Their discernment, nurture, and training is just as important to a future that will continue to demand a community of leaders who enjoy parity with each other, and who are mutually accountable and mutually supportive.

Forming People for Ministry

The office fulfills this task especially through the work of the board and staff of the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency (MFCA). Their report is also found within this section. It would be helpful to hold up three developments in this area in addition to the work of MFCA.

First, the General Synod of 2002 approved the ministry designation of commissioned pastor and a provisional set of guidelines and standards. The Office for Ministry Services was given the responsibility to return to the 2003 General Synod with a proposed set of permanent guidelines and standards after consulting with the church. In late summer of 2002 the Commissioned Pastor Report with recommendations was sent to the stated clerk of every classis and regional synod, with the encouragement to gather people to reflect on, and respond to, the report. More than half of the classes, either individually or in regional gatherings, did so. The responses were gathered and distributed to a group of about a dozen people from across the denomination, which in turn offers the following report. The group included Barbara Alexander, Johan Bosman, Jim Brownson, Tom DeVries, Salomon Diaz, Ronald Geschwendt, Gregg Mast, Carol Myers, Okke Postma, David Schutt, and Deborah Swanson.

GUIDELINES FOR COMMISSIONED PASTORS IN THE RCA

A commissioned pastor is an ordained elder who has come under classis supervision, training, commissioning, and accountability for an expanded ministry responsibility that the classis believes requires direct classical oversight.

1. The consistory may recommend an ordained elder to the classis as a candidate for commissioned pastor, using an application form approved by the classis. The Office for Ministry Services shall provide guidance for the development of an appropriate application form.

2. When the classis accepts the consistory’s application on behalf of a candidate for commissioned pastor, it shall be the responsibility of the classis to approve and supervise the training plan for each person. The classis may covenant with the regional synod, with racial/ethnic councils, or other church bodies in the design and supervision of training programs.
3. The classis shall satisfy itself regarding the candidate’s ministry competency at least in the following areas:
   a. Character
      i. Commitment to Christ and compassion for the world
      ii. Maturity of faith
      iii. Personal integrity
      iv. Adherence to the Constitution and mission of the RCA
   b. Knowledge
      i. Old Testament
      ii. New Testament
      iii. Biblical interpretation
      iv. Reformed theology
      v. Church history
      vi. RCA polity and policies
      vii. Worship and sacraments
      viii. Pastoral care
   c. Skills
      i. Preaching/leading worship
      ii. Leadership/discipleship/spiritual formation
      iii. Pastoral care/interpersonal skills
      iv. Ministerial ethics and best practices

4. Upon successful completion of the classis assessment, the classis shall identify the specific forms of commissioned service appropriate to the gifts and training of the candidate. When the classis receives an invitation for a ministry it deems appropriate for the candidate, the classis shall authorize the ministry, approve a contract, and commission the candidate using the Order for Commissioning Christians to the Ministries of the Church.

5. The classis shall assign a mentor for each commissioned pastor’s period of training and ministry.

6. The classis may authorize a commissioned pastor to perform any or all of the following functions in the ministry to which he or she is commissioned:
   a. Preach the Word and lead worship
   b. Administer the sacraments when authorized by the consistory
   c. Serve as presiding officer of the consistory, at the request of a consistory or with its consent, under the supervision of the classis supervisor
   d. Preside at the ordination and installation of elders and deacons
   e. Perform a service of Christian marriage when approved by consistory and in accordance with state law

7. The commissioned pastor shall be a temporary member of the classis, but shall not serve as an elder delegate, during the period of commissioned service. For the definition of temporary members of classis, see the Book of Church Order (BCO), Chapter 1, Part II, Article 12, Section 16.

8. The performance of the commissioned pastor shall be evaluated by the classis at least annually. As part of this evaluation, the classis shall require and approve at least one experience in continuing education annually and a report from the local consistory.

9. When a commissioned pastor concludes a commissioned ministry, the classis shall provide to that person a written statement of the training received, the classis assessment process completed, and the commissioned ministry that was performed. If that person is invited to be a candidate for another commissioned ministry, that classis,
or any other classis, may use this information in assessing the training needed, the assessments required, or the commissioning that is appropriate for the candidate.

10. The commissioned pastor continues to hold membership in a local congregation, but is subject solely to the discipline of the classis, as set forth in the *BCO*, Chapter 2, Part I, Article 3, Section 3, for the period of his or her commissioning.

The committee agreed to request the Commission on Church Order propose guidelines modeled on this work for inclusion into the *BCO*, with no other changes in the *BCO* for the time being.

The committee agreed to recommend to the General Synod Council (GSC) that it establish a commissioned pastor advisory group under the GSC to facilitate the ongoing sharing and further development of standards and best practices for commissioned pastors throughout the church.

Second, in mid-March the office gathered almost two dozen people from across the denomination to reflect on what tools and resources are necessary to help nurture healthy consistories. The work of this gathering will have a direct impact on a major new initiative, which will begin in the fall of 2003, to create a number of models to nurture healthy consistories in a multitude of cultural contexts.

Third, the General Synod Council, meeting in the spring of 2003, took a major new step to address the need to financially assist those being called to pastoral ministry. A new endowment will soon be established to provide annual scholarships to those under the care of our classes. Again and again, the issue of the expense of a seminary education has been cited by those who are considering a vocational call, or those who have accrued substantial debt in the process. Until forty-five years ago, the Reformed Church in America provided a tuition-free education to all who attended one of our two seminaries. This new endowment will provide a concrete expression of support for those who are being called to become a new generation of pastoral leaders.

**Nurturing People in Ministry**

The Office for Ministry Services has historically extended its strongest efforts in this area. The office continues to nurture and support in unique ways over one hundred RCA pastors who are serving as chaplains. Synodically based specialized interim pastors are encouraged, and women called to ministry are especially nurtured, through an annual retreat and personal contacts. A time-consuming and crucial role includes work with committees, supervisors, and ministers who are willing to consider another call. The Rev. Toni Macon has been trained and made available to the church in the area of sexual misconduct and the call of congregations to be communities of integrity and safety.

The General Synod of 2004 will receive from the office a proposal to address two important dimensions of ministry. A plan for the assistance of those discerning a call to ministry has been described in general terms already in this report. Second, the critical concern of continuing education of ministers and other congregational leaders will be addressed. Almost twenty people from our colleges, seminaries, and regional synods were called together in March to spend a day reflecting on continuing education and distance learning. The vision of the group will play an important role in the plan presented before the synod of 2004.
From the Report of the Board of Benefits Services

RETired MINISTERS OF WORD AND SACRAMENT

During 2002 twenty RCA ministers of Word and sacrament retired from active service. Those who retired are being recognized with a display of their photographs 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-71
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.

Robert Block
Orange City, Iowa

John Bowen
Catskill, New York

Harold Brown
Camano Island, Washington

Allen Buurma
Flemington, New Jersey

Robert De Young
Pella, Iowa

Ronald Geschwendt
Traverse City, Michigan

Ronald Gross
Lakewood, Colorado

John Helmus
Aplington, Iowa

Walter Henrichsen
El Cajon, California

Jonathan Hinkamp
Ticonderoga, New York
Report of the Task Force on Long-Range Funding for Theological Education

The General Synod Council, in response to the General Synod directive to study funding of theological education (MGS 2000, R-76, p. 346, and R-78, p. 348) appointed a task force to study the long-range funding needs for theological education in the RCA (GSC 00-38).

The Task Force on Long Range Funding for Theological Education met on October 16, 2001, at the Ramada Plaza O’Hare Hotel in Chicago, Illinois. The following people attended the meeting: Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, Cornelis Kors, Norman Kansfield, Dennis Voskuil, Okke Postma, and Vernon L. Hoffs.

The task force members reviewed the financial needs of theological education and ministry formation. Reports were received from the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency, Western Theological Seminary, and New Brunswick Theological Seminary in reference to their anticipated costs in the coming years.

The following recommendation was presented to and approved by the General Synod Council (GSC 01-71) in the spring of 2001:

To approve the recommendations from the task force for long-range theological funding as follows:
That the present level and distribution of assessment for theological education recommended by the 2000 General Synod continue through the year 2005, and further;

that beginning in the year 2003 the congregations of the RCA be encouraged and educated by the Office of Ministry Services and the seminaries to begin tithing one half of one percent of their annual congregational income and their annual giving for other purposes for the denomination’s program of ministry formation and theological education, and further;

that beginning in the year 2006, the assessment for theological education be reduced by 20 percent for that and each of the following four years, with the result that by the year 2010 there would no longer be assessments for theological education, and further;

that an evaluation of the assessment reduction plan be done in the year 2008.

In the spring of 2003, the General Synod Council acted to rescind the above action in view of two realities. First, the council acted to establish the Fund for Ministerial Leadership, which will encourage the benevolent contributions of the RCA toward annual scholarships for RCA candidates for the ministry. Second, the council, through the reflection of its Ministry and Personnel Services Committee, expressed its commitment to continue to fund theological education through assessments and benevolent giving (Fund for Ministerial Leadership).

Since the 2001 General Synod Council action was shared with the General Synod of 2001 for information, it was deemed appropriate to share the action to rescind with this year’s General Synod.

Report Regarding a Long-Term Strategy for Recruiting, Training, and Empowering Those Called to Ordained Pastoral Leadership

In 2001 the General Synod, in response to the Report of the General Secretary, adopted the following recommendation:

That the General Synod instruct the general secretary to convene a process bringing together denominational leadership...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; and further,

that this strategy include recommendations for changes in our present system, requirements, and process for the training and ordination of ministers of Word and sacrament that may be required to fulfill our mission and vision for report to the General Synod of 2002 (MGS 2001, R-74, p. 275).

From January 8 to 11, 2002, a leadership summit was held and great strides were made toward answering some compelling questions regarding ministerial formation in the RCA. However, issues were raised that remained unresolved and which needed further discus-
sion and eventual decisions. These issues could be summarized into three categories of questions: 1) Are the present gatekeepers the appropriate ones to determine whether or not a candidate is adequately prepared and ready to be examined for ordination? 2) Are there changes that should be made in the General Synod standards to best equip candidates for ministry in our contemporary culture? and, 3) How can the RCA better equip candidates to meet the needs of diverse racial/ethnic contexts in ministry? The group also questioned how flexibility can be allowed in the system of ministerial formation, while at the same time it holds candidates to a uniform set of expectations. Is it possible to uphold a trustworthy commitment to Reformed identity in those ordained to be ministers of Word and sacrament and still allow for a diversity of models for ministerial formation—some that are more locally or regionally based, and others that are primarily based at seminaries? The group agreed that it was essential for the RCA to resolve these issues in order to carry out our mission of “equipping congregations for ministry.”

Therefore, the following recommendation was adopted by the 2002 General Synod:

To instruct the general secretary to continue the present process initiated by the 2001 General Synod and explore how the RCA can more effectively identify, support, train, certify, and ordain emerging leaders who are in faithful ministries in their cultural contexts, for report to the 2003 General Synod (MGS 2002, R-105, p. 311).

In fulfillment of this task the general secretary convened a second leadership summit from January 7 to 10, 2003. The planning team for this gathering included Gregg Mast, Anthony Vis, Daniel Gillett, Kathleen Edwards-Chase, Charles Van Engen, and Wesley Granberg-Michaelson. The Rev. Jacqui Lewis, a consultant from the Alban Institute who served as the group facilitator for the first leadership summit, also facilitated this summit. Other participants were as follows:

Elders Ella Campbell, Bradley Lewis, Carol Mutch, Oliver Patterson, and Carol Wagner and the following ministers of Word and sacrament: Stephanie Doeschot, John Chang, Evelyn Diephouse, Carolyn Holloway, Thomas De Vries, David Izenbart, Cornelis Kors, Norman Kansfield, Paul Fries, Luis Pérez, David Schutt, Sherwin Weener, Richard Otterness, James Brownson, Randal Wieland, Richard Welscott, Dennis Voskuil, and Steven Brooks.

Compelling issues were identified in three broad areas, for which recommendations were made.

I. GATEKEEPERS AND THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

The issue of “gatekeepers” addresses the question of who is in the best position to determine if a candidate is adequately prepared and is ready to be examined for ordination. Participants discussed what changes are essential to the system of ministerial formation to ensure that in the future all RCA congregations will have the possibility of being served by a qualified and competent minister of Word and sacrament.

Recommendation 1: Gatekeepers

In 1999 the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency (MFCA) was established as the coordinating agency for theological education in the RCA and established as the overseer of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry process for RCA candidates enrolled at non-RCA seminaries. Through MFCA, new possibilities were created, including the Approved
Alternate Route (AAR). The evolving AAR process offers great potential for addressing the issue of creating more flexibility in our system while maintaining unified standards for ordination across the denomination.

Presently, there are four criteria that must be met in order to be received as a candidate for ordination through the AAR: 1) the candidate must have at least five years’ experience in leadership in the church; 2) a consistory or classis must demonstrate a compelling need for the candidate’s ministry; 3) the candidate must be able to provide evidence of the call, gifts, and experience appropriate for a minister of Word and sacrament; and 4) the candidate must, for compelling practical reasons, not be able to complete a master of divinity degree at an accredited seminary. The group questioned whether as the AAR process evolves the present criteria will be adequate for encompassing its possibilities and the need for flexibility in our system. In other words, is it too limiting? Therefore, the group offers the recommendation:

R-72
To direct the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency Board of Trustees to review the four Approved Alternate Route (AAR) criteria, and the rationale for either keeping or changing the criteria, with report to the 2004 General Synod. (ADOPTED)

Recommendation 2: Gatekeepers

MFCA is mandated to oversee, interpret, and implement the standards of ministerial formation for candidates who do not attend an RCA seminary. The Certificate of Fitness for Ministry is granted by the board of trustees of the MFCA, upon recommendation of one of the two MFCA certification committees, or by the board of trustees of one of the RCA seminaries when the specific standards have been met by the candidate. Currently, there is not a process in place that allows for dispensation from current standards for candidates who are completing the Certificate of Fitness outside of the master of divinity route, such as the Approved Alternate Route. Therefore, the group offers this recommendation:

R-73
To direct the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency Board of Trustees to propose a process for dispensation from standards, with report to the 2004 General Synod. (ADOPTED)

Recommendation 3: Gatekeepers

The next recommendation essentially asks the question, To whom are we looking to become the next generation of pastoral leaders in the RCA? It asks whether RCA churches and classes are considering the entire pool of candidates when recruiting those who will provide pastoral leadership to meet the diverse needs of our present and future congregations. The group discussed the reality that, too often, specifically women and racial and ethnic populations are not considered by their congregations and classes as those whom God is calling and who should be invited to consider training for pastoral leadership. Therefore, the group recommends:

R-74
To urge classes to be proactive in affirming, guiding, and enabling persons with leadership gifts to consider preparation for ministry—especially women and racial/ethnic populations. (ADOPTED)
Recommendation 4: Gatekeepers

At times a tension has existed between some of the classes and the MFCA board of trustees regarding whether specific candidates have sufficiently met the standards to receive the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry, which leads to ordination by the classis. Although there is already significant communication between the classis and the MFCA board throughout the candidate’s training and supervision process, the group discussed the need for even more coordinated teamwork between the entities. The following recommendation urges classes to appoint a liaison to be involved in the process of MFCA supervision and certification. The group suggests that the classis liaison would be in contact with MFCA regarding the candidate’s progress throughout the process. And if either the student or one of the MFCA certification committees would deem it helpful, the classis liaison would also be invited—at classis expense—to be present at the periodic MFCA certification committee meetings with the candidate. As the committees seek to determine progress and eventually to make a recommendation to the MFCA board of trustees regarding the candidate’s readiness for the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry, a classis liaison could 1) serve as an advocate for the candidate during the process, 2) increase communication with MFCA regarding candidate supervision, and 3) assist in responding to questions the classis might have concerning process and recommendations.

R-75
To direct the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency Board of Trustees to urge each classis to appoint a personal liaison for each student under its care and to invite this liaison to participate in the Approved Alternate Route or Reformed Candidate Supervision and Care certification process when either the student or one of the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency certification committees would deem it helpful. (ADOPTED)

Recommendation 5: Gatekeepers

The leadership summit’s 2002 report to General Synod specified that “more radical, systemic changes to our structure should be given consideration in order to ensure that our system of ministerial formation functions effectively to support the mission and ministry of the RCA” (MGS 2002, p. 309). The 2003 leadership summit discussed the issue, but consensus could not be reached on what specific proposals could be endorsed. However, because a large percentage of the participants believed that specific issues with the present system of ministerial formation remain unresolved, it was decided that systemic change should be considered. Therefore, a subcommittee was formed to summarize the structural problems most often referred to in the group’s discussions, and to draft a proposal addressing these problems for consideration at the 2003 General Synod.

The subcommittee began by highlighting two basic core values necessary in the formation of candidates. Discussion then centered around two primary and separate issues regarding how the denomination’s present system may conflict with these values, and then offered an approach to further consider systemic changes that could eventually remedy structural problems.

Core Values

The subcommittee began with the following core values:

1. The care of candidates for ministry is of utmost importance. Therefore, structural problems that put any unnecessary obstacles in the way of these candidates must be addressed.
2. Equipping these candidates for ministry requires considering the radical changes in the context of the church, in our society, and in the RCA’s increasing diversity. The structural problems may be leaving candidates poorly equipped for the work of the church.

The following two areas of concern arose regarding the relationship of the denomination’s present system with these core values:

1. Candidate care committees and the role of classes

Leadership summit participants agreed that the effectiveness of candidate care committees (which work at the classis level and in connection with MFCA and RCA seminaries) varies greatly among classes. Indeed, some classes do not even have candidate care committees. Would the difficulties that this creates for candidates best be addressed by giving the regional synods a major role in the candidate care process, probably on a shared basis with classes? The group took special note of the fact that: 1) many classes have either too few or too many candidates for classis members to effectively work with them, 2) classis care committees often have rapid turnover of members, 3) the 1993 Report of the Task Force on Procedural Steps to Ordination offered specific proposals for improvements which seem to have been ignored, and 4) it appears some candidates who might otherwise continue the process toward ordination drop out because of frustration with their interactions with classes. Regional synods, in cooperation with MFCA and the classes, might bring resources and coordination that would help remove structural obstacles that may be limiting the effectiveness of the candidate care process.

2. The Certificate of Fitness for Ministry

The subcommittee considered at length the process for awarding the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry, which is currently the responsibility of MFCA and RCA seminaries. Should responsibility for awarding the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry remain with MFCA (working with non-RCA seminaries) and New Brunswick and Western theological seminaries, or should responsibility be shared between MFCA and the seminaries on the one hand and either classes or regional synods on the other? There was no consensus among the summit participants on whether our current system for awarding the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry needs to be changed. All agreed, however, that this question ought to be addressed directly as a denomination rather than discussing it mainly in other contexts such as the new programs for commissioned pastors, the work of deacons and elders, and concerns over continuing education of current pastors. Whether there should be a Certificate of Fitness for Ministry at all is simply an extreme form of this question.

It was determined that the structural issues need to be defined more clearly, that questions should be discussed at greater length, and that more research on the specifics of the problems needs to be done before recommendations regarding any systemic changes can be brought to the 2004 General Synod. It should be noted that the 2002 General Synod adopted the following recommendation, which could serve as a resource:

To request the boards of trustees of the RCA seminaries and the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency to conduct an evaluation of their roles in the ministry formation process as they prepare ministers of Word and sacrament to lead RCA congregations, and to present that evaluation and report to the 2003 General Synod; and further, to identify changes necessary in that process in order to strengthen the development of ministers of Word and sacrament who will provide for local congregations leadership that nurtures their health and effectiveness in their mission contexts (MGS 2002, R-104 amended, p. 311).
The advisory committee recommended that the synod vote against R-76 for the following reasons:

1. The synod should wait for the completion of program evaluations being conducted by New Brunswick Theological Seminary and the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency before proceeding with this recommendation.
2. The estimated cost of $5,000 exceeds the benefits that might be gained.

R-76
To instruct the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency Board of Trustees to initiate a process of research and consultation and to propose possible systemic changes in the responsibility for candidate care and, if appropriate, in the awarding of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry for report to the 2004 General Synod; and further,

that this process include present candidates for minister of Word and sacrament, regional synods, current members of classis candidate care committees, mentors, and persons involved in ministry formation in local contexts; and further,

that in developing this process, due attention be paid to the ways in which the needs of women and racial/ethnic candidates can adequately be served; and further,

that funds be allocated by General Synod for the work of this task force. (NOT ADOPTED)

II. GENERAL SYNOD STANDARDS FOR ORDINATION

The General Synod of the Reformed Church in America has the responsibility to articulate the standards that should be met by any candidate who is called and prepared to be a minister of Word and sacrament in the RCA. The synod then directs its agents—the two RCA seminaries and MFCA—to implement programs of ministerial formation that can best prepare candidates to fulfill the expectations of our denominational standards.

Since the 1997 General Synod approved a set of standards, the General Synod professors of theology organized these standards into seven specific areas. This has proven to be a helpful way to apply the standards to evaluate candidates and determine readiness for ordination as minister of Word and sacrament. These “Seven Criteria for Evaluating the Preparation of Candidates for Ministry” state that a candidate shall:

1. Demonstrate a faith in Jesus Christ that is both articulate and evident; and demonstrate skill, knowledge, insight, compassion and maturity both in nurturing that faith in others and in inviting others to share it.

2. Demonstrate an articulate sense of divine call to the office of minister of Word and sacrament, a thorough understanding of the nature of that office in the Reformed tradition, a wholehearted ownership of its authority and a full knowledge of, and commitment to, the responsibilities that it entails.

3. Demonstrate deep and thorough conversancy with the Scriptures, an articulate commitment to their authority as Word of God, skill and knowledge in their timely interpretation and in the proclamation of the Word, and competence in Hebrew and Greek.
4. Demonstrate a deep and thorough conversancy with the Christian tradition in its full historic breadth, as well as the skill and knowledge in the timely interpretation of Christian doctrine and its application to issues facing church and society.

5. Demonstrate the skill, knowledge, and insight to lead a congregation in matters of stewardship, mission, evangelism, mutual care, and social compassion and justice.

6. Demonstrate skill, knowledge, insight, compassion, and maturity in matters of spiritual development and human relationships, in all areas of life but also with particular reference to the life of the congregation.

7. Demonstrate knowledge of, and commitment to, the historic Reformed tradition, specifically its doctrine, polity, and liturgy.

These seven areas can be adjusted and changed as the church, through the General Synod, continually assesses which qualities for ministry and forms of preparation are required in order that ministers of Word and sacrament may meet the challenges of ministry and mission in our time.

**Recommendation 1: Language Standards**

One part of the criteria used for evaluating candidates for ministry is that they should have “competence in Hebrew and Greek.” This criterion has been interpreted by many to mean that candidates should master the languages while in seminary and be able to use the languages at that level for the lifetime of their ministry. Although some candidates might do this, it is an unrealistic expectation for everyone. Also, it was pointed out that a significant amount of a candidate’s time may be spent trying to master the languages to meet this interpretation of the criterion.

The first leadership summit, held in 2002, agreed that the language requirement should be changed in some way. A recommendation was offered at the 2002 General Synod, but through the deliberation process it was recognized that the issues surrounding the languages needed further discussion and that a forum needed to be held for such discussion and clarification before a new recommendation could be offered. The appropriate forum was the 2003 leadership summit.

The 2003 summit unanimously agreed that having candidates introduced to the Greek and Hebrew languages is important to the life of the church. The group also agreed that the ability to acquire the skills for the effective biblical interpretation needed for preaching has been significantly advanced by the recent developments and availability of interpretive resources. Taking into account all the factors above, the group consensus was that the goal of the standard is for candidates to have “sufficient Greek and Hebrew to understand the meaning of the biblical text,” not full mastery of the languages as once interpreted by some. Therefore, the group offers the following recommendation:

R-77

To direct the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency to revise the “Seven Criteria for Evaluating the Preparation of Candidates for Ministry” as follows (deletions stricken; additions underlined):

3. Demonstrate deep and thorough conversancy with the Scriptures, an articulate commitment to their authority as Word of God, skill and knowledge in their timely interpretation and in the proclamation of the Word, and competence in to require sufficient Hebrew and Greek to understand the meaning of the biblical text. (ADOPTED)
Further, the group requests that the General Synod professors of theology (fourth office) discuss the appropriate principles to effectively teach the languages with this new understanding of the standard, and that they consider publishing proposed changes.

Recommendation 2: Language Standards

The RCA Book of Church Order specifies that classis examine candidates to determine if they have “requisite skills in interpretation and proclamation of Scripture, including sufficient Greek and Hebrew to understand nuances of the biblical text” (Chapter 1, Part II, Article 8, Section 6). The group discussed the discrepancies among the forty-six classes’ evaluations of candidates’ knowledge of Greek and Hebrew. Participants discussed the possibility that perhaps the best evaluators of the desired competency are those who are training the candidates in the languages and use of resources. The intent of this recommendation is not to eliminate appropriate language competency from the standards of ordination, but simply to remove the explicit assessment of this competency from the classical oversight process. Therefore, the group offers the following recommendation:

R-78
To direct the Commission on Church Order to propose amendments to the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 8, Section 6, eliminating the requirement for classis to “satisfy itself that the candidate exhibits...sufficient Greek and Hebrew to understand nuances of the biblical text.” (ADOPTED)

Division of the house: Yes 112; no 111.

A motion made to vote by paper ballot was defeated.

Recommendation 3: Uniform Standards

The group shared the perspective that the present system of evaluating the standards varies among the two RCA seminaries, MFCA and its two certification committees, and the classis. The group discussed the need for unified standards by which the candidates are prepared and evaluated, and felt that the present criteria being used by MFCA should be reviewed and revised to serve in this way.

R-79
To direct the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency to review and revise the “Seven Criteria for Evaluating the Preparation of Candidates for Ministry”; and further,

to propose revisions to the Book of Church Order to set these criteria as the uniform standards for preparation of candidates for minister of Word and sacrament.

The advisory committee recommended the following substitute:

R-79 (substitute)
To direct the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency to review and revise the “Seven Criteria for Evaluating the Preparation of Candidates for Ministry” for adoption by General Synod 2004. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. The original R-79 was not clear.
2. These criteria should be adopted by the General Synod but not inserted in the Book of Church Order.

Recommendation 4: Uniform Standards

As the RCA continues to become increasingly diverse, a need has arisen to assist emerging leaders who are in non-English-speaking contexts to understand the standards by which they will be prepared and evaluated.

The advisory committee recommended an amendment:

R-80
To direct the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency to translate such revised standards into other appropriate languages and make them widely available, and that funds be allocated by General Synod for this task. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

III. CONTEXTS

Training Emerging Leaders in Cultural Contexts

The RCA has a tradition of educating clergy who are sensitive to, and meet the demands of, the diverse population they serve. As the RCA becomes more diverse in many ways—including racially and ethnically—there has been growing awareness of the need to be even more culturally attentive to this reality in ministerial formation.

Recommendation 1: Contexts

Racial/ethnic communities often have specific ways of validating leadership, evaluating competency, and preparing candidates for ministry in their particular local contexts. And yet, the group discussed that ministers are not ordained simply to one context, but to the whole church across regional and contextual lines. As the RCA researches and discovers the best ways to develop an appropriate and culturally sensitive plan for ministerial formation, particularly for racial/ethnic candidates who are called to both contextual and broad ministries, it is crucial that the church seeks the experience and input of racial, ethnic, and multicultural leaders within these contexts.

A motion was made to amend R-81:

R-81
To direct the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency and the General Synod Council’s Office for Ministry Services to facilitate conversations with the leaders of racial/ethnic groups within the RCA; and to develop an action plan that will enable the RCA to more effectively identify, support, train, certify, and ordain emerging leaders from these groups within their cultural contexts; and that funds be allocated by General Synod for this task; and further, that special attention be given to removing obstacles from this process, identifying mentors/teachers within the racial/ethnic communities, and making training resources available within these cultural communities, for report to the 2005 General Synod. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)
Recommendation 2: Contexts

The General Synod elects nine people to serve as the MFCA board of trustees: four laypersons, three pastors, one specialized minister, and one General Synod professor of theology. As the RCA seeks to increase its awareness of ways to effectively provide ministerial formation to emerging leaders in racial and ethnic communities, the group questioned whether the present composition of the board adequately represents the concerns of not just the leadership but the membership of our racial and ethnic communities.

The advisory committee recommended to vote against R-82 for the reason that the substance was already addressed in R-67.

R-82
To urge the General Synod Council to review the size and cultural diversity of the membership of the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency board of trustees in order to ensure that it can adequately address the challenge of ministerial formation in multicultural contexts, for report and recommendation to General Synod 2004. (NOT ADOPTED)

Recommendation 3: Contexts

In what circumstances, where, and by what methods will racial/ethnic leaders be identified and trained for continued success in their ministries and participation in the RCA’s common life? As already mentioned, the evolving Approved Alternate Route offers a source of great potential for the RCA in ministerial formation. However, the group believes the AAR needs to be further developed, taking the multicultural settings into account, as well as the commissioned pastor training program as it develops, and other leadership development processes taking place in specific regions of the church. The summit therefore recommends:

R-83
To direct the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency and the General Synod Council’s Office for Ministry Services to further develop the Approved Alternative Route, paying particular attention to ministry formation in multiple cultural contexts, commissioned pastor training programs, and other leadership development processes, and how these will integrate with the Approved Alternative Route. (ADOPTED)

Overtures

Alternative Means to Train Ministers of Word and Sacrament

1. The Classes of Albany, Greater Palisades, and Mid-Hudson respectfully overture the General Synod to instruct the Commissions on Theology and Church Order, working in cooperation with the Office for Ministry Services, the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency, and the General Synod professors of theology, to prepare frameworks for alternative means to train ministers of the Word and sacrament and to provide financial and spiritual support for pastors and teachers in local congregations, and to present a preliminary report to the General Synod of 2004; and further, that the General Synod provide the commissions with such additional funding as necessary to allow the swift completion of this work.
Reasons:

1. Many pastoral openings in various congregational settings are not being filled by the current supply of ordained ministers of Word and sacrament because of the financial limitations of the churches or a lack of interested candidates (MGS 2002, p. 292).

2. There is a shortage of trained ministers of Word and sacrament to expand the RCA’s ministry (MGS 2002, p. 292).

3. People who are raised up by their congregations (for example, racial/ethnic, rural, and small-membership churches) and are clearly called by God to lead their church are, on occasion, unable to complete in-residence theological training due to family obligations, finances, age, or the need to stay in an already established ministry (MGS 2002, p. 292).

4. There is nothing in our doctrine that limits the path to certification and ordination of ministers of Word and sacrament to the programs, which have become customary in the last several decades.

5. To meet the new and growing challenges facing the church, every congregation needs pastors and teachers with the best possible training, experience, and ability.

6. Since a weakness in any part weakens the whole body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:26), we need to do everything possible to make sure that economics are not a determining factor in calls to ministry, and to make sure that every minister has such financial and spiritual support as needed to work joyfully and productively.

In response to Overture 1, the advisory committee recommended:

R-84
To deny Overture 1. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. Alternative means for training ministers of Word and sacrament include the Approved Alternate Route, which provides great flexibility for those seeking ordination.

2. The second part of the overture is now being addressed due to the General Synod Council approval for the new Fund for Ministerial Leadership and the continued theological assessment dedicated to training seminarians.

Connecting the Ministry Designation of Commissioned Pastor to the Office of Elder

2. The Classis of Schenectady overtures the General Synod to connect the “new ministry designation of commissioned pastor in the RCA” (MGS 2002, R-85, p. 293) to the existing office of elder, per the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee to Implement Commissioned Pastors. The commissioned pastor will then be under classis supervision of training, commissioning, and accountability, for an expanded ministry which requires direct classical oversight. Consistory may recommend an ordained elder to the classis as a candidate for commissioned pastor. The classis will approve and supervise the training plan for each person.

Reasons:

1. The role of the commissioned pastor as described is that of an elder (Part 1, Section I, Article 8, Book of Church Order).
2. This would provide consistency across the denomination.

3. The role of classis is maintained as the overseer, as of those ordained as minister of Word and sacrament.

4. This would avoid the need of creating a new office. It maintains parity and equality instead of creating an hierarchy.

In response to Overture 2, the advisory committee recommended:

**R-85**

To deny Overture 2. (ADOPTED)

Reason:

The intent and concerns of the overture are addressed in the *Book of Church Order* amendments recommended by the Commission on Church Order.

**Evangelism Training for Candidates for Ministry**

3. The Regional Synod of Mid-America overtures the General Synod to instruct RCA seminaries and the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency to require that every candidate for the ministry complete at least one three-credit-hour course in evangelism during his or her seminary training.

Reason:

To further implement the mission of the RCA as stated in our Mission and Vision Statement, ministers must be prepared to lead and equip congregations with the good news of Jesus Christ when engaging the unbelieving world.

In response to Overture 3, the advisory committee recommended:

**R-86**

To deny Overture 3. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. The seminaries and Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency have already fulfilled the intent of this overture.

2. The General Synod does not determine the content of the curriculum of the seminaries.

**Mediation and Interim Ministry in Church Revitalization**

4. The Regional Synod of New York (RSNY) overtures the General Synod to include conflict resolution/mediation training (and its supporting programs), as well as the training and support of specialized interim ministers, as integral parts of its emerging emphasis upon the revitalization of existing churches; and that this be reflected in the objectives and initiatives developed under the (proposed) ten-year goal.

Reasons:

1. General Synod Council has voted to direct the general secretary to discontinue and/or re-envision these programs by October 2003 (GSC 03-17).
2. Almost four centuries of establishing and revitalizing congregations have taught the RSNY to value programs such as conflict mediation and interim ministry, which provide invaluable direct services to churches in transition. Many skills are required over time to nurture congregations through cycles of growth, decline and renewal. cf. 1 Corinthians 3:5-9, 1 John 2:7-11.

3. Congregational understanding of what is involved in revitalization is strengthened by the specification of the types of services available to them for renewal. Both of these initiatives fulfill the fifth of the General Synod Council’s Twelve Priorities: to “provide support and leadership for revitalization of congregations.”

4. Given the pervasiveness of conflict within congregations and classes, the capacity to utilize mediation and conflict resolution skills is often necessary in establishing programs for church growth. Mediation gives a concrete means for fulfilling the requirement of the Book of Church Order that offenses...“be dealt with first in the manner indicated by the Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 18:15-17” (BCO Chapter 2, Part I, Article 2, Section 2). Matthew 5:23-24 also makes clear that reconciliation within the fellowship is necessarily prior to any worshipful approach to God and to the offering of one’s gifts.

5. Specialized interim ministry has long been promoted in the RCA as appropriate and “especially useful...in those situations in which a congregation seeks to evaluate its ministry and mission and set new goals and directions” (“Is There a Specialized Interim Minister in Your Future?”—Office of Ministry Services).


In response to Overture 4, the advisory committee recommended:

R-87
To direct the General Synod Council to include conflict resolution/mediation training (and its supporting programs), as well as the training and support of specialized interim ministers, as integral parts of its emerging emphasis on the revitalization of existing churches; and further,

that this be reflected in the objectives and initiatives developed under the proposed ten-year goal. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. This recommendation affirms and strengthens the work already being done by the Office for Ministry Services on behalf of the GSC.

2. Conflict resolution/mediation is often a valuable resource to churches in transition. Training of specialized interim ministers is necessary since specialized interim ministers often are utilized by churches in transition.

3. Training of specialized interim ministers is necessary since specialized interim ministers often are utilized by churches in transition.
REPORTS ON EVANGELIZATION AND CHURCH GROWTH

Report of the Office of Congregational Services/ Evangelism and Church Development Services

FAITHFUL WITNESSES

The Church Gathered
You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

Those words are not a command but a promise. The command was to wait: “While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father” (Acts 1:4; cf., Luke 24:45). The promise is that those who wait will receive power to be witnesses.

Obeying the command and trusting the promise, the church gathers to wait and to pray.

We gather to be shaped by the Word and to be fed at Christ’s table.

Our waiting and praying are marks of obedience and trust in the one who has promised the gift of the Spirit.

Our waiting and praying is an acknowledgment that the promised kingdom is not to be built by human hands, but is a gift to be given in God’s own time. Our waiting and praying is an indication that the things that need to be done in the world are beyond our ability to accomplish by our own efforts, programs, or strategies.

Our waiting and praying is an indication that the gift of the Spirit is never an assured possession of the church but is a gift that must be constantly sought anew in prayer.1

The Church Sent
“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).

These words are a command with a promise. The command is to go and make disciples. The promise is that those who go, go not alone, but with the companionship of Jesus Christ.

Obeying the command and trusting the promise, the church goes forth to make disciples.

We go forth to announce good news, to teach all that our Lord commands, and to invite all people to the waters of life and the fellowship of the table.

Our going forth is a mark of obedience and trust in the one who sends us and promises to be with us.

Our going forth is an indication that God makes use of human talents and efforts in bringing to fruition the kingdom that is coming.

We go with the assurance that the one who sends us will be with us always.
EVANGELIZATION AND CHURCH GROWTH

GOAL

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.3

In partnership with Mission Services, the racial/ethnic councils, regional synods, and classes, Congregational Services/Evangelism and Church Development (CS/EVCD) will provide leadership, guidance, and resources to assist congregations in being faithful witnesses to the gospel in their own contexts of ministry. It will do this by focusing its efforts jointly in the areas of worship, discipleship, leadership development, and outreach.

During the past year the staff of CS/EVCD has sought to carry out objectives made known through Scripture and expressed in the Statement of Mission and Vision, the Twelve Priorities established by the General Synod Council, and the Faithful Witnesses document. Those accomplishments are highlighted in this report and expanded in the reports of the individual offices: Christian Education, Worship, Social Witness, Diaconal Ministries, Evangelism, and New Church Development.

The work of these offices is represented individually in reports for their respective General Synod advisory committees, so that General Synod delegates and readers of General Synod minutes can more easily find appropriate material. However, the Faithful Witnesses document is based on the premise that, while documents can be separated for reporting purposes, our lives and actions represent the theological truth that word and deed, doing and being, gathering and sending belong together in a wholistic expression of our Christian faith. The Faithful Witnesses document is an expression of that belief in and commitment to unity.

WORSHIPING THE LORD

Great and amazing are your deeds, Lord God the Almighty!
Just and true are your ways, King of the nations!
Lord, who will not fear and glorify your name?
For you alone are holy.
All nations will come and worship before you,
for your judgments have been revealed (Rev. 15:3-4).

Each week the church gathers to meet God in Word and sacrament and is sent again into the world to witness to Jesus as Savior and Lord. Worship itself is both a gift from God and a response to God. In the assembly gathered for worship, God is at the center and we are placed in community. Here God addresses us with his Word, washes us in grace, feeds us at his table, and joins us to Christ and to one another. Here we sing songs, offer praises, receive forgiveness, hear the stories of God’s mighty acts, and bring the world before God in prayer. “In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself” (2 Cor. 5:19). In worship
the people of God witness to and participate in this reconciling movement of God toward
the world. There is also a leader’s edition and a CD-ROM available. To date, it is in its
third printing, with nearly 2,900 copies sold through the RCA Distribution Center.

These are some examples of how CS/EVCD has lived out this commitment to worship:

**Sing! A New Creation**: This supplemental hymnal, developed in cooperation with the
Christian Reformed Church in North America and released in the summer of 2001,
gives congregations single-book access to some of the best current church music, songs,
and choruses from around the world. There is also a leader’s edition and a CD-ROM
available. To date, it is in its third printing, with nearly 2,900 copies sold through the
RCA Distribution Center.

**www.rca.org**: All new RCA liturgies, many older liturgies, and all seasonal worship
resources (Advent and Lent) are accessible through the website. Work is also progress-
ing on translating many of these resources into the languages of the RCA, and on
preparing these orders and additional worship resources for publication in both print
and CD-ROM.

**Children and Worship**: More than three hundred RCA congregations use the Children
and Worship program to introduce young children to the gospel in a worshipful setting.
The RCA equips trainers across North America to provide congregations with assis-
tance in this ministry.

**Children and Worship International**: Through the office for children’s ministries and
the financial support of individuals and congregations, the Children and Worship pro-
gram now serves RCA mission partner congregations in The Gambia, Hungary, Kenya,
South Africa, and Mexico.

**Worshipful Work**: The importance of worship in a variety of settings is the foundation
of the discernment training that provides congregations with a means for seeing the role
of worship throughout our life and decision-making.

**MAKING DISCIPLES**

*A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; it is enough for the dis-
ciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master* (Matthew 10:24-25). *Whoever
does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple* (Luke 14:27).

Under the guidance of the Word and Holy Spirit, the church is called to form people whose
lives are shaped after the life and teachings of Jesus. They will follow Jesus in ministering
to those in need, standing with those who are oppressed, and comforting those who sorrow.
They will follow Jesus in being a people who are called to do justice, to love kindness, and
to walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8). The making of Jesus-followers and cross-carriers
is a lifelong process and belongs to the entire community of faith. Through worship and
teaching, through prayer and in ministry to those in need, in our witness in the world and
in our life together, we are called to help each other grow up in every way into Christ
(Ephesians 4:15).

These are some examples of how CS/EVCD has lived out this commitment to making disciples:

**Catechumenate**: Modeled after the early Christian church, the catechumenate provides
a framework for the welcoming and discipling of new Christians. Training events con-
tinue to be held for congregations seeking this intentional means of assisting seekers in
exploring faith.
Peace and the Care of Creation: Fifty Caring for Creation coordinators serve congregations as resource people, providing materials and learning opportunities on environmental issues and stewardship of the earth.

“Every Christian—Called by God Gifted for Ministry”: This resource on the identification and use of spiritual gifts was developed by the Office of Christian Education and sent to every RCA congregation, in response to a 2001 General Synod directive, and is now available on the RCA website.

Wind and Fire: Begun as an outgrowth of Mission 2000, the denomination’s prayer network also published its Wind and Fire newsletter.

Offering of Letters: Supported by Reformed Church World Service, scores of RCA congregations supported Bread for the World in their offering of letters and workshops on world hunger.

Learning for Life: This comprehensive, 250 page, loose-leaf notebook has assisted more than 625 RCA congregations in building the foundation for an effective ministry of education and faith formation, a key portion of a commitment to lifelong discipleship. Nearly a thousand persons currently receive the monthly newsletter Still Learning for Life at no charge.

Care of Creation: More than eighty Caring for Creation Coordinators now serve congregations as resource people, providing materials and learning opportunities on environmental issues and stewardship of the earth. They are the cornerstone of an active program that includes a newsletter, retreats, and conferences.

Curriculum: The RCA, with its ecumenical partners, continues to help develop and make available (through the RCA Distribution Center) the best in core curriculum materials for adults and children. In addition, RCA-specific material such as LIME (Living in Mission Everywhere) has been produced.

Project Timothy: annually, fifty RCA young people gain firsthand experience in cross-cultural mission settings, stretching themselves and building foundations of faith that last a lifetime.

EQUIPPING THE SAINTS

The gifts he [Christ] gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry (Ephesians 4:11).

Leaders in the church arise out of the community of faith in order to serve it and to equip it for ministry in the world. Church leaders are called by God, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and sustained by the grace of Jesus Christ to witness to the transforming power of the gospel and to serve as Christ served.

In the Reformed Church in America leadership is formally invested in the offices of minister of Word and sacrament, elder, and deacon. Together they are called to enable the whole ministry of the church and to equip all those who through baptism are called to be disciples of Jesus Christ.

These are some examples of how CS/EVCD has lived out this commitment to the equipping of leaders:
Discernment: The Pentecost Letter from Mission 2000 was the product of an intentional effort at discernment. A network of trained leaders across the denomination are bringing the values and insights of discernment to denominational gatherings and local congregations.

Consistory Training: A major consultation on the equipping of faithful consistories was held in March 2003. The newsletter Called to Serve: Deacons and Elders Together continues to provide resources to deacons and elders twice a year. What’s an Elder to Be? is a new video resource for elders, released in 2002. All are examples of a broader effort both within the work of a broad spectrum of GSC staff and across assembly lines to celebrate and equip the offices of deacon and elder in their specific callings and in their unity.

Networks: A web of networks for congregational leaders across the denomination now forms the foundation of the RCA’s revitalization effort. While a grant to fund a significant expansion of these networks was not received, the Revitalization Task Force is actively pursuing alternatives toward a goal of having four hundred church leaders in support networks by 2005.

Ethnic Writers Training Event: In response to the church and the General Synod, the office for children’s ministry began a mentoring program that will train and equip curriculum writers from racial/ethnic communities and constituencies.

Revitalization: The revitalization task force has taken up the call to networks envisioned in the Lilly Grant proposal that was not funded. Their goal is that more than four hundred RCA leaders and pastors be involved in networks by 2005. Planning is underway for hosting Leadership Summit II in Chicago on April 23-24, 2003. Through this event, the development of a broader leadership foundation is envisioned that will be able to help move pastors and churches from experiencing incremental change to a deep change in their mission and ministry. Forty people—pastors and national, regional, and seminary leaders—will gather together to pray, discover, and seek God’s leading as we move into a revitalized future. This vision will be integrated with the denominational ten-year goal currently being discerned by GSC.

Workshops and Training Sessions: Numerous workshops are planned and sponsored over the year on stem cell issues; education and discipleship; evangelism; older adult ministry; economic justice; deacons; care of creation; and Children and Worship.

Targeted Newsletters and Webpages: Various newsletters and webpages are produced for leaders in Christian education and discipleship, caring for creation, evangelism, deacons and elders, and intentional outreach.

REACHING OUT TO ALL PEOPLE

“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” 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? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”...So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ” (Romans 10:13-15, 17).

Winsomely sharing the good news of Jesus Christ in word and deed is a calling of all Christians. By the Holy Spirit all who 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. The ministry of evangelism, “one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread” (D. T. Niles), is a natural and grateful response to the new life we have experienced through Jesus Christ.

The formation of new churches is part of the church’s faithful witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The community of Jesus Christ will look beyond itself, reaching out to those who have not yet heard the gospel or found it compelling. In seeking to present the gospel in a variety of contexts and situations, new congregations may vary widely in worship styles, geographic settings, and socioeconomic conditions. Whatever its particular style or setting, a congregation of Jesus Christ will seek to know him and to make him known; it will gather regularly for the preaching of the Word, prayer, and the celebration of the sacraments; members will serve each other and those in need; they will reach out in love to those who do not yet know Christ.

These are some examples of how CS/EVCD has lived out this commitment to outreach:

**Evangelism Workshops:** Numerous workshops have been held in congregations across the country.

**Evangelism Training Events:** Three major events were held last year with our ecumenical partners; more than ninety RCA pastors, lay persons, and synod leaders participated.

**New Church Planter Training:** Intentional training and support events for pastors and spouses involved in the ministry of church plants continue; two conferences were held this year.

**New Church Pastor Evaluation:** Over three dozen candidates have been evaluated by either Gallup or the Ridley interview, in order to identify those persons gifted and called to the ministry of new church development.

**New Churches Started:** Twelve congregations have been approved for inclusion in the denominational plan; two additional ministries are completing their paperwork. Since 1998, the RCA has started 61 percent of churches (forty-nine) toward its goal of eighty new churches by December 31, 2005.

1. The Journey, San Jose, California
2. Harvest Joy Church, Nampa, Idaho
3. [no name], Parker or Highlands Ranch, Colorado
4. CenterPoint, Lewis Center, Ohio
5. The Crossing, Sioux Falls, South Dakota
6. Crossroads, Estherville, Iowa
7. Lighthouse Korean Reformed Church, Kent, Washington
8. Primera Iglesia Reformada Fuente De Salvación, Scranton, Pennsylvania
9. New Life Celebration, Luverne, Minnesota
11. Sanctuary, Boulder, Colorado
12. [no name], Norton Shores, Michigan

**R-88**
To celebrate the beginning of twelve new ministries in the RCA by supporting them with prayer and highlighting their ministries in our congregations. (ADOPTED)

**New Initiatives Grants:** Over $638,000 has been granted to congregations over a three-year period to develop new ministries to reach the unchurched.
**Restarts:** Since the Faithful Witnesses program began in 1999, ten congregations have been restarted. This is half of our goal of twenty churches by December 31, 2005.

**Churches Organized:** Four churches have been formally organized and will be recognized at General Synod 2003.

- East Hills Community Church, Riverside, California
- Forest Ridge Community Church, Monument, Colorado
- Han Sung Church, Reformed Church in America, Cresskill, New Jersey
- Kew Gardens Sung Shin Reformed Church, Kew Gardens, New York

**Reception of new congregations**

The RCA celebrates the organization of the following four congregations:

**R-89**

To adopt the following resolution:

BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred and ninety-seventh session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting on the campus of Hope College on the ninth day of June 2003, gives recognition and heartily celebrates the organization of the following congregations:

- East Hills Community, Riverside, California
- Forest Ridge Community, Monument, Colorado
- Han Sung Church, Reformed Church in America, Cresskill, New Jersey
- Kew Gardens Sung Shin Reformed Church, Kew Gardens, New York

**Standards and Process for the Certification of Christian Educators**

The 2002 General Synod voted:

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).

This action was assigned to the Congregational Services committee of General Synod Council. At its November meeting, the committee said it would wait to see the report of
the committee studying possible parameters for commissioned pastors, to see if those requirements would or would not meet the needs of educators, as identified by this action.

The General Synod Council’s Congregational Services Committee will continue its discussion of this referral.

Report of the General Synod Council’s Evangelism and Church Development Services Committee

OFFICE OF EV ANGELISM AND CHURCH DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

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 evangelism is part of a common effort in 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 on the pages just previous to this report. This is the detailed report of the RCA’s work in evangelism.

Evangelism Online

“From the congregations, for the congregations” is the motto of the RCA evangelism webpage on the RCA website. The current spring edition is number six in a series that began in 2000. The webpage features articles pertinent to evangelism strategies of local congregations, book reviews by pastors and other leaders seeking a greater knowledge of the task before us, and resource recommendations useful to congregations in equipping their members for mission. Since the revision of the RCA website, EvangelismOnline can be accessed easily through www.rca.org/evangelism.

“Postmodern” Webpage

How do we reach the people out there who may be interested in exploring the Christian faith but are not yet ready to worship in a local congregation? The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America decided to fund a project to meet that need and invited the RCA to join them. ToLive.org is a website linked, but not directly related to, our two denominations. Postmoderns surfing the web find a website that begins where they are, with their questions, and provides stories of real people who have found God’s help in their daily lives. After a delay due to staff changes at the ELCA, the website is now up and running again, and a team of people from both communions is developing the innovative outreach effort.

Evangelism Connections

More than ninety RCA pastors, laypersons, and synod leaders took part in major evangelism training events in Louisville, Kentucky; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Navasota, Texas, during the past year. All were produced and coordinated by “Evangelism Connections,” a consortium of evangelism staff from our Formula of Agreement partners, plus the Episcopal Church, Church of the Brethren, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and Net Results. A total of thirteen hundred participants from those denominations and oth-
ers attended one of the three national events. The Rev. Andres Serrano, RCA pastor of Iglesia la Senda in Corona, California, led a workshop on the topic, “Reaching Out: Evangelism in Your Own Backyard,” and both General Synod President John Chang and Synod of the Mid-Atlantics executive Luis Perez addressed an RCA breakfast at the Philadelphia event. Another event for regional synod executives, bishops, and other mid-level denominational leaders is currently being planned for 2004.

Belonging

After twelve years of use for new members classes in RCA churches, the “Belonging” packet was in need of updating and upgrading. The minister of evangelism has been leading a team consisting of Thomas DeVries, Jeffrey Japinga, and Jane Schuyler. The upgrade will emphasize the mission and vision of the RCA and the need for new members to become disciples and to follow Christ in mission in a lost and broken world so loved by God. Hopefully the revised resource will be available at General Synod.

Evangelism Workshops

The minister of evangelism and other pastors trained in evangelism have conducted numerous workshops in local congregations throughout the RCA over the past year. These workshops include the following topics: “Unchurched, Dechurched, Rechurched; Who Cares?” “How to Share Your Faith without Losing Your Friends,” “Welcoming People, Welcoming Church,” “From a Teflon to a Velcro Church,” “What in the World Are We Doing for Heaven’s Sake?” and “Generation to Generation: Passing It On.” The seminars and workshops are tailored for the particular needs of the local congregation and are available free of charge in an effort to equip congregations for mission in their local communities.


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 render financial assistance in the erection of church buildings. In fulfillment of this purpose, it maintains and operates a loan fund commonly known as the “Building and Extension Fund” (BEF). Prior to the summer of 2002 the RCABEF operated two separate loan funds—the Church Building Fund (CBF) and Extension Foundation Fund (EFF). In the summer of 2002 the CBF and EFF were consolidated into the BEF. Detailed information regarding the BEF (such as the amounts that can be borrowed, the purposes for which funds can be borrowed, the requirements which must be satisfied in order to borrow funds, and how one can invest in the BEF) can be obtained through the RCA’s website (http://www.rca.org/lead/bef).

Funds in the RCABEF come from gifts and bequests from members and friends of the RCA, the sale of investment notes, and interest earnings on RCABEF assets. Investment notes are offered in fixed maturities of two, five, and ten years. The notes are securities, and therefore are offered for sale through an offering circular. The offering circular is also available on the RCA’s website (http://www.rca.org/lead/bef/invest1.php). Presently the RCABEF offers investment notes for sale in eighteen states—Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin. The rates of interest paid on investment notes are established quarterly by a
subcommittee of the RCABEF board, and can be found on the RCA’s website.

At the end of fiscal year 2002 (September 30, 2002) the RCABEF had assets of over $37.43 million and liabilities of just over $8.97 million (nearly all of which were investment notes). Of the over $37.43 million in assets, nearly $23.84 million was in the form of loans outstanding to RCA congregations, and nearly $7.24 million was committed but not yet funded. Two hundred loans were outstanding (or committed but not yet funded) to local RCA congregations at the end of fiscal year 2002 (compared to one hundred ninety-two loans at the end of fiscal year 2001). Following this report is a list of all churches that are borrowers from the RCABEF (or for whom loans have been approved) as of the end of fiscal year 2002.

During fiscal year 2002 thirteen loans were paid off (compared to fifteen in 2001). Thirty-three commitments for loans were issued to RCA congregations in fiscal year 2002 (compared to thirty-one in fiscal year 2001, twenty-three in 2000, thirty-four in 1999, and twenty-two in 1998), and the total dollar amount committed was over $8 million (compared to over $5.3 million in fiscal year 2001, over $3.5 million in 2000, over $7.5 million in 1999, and nearly $4.4 million in 1998). The RCABEF prays that the facilities that are purchased, built, or remodeled will enable the congregations to fulfill their call to ministry in their communities.

The RCABEF also continues to provide resources (through RCA Evangelism and Church Development Services) to fund matching grants for new ministries. Through the end of fiscal year 2001, twenty-three commitments for such grants have been issued. The RCABEF is grateful that it can provide such funding for new ministries and prays that through them hurts may be healed, the lost may be found, the hungry may be fed, peace may heal brokenness, hope may replace despair, and lives may be transformed by the love of Jesus Christ.

During fiscal year 2002 the RCABEF amended its certificate of incorporation and bylaws. The amendments have made possible the following:

1. As previously noted, the Church Building Fund and Extension Foundation Fund have been consolidated into a single fund. Churches with substantial loan needs no longer must obtain multiple loans. Instead they may obtain a single loan of up to $1,500,000.
2. The amount that a church may borrow unsecured has increased to $25,000.
3. Classes are specifically identified as eligible borrowers under certain circumstances.
4. Loans now may be secured by either real estate or personal property (such as publicly traded, marketable securities).
5. The RCABEF may participate with other lenders in loans to local congregations (to accommodate borrowers seeking loans in larger amounts than what is available from the RCABEF).
6. Interest rates for loans to established churches will be adjusted annually (rather than once every three years), thereby enabling the RCABEF to be more responsive to market fluctuations.

The RCABEF hopes that these changes will simplify its practices and procedures and enable it to be more responsive to the needs of local churches.

As in prior years, 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
Alberta
Christ Community Church, St. Albert

British Columbia
Grace Community Church, Surrey

Manitoba
Elmwood Community Reformed Church, Winnipeg

Ontario
Bethel Reformed Church, Brantford
Drayton Reformed Church, Drayton
First Reformed Church, St. Catharines
Classis of Ontario (Igreja Evangelica Vida Nova), Stevensville
Classis of Ontario (Christ Community Church), Welland
Emmanuel Reformed Church, Woodstock

UNITED STATES
Arizona
New Hope Community Church, Gilbert
Christ's Community Church, Glendale
Desert Haven Community Church, Mesa
Hope Community Church, Scottsdale

California
Canyon Lake Community Church, Canyon Lake
Christ Community Church, Carmichael
Corona Community Church, Corona
Crossroads Community Church, Elk Grove
(Classis of California)
New Hope Community Church, Fremont
New Hope Community Church, Glendora
CrossWinds Community Church, Hesperia
Living Faith Community Church, Modesto
Palm Canyon Community Church, Moreno Valley
Lincoln Avenue Community Church, Pomona

Colorado
New Hope Community Church, Aurora
Christ Community Church, Denver
Church of the Rockies, Denver
Faith Community Church, Littleton

Florida
West Broward Community Church, Fort Lauderdale
Palm Grove Reformed Church, Holiday
Classis of Florida (Korean Choong Hyun Church), Orlando
Christ Community Church, Palm Springs, Florida
First Reformed Church, Tampa, Florida
Rolling Hills Community Church, Zellwood

Georgia
North Atlanta Community Church, Roswell

Idaho
Twin Falls Reformed Church, Twin Falls
New Life Community Church, Wendell

Illinois
Downers Grove Community Church, Downers Grove
Peace Reformed Church, Mt. Prospect
Second Reformed Church, Pekin
Indiana
Christ’s Community Church, Fort Wayne
Community Reformed Church, Lafayette

Iowa
Adventure-Life Reformed Church, Altoona
Classis of Central Iowa (Bridgeway Church), Ames
Christ’s Family Reformed Church, Davenport
Calvary Reformed Church, Des Moines
Hope Reformed Church, George
Newkirk Reformed Church, Hospers
Classis of Central Iowa (Knoxville restart), Knoxville
Classis of West Sioux and Rejoice! Community Church, LeMars
First Reformed Church, Maurice
Good News Community Church, Okoboji
American Reformed Church, Orange City
Heartland Reformed Church, Pella
First Reformed Church, Rock Valley
New Life Reformed Church, Sioux Center
Classis of West Sioux (New Hope Community Church), Sioux City
Hope Reformed Church, Spencer
Westview Church, Waukee

Kansas
Crossroads Church, Overland Park
Harvest Community Church, Wichita

Michigan
Reformed Church of Corinth, Byron Center
CrossWinds Community Church, Canton
Open Door Reformed Church, Dorr
University Reformed Church, East Lansing
Calvary Reformed Church (aka Common Ground Community Church), Grand Rapids
Classis of North Grand Rapids and Clancy Street Ministries, Grand Rapids
Central Park Reformed Church, Holland
Grace Reformed Church, Holland
Covenant Community Church, Hudsonville
Second Reformed Church, Kalamazoo
Twin Lakes Reformed Church, Kalamazoo
Martin Reformed Church, Martin
Calvary Reformed Church, Mattawan
Covenant Community Church, Muskegon Heights
Faith Reformed Church, Portage
Mason County Reformed Church, Scottville
Classis of Northern Michigan (for New Hope Community Church), Shelby
Community of Joy, Traverse City
Gun Lake Community Church, Wayland

Minnesota
Riverside Reformed Church, Bloomington
Peace Reformed Church, Eagan
Minnesota Valley Community Church, Prior Lake
American Reformed Church, Worthington

Missouri
Christ’s Church, St. Peter’s

Nebraska
Reformed Church of Firth
New Jersey
Classis of Greater Palisades, Bogota
Blawenburg Reformed Church, Blawenburg
Old Bergen Church, Jersey City
The Reformed Church in Kinnelon
First Reformed Church, Lincoln Park
Ocean Community Church, Manahawkin

New York
Classis of Albany
Taiwanese American Reformed Church in Queens, Bayside
Old First Reformed Church, Brooklyn
Christ Community Church, Clifton Park
Community Reformed Church of Colonie
Siloam Church, Flushing
Helderberg Reformed Church, Guilderland Center
Herkimer Reformed Church, Herkimer
Levittown Community Church, Levittown
Pitcher Hill Community Church, North Syracuse
The Reformed Church, Poughkeepsie
Pultneyville Reformed Church, Pultneyville
Lakeview Community Church, Rochester
The New Church of Greater New York, Roslyn Heights
New Life Community Church, Sayville
First Reformed Church, Scotia
First Reformed Church of Bethlehem, Selkirk
Grace Christian Church, Staten Island
Nakwon Reformed Church, Sunnyside
Christ Community Church, Utica
New Hackensack Reformed Church, Wappinger Falls
First Reformed Church, Wynantskill
New Hope Reformed Church, Yonkers

North Carolina
First Reformed Church of Cary

North Dakota
Red River Reformed Church, West Fargo

Ohio
New Hope Reformed Church, Powell

Pennsylvania
Newtown Reformed Church, Newtown
The Reformed Church, Willow Grove

South Dakota
Bethany Reformed Church, Canton
The Reformed Church, Dell Rapids
Good News Reformed Church, Sioux Falls

Tennessee
Franklin Fellowship Church, Franklin

Texas
Christ Community Church, Dallas

U.S. Virgin Islands
St. Thomas Reformed Church, St. Thomas

Washington
Fourth Corner Community Church, Bellingham
Faith Community Church, Edmonds
Classis of Cascades (formerly Servants of Christ), Federal Way
Trinity Reformed Church, Kent
Church of the Good Shepherd, Lynnwood
East Valley Reformed Church, Yakima

Wisconsin
Emmanuel Reformed Church, Clinton
New Life Community Church, Milwaukee
Bethany Reformed Church, Sheboygan
Gibbsville Reformed Church, Sheboygan Falls
Hope Community Reformed Church, West Bend
REPORTS ON FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Report of the General Synod Council’s Finance Services Committee

Report of the Office of Finance

The Office of Finance provides centralized finance and accounting services to the denominational corporations, including the General Synod, the General Synod Council, the Board of Benefits Services, the RCA Building and Extension Fund, and the RCA Foundation. Its goal is 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 our corporations to fulfill their fiduciary responsibilities.

The director of finance, who serves as the RCA’s treasurer and chief financial officer, is charged with primary responsibility for the oversight of all activities related to the Office of Finance. The Office of Finance is staffed with a team of eight dedicated professionals who handle a wide range of tasks including: 1) proper recording and reporting of contributions and other income; 2) payment of all bills, including the program expenditures that make up the RCA’s total mission worldwide; 3) supervision of income and expense budgets; 4) preparation of payroll for RCA staff and missionaries; 5) preparation of financial reports; and 6) working with outside investment managers, the Investment Advisory Subcommittee, and board members to ensure that the RCA’s funds are prudently invested. Finance staff members are also responsible for interfacing with legal counsel, independent auditors, state regulators, the Internal Revenue Service, and corporate insurance providers.

Financial Summary for 2002

In 2000 the General Synod Council, the Board of Benefits Services, the RCA Foundation, and the RCA Building and Extension Fund all adopted a new fiscal year-end of September 30. This change was made so that the bulk of the contributions that are normally received in December will be recorded at the beginning of the fiscal year rather than at the end. This change has allowed us to better manage our budgets and workflow. The information provided below is for the fiscal year ending 9/30/02. The complete set of financial statements is available on the website: www.rca.org.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Corporation</th>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Expenses</th>
<th>Change in Net Assets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Synod Council</td>
<td>$19,301,989</td>
<td>$19,713,250</td>
<td>($411,261)*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Board of Benefits Services - General Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>Board of Benefits Services - Insurance Fund</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCA Building and Extension Fund</td>
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<td>$1,177,014</td>
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<tr>
<td>RCA Foundation</td>
<td>$608,911</td>
<td>$649,252</td>
<td>($40,341)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The deficit is due to a transfer of funds from GSC investments to cover Communication and Production Services’ $876,377 overdraft in the RCA Fund.

Investment Programs

The RCA’s investments are managed by outside investment managers. The treasurer, the Investment Advisory Subcommittee, and the various boards are responsible for ensuring
that the RCA's funds are prudently invested, investment managers adhere to established investment policies, and performance of the funds is monitored on an ongoing basis. The following is a brief overview of the investments in the RCA Fund, the RCA Investment Program, and the RCA Retirement Plan. Individual investments in the RCA Fund and RCA Investment Program are listed in the audited financial statements that can be found on the RCA website: www.rca.org.

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 $15.9 million (or $3.2 million) may be invested in Extension Foundation Fund (EFF) notes; however, given the present liquidity of the EFF, only about 2 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 RCA Fund 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.

The Bank of New York actively manages a fixed income portfolio, which comprises the bulk of the RCA Fund assets. The Fund also invests in EFF notes, and about 7 percent of its assets are held in money market accounts to provide liquidity. The total return of the assets managed by the Bank of New York was 9.4 percent in 2002 and 8.6 percent since the Bank of New York assumed responsibility for investment management in April 1999. RCA Fund investors receive distributions of cash earnings on a quarterly basis. The average payout to RCA Fund investors was 3.97 percent in 2002.

The Investment Objectives and Guidelines for the RCA Fund marketable securities is 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 10 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 which may be deemed unethical or in violation of biblical principles, which would be determined by 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 issues shall be limited to a minimum rating of A by either Standard and
  Poor’s or Moody’s at the time of purchase. Downgrades in credit quality shall be
  reported to the client and sold at the discretion of the manager. The average qual-
  ity of the portfolio shall be maintained at a minimum of AA, on a weighted-aver-
  age basis.
- Eligible investments include U.S. Government obligations or deposits issued or
  guaranteed as to interest and principal by the government of the United States or
  any agency or instrumentality thereof. Corporate obligations, asset-backed secu-
  rities, and mortgage-backed securities are allowable investments.
- Prohibited investments include instruments known as “structured notes” or
  instruments commonly considered “derivative” instruments (e.g., inverse
  floaters, leveraged floaters, equity-linked securities, options, futures, swaps, caps, 
  floors, and collars).

**RCA Investment Program**

The restricted and unrestricted endowment funds of the General Synod and the General
Synod Council are managed through the RCA Investment Program. Scudder Private
Investment Counsel serves as investment manager for the bulk of the portfolio. The invest-
ment objective is to generate long-term preservation and growth of capital after inflation, 
and portfolio investments are diversified among high-quality companies and industry sec-
tors to reduce risk. Individual stock positions are limited to 5 percent of the equity portion
of the portfolio based on cost. Target asset allocation is 65 percent stocks, 35 percent
bonds. As is the case with the RCA Fund, social screening constraints approved by the
General Synod apply.

In order to preserve the corpus of the endowments, the RCA Foundation’s policy is to pay
out 6 percent of a five-year rolling average market value in four equal quarterly install-
ments. At 12/31/02, the market value of the Scudder portfolio was $11,474,644.

**Performance summary statistics follow:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RCA Investment Program Performance Summary as of December 31, 2002</th>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equity</td>
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<td>Benchmark**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benchmark***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*S&P 500 Stock Composite Index with Dividends
**Lehman Brothers U.S. Government/Credit Index
***Blend S&P 500 70 percent; Lehman Govt/Corp 30 percent

**RCA Retirement Plan Investments**

Since January 2001 Fidelity Investments has served as investment manager and record
keeper for the RCA Retirement Plan and the Supplemental 403(b) Plan. Plan participants
may select from a variety of Fidelity and socially screened mutual funds, and they have the
option of transferring their account balances from one fund to another within the guidelines
established by the Board of Benefits Services. A summary of investment returns follows:
Past performance is not necessarily indicative of future results.

New Investment Manager for the RCA Foundation Planned Giving Programs

The RCA Foundation manages a gift annuity fund and a pooled income fund and acts as trustee for several charitable remainder trusts. For the past couple of years the RCA Foundation has been looking to consolidate investment management and record-keeping of these planned giving programs with one financial services provider. In the summer of 2002 the staff members of RCA Foundation and the Office of Finance began conversations with State Street Global Advisors (SSgA), a division of State Street Bank and Trust Company. SSgA has a long history of managing charitable funds; they are the industry leader in the endowment and foundation market. Along with the management of these funds they have also set up a payment and reporting system that provides information to both the donor and the charitable organization. They also review all contracts to make sure they are written properly and provide complete tax filing services.

In December 2002 the RCA Foundation entered into an agreement with State Street Global Advisors, and assets were transferred to State Street early in January. Staff and the Investment Advisory Subcommittee worked with State Street to finalize an investment policy that was presented to the RCA Foundation board for ratification at its March 2003 meeting.

Mission Investments

In 1970 the General Synod Executive Committee (GSEC) established a mission investment policy that directed the General Program Council to make “available for mission investment purposes ten percent of the appropriated and unappropriated operating reserve” (GSEC Action 70-50). The main operating criterion 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 12/31/02, mission investments in thirteen banks, credit unions, and other organizations totaled $316,096. 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; the Navigators Kenya, which is making small business loans in impoverished parts of Kenya; and EDCS (Oikocredit), which is making small business loans in impoverished parts of Nicaragua.

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 assessment giving for 2002, 94 percent was collected by the due date of December 31. Of the outstanding 6 percent, all was received during the first two months of calendar year 2003. The total assessment for 2003 is $34.53 per communicant member. It is comprised of a $28.74 amount for the General Synod Operations Budget, $1.50 for the Board of Benefits Services General Fund, and $4.29 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 on January 17, 1986. The exemption covers all participating churches, agencies, and educational institutions within the RCA that have asked to be included.

As one of its conditions, the commissioner of the IRS requires the church to file an annual update listing churches and/or agencies that fall under the 501(c)(3) designation of the IRS code. A complete listing is supplied to the IRS incorporating any revisions under the RCA group exemption umbrella. The report, filed with the commission in June of 2002, listed six newly formed churches to be added, eight name/address changes, and three 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 2002 financial statements of the Reformed Church in America are examined and certified by Lambrides, Lamos, Moulthrop & Co., Certified Public Accountants. The complete set of financial statements is available on the RCA website: www.rca.org.
REPORT OF THE BOARD OF BENEFITS SERVICES

The mission of the Board of Benefits Services is to provide insurance benefits, retirement plans, and assistance programs and support services for ordained ministers and their families and for lay workers of the Reformed Church in America (RCA) in accordance with the rules prescribed in the Constitution and Rules of the Board of Benefits Services. These benefit programs are firmly rooted in, and are an expression of, the “Covenant of Grace/Covenant of Care,” which was endorsed by General Synod at its June 7-12, 2002, meeting in Orange City, Iowa, and is contained in its entirety as the Appendix of this report. Central to the “Covenant of Grace/Covenant of Care” is the concept that we bear each other’s burdens, caring for our neighbors as we would care for ourselves. The 2002 General Synod affirmed “Covenant of Grace/Covenant of Care” as “a foundational statement for the life and work of the church” and adopted the following recommendations:

To instruct the Board of Benefits Services to continue a full and careful review of the medical and other insurance programs, and the assistance programs, to assure that these programs are offering coverage and assistance for RCA ministers and church workers within the framework established in the paper “Covenant of Grace/Covenant of Care,” and that these programs are offered at the fairest possible cost to the churches and other RCA employers, with report to the 2003 General Synod (MGS 2002, R-114 amended, p. 364).

To direct the Board of Benefits Services to deliver to the 2003 General Synod proposed amendments to the Constitution and Rules of the Board of Benefits Services, Part II (Reformed Church in America Retirement Plan, Plan Document), Part III (Reformed Church 403(b) Retirement Plan, Plan Document), and Part IV (Supplemental Assistance and Insurance) to comply with the final action of General Synod arising out of any Plan changes (MGS 2002, R-115 amended, p. 364).

The Board of Benefits Services met on October 22-23, 2002, and on March 18-19, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois. It also formed a task force that met between the two meetings for the purpose of studying and determining how best to implement the “Covenant of Grace/Covenant of Care” in the formulation and administration of the RCA’s insurance and retirement programs. These are extremely challenging times for those programs because of the rapidly rising costs of medical care and the poor performance of the financial markets.

MEDICAL INSURANCE PROGRAM

Faithful Stewardship

Faithful stewardship fulfills our covenantal relationship with God and with each other.

The RCA medical insurance premiums are comparable to those charged by the other Formula of Agreement communions (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.); and United Church of Christ). Despite the competitive cost and quality of the RCA plan, some consistorys, institutions, and agencies argue that good financial stewardship requires them to withdraw from the RCA medical insurance plan and obtain cheaper local coverage. The negative effects of this “adverse selection” on the quality, portability, and cost of RCA medical insurance will be explained below. First, however, the board wishes to address this fundamental question of stewardship in light of the biblically grounded “Covenant of Grace/Covenant of Care.”

Biblical stewardship is covenantal care for creation, the faithful management of all that is entrusted to us by God. It cannot simply be equated with the cheapest option or the greatest cost savings available to a congregation or a denominational agency or institution. We
are called to be “good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10). In covenant, faithful people are blessed in order to be a blessing to all the families of the earth (Genesis 12:3). Like God’s grace, our stewardship extends beyond the local to embrace the entire body of Christ and the world for which Christ died. Calling the church to have the same mind as Christ Jesus, the chief steward of God’s grace, the apostle Paul urged: “Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others” (Philippians 2:4-5). Christ’s law of love is fulfilled in “bearing one another’s burdens” (Galatians 6:2) rather than in lessening our own. The covenant of grace, which provides our identity and security as God’s people, also defines our mission to care for the entire world so loved by God. Like God’s love, faithful stewardship is global, not parochial.

Faithful stewardship in health care seeks the wellness and healing God wills for all people. Indeed, in providing medical insurance for RCA ministers, their families, and other church workers, the Board of Benefits Services cannot ignore the poverty and disease that plague multitudes in our world or the 41 million Americans who lack medical insurance in any form. Global poverty and the mounting health care crisis in the United States complicate our task and also offer an opportunity for a covenantal witness.

In place of individualism and special interests, the church’s covenantal stewardship requires that the board provide a medical insurance plan in which all participate in order to best meet the needs of each servant of the church. The board, as a covenant partner, recognizes its responsibility to provide quality medical insurance at a reasonable and competitive cost. The board asks consistorys, agencies, and institutions for their part to recognize that the premiums they pay provide not only for their own ministers or staff, who may be younger and in good health. They also help to bear the burdens of the elderly, retired, or ill servants of the church who are also our responsibility under the covenant of care. Faithful stewardship requires no less and offers a powerful witness to the competing interests and individualism that mark the medical insurance crisis of our time.

A Plan for Full Participation

To fulfill its responsibility, the Board of Benefits Services (BOBS) recommends to the church a full participation insurance program as an embodiment of the “Covenant of Grace/Covenant of Care.” Implementation of this program requires the adoption of revisions to the Book of Church Order to cause all ministers of Word and sacrament to be covered by the RCA medical insurance program. The revisions also call for immediate family members to be covered unless the immediate family members are enrolled in alternative medical coverage through the spouse’s employer’s group medical insurance plan.

By providing a quality group health plan to pastors, non-ordained church workers, and missionaries who serve the entire church, the RCA will also be better able to fulfill its mission to equip congregations for ministry and increase its mission presence worldwide. The church at large agrees with the importance of the denomination offering a quality group health plan, as reflected by the General Synod Council–commissioned study of denominational services conducted by the Frost Center of Hope College (Reformed Church in America Evaluation of Denominational Services, Hope College, 2002). In that study, which ranked the use and value of a variety of denominational programs, providing insurance benefits to pastors and other church workers received consistently high scores across all regional synods. The recommendation by the Board of Benefits Services also fulfills its covenant commitment to provide continuous medical care to retired pastors who have made lifetime commitments to the church. Finally, the concept of full participation is not unique; rather, it is common to most denominationally-sponsored medical insurance plans.

In addition to covenant theology, there are other practical reasons for adopting a full participation policy.
1. **Medical Inflation:** Industry trends in medical inflation are well known, and the RCA medical insurance plan needs to take proactive steps to respond to the skyrocketing cost of health care. Medical inflation has been driving up health care costs at a rate of approximately 15 percent per annum over the past three years, with inflation in prescription drug costs growing at an even faster rate of 18 percent per year. In order for the RCA medical insurance plan to remain viable, steps other than increasing insurance premiums must be taken.

2. **Uncertainty of Plan Size:** As presently understood by the church, the RCA medical plan creates financial instability. Currently classes, consistories, and ministers have interpreted the *Book of Church Order* (Appendix, The Formularies of the Reformed Church in America, 5: “Call to a Minister of Word and Sacrament”) to mean that they may decide to provide medical coverage for the minister and his or her family through the RCA medical insurance plan or through another source. As a result of the perception that this is a voluntary relationship, many consistories shop for alternative coverage for their pastors on an annual basis and, if in a given year less expensive coverage is located, they may choose to leave the RCA medical insurance plan. This option of choice for the church and minister causes the size of the pool of participants in the RCA medical insurance plan to never be firmly established. This creates uncertainty regarding the size of the RCA medical insurance plan and makes it difficult to establish premiums and reserve levels. If a full participation policy is adopted, the administrators of the RCA medical insurance plan will be able to make more reliable projections, which will result in more accurate financial decisions regarding the plan. This will benefit the participants as well as the plan as a whole. It should be noted that approximately two hundred pastors have elected to not participate in the RCA medical insurance plan and that since January 1, 2003, fifty-five participants have left the plan. This has resulted in a loss of approximately $930,000 in premium revenue over the past year.

3. **Negative Financial Spiral:** The open door policy creates a negative financial spiral. As participants leave the RCA medical insurance plan, the plan loses revenue and must spread the risk of catastrophic claims across a smaller group. As a result, premiums often need to be increased. Increased premiums drive more churches and ministers to look for alternative coverage. A full participation policy would break this cycle.

4. **Adverse Selection:** The freedom to choose creates the problem of “adverse selection.” When a participant is young and healthy, it may be relatively easy for a church to locate a less expensive alternative medical insurance policy for the minister. However, as the minister ages and experiences medical problems, alternative coverage may be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to obtain. An insurance consultant retained by the Board of Benefits Services (Mercer Human Resource Consulting, a division of the Marsh & McLennan Companies) has indicated that this is typically the case once an individual reaches the age of forty-five, particularly if the individual has any ongoing medical conditions. Presently, when alternative coverage becomes too expensive or impossible to obtain, the individual is free to enroll in the RCA medical insurance plan. Obviously, an RCA medical insurance plan comprised primarily, or solely, of older participants with medical conditions and few, if any, younger, healthy individuals is a more expensive plan to maintain. This is in direct contradiction to the concept of faithful stewardship.

5. **Burden of Safety Net:** The RCA medical insurance plan also provides medical coverage to those ministers who have faithfully served the church but who have few or no other medical insurance options. This group includes ministers without charge,
disabled ministers, and retired ministers. In fact, a minister who is without charge, disabled, or retired may enroll in the RCA Plan even if the minister has never been enrolled while actively working for the church (for example, because the congregations the minister served chose to provide the minister with insurance through another source in his or her younger, healthier days). The full participation policy embodies the Covenant of Care by providing continuous lifetime medical care to its pastors.

6. Burden on Ministers: The freedom of choice currently practiced by many consistories may place a minister in an awkward position of disagreeing with his or her consistory regarding medical insurance. The Board of Benefits Services believes that ministers should not be placed in a position of negotiating with their consistories regarding medical insurance. This could occur, for example, if the minister wanted to stay enrolled in the RCA plan but the consistory wanted to switch to a less expensive option. If the less expensive option provided different or lesser coverage, it could be upsetting and disruptive, not only for the minister and his/her family but for the entire congregation. Medical insurance should not create a distraction or a disruption in ministry. Further, if a minister participating in the RCA plan accepts a call to another church that does not participate in the RCA plan, currently the minister needs to switch medical insurance coverage. In the event that the minister or a member of the minister’s family has a medical condition, this could cause a lot of anxiety as to whether the new medical insurance will be adequate or even available. A minister’s decision to accept a call should not be predicated on medical insurance benefits. The future of the RCA’s mission and ministry depends on fully equipping ministers to serve the church.

The recommendation of the Board of Benefits Services is that the RCA adopt a policy of full participation for the RCA medical insurance plan, which will allow it to fulfill the Covenant of Care. Under the full participation policy, all ministers serving the church and the assemblies, institutions, and agencies of the Reformed Church in America, including regional synods and seminaries, will be required to enroll in the RCA medical insurance plan. Immediate family members of a minister will also be enrolled unless the immediate family member is enrolled in group medical coverage through the minister’s spouse’s employer group plan. If that alternative coverage is lost, the dependents could immediately enroll in the RCA medical insurance plan. This recommendation requires revisions to the Book of Church Order, which follow.

In summary, adoption of the full participation policy is critical to the fulfillment of the Covenant of Care and ensures the future viability of the RCA medical plan. For the Reformed Church in America, it:

- Demonstrates wise stewardship of the church’s resources.
- Ensures certainty and stability for the insured pool.
- Improves the quality of financial planning.
- Stops the negative financial spiral caused by participants leaving the plan and corresponding premium increases.
- Provides for a uniform insurance program for each pastor throughout his or her lifetime.
- Spreads the risk of the plan more appropriately, as the RCA’s younger, healthier pastors will be a part of the plan.
- Eliminates medical insurance as an issue for pastors to negotiate with their consistories, thereby permitting them to focus on their ministries.
- Helps lay the groundwork for recruitment of future pastors.

What will happen if this General Synod does not adopt a full participation policy? There are two options:
1. The RCA medical insurance plan could continue in its present form. However, there will continue to be challenges, perhaps overwhelming obstacles, concerning financial planning with an unstable pool of participants, the negative financial spiral when participants leave and premiums must be increased, and the adverse selection and the burden of serving as a safety net. The Board of Benefits Services has retained the services of an insurance consultant to examine the RCA medical insurance plan and the full participation policy. The consultant indicated that if a full participation policy is not implemented, the plan probably has only a 20 percent chance of survival over the next ten years. If the church wants the plan to continue, it is very possible that unless a full participation policy is adopted, additional assessments will be needed to fund the plan. General Synod needs to be aware of this potential, possibly significant, financial obligation.

2. Alternatively, the plan could be terminated. If the plan is terminated, the church will need to locate alternative insurance, not only for actively working ministers, but also for ministers without charge, disabled ministers, and retired ministers. There would no longer be an RCA group plan for these individuals and their families. It should be noted that the Board of Benefits Services solicited bids to convert the plan to a fully insured policy last year, and there were no carriers willing to provide quotes. The insurance consultant has indicated that this is not surprising. He indicated that carriers would be even less likely to quote a group insurance policy for the plan upon termination because it would cover a group smaller than the current pool. Therefore, individual policies would need to be secured for each minister, and this could be difficult, especially for those with serious medical conditions. Furthermore, individual policies are usually more expensive than group policies, and they typically provide lesser benefits. In the event that coverage could not be obtained, the church would need to consider providing other resources, such as assistance, to support those ministers.

The Board of Benefits Services understands that a covenant is a reciprocal relationship. As a result, it is committed to providing a quality group health plan that meets the needs of its ministers. Recent actions taken in response to feedback from participants have included:

- Switching the third party administrator from Health Plan Management to Professional Benefit Administrators to provide more timely and accurate claims processing; and
- Changing the network of preferred provider organizations (PPO's) for certain areas of the country to cause more providers to be “in-network” for plan benefit purposes.

The Board of Benefits Services is also looking for additional ways to improve the plan. For example, it has recently retained Mercer Human Resource Consulting to review the plan and to provide recommendations for improving its design. One of the areas the board anticipates making changes in is prevention and disease management. Providing these services on a proactive basis will promote the health of participants as well as the health of the plan. The Board of Benefits Services is also committed to soliciting further input from participants in the future.

In addition, the Board of Benefits Services is reviewing ways to make the plan more equitable for all participants. One proposal under serious consideration for 2004 is the implementation of a three-tier premium rate schedule. In addition to single or family coverage, participants would have a third option for a single participant plus one dependent. This change will result in ministers with only one dependent paying a premium that more truly represents the cost of their coverage.

Finally, the Board of Benefits Services continues to seek ways to improve the financial efficiency of the plan and its responsiveness to participants. Recently the board retained an
outside auditor with medical insurance expertise to review the operation of the plan from a financial point of view. While the initial analysis shows that the plan is well run, the board is concerned about the future financial integrity of the plan.

The advisory committee recommended an amendment to R-90 with the addition of the words “full-time” to each section to fulfill the intent of the Board of Benefits Services:

R-90
To adopt the following revisions of the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, new Section 7 (and renumbering the subsequent sections); Chapter 1, Part II, Article 12, Section 3; Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 8, new Section 6 (and renumbering the subsequent sections); and Appendix, The Formularies of the Reformed Church in America, number 5, “Call to a Minister of Word and Sacrament,” for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined, deletions are stricken out):

Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Responsibilities of the Consistory

Sec. 7 A consistory shall fulfill the provisions of the call form (Formulary 5) for all ministers serving the church full-time under call or contract through participation in the retirement and insurance programs of the Reformed Church in America, unless the minister is covered through the Canadian portion of the RCA plan or the plan of the communion where the minister’s membership is held.

Chapter 1, Part II, Article 12, Supervision of Ministers of Word and Sacrament

Sec. 3 The classis shall be responsible for the pastoral care of each enrolled minister and the minister’s immediate family.* Pastoral care shall be exercised by such means as the classis deems appropriate, which shall be reported to the classis annually in order to assess its adequacy and effectiveness. The classis shall assure that the provisions of the call form (Formulary 5) for retirement and insurance are fulfilled for all of its ministers serving full-time in congregations or employed by an assembly, institution, or agency of the Reformed Church in America under call or contract, unless the minister is covered through the Canadian portion of the RCA plan or the plan of the communion where the minister’s membership is held.

Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 8, The Office of General Synod Professor of Theology

Sec. 6 The General Synod shall be responsible for the pastoral care of each enrolled professor and the professor’s immediate family.* Pastoral care shall be exercised by such means as the synod deems appropriate, which shall be reported to the synod annually in order to assess its adequacy and effectiveness. The synod shall assure that the provisions of the call form (Formulary 5) for retirement and insurance are fulfilled for all of its full-time professors of theology.
Appendix, The Formularies of the Reformed Church in America, number 5: “Call to a Minister of Word and Sacrament” (p. 118, paragraph five)

...We also promise to pay the stipulated dues contributions to the Reformed Church Annuity Fund retirement plan and the premiums for group life insurance, long-term disability insurance, and medical insurance for the minister as offered by the Board of Benefits Services, and further, to provide this same medical insurance for his/her immediate family, except where equivalent coverage is already in effect the immediate family has medical coverage through a spouse’s employer sponsored group plan, as long as you continue...

*“Immediate family” is understood to mean those dependents eligible for family medical insurance according to the insurance plan document of the Board of Benefits Services, (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

RETIREMENT PLAN

This year the board began a major review of the Reformed Church in America Retirement Plan within the framework of the paper “Covenant of Grace/Covenant of Care” to determine if the plan continues to be the best possible vehicle to serve the retirement needs of participants and to provide adequate funding of the assistance grant and Senior Pastors programs. The board believes the assistance and Senior Pastors programs are core parts of its ministry to the church. There are concerns about the sufficiency and source of the funding to support these programs, which will be addressed as part of the ongoing review of the programs.

The poor performance in the financial markets continues to be a major concern for the Board of Benefits Services. Representatives from the board meet regularly with the Investment Advisory Committee and representatives from Fidelity Investments, Inc. to monitor investment performance and review options. Recently the board authorized the addition of PIMCO Total Return III Fund as a replacement for Citizens Income Fund in the Reformed Church in America retirement plans. The change was made because of a record of better performance by the PIMCO fund. Also, the PIMCO fund is socially screened and therefore continues to provide an option for those participants who are concerned with investing exclusively in screened funds.

The board and staff will continue to monitor the performance of the investment options relative to its benchmarks, but recognizes that overall results are subject to market performance. The retirement programs are also being evaluated to verify that they will produce adequate savings for retirement over the long term. Special attention is being paid to the anticipated needs of those in retirement who have had limited opportunities to accumulate retirement savings and whose problems are compounded by poor market performance. The board recognizes that until some level of certainty returns to the geo-political situation and the economy begins to demonstrate some level of improvement, investment performance will be questionable.

Fidelity Investments continues to provide the Board of Benefits Services and staff with a high level of service. Obviously the performance of the financial markets leaves much to be desired, but the Fidelity funds have performed adequately when compared to their benchmarks. Also, Fidelity offers excellent assistance in dealing with legal and compliance issues as well as superior educational and retirement planning materials. A series of region-
Changes in the tax law have again necessitated amendments to the Reformed Church Retirement Plan and 403(b) Retirement Plan in order to be in compliance. The board has reviewed the proposed changes and recommends that the General Synod adopt them in 2003.

403(b) and Retirement Plan Amendments

At its March 2003 meeting the Board of Benefits Services approved several amendments to the Retirement Plan and the 403(b) Retirement Plan for consideration and action by the General Synod. The proposed amendments relate to changes in the tax laws, which were included in the Economic Growth and Tax Relief Reconciliation Act (EGTRRA) of 2001. There are also amendments to the plans that relate to the distribution of accounts in the event of the divorce (and the tax law changes involved) and the death of the participant. Additional amendments address the handling of participant (after tax contribution) accumulations. Finally, an amendment clarifies that the retirement plans of the RCA are operating on a calendar year rather than a fiscal year. The changes will make the RCA plan more favorable to participants in terms of savings opportunities and distribution options. In cases where the EGTRRA changes were optional the board has proposed to synod that it adopt them because the changes will enhance the RCA plan.

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WHEREAS, the Reformed Church in America, an organization described in Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as amended, and exempt from taxation under Section 501(a) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as amended, has in effect the Reformed Church in America Retirement Plan for its ministers and lay workers and the Reformed Church 403(b) Retirement Plan; and

WHEREAS, the Reformed Church in America now desires to amend and restate these Plans in order that the Plans may conform to certain requirements of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as amended by the Economic Growth and Tax Relief Reconciliation Act of 2001 (EGTRRA);

NOW THEREFORE, in consideration of the foregoing, these Plan Documents are hereby amended and restated, effective as of January 1, 2003. (ADOPTED)

REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA
BOARD OF BENEFITS SERVICES

Reformed Church in America Retirement Plan
Plan Document

ARTICLE X
Benefits Payable Upon Death

10.1 Commencement of Benefits—Married Participants. In the event a married Participant dies before payments of Retirement or Disability benefits have commenced under Article IX, benefits will be distributed to the Participant’s surviving
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Spouse {or Beneficiary} according to the distribution election in place under Article VI from among the distribution options available under Section 9.1, as approved by the Board; however, subject to Board approval, unless a commercial annuity has already been purchased for the Participant under Section 9.1(b), a surviving Spouse may revoke the Participant’s prior election and make a one-time, irrevocable election to receive the Participant’s benefits in a different form from among the distribution options available under Section 9.1. All other designated Beneficiaries of a married Participant, other than a surviving Spouse, shall only be entitled to receive a lump sum distribution. A lump sum distribution option may be made available for the Spouse {or a non-Spouse Beneficiary} by the Board in its sole discretion.

10.2 Commencement of Benefits—Single Participants. In the event an unmarried Participant dies before or after payment of Retirement or Disability benefits under Article IX {have} [has] commenced, the balance of his or her deemed Account, as determined on the valuation date established by the Board, shall be distributed in a lump sum payment {(unless payments are established under an alternative distribution election available under Section 9.1 )} to his or her Beneficiary, and if none, according to Section 10.4 herein.

10.3 Death After Benefit Commencement—Married Participants. In the event of the death of a married Participant after distribution of benefits commences, [in the case of a surviving Spouse] benefits payable under the Plan shall be such amounts payable under the distribution option made available under Section 9.1 and selected by the Participant then in effect for the Participant under the Plan, as approved by the Board; however, subject to Board approval, unless a commercial annuity has already been purchased for the Participant under Section 9.1(b), a surviving Spouse may revoke the Participant’s prior election and make a one-time, irrevocable election to receive the present value actuarial equivalent (as of the time of the surviving Spouse’s election) of the Participant’s remaining benefits in a different form from among the distribution options available under Section 9.1. All other designated Beneficiaries of a married Participant, other than a surviving Spouse, shall only be entitled to receive a lump sum distribution. A lump sum distribution option may be made available for the [surviving] Spouse {or non-Spouse Beneficiary} by the Board in its sole discretion.

ARTICLE XIII
Miscellaneous Provisions

13.1 Spendthrift Provisions.

(a) A Participant’s or Beneficiary’s right to payment under the Plan shall not be subject to alienation, assignment, attachment, transfer, garnishment or 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 [as provided in Section 13.1(b) or] to the extent {as may be} required by law.

(b) A Participant’s benefits under the Plan {will be distributed} [may be assigned, subject to Board approval,] to a nonparticipant ex-spouse {, or the designated beneficiary of a nonparticipant ex-spouse, only in the form of a lump sum} pursuant to the terms of a divorce decree issued under state law, a marital property settlement agreement, or any other written agreement signed by the Participant and the nonparticipant ex-spouse as part of a divorce action [. The] [ , and, effective April 1, 2003, will be distributed to a] nonparticipant ex-spouse {shall not be entitled to maintain any benefit under the Plan.} [pursuant to the election made by the ex-
spouse in accordance with Article VI and Section 9.1 of the Plan. To the extent applicable, the provisions of the Plan shall govern the timing and form of the distribution of the assigned benefit to the nonparticipant ex-spouse. In addition to the distribution options available in Section 9.1 of the Plan, subject to Board approval, a nonparticipant ex-spouse may make an initial election to have his or her assigned benefit distributed in the form of a lump sum distribution as soon as is administratively practicable. Any designated beneficiary of a nonparticipant ex-spouse, including the surviving Spouse of the nonparticipant ex-spouse, shall only be entitled to receive the nonparticipant ex-spouse’s assigned benefit in the form of a lump sum distribution. Prior to April 1, 2003, a nonparticipant ex-spouse could not maintain his or her assigned benefit in the Plan and was only entitled to receive a lump sum distribution.]

**ARTICLE IV**

**Participant Accounts; Contributions**

4.2 Participant Payments.

(a) Participant Payment Accounts held under the prior RCA Church Annuity Fund will be held under this Plan, and will reflect the market value of the Investment Options based on the Investment Option selected by the Participant pursuant to Article V. No further Participant Payments will be accepted by the Board under this Plan as of the Effective Date.

(b) Beginning January 1, 2002, a Participant Payment Account may be rolled over to an IRA or another plan, as permissible, in accordance with the provisions contained in Section 11.1 of this Plan. [Effective April 1, 2003.] Participant Payments will be distributed in [the form of] a lump sum [by the Board if] [or periodic payments, as] requested by the Participant [and subject to approval by the Board], with the Participant’s understanding that federal, state, and local taxes [will] may be incurred on such distributions at that time.

[Catch-up Contributions.] Beginning January 1, 2002, all employees who are eligible to make elective deferrals under this Plan and who have attained age 50 before the close of
the Plan Year shall be eligible to make catch-up contributions in accordance with, and sub-
ject to the limitations of, section 414(v) of the Code. Such catch-up contributions shall not
be taken into account for purposes of the provisions of the Plan implementing the required
limitations of sections 402(g) and 415 of the Code.

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, [unless a commercial annuity has already been purchased for the Participant under Section 8.2,] the distribution options described in Article VIII are available to the surviving Spouse [or Beneficiary], subject to the approval [by the Board.] of the Board. All other designated Beneficiaries of a married Participant, other than a surviving Spouse, shall only be entitled to receive a lump sum distribution. All distributions of benefits remaining in the Plan after the death of the Participant and his or her [surviving] Spouse [or Beneficiary] will be in a lump sum.

9.2 **Commencement of Benefits—Single Participants.** In the event an unmarried Participant dies before or after payment of Retirement or Disability benefits under Article [IX have] [VIII has] commenced, the balance of his or her Accounts, as determined on the Valuation Date established by the Board, shall be distributed [in accordance with the distribution option selected from those available under Article VIII] [to the Participant’s designated Beneficiary in the form of a lump sum distribution, which shall be paid as soon as administratively practicable, but in no event later than December 31 of the calendar year containing the first anniversary of the Participant’s death]. All distributions of benefits remaining in the Plan after the death of the Participant and his or her [surviving] Beneficiary will be in a lump sum.

9.3 **Death After Benefit Commencement—Married Participants.** In the event of the death of a married Participant after distribution of benefits commences, [unless a commercial annuity was purchased for the Participant under Section 8.2,] benefits will be paid according to the distribution option selected by the Participant[ or the participant’s surviving Spouse [or Beneficiary] ], as approved by the Board. [If a married Participant, in accordance with Section 9.4, has designated someone other than his or her Spouse as his or her Beneficiary, such Beneficiary shall receive the Participant’s remaining Account balance in the form of a lump sum distribution.] All distributions of benefits remaining in the Plan after the death of a Participant and his or her [surviving] Spouse [or Beneficiary] will be in a lump sum.

ARTICLE X
Minimum Distribution Requirements

(Applicability of Article. The provisions contained in this Article shall apply to any distribution of a Participant’s interest and shall take precedence over any inconsistent provisions of this Plan.

General Rule. All distributions under this Plan will be made in accordance with the final Regulations promulgated under Code Section 401(a)(9). Notwithstanding any provision of the Plan to the contrary, with respect to distributions under the Plan for Plan Years beginning on or after January 1, 2002, the Plan will apply the minimum distribution requirements of Section 401(a)(9) of the Code in accordance with the final regulations promul-
gated under Section 401(a)(9) of the Code on April 17, 2002. The entire interest of each Participant will be distributed beginning no later than the Participant’s Required Beginning Date, as defined in Section 10.3.

10.2 Required Beginning Date. The Required Beginning Date of a Participant shall be April 1 of the calendar year following the later of the calendar year in which the Participant attains age 70 1/2 or [10.1 General Rules.

(a) Effective Date. The provisions of this Article will apply for purposes of determining required minimum distributions beginning January 1, 2003.

(b) Coordination with Minimum Distribution Requirements in Effect. Because the Effective Date of this Article X is earlier than January 1, 2003, required minimum distributions for 2002 under this Article X will be determined as follows: If the total amount of 2002 required minimum distributions under the Plan made to the distributee prior to the Effective Date of this Article X equals or exceeds the required minimum distribution determined under this Article X, then no additional distributions will be required to be made for 2002 on or after such date to the distributee. If the total amount of 2002 required minimum distributions under the Plan made to the distributee prior to the Effective Date of this Article X is less than the amount determined under this Article X, then required minimum distributions for 2002 on or after such date will be determined so that the total amount of required minimum distributions for 2002 made to the distributee will be the amount determined under this Article X.

(c) Precedence. The requirements of this Article X will take precedence over any inconsistent provisions of the Plan.

(d) Requirements of Treasury Regulations Incorporated. All distributions required under this Article X will be determined and made in accordance with the Treasury regulations under section 401(a)(9) of the Code.

10.2. Time and Manner of Distribution.

(a) Required Beginning Date. The Participant’s entire interest will be distributed, or begin to be distributed, to the Participant no later than the Participant’s Required Beginning Date.

(b) Death of Participant Before Distributions Begin. If the Participant dies before distribution of the Participant’s Account(s) has commenced, the Participant’s entire interest will be distributed, in accordance with Section 9.1 or 9.2 of the Plan, as the case may be, as soon as administratively practicable after the Participant’s death, but in no event later than December 31 of the calendar year containing the first anniversary of the Participant’s death. Notwithstanding of this Section 10.2(b) and subject to this Article X, the distribution of a Participant’s Account(s) to a surviving Spouse shall be made in accordance with Section 9.1.

(i) In the case of a surviving Spouse, if the surviving Spouse is the Participant’s sole Designated beneficiary, then distributions to the surviving Spouse shall begin by December 31 of the calendar year immediately following the calendar year in which the Participant died, or by December 31 of the calendar year in which the Participant would have attained age 70 1/2, whichever is later.
(ii) If the Participant’s surviving Spouse is not the Participant’s sole Designated Beneficiary, then distribution of the nonspousal Designated Beneficiary’s interest in the Participant’s Account(s) shall be made as soon as administratively practicable, but in no event later than June 30 of the calendar year containing the first anniversary of the Participant’s death. The distribution of the surviving Spouse’s interest in the Participant’s Account(s) shall, subject to this Article X, be made in accordance with Section 9.1.

(iii) If there is no Designated Beneficiary as of September 30 of the calendar year following the calendar year of the Participant’s death, then the Participant’s entire interest will be distributed by December 31 of the calendar year containing the first anniversary of the Participant’s death.

(iv) If the Participant’s surviving Spouse is the Participant’s sole Designated Beneficiary and the surviving Spouse dies after the Participant but before distribution of the Participant’s Account(s) to the surviving Spouse has commenced, any Designated Beneficiary of the surviving Spouse, including the surviving Spouse of the surviving Spouse, shall only be entitled to receive the surviving Spouse’s entire interest under the Plan in the form of a lump sum distribution, which shall be paid as soon as administratively practicable, but in no event later than December 31 of the year containing the first year anniversary of the surviving Spouse’s death.

For the purposes of this Section 10.2(b) and Section 10.4, unless Section 10.2(b)(iv) applies, distributions are considered to begin on the Participant’s Required Beginning Date. If Section 10.2(b)(iv) applies, distributions are considered to begin on the date distributions are required to begin to the surviving Spouse under Section 10.2(b)(i). If distributions under an annuity purchased from an insurance company irrevocably commence to the Participant before the Participant’s Required Beginning Date (or to the Participant’s surviving Spouse before the date distributions are required to begin to the surviving Spouse under Section 10.2(b)(i)), the date distributions are considered to begin is the date distributions actually commence.

(c) Forms of Distribution. Unless the Participant’s interest is distributed in the form of an annuity purchased from an insurance company or in a single sum on or before the Required Beginning Date, as of the first Distribution Calendar Year distributions will be made in accordance with Sections 10.3 and 10.4. If the Participant’s interest is distributed in the form of an annuity purchased from an insurance company, distributions thereunder will be made in accordance with the requirements of Section 401(a)(9) of the Code and the Treasury regulations.

10.3. Required Minimum Distributions During Participant’s Lifetime

(a) Amount of Required Minimum Distribution For Each Distribution Calendar Year

During the Participant’s lifetime, the minimum amount that will be distributed for each Distribution Calendar Year is the lesser of:

(i) the quotient obtained by dividing the Participant’s Account balance by the distribution period in the Uniform Lifetime Table set forth in Section 1.401(a)(9)-9 of the Treasury regulations, using the Participant’s age as of the Participant’s birthday in the Distribution Calendar Year; or

(ii) if the Participant’s sole Designated Beneficiary for the Distribution Calendar Year is the Participant’s Spouse, the quotient obtained by dividing the
Participant’s Account balance by the number in the Joint and Last Survivor Table set forth in Section 1.401(a)(9)-9 of the Treasury regulations, using the Participant’s and Spouse’s attained ages as of the Participant’s and Spouse’s birthdays in the Distribution Calendar Year.

(b) Lifetime Required Minimum Distributions Continue Through Year of Participant’s Death. Required Minimum Distributions will be determined under this Section 10.3 beginning with the first Distribution Calendar Year and up to and including the Distribution Calendar Year that includes the Participant’s date of death.

10.4. Required Minimum Distributions After Participant’s Death.

(a) Death on or After Date Distributions Begin.

(i) Participant Survived by Designated Beneficiary. Except in the case of a Designated Beneficiary who is also a surviving Spouse, a Participant’s entire remaining interest will be distributed to his or her Designated Beneficiary as soon as administratively practicable after the Participant’s death, but in no event later than December 31 of the calendar year containing the first anniversary of the Participant’s death. If in the case of a Designated Beneficiary who is also a surviving Spouse, the Participant dies on or after the date distributions begin, the minimum amount that will be distributed for each Distribution Calendar Year after the year of the Participant’s death is the quotient obtained by dividing the Participant’s Account balance by the longer of the remaining life expectancy of the Participant or the remaining life expectancy of the Participant’s surviving Spouse, determined as follows:

(A) the Participant’s remaining life expectancy is calculated using the age of the Participant in the year of death, reduced by one for each subsequent year.

(B) If the Participant’s surviving Spouse is the Participant’s sole Designated Beneficiary, the remaining life expectancy of the surviving Spouse is calculated for each Distribution Calendar Year after the year of the Participant’s death using the surviving Spouse’s age as of the Spouse’s birthday in that year.

(C) If the surviving Spouse is not the Participant’s sole Designated Beneficiary, all Designated Beneficiaries, other than the surviving Spouse, shall be paid their respective interest in the Participant’s Account in the form of a lump sum by June 30 of the calendar year containing the first anniversary of the Participant’s death, and the surviving Spouse’s remaining distributions shall be determined in accordance with this Section 10.1(a)(ii)(A)-(B).

(ii) No Designated Beneficiary. If the Participant dies on or after the date distributions begin and there is no Designated Beneficiary as of September 30 of the calendar year following the year of the Participant’s death, the Participant’s remaining interest under the Plan shall be distributed to his or her estate by December 31 of the calendar year following the calendar year of death.
(b) Death Before Distributions Commence.

(i) Participant Survived by Designated Beneficiary. If the Participant dies before the date distributions begin and there is a Designated Beneficiary, who is also a surviving Spouse, the minimum amount that shall be distributed each Distribution Calendar Year after the year of the Participant’s death is the quotient obtained by dividing the Participant’s Account balance by the remaining life expectancy of the Participant’s Designated Beneficiary, determined in accordance with Section 10.4(a). In the case of a Designated Beneficiary, who is not a surviving Spouse, the Participant’s entire Account balance shall be distributed to such Designated Beneficiary by December 31 of the calendar year containing the first anniversary of the Participant’s death. If the Participant dies before the date distributions begin and there are multiple Designated Beneficiaries, at least one of whom is also a surviving Spouse, the nonspousal Designated Beneficiaries shall be paid their respective interest(s) in the Participant’s Account as soon as administratively practicable, but in no event later than June 30 of the calendar year containing the first anniversary of the Participant’s death.

(ii) No Designated Beneficiary. If the Participant dies before the date distributions begin and there is no Designated Beneficiary as of September 30 of the calendar year following the calendar year of the Participant’s death, distribution of the Participant’s entire interest shall be completed by December 31 of the calendar year containing the first anniversary of the Participant’s death.

(iii) Death of Surviving Spouse Before Distributions to Surviving Spouse Are Required to Begin. If the Participant dies before the date distributions begin and the Participant’s surviving Spouse is the Participant’s sole Designated Beneficiary, and the surviving Spouse dies before distributions are required to begin to the surviving Spouse under Section 10.2(b)(i), the surviving Spouse’s Designated Beneficiary shall receive the surviving Spouse’s entire interest under the Plan in the form of a lump sum distribution, which shall be distributed to the surviving Spouse’s Designated Beneficiary no later than December 31 of the calendar year following the calendar year in which the surviving Spouse died.

10.5. Definitions

(a) “Designated Beneficiary” means the individual who is designated as the Beneficiary under Article II of the Plan and who is a designated beneficiary under section 401(a)(9) of the Code and section 1.401(a)(9)-1, Q&A-4, of the Treasury regulations.

(b) “Distribution Calendar Year” means the calendar year for which a minimum distribution is required. For distributions beginning before the Participant’s death, the first Distribution Calendar Year is the calendar year immediately preceding the calendar year which contains the Participant’s Required Beginning Date. For distributions beginning after the Participant’s death, the first Distribution Calendar Year is the calendar year in which distributions are required to begin pursuant to Section 10.2(b). The required minimum distribution for the Participant’s first Distribution Calendar Year will be on or before the Participant’s Required Beginning Date. The required minimum distribution for other Distribution Calendar Years, including the required minimum distribution for the Distribution Calendar Year in which the Participant’s Required Beginning Date occurs, will be made on or before December 31 of that Distribution Calendar Year.
(c) “Life Expectancy” means life expectancy as computed by use of the Single Life Table in section 1.401(a)(9)-9 of the Treasury regulations.

(d) “Required Beginning Date” means April 1 of the calendar year following the later of: (i) the calendar year in which the Participant attains age 701/2; and (ii) the calendar year in which the Participant retires.

Required Minimum Payments. Beginning when you reach age 701/2 or retire, whichever is later, a certain portion of your payment cannot be rolled over because it is a “required minimum payment” that must be paid to you. [Special rules apply if you own more than 5% of your employer.]

APPENDIX

The 2002 General Synod voted:

To affirm the paper “Covenant of Grace/Covenant of Care” as a foundational statement for the church; and further,

to commend the paper to the General Synod’s boards and agencies, regional synods, classes, consistory, and congregations of the RCA for study and application to their life and ministry. (MGS 2002, R-111, p. 363)

COVENANT OF GRACE/COVENANT OF CARE

A church whose faith and life are drawn from the word of God finds every form of its ministry in that word. The several assemblies of the Reformed Church in America—consistory, classis, regional synod, and General Synod—are not administrative or legislative gatherings based on civic or corporate models without biblical or theological foundation. Rather, each of their meetings belongs to a tradition reaching back to the Jerusalem Council of the first century. Now as then, representatives of the church equipped by the Holy Spirit, discuss and determine how the church can best carry out its life and mission.

Similarly, the evangelistic outreach of the Reformed Church, from local congregations to world mission, is not motivated by models of corporate growth or marketing techniques, but rather by the Spirit-filled words of Jesus: “As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world”; by his post-resurrection commission: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations”; and by his pre-ascension promise: “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.”

The often lower-profile “inreach” of the Board of Pensions, now the Board of Benefits Services, is also rooted in the word of God. Its mandate is drawn not from the occasional New Testament text but from the very centerpiece of God’s self-revelation that spans the testaments, namely, the covenant. Its perspective views the Scriptures as the story of God’s remarkable love affair with the human race. It recognizes that what really made Eden Eden in the beginning was that on any given day, the first man and woman could hear the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze. When the sin of Adam and Eve replaced that mutual affection with alienation, the couple and their descendants learned that God loved them with a love that would not let them go. And so God came again, this time walking in the fields of Haran. There God made a covenant with Abram and Sarai that began with the promise to be God to them and to their children, and ended with the assurance that in them all the families of the earth would be blessed!
From there, the long story of God’s people that culminates in the renewal of the covenant through the coming of Jesus is the story of how God’s enduring love makes us one with God and with each other. God’s loving, persistent concern to be in relationship with us is always expressed in the covenant of grace that not only binds the Old and New Testaments into one, but also makes those testaments God’s gracious invitation to covenant life. This covenant life is from first to last a gift of God’s unmerited love.

I. THE COVENANT OF GRACE

As the apostle Paul reminded his Jewish and Gentile Christian readers at Rome, Abraham is the father of all who trust God as Abraham did. With a single stroke of his pen, Paul takes us back to Genesis, the book of beginnings, where God’s covenant with Abraham is hinted at in chapter 12, clarified in chapter 15 (“On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abraham”), and had its heart laid bare in chapter 17: “I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to your offspring after you.” And centuries later when God assured Moses that there was an exodus and a destiny in his people’s future, it was because God was remembering the covenant made with Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and Jacob and Rachel—the covenant to take them as his people and be their God.

Throughout the unfolding drama of Old Testament history, God’s people broke the covenant from their side with tragic regularity. Appropriate discipline followed, but the covenant itself was never broken from God’s side! In fact, the Old Testament moves to a hope-filled close with Jeremiah’s bright word for the future, a text that focuses on covenant renewal:

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more (Jer. 31:31-34).

For Christians, that promised covenant renewal was realized in the coming of Jesus. Although the New Testament does not complete any of Jesus’ “I am” sayings with the words, “a new” or “renewed” covenant, it does make clear connections between Jesus and the covenant of grace. Paul’s witness to the institution of the Lord’s Supper in 1 Corinthians—the earliest record in the New Testament—is a shining example. There the bread saying is followed by this significant word about the cup: “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” The letter to the Hebrews makes the point again, for what is implicit in the comparison made in chapter 8:

But Jesus has now obtained a more excellent ministry, and to that degree he is the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted through better promises (v.6).

becomes explicit in the next chapter:

For this reason he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, because a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant (9:15).
Both of these texts bring Jesus and the new covenant together in the context of his death, his promises, and his deliverance from sin, without explicitly identifying him as the new covenant. That identification is made by attending to the Old Testament witness to what was essential to the old covenant, and then observing how those essentials are effectively incarnated in Jesus, the new covenant.

As we have seen, the heart of the covenant is the gift of God’s self in a relationship of enduring love. In Jeremiah’s splendid vision, even the promise of land, historically significant as it was, merits no mention. With unerring insight, the prophet points to the inner life where the heart of the covenant is laid bare: “But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: ...I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jer. 31:33). Above all else, then, covenant means a personal relationship with God!

That a gracious renewal of the covenant is precisely what God is about in Jesus received definitive confirmation in the prologue of John’s Gospel: “And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of the Father’s only Son, full of grace and truth” (1:14). That the incarnation is the full and final enactment of God’s declared desire, “I will be your God, and you shall be my people” (Jer. 31:33), is plain enough. But how is the testimony that Jesus was “full of grace and truth” to be understood? Once again, this new covenant language about Jesus points us to the old. Behind John’s words “grace and truth” stands a pair of Hebrew words. “Grace” translates the first one well enough, but to translate the second one as “truth” invites misunderstanding. It can lead us to think that Jesus champions some abstract truth over against falsehood or that Jesus is above all else the repository of all true knowledge and right thinking. But the Hebrew word used is a covenant word, a relational word that means truth in the sense of fidelity. It means being true or faithful to the covenant partner. The evangelist John, therefore, is not witness to Jesus as the embodiment of every kind of objective truth, but as the incarnation of God’s covenant of grace and covenant fidelity. Israel’s long experience of divine grace and faithfulness under the old covenant was now fully and finally manifested in Jesus, the new covenant. Jesus Christ is overflowing with God’s enduring love. In him, the new covenant, we reach the supreme good of the old: “See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them” (Revelation 21:3).

This is the covenant of grace celebrated repeatedly in Reformed Church worship. Setting out the meaning of the sacrament of baptism our liturgy declares:

In baptism, God reveals and seals to us his covenant of salvation, given first to Noah and his whole family whom God saved from the waters of the flood, and renewed time after time through the patriarchs and prophets until it reached perfection in the person of Jesus Christ our Lord. We participate in this covenant through faith in Christ, and in him become a new creation.

At the heart of the meaning of the Lord’s Supper lies this thrilling confession about the work of the Lord Jesus Christ: “By his death, resurrection, and ascension he established a new and eternal covenant of grace and reconciliation that we might be accepted of God and never be forsaken by him.”

And the language of covenant runs like a refrain through the order of worship for Christian marriage, underlining the enduring joy of this most intimate human relationship. The minister declares that the wedding party and their guests

are gathered here to praise God for the covenant of grace and reconciliation made with us through Jesus Christ, to hear it proclaimed anew, and to respond to it as we witness
the covenant of marriage [the man and woman] make with each other in Christ’s name. Christian marriage is a joyful covenanting between a man and a woman in which they proclaim, before God and human witnesses, their commitment to live together in spiritual, physical, and material unity. In this covenant they acknowledge that the great love God has shown for each of them enables them to love each other.

Nor is it surprising, given this order’s powerful witness to the covenant of grace, that the ceremony climaxes in vows to live together in a covenant of care: The man and woman take each other

to have and to hold from this day forward,
for better, for worse
for richer, for poorer,
in sickness and in health
to love and to cherish
as long as they both shall live.

Not surprising, indeed, for God’s covenant of grace always carried within itself a covenant of care!

II. THE COVENANT OF CARE

Primary as the vertical relationship with God was in the old covenant, it was never separated from the horizontal relationship with other members of the covenant community. The Book of Exodus records God’s strong covenant care for his people suffering as slaves in Egypt. In response to their groaning God remembered the covenant made with the patriarchs, looked down upon the Israelites, and took notice of them. That notice in turn motivated God to appear to Moses at the burning bush, complete with a full explanation:

Then the Lord said, “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt” (Exodus 3:7-10).

Exodus also specifically names the widow and the orphan as of special concern to the covenant community (22:22). In fact, these fatherless and unprotected members of the community could rest in the knowledge that “Father of orphans and protector of widows is God in his habitation” (Psalm 68:5).

More than any other Old Testament witness, the Book of Deuteronomy declares that God’s own care and compassion for the covenant people were to be mirrored in their covenant care and compassion for one another. Sample instances from that book alone serve to demonstrate that that care was both concrete and personal. No one was to be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward needy members of the community. Their needs were to be met liberally and ungrudgingly (15:7-11). When a bondman or bondwoman was set free, they were not to be sent out empty-handed but were to be provided for liberally from the harvest or flock, thus giving to them some of the bounty with which God had blessed their masters (15:12-14). (Israel was to remember how good it was to leave Egypt with the gifts of their masters.) During the harvest festivals, the slaves, the orphans, and the widows were to share in the joy and the abundance of food of the prosperous (16:11, 14).
Throughout these expressions of covenant care, God showed great concern for the rights and the dignity of those whose poverty had forced them into borrowing. Witness these remarkable Torah lines:

When you make your neighbor a loan of any kind, you shall not go into the house to take the pledge. You shall wait outside, while the person to whom you are making the loan brings the pledge out to you. If the person is poor, you shall not sleep in the garment given you as the pledge. You shall give the pledge back by sunset so that your neighbor may sleep in the cloak and bless you; and it will be to your credit before the Lord your God (Deut. 24:10-13).

The lender, said God, is not to invade the poor man’s house and help himself to whatever pleased him as collateral. Rather, the poor man is to decide which of his things to offer as a pledge, and the lender is to wait on the porch until the poor man brings it out to him. And if the borrower is so destitute that his only collateral is his cloak, the lender must return it when the day’s temperature goes down with the sun, so he can use it as his blanket through the night. Thus does the covenant God who inhabits eternity and dwells in the high and holy place make it a matter of personal concern to be sure a poor man sleeps warmly!

No wonder then that covenant privileges with God were always joined to covenant responsibilities toward covenant partners. Old covenant law and prophets were at one in demanding care for the needy, justice for the oppressed, and love for the stranger. In this way too, our Lord Jesus Christ is the embodiment of the new covenant. Jesus promised the blessing of God and inheritance in God’s realm to all who care for the physical and material well-being of the needy. To care for the least of those who are members of my family, he said, is to care for me (Matthew 25). And to the covenant commandment, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” Jesus not only added the parable of the Good Samaritan but also his own concern for covenant care: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12).

The book of Acts testifies that the covenant of care was close to the heart of the church from its inception. All who believed were not only together but had all things in common. They sold their possessions and distributed the proceeds to all according to need (chap. 2). The apostle Paul laid his understanding of the gospel before the leaders of the Jerusalem church, and when those church pillars had recognized the grace that had been given to him, they offered him and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship and blessed their gentile mission asking only one thing: that they remember the poor (Galatians 2). And when the apostle John needed to remind his readers that the covenant of grace and the covenant of care are a seamless whole he simply raised the inescapable question for every Christian then and now: “How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses to help?” (1 John 3:17).

Texts like those remind us of the moment in Jesus’ earthly ministry when a Pharisee asked him which commandment in the law, the Torah-God’s instruction for covenant life—is the greatest (Matthew 22). Remarkably, although the request was for one (“which commandment”), Jesus gave him two (“and a second is like it”)! Apparently, Jesus thought it impossible to say the one without the other. Love of God is inseparable from love of neighbor. This suggests that like the seamless wholes—covenant of grace/covenant of care and love God above all/love your neighbor as yourself—the second commandment may also be a seamless whole: love your neighbor as yourself/care for your neighbor as yourself.
Report of the RCA Foundation

Beginning with a planned giving ministry in 1994, the RCA Foundation continues to expand and transition into the fundraising arm of the RCA. The RCA Foundation staff is committed to raising money for the many programs offered by the General Synod Council of the RCA.

This new fundraising emphasis allows the foundation to strengthen and support the program components of the RCA, so that together we can “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” (RCA Statement of Mission and Vision).

The foundation staff works to establish and nurture relationships with those who currently support, or those who wish to support, the ongoing work of the RCA. The foundation staff seeks to understand which RCA programs excite our donors. The staff wants to match the passion of RCA people to the programs of the Reformed Church in America. This type of fundraising is a ministry that is vitally important both to donors and to the Reformed Church in America.

In addition to raising funds for the programs of the RCA, the foundation continues to offer estate planning seminars and services to all members of the RCA. Whether you have a charitable intent for the RCA or not, we want to help you “put your house in order” (2 Kings 20:1).

The foundation strongly encourages anyone who seeks the assistance of a Certified Financial Planner in planning his or her estate to call Norman Tellier (1-800-766-9660). Norm will be more than happy to work with you in preparing for the transfer of assets from one generation to the next.

We, the board and staff of the RCA Foundation, are equally committed to continue to serve as resource people for those congregations who seek fundraising guidance and counsel in their capital campaigns. Churches who wish to inquire about this assistance can call Larryl Humme (1-800-228-3813).

We are grateful for this opportunity to work with you as we further the kingdom.

The Staff and Board

Larryl Humme continues to serve as the director of the RCA Foundation. Humme has been with the Reformed Church in America since 1993 and works out of the Hinsdale, Illinois, office. Beginning July 1, 2003, you can reach Larryl and his administrative assistant, Deborah Von Feldt, at 107 Salt Creek Ln., Hinsdale, IL 60521 or 1-800-228-3813. Norman J. Tellier continues to serve as the coordinator for Gift Planning. Tellier has been with the Reformed Church in America since 1987. You can reach Norm and his administrative assistant, Noreen Fargione, at 1790 Grand Blvd., Schenectady, NY 12309 or 1-800-766-9660. Don Vander Stoep has recently been hired to serve as the coordinator of special gifts. Don works out of the RCA offices in Orange City, Iowa. You can reach Don at 612 8th St. SE, Orange City, IA 51041 or 1-712-737-4956. Joanne Fernandez serves as the coordinator for Foundation Services. Joanne has been with the Reformed Church in America since 1968 and works out of 475 Riverside Dr., 18th Fl., New York, NY 10115 (1-800-722-9977, ext. 2949).

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:
Office of the Director

While transitioning the foundation into a fundraising entity for the RCA, the director is intricately involved in the entire process of fundraising, working closely with the coordinators for special gifts and gift planning in the development of a community of donors for the RCA. The director articulates the mission and vision of the denomination in such a way as to inspire confidence and enthusiasm amid this growing community of donors. He works closely with the foundation staff, the general secretary, the foundation board and other GSC staff members in establishing a clear direction, as well as plan of action, for further establishing a full array of fundraising programs.

Office of Special Gifts

The Office of Special Gifts 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 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.

For fiscal year 2001-2002, the foundation staff committed to raise $262,500 in support of GSC programs (Evangelism and Church Development Services; Policy, Planning and Administration Services; the Office of the General Secretary; and the RCA Foundation). With thanksgiving to God, the foundation staff was able to raise $293,000.

RCA Foundation and R.E.D.I.

The RCA Foundation has entered a working relationship with RCA Mission Services in establishing a new 501(c)(3) for the purpose of attracting additional financial resources for the Reformed Church in America. The new 501(c)(3), Reformed Economic Development, Inc. (R.E.D.I.) will write funding grants for various programs of the RCA. Initially, much of the energy and work generated by the R.E.D.I. staff will be in support of the urban ministries initiative of the Reformed Church in America. In the foreseeable future, the R.E.D.I. staff and function will become more integrated into the fundraising programs of the RCA,

Harlan Bergman (GSC) 2003
Harry De Bruyn (at-large) 2004
Robert De Young (at-large) 2005
Art Hessinger (GSC) 2003
Ed Mondore (at-large) 2003
Marilyn Norman (at-large) 2004
Okke Postma (GSC) 2004
Steven Sayer (GSC) 2005
Andrea Van Beek (GSC) 2004
continuing to write funding grants for the RCA as well as offering grant-writing assistance to local congregations and other agencies affiliated with the Reformed Church in America.

Office of Gift Planning

The task of the RCA Foundation 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 members and friends of the RCA.

In 2002 the office had one full-time staff person—the coordinator, 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. While focusing on the ways in which people may give, these presentations also 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.

A workshop for ministers and deacons on the importance of gift planning—with an emphasis on how to get started locally and the resources available to churches within the foundation—is also available.

Help with estate and financial planning is offered to members and friends of the RCA at no cost. Tellier is a CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER™ practitioner (CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER™ is a federally registered mark of the Certified Financial Planner Board of Standards, Inc.).

The Board of Benefits Services of the RCA provides pre-retirement workshops for ministers and other persons who work for the RCA. Tellier assists in the presentations at these workshops and works with ministers doing pre-retirement financial planning.

The office keeps on hand a large supply of literature on the value of having a will and how gifts may be made in other ways. These materials are sent on request and are distributed at workshops and displays.

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 2002 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.

The following charts illustrate the gifts received by the Office of Gift Planning during calendar year 2002 and the wishes of the donors in the final disposition of those gifts. While the gifts received represent money received, in most cases the distribution of the gift will take place upon the death of the donor or some other specified event. The work of the Office of Gift Planning in the United States resulted in gifts totaling $1,045,023 during 2002 (Canadian gifts are reported below). These gifts were received in the following forms:
*The gift made to a pooled income fund in the above chart was made by a donor to a pooled fund other than that operated by the RCA.

The GIFTS Philanthropic Fund is a donor-advised fund. This fund allows donors to make a gift to the foundation, which 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 2002 $244,198 was received in this fund, and $237,130 was distributed to charities. The foundation received one-half of the interest earned on GIFTS Philanthropic Fund accounts.
The gifts received by the RCA Foundation during 2002 in all funds were designated as follows:

Total Gifts Designated: $1,040,137

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.

The above charts reflect gifts received in 2002 and the designations. In the case of the GIFTS Philanthropic Fund, distributions were made to the designated parties. In the case of the life-income gifts, distribution will not take place until the RCA no longer has to make income payments to the income beneficiaries. Every year several of these gifts mature due to the death of the life-income beneficiary.

One of the benefits to congregations is that while the RCA Foundation promotes giving through wills and other means, persons often act upon the suggestions made by RCA Foundation staff without notifying the foundation of the gift. These gifts come to the churches at a later time. In order to judge the effectiveness of the RCA Foundation program the churches of the RCA are asked the number and amount of bequests and planned gifts received by them each year. Gift planning staff members have noted while reading the consistorial reports that bequests and planned gifts are reported more frequently from churches where the foundation has worked than from other churches. In 2001 the churches reported receiving 231 bequests, totaling $7,121,439, and 81 planned gifts, totaling $1,358,047. The planned gifts came in the form of trust distributions and matured life income payments to the beneficiaries.
insurance policies and annuities. Total bequests and planned gifts reported by the congregations amounted to $8,479,486. The distribution of these gifts by synods is as follows:

![2001 Bequests and Planned Gifts by Synods](image)

Total Received: $8,479,486

RCA Foundation Canada

With the cooperation of the Regional Synod of Canada, RCA Foundation Canada (RCAFC) was incorporated in October of 2000. This action was taken in order to offer a full range of services to our churches in Canada. Canadian law prevents the RCA Foundation from offering gift annuities or management of funds to RCA churches in Canada. Because of Canadian law a foundation may not offer gift annuities. The regional synod has agreed to be the agency through which gift annuities will be written. All annuities are re-insured since only a few non-profit organizations in Canada are allowed to manage and invest an annuity portfolio.

The primary purpose of the foundation is to provide management of endowments and other funds for the churches and other RCA organizations in Canada. In 2002 the staff of the RCA Foundation working on behalf of RCAFC generated one charitable gift annuity of $10,000.

Office of Gift Planning and the RCA Building and Extension Fund

The Office of Gift Planning also promotes RCA Building and Extension Fund (RCABEF) investment notes. Investments in the RCABEF are used for the construction of church buildings. Promotion is done by Church Herald ads, publicity material, and personal contacts. The office is also responsible for obtaining state registrations, writing the offering circular, and issuing new and rollover notes.
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 planned gifts. The planned gift may be designated 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.

The General Synod Council voted at its October 1993 meeting to have the following summary of the Van Bunschooten Bequest (adopted by the 1937 General Synod) read at the General Synod meeting as part of the report of the Advisory Committee on Financial Support:

THE VAN BUNSCHOOTEN BEQUEST

Summary for Voluntary Use in Classes

At a meeting of General Synod in New York City, June 9, 1814, Dominie Elias Van Bunschooten, one of the advisory members, walked up the aisle and laid down on the table ten bonds amounting to $13,800 and $800 in cash and asked Synod to accept the gift for the education of young men for the ministry. On January 10, 1815, in his seventy-seventh year, Dominie Van Bunschooten went home to his reward and was buried in the church yard of First Reformed Church of New Brunswick, New Jersey. In his last will and testament he added over $3,000 to his former donation, making a total of more than $17,000—a princely gift for those days. (Additions of income have increased the principal to $20,000.) Dominie Van Bunschooten thus had the honor of making the first substantial contribution for assisting young students of theology. His example has been followed from time to time by others, thus realizing his desire as expressed in the bequest “that he might be an humble pattern for others to copy after.” It would be impossible to catalogue all the results that have flowed from these donations. For more than a century they have made possible the education of candidates for the ministry, for the work both at home and abroad. All honor to him and the other liberal donors who have followed his example (MGS 1937, pp. 8-9).

In honor of Dominie Elias Van Bunschooten, the Van Bunschooten Society has been formed in the Reformed Church in America to honor those who have included the Reformed Church in America in their wills.
From the Report of the Board of Directors

BUDGET

PROPOSED 2004 GENERAL SYNODoperational (ASSESSMENT) BUDGET

Framework for the FY 2004 General Synod Council Budget

In October 1999 the General Synod Council (GCS) 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). This model, which continues to serve as the basis of the FY2004 General Synod Council budget, is based on the following principles:

- Infrastructure costs are covered primarily by revenue from assessments. Budget areas that receive assessments are the General Secretary Cluster; Operations and Support (formerly Policy, Planning, and Administration Services (including General Synod Operations, the Reformed Church Archives, the racial/ethnic councils, Information Technology, and Personnel); Finance; Ministry; Communication and Production Services (communications vehicles); and the RCA Foundation (fundraising staff costs). Note that Church Herald assessments are also included in the GSC assessment budget line.

- Program costs for Mission Services, Evangelism and Church Development Services, and Congregational Services are covered primarily by contributions and designated investment income.

- Basic service charges are charged to non-GSC budget areas (e.g., Board of Benefits Services and RCA Building and Extension Fund) based on services provided.

- Investment income is allocated to budget areas based on designations. Undesignated investment income is available to program and infrastructure budget areas based on agreements made by the Leadership Advisory Team.

- A percentage of the overall Mission Services budget will continue to 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 that focus on programs centering around discipleship, leadership, mission, and connection.

Assumptions and Strategies for the FY 2004 General Synod Council Budget

These are the assumptions and principles supporting the proposed FY2004 General Synod Council budget. More detailed assumptions for each of the GSC budget areas are contained in the pages that follow.

1. The overall budget is balanced, but there is little flexibility or cushion for error in it.

2. Resources are being allocated to support the goal of “equipping congregations for ministry.” Priorities that center on discipleship, leadership, mission, and connection guide GSC budget decisions.

3. The 2004 GSC assessment budget that will be proposed to General Synod will not be increased by more than 3.5 percent, as has been the case for the past two years.
The assessment request is adequate to support the church’s ability to conduct its work in representative assemblies, commissions, councils, and task groups. Staff will continue to implement operational efficiencies while sustaining the ability to provide effective and required oversight of the administrative and financial needs of the church.

4. A continuing focus is placed on funding and resourcing the Ministry Cluster to meet the clear denominational priority of providing future pastoral and consistorial leadership. As previously agreed, in the FY2004 budget the equivalent of approximately $150,000 in resources will be provided from the Mission Cluster in support of the Ministry Cluster. This will be accomplished in part through redirecting our work of social witness through diaconal ministries, mission services, ecumenical work, and the office of the general secretary, and discontinuing a separate office of social witness as presently organized.

5. The Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency (MFCA) budget has been consolidated as part of the Ministry Cluster budget. (Note that the assessments received by MFCA are part of the assessment for theological education, not the GSC assessment.)

6. The Mission Services budget will be supported by designated contributions and designated investment income. Thus, it can spend to the level of anticipated contributions, but must balance itself. In this budget year, the Urban Ministries Fund Drive budget is being consolidated within the Mission Services budget.

7. The Mission Is One fund will continue to be supported by 10 percent of Mission Services expenditures for undergirding “local mission” through evangelism, new church development, and discipleship programs. This was instituted three years ago in lieu of payments from Mission Services to cover the costs of services provided by other units of the GSC.

8. Major changes will take place in Communication and Production Services (CAPS) based on direction given by GSC at its spring 2003 meeting. Therefore, the FY2004 budget included in this agenda package (which is based on FY2003 revenue assumptions and does not reflect reorganization options that may be implemented) will undergo significant revision. A specific FY 2004 budget will be finalized based on the reorganization options approved by GSC. Tentative plans envision placing the function of “congregational resource support” (providing congregations with advice in selecting various resources for their ministry) in the Mission Cluster. This assumes, however, a revenue stream from the present CAPS activities to support this service.

9. We will continue to focus on developing an integrated communications strategy and allow this to guide efforts toward a coordinated budget that includes our various means and methods of official denominational communication.

10. We will achieve savings in GSC meeting costs. The FY2004 budget is based on General Synod’s action in 2002 approving the GSC Reorganization Proposal, and assumes that General Synod 2003 will give its final approval to the implementation plan, enabling this to take effect in the fall of 2003.
## FY2004 GSC Assessment Budget

### PROPOSED FY 2004 GSC ASSESSMENT

<table>
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<th>Budget Area</th>
<th>Amount of Assessments Allocated to the Budget Area FY2003</th>
<th>Amount of Assessments Allocated to the Budget Area FY2004</th>
<th>Assessments Allocated to the Budget Area as a Percentage of the Total GSC Assessment Budget FY2003</th>
<th>Assessments Allocated to the Budget Area as a Percentage of the Total GSC Assessment Budget FY2004</th>
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<th>Assessments Allocated to the Function as a Percentage of the Total GSC Assessment Budget FY2003</th>
<th>Assessments Allocated to the Function as a Percentage of the Total GSC Assessment Budget FY2004</th>
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<td>Communications Vehicles (including <em>Church Herald</em> and CAPS)</td>
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<td>Finance</td>
<td>621,175</td>
<td>646,022</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance Structure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Commissions</td>
<td>49,870</td>
<td>58,724</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• General Synod</td>
<td>441,953</td>
<td>448,208</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• General Synod Council</td>
<td>127,254</td>
<td>74,137</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• General Synod Operations</td>
<td>521,277</td>
<td>580,303</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• General Secretary</td>
<td>281,946</td>
<td>296,694</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ecumenical</td>
<td>95,348</td>
<td>84,763</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Racial/Ethnic Councils</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Total Governance</td>
<td>2,085,769</td>
<td>2,137,479</td>
<td>41.5%</td>
<td>40.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Technologies</td>
<td>395,500</td>
<td>409,000</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry Services</td>
<td>164,000</td>
<td>168,243</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel Services</td>
<td>130,829</td>
<td>131,673</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning &amp; Development</td>
<td>413,853</td>
<td>505,349</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>5,052,126</strong></td>
<td><strong>5,228,766</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FY2004 GSC Assessment Budget

The General Synod Council budget is based on a fiscal year ending September 30, whereas the assessment budget approved by General Synod is on a calendar-year basis. Therefore, in FY2004, GSC will receive assessments based on the 2003 rate for the first quarter of the year (10/1/03 - 12/31/03) and assessments based on the 2004 rate for the last three quarters of the year (1/1/04 - 9/30/04). In order to generate total assessment income of $5,228,766 for the FY2004 GSC budget, an assessment of $5,273,348 in 2004 is required. This represents a 3.5 percent increase over the 2003 GSC assessment of $5,095,022, a percentage increase that is in line with prior-year increases.

RCA 2004 ASSESSMENT BUDGET SUMMARY

Assessment Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Confessing Members, 12/31/02</th>
<th>175,184</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>2004 GSC Assessment</strong></td>
<td><strong>$5,273,348</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003 GSC Assessment</td>
<td>$5,095,022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment Change</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Change*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2004 BOBS &amp; Theol. Ed. Assessment</strong></td>
<td><strong>$1,003,804</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003 BOBS &amp; Theol. Ed. Assessment</td>
<td>$1,027,384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment Change</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Change</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2004 Total General Synod Assessment</strong></td>
<td><strong>$6,277,152</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003 Total General Synod Assessment</td>
<td>$6,122,406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment Change</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Change</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each percentage change in assessment requires a $62,722 change in amount of assessment.

*The BOBS assessment is based on $1.50 per member and the Theological Education assessment is based on 13.4% of the GSC assessment and the BOBS assessment.

The advisory committee recommended an amendment to R-92:

To approve the 2004 General Synod Council (GSC) Assessment Budget of **$5,273,348** $5,095,022; and further,

to set the 2004 per-confessing-member assessment for the GSC Assessment Budget at $____.

Reason:

Costs need to be held at the 2003 level to reflect economic realities.

VOTED: To not adopt the amendment.
R-92
To approve the 2004 GSC Assessment Budget of $5,273,348; and further,

to set the 2004 per-confessing-member assessment for GSC Assessment Budget at $30.10. (ADOPTED)

(The 2003 GSC assessment is $28.74 per member.)

2004 General Synod Assessments for Retired Clergy (pre-1973) and for Theological Education Administration.

In addition to the GSC assessment 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).

$4.23 to provide unified funding for the administration of theological education ($4.29 in 2003).

$5.73 TOTAL

R-93
To fix the 2004 budget for other General Synod assessments (sufficient retirement income and theological education administration) at $5.73 per confessing member. (ADOPTED)

(The 2003 General Synod assessment amount for the above two items per confessing member is $5.79.)

Total 2004 General Synod Assessment

The preliminary total assessment for General Synod concerns in 2004 is $35.83. This is an increase of 3.76 percent over the 2003 total of $34.53 per confessing member.

R-94
To fix the total General Synod assessment budget at $35.83 per confessing member. (ADOPTED)

The advisory committee recommended:

R-95
To instruct the General Synod Council to explore cost-saving alternate means for conducting General Synod meetings (for example, suggestions made in R-66, MGS 2002, p. 255; video conferencing; delegate travel paid for by other entities; etc.). (NOT ADOPTED)

Reason:

Current General Synod costs exceed $400,000.

R-66 (from MGS 2002)
To direct the General Synod Council (GSC) to revise the General Synod agenda
and schedule to allow commissions, institutions, and agencies to report in rotation as decided by the GSC to reduce the annual workload of the synod; and further,

to direct the GSC to allow significant time in the schedule to do the work of the church in areas such as ministry and mission, the theological life of the church, and the worship life of the church; and further,

to direct the GSC to schedule annually essential business such as Commission on Nominations, Commission on Judicial Business, recognition of newly organized congregations, necrology, approval of the assessment budget, and election and installation of officers.

Report of the General Synod Council and the Board of Benefits Services

SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE INVESTMENT COMMITTEE

The General Synod of 2001 appointed a committee “to be in regular dialogue with the custodians of the assets of the denominational corporations regarding the implementation in the marketplace of the biblical values and vision we hold dear” (MGS 2001, R-15, pp. 70-71). The committee was instructed:

* To maintain a continuing conversation with the custodians of the assets of the denominational corporations, in order to advance the values and visions of Christ’s kingdom and to strongly encourage those who manage the assets to be conscious of moral and biblical concerns as well as economic ones.
* To identify specific companies within the mutual funds used which have policies and practices clearly opposed to the gospel, and to strongly recommend their deletion from the mutual fund or funds.
* On behalf of the Reformed Church in America, to exercise full shareholder rights and responsibilities, to engage in dialogue with the custodian of its funds and the companies held in the mutual funds, and if necessary, initiate shareholder resolutions which seek to implement biblical values.
* To provide leadership in the ecumenical and interfaith communities which utilize Fidelity as their custodian and/or investor of their funds. This leadership will include identifying such communities and encouraging them to act with the Reformed Church in America in the service of biblical values (MGS 2001, pp. 67-71).

The Socially Responsible Investment committee met on February 12, 2003, at the Reformed Church offices at the Interchurch Center in New York City. Members of the committee include:

Steven Brooks, moderator of the General Synod Council (present by conference call)
Robert White, president of the Board of Benefits Services (present by conference call)
Harry De Bruyn, Investment Advisory Committee (present by conference call)
Eric Johnson, Commission on Christian Action
Seth Kaper-Dale, Commission on Christian Action
Susan Converse, treasurer of the RCA
Jack Dalenberg, director of the Board of Benefits Services
John Paarlberg, minister for social witness
Carolyn Zimmer and Roland Jacobson (present by conference call), representatives from Fidelity Investments, were also present for part of the meeting.

**Identify Specific Companies within the Mutual Funds**

**Tobacco, Gambling, Alcohol, and Nuclear Weapons:** The Reformed Church in America has had a policy of not investing in tobacco companies (*MGS 1985*, p. 85) or the gambling industry (*MGS 1997*, p. 88) and a policy of holding only the minimum number of shares necessary in order to initiate shareholder resolutions in the major companies involved in the nuclear weapons industry (*MGS 1985*, pp. 63-64). The church has also followed a practice of not investing in companies involved in the alcoholic beverage industry. These screens are applied to the RCA portfolios that are separately managed, including the RCA Fund and the RCA Investment Program. However, under the Retirement Plan, which is managed by Fidelity, unless participants specifically choose to invest in the socially screened funds, they will be invested in various Fidelity mutual funds, which employ no social or ethical screens.

Fidelity representatives Carolyn Zimmer and Roland Jacobson reported to the committee on the amount of tobacco, gambling, and alcohol stocks in the mutual funds that are available to retirement plan participants. The percentages of net assets in tobacco, alcohol, and gambling stocks in the various funds range from zero to 3.91 percent. However, a review of the top ten holdings in the Fidelity Freedom Funds shows that Phillip Morris, a major tobacco company, is among the top ten in each case.

As of December 2002 participants in the RCA retirement plan had approximately $1.5 million invested in tobacco, gambling, and alcohol stocks. In addition, participants in the RCA 403(b) plan have approximately $168,000 invested in such companies.

In addition to Phillip Morris, other tobacco, gambling, and alcohol investments include RJ Reynolds, Harrah’s Entertainment, MGM Mirage, Station Casinos, and Anheuser Busch; investments in the weapons and defense industry include Boeing, General Dynamics, Lockheed Martin, and Northrup Grumman.

The committee also reviewed equity holdings in the RCA Fund and the RCA Investment Program managed by Fleet Bank and Scudder, Stevens, and Clark, where it is possible to maintain the investment screens established by the General Synod.

**Disclosure of Proxy Votes**

On September 19, 2002, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) issued a proposed rule requiring that mutual funds disclose their proxy voting policies, procedures, and voting records. In December, the minister for social witness wrote the SEC urging adoption of the new rules, arguing that shareholders have a right to know how managers vote their shares on important issues. The letter supported the proposed rule changes because they would help ensure that “investment advisers take their voting responsibilities seriously so that we can ensure that our investments are helping to support greater corporate accountability and social and environmental responsibility. Requiring all mutual funds and investment advisors to reveal how they cast their proxy votes and enabling shareholders to know what is being done in their name is an important step toward greater transparency, greater integrity, and greater social responsibility.” Fidelity vigorously opposed the new rules requiring disclosure.

The SEC approved the new rules, and mutual fund companies will now be required to disclose proxy votes beginning with the July 1, 2003, shareholder season. Fidelity will make this information available electronically by the end of August 2004. In the past Fidelity fund managers have generally followed management advice except when management is
“feathering its own nest.” Ethical and social considerations have not figured into the decision about how shares are voted.

Exercise Full Shareholder Rights and Initiate Resolutions

The minister for social witness reported on the two shareholder resolutions that the RCA co-filed in the 2001-2002 shareholder season: a resolution with General Electric asking for disclosure of costs of the delay in the cleanup of PCBs in the Hudson River (policy basis, MGS 1982, pp. 63-70, esp. 67-68) and another with ExxonMobil asking the company to promote renewable energy sources in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (MGS 1993, pp. 98-103; MGS 1999, pp. 98-104).

Each of the resolutions received more than 20 percent of the shares voted, an unusually large percentage for shareholder resolutions focusing on socially responsible and environmental issues. For the 2002-2003 shareholder season the RCA has again co-filed a “costs of disclosure” resolution with General Electric and a resolution with ExxonMobil concerning the company’s strategy for addressing climate change.

Provide Options in Socially Screened Mutual Funds

Socially screened mutual funds available to participants in the RCA retirement plan are Citizens Income, Neuberger Berman Socially Responsive Trust, Calvert Social Investment Fund: Equity A, and Citizens Core Growth A. Socially screened options in the 403(b) plan include the above named funds plus Citizens Emerging Growth and Citizens Global Equity A. As of March 1, 2003, the Citizens Income Fund was replaced with the PIMCO Total Return III Fund.

Only about 2 percent of the RCA retirement and 403(b) assets are invested in socially screened funds. Socially screened funds have slightly higher management fees and periodic asset-relocation is the responsibility of the individual investor (in the Freedom Funds this is done for the investor).

The committee agreed on the need to raise awareness about the options for socially screened funds and for more education about socially responsible investing in general. The committee advocated including such educational resources in presentations offered by the Board of Benefits Services. The Office of Social Witness recently produced a brochure on Socially Responsible Investing (posted online at http://www.rca.org/disciple/care/invest.php) based on the Commission on Christian Action report to the General Synod of 2002.

Fidelity and the Board of Benefits Services are in the process redesigning communication resources in order to make clear to participants the options available in retirement funds and in the 403(b) plan. The committee requested that options for the socially screened funds also be clearly identified.

Leadership in the Ecumenical and Interfaith Communities

Among other churches utilizing Fidelity are the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the Episcopal Church. Members of the committee will explore the possibility of enlisting representatives from these and other possible partners in dialogue with Fidelity.
Overtures

**Capping Assessments**

1. The Classis of California overtures the General Synod to instruct the General Synod Council to cap the membership on which a church pays assessments at one thousand members.

Reasons:

1. The denomination presently has a cap on the number of elder delegates to classis (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 3, Section 1).

2. The denomination presently has a cap on the number of elder and minister delegates which a classis can send to the annual meeting of the General Synod.

3. Growing churches will be encouraged to grow beyond one thousand members if there is a cap on the number of members on which it is to pay assessments.

4. When a church grows to more than one thousand members it carries a disproportionate amount of the budgets of the General Synod, regional synod, and classis.

5. A church of one thousand members has need for fewer of the services of the assemblies.

6 A church of one thousand members is a “resourcing church” providing numerous people and services that benefit other classis churches.

In response to Overture 1, the advisory committee recommended:

R-96
To deny Overture 1. (ADOPTED)

Reason:

Capping per-member assessments for larger congregations will cause assessments to rise, causing hardship for all other churches.

**Pastoral Health Insurance in Small Congregations**

2. The Classis of Dakota overtures the General Synod to: 1) investigate the possibility of a health care program merger with other denomination(s) in order to maintain the viability of continuing health care for pastors of small rural churches, 2) to investigate any other options such as joining an existing health insurance program, and 3) to explore a plan to have larger congregations help share the burden of cost.

Reasons:

1. The small churches are finding the high cost of medical insurance for clergy overwhelming to their budgets.

2. These higher costs are forcing churches to decide between programs (i.e., missions, outreach, etc.) in order to pay the increasing costs.

3. Smaller rural churches may not be able to afford to continue to maintain a full-time pastor.
4. These high costs are driving young and healthy ministers to seek insurance through other less expensive programs, forcing older, and sometimes uninsurable, ministers to stay with the higher-cost Reformed Church in America insurance, making it difficult for the affected churches to maintain these costs.

In response to Overture 2, the advisory committee recommended:

**R-97**  
To deny Overture 2.

Reason:

The Board of Benefits Services has investigated all of these options, and the plan it is proposing takes them into account.

*Pastoral Health Insurance to Be Covered by Assessments*

3. The Classis of Pleasant Prairie overtures the General Synod to implement a plan to pay all costs for ordained pastoral health insurance through assessments.

Reasons:

1. This will help churches deal with the excessive cost of health insurance for RCA pastors.
2. Those who opt out of the program are making it more difficult for those who do not, and those who are not as healthy or unable to find other insurance.
3. This will provide quality, consistent care for our pastors and missionaries, wherever they may live.
4. This will give the overall church a sense of mission to the smaller churches.
5. This will unify the churches around a concrete affirmation of the Covenant of Care.

In response to Overture 3, the advisory committee recommended:

**R-98**  
To deny Overture 3.

Reason:

This would cause per-member assessments to increase by over 200 percent (based on FY2002 expenses).

*Pastoral Health Insurance to Be Mandatory*

4. The Classis of Schenectady overtures General Synod to require enrollment in the RCA Insurance Program for all pastors of RCA congregations and ministers and employees serving assemblies, agencies, and institutions under the direct supervision of classes, regional synods, and the General Synod.

Reasons:

1. Our covenant theology calls us from individualism to community, from economic expedience to “bearing one another’s burdens” (Galatians 6:2) as the body of Christ.
If this fundamental biblical principle truly informs our theology, then it also applies to every aspect of our common life, including the compensation and benefits that free ministers and employees of the church from worldly concerns and for service to Christ and the church.

2. The clear intent of the “Call to a Minister of Word and Sacrament” (*Book of Church Order*, Appendix, The Formularies of the Reformed Church in America, 5) is that participation in the various insurances provided by the RCA Insurance Program shall be required of all ministers serving RCA congregations, institutions, and agencies.

3. Full participation is necessary to provide a strong RCA insurance program at competitive cost for all who earn their living by serving the church. When the young or healthy may opt for other coverage at lesser cost, the ill and elderly servants of the church face disproportionate insurance costs and the viability of our common insurance program is jeopardized. Full participation will enable the whole church to bear the burdens of our ill and elderly servants while reducing costs by increasing participation.

4. Required participation will affirm and strengthen “The Equality of Ministry” (*Book of Church Order*, Preamble, p. 4), which is a key provision of our covenant theology and polity. The General Synod, through its Board of Benefits Services, attempts to set standards for adequate insurance coverage for all servants of the church. When individual ministers, consistories, or agencies are allowed to seek insurance elsewhere, often at reduced cost, it is impossible to assure equal coverage for all who serve.

5. Participation in the RCA Insurance Program assures that medical coverage and other insurances are available to ministers and their families across the regions and regardless of preexisting conditions, thus allowing ministers to move freely in response to the call of God and the church with no fear of a loss of insurability.

In response to Overture 4, the advisory committee recommended:

**R-99**

To deny Overture 4.

Reason:

The essence of the overture has been addressed by the Board of Benefits Services in R-90.

*Increases in Expenses to Be Tied to CPI*

5. The Classis of the Greater Palisades overtures the General Synod to reexamine its proposed 2005 anticipated expenditures with the goal of bringing spending in line with the forecast increase in the Consumer Price Index in that and future years.

Reasons:

1. Accomplishing this goal should translate into assessments reflective of what an aggregate of RCA members are experiencing in their economic environment.

2. General Synod increases that exceed the CPI result in financial hardship for classes.
3. Good stewardship practices on the part of the General Synod encourage the same on the part of all lower assemblies.

In response to Overture 5, the advisory committee recommended:

**R-100**

**To deny Overture 5.**

Reason:

There are General Synod Council expenses that do not follow the Consumer Price Index (insurance, for example).
REPORTS ON THEOLOGY

Report of the Commission on Theology

The Commission on Theology met October 31 through November 2, 2002, and February 7 and 8, 2003. Both meetings were at the Hayworth Center of Hope College in Holland, Michigan. Just prior to the October meeting most commission members attended a conference dealing with the theological understanding of “office,” held at Western Theological Seminary and cosponsored by the General Synod professors of theology and the Center for Reformed Church Studies of New Brunswick Theological Seminary. At this same fall meeting the Commission on Theology also met with the Commission on Church Order to continue a discussion on offices in the church.

Continuing Work on the Concept of Office

The commission has given considerable attention to the study of offices this year and has begun to frame a paper on the concept of office in Reformed theology which it is hoped will provide a base for examining the relationships between the several offices currently in existence in the Reformed Church in America and for evaluating how these several offices currently function in the church and whether the church is in need of additional offices or some further development of existing offices in order to more effectively carry out the church’s ministry in the world. The commission expects to present a foundational paper on office to the General Synod of 2004.

Growing out of the conference on offices in October 2002 the commission asked that the papers presented at this conference be posted on the RCA website with linkages to the Western and New Brunswick Seminary websites and asked that responses to these papers be directed to the Commission on Theology. The commission also requested that one of the forums at the General Synod of 2003 be devoted to a presentation and discussion of offices in the RCA.

Previous referrals to the commission regarding the role of deacons in higher assemblies, the proposal of a new office of “evangelist,” and the more recent proposal concerning “commissioned pastors” remain on the agenda, but these proposals await a more general study of office and how the several offices are related and contribute to the overall ministry of the church.

Continuing Work on Baptism

The commission continued its discussion on the practice of baptism in our churches and reviewed a number of resources that are available from previous RCA publications and materials developed recently by other denominations in the Reformed family of churches. The commission is not prepared at this time to develop a new study on baptism but is interested in correspondence and communication regarding baptism and questions about baptism from individuals, congregations, and classes.

Earth and Ethics Working Group

In response to an appeal from the World Alliance of Reformed Churches some years ago to engage in work to establish principles of justice in providing care for the earth and the environment, and recognizing how economic issues impact care for the earth, the Commission on Theology committed itself to supporting a working group to study issues of ecology and economics. A three-year grant that provides funding was secured this past year, and through the able leadership of Dr. Stephen Bouma-Prediger of Hope College, a
working group of environmentalists, ethicists, geographers, and economists has been assembled to begin to study how our churches might become more aware of the interface between economics and care for the earth as well as how our churches might become more meaningfully involved in working with these issues. The commission will maintain regular contact with this working group and report on its work over the next two and a half years.

Evaluation

The Commission on Theology was reviewed by the General Synod Council (GSC) this year regarding its purpose and effectiveness. The Rev. James O’Connell, representing the GSC, met with the commission during its February meeting and led the commission through an evaluation process that was very helpful and productive. Mr. O’Connell’s report appears in the Church Order section.

Work Completed

The General Synod of 2000 requested that the Commission on Theology prepare a study on God’s sovereignty and evangelism. This request grew out of an overture from the Classis of California. The following paper is the commission’s response to this request.

GOD’S SOVEREIGN GRACE IN EVANGELISM

Commission on Theology, Reformed Church in America

Historically Reformed Christians have declared and celebrated God’s ultimacy and sovereignty in the cosmos; the providential hand in the midst of human affairs; and electing, regenerating grace in human redemption. Reformed Christians have also taken seriously the necessity and urgency of evangelism and fidelity to Christ’s mandate to make disciples of all nations. Yet while the above is an eminently compelling and attractive vision of the divine Creator and Sustainer and God’s gracious way of salvation, at times either the affirmation of sovereignty or the practice of evangelism have been met with a certain amount of resistance or neglect. Questions regarding the compatibility of divine governance and human freedom, the necessity of faith in light of election, and motivation for meaningful evangelism have not infrequently been raised. The purpose of this paper, in response to an overture from the 2000 General Synod, is to seek some clarity on these issues; to show what difference a Reformed perspective on the gospel might make to its proclamation; and to give fruitful reasons for the winsome articulation of the gospel message to persons in our culture, world, and era.

What Difference Does Sovereignty Make to the Evangelistic Message?

In short, Reformed Christians affirm the biblical vision of the supremacy and majesty of God in all things. We acknowledge the spiritual deadness of humanity due to sin and humanity’s natural inability to choose God; the incomparable salvation accomplished by God’s extravagant and undeserved grace alone; the deity’s sovereign and gracious choosing of the covenant people based solely on God’s good pleasure and will; God’s overwhelming grace poured out in the human heart through the Holy Spirit’s initiation of the new birth; the resulting and necessary faith placed in God by a repentant believer; Christ’s justifying sufferings and crucifixion for God’s people; the life-giving spiritual union between believers and Christ; and therefore God’s fatherly and unbreakable embrace by which we can never truly fall away from faith. This is the Christian euangelion, the evangel, the good message, the gospel.
Divine Sovereignty and the Evangelistic Message

Examining the constituent parts of this evangelistic message gives insight as to the unique Reformed emphases and their implications for evangelism. Reformed theology—indeed a biblically informed Christianity—starts and ends with its intense preoccupation with the nature and mystery of God. “The central theme of Calvinist theology, which holds it all together, is the conviction that every human being has every moment to do with the living God.”¹ As Moses discovered in the talking flames of a bush, God simply is. God is self-sufficient, not dependent on anything, unencumbered by physical or intellectual boundaries, perfect in fullness and richness of being, lacking nothing.² The triune God, relational and communal by very nature, enjoys perfect, whole, and harmonious fellowship between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Accordingly, God does not strictly need even human relationships, as if the trinitarian bond lacked anything. Rather, the divine creation of humanity flowed from the abundance and self-giving love between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God’s creative activity is natural but not necessary. Thus even the creation of humanity—indeed the creation of the entire universe—is not a matter of necessity but of bounteous grace. This covenant God, self-identified as I AM, is worthy of our worship, the only being capable of centering human life. Therefore God alone is supremely important. As Reformed Christians we attempt to define all our doctrine and practice in a theocentric way. Sin is horrible because it is an affront to God. Salvation is wonderful because it brings glory to God. Heaven is heaven because it is the place where God is all in all. A Christian can commend much true doctrine, say, about sin (sin is damaging, sin leads to wretchedness, etc.), but if there is not the God-centered perspective, the most important emphasis of all has been missed.³

Other Christians may say that evangelism, or mission, or revival, or justice is their great concern. While these are all crucial, Reformed Christians have only one—God—to know God, to mirror God, and to see God glorified. Reformed Christians refuse to absolutize any other objective. The justice of a society is important to us only in so far as it leads to the doing of God’s will on earth as in heaven. Bible study and prayer are important to us only in so far as they lead us into communion with the three persons of the Trinity. The salvation of the lost is important to us only in so far as it leads to the honoring of God’s name and the coming of his kingdom.⁴ Troeltsch points out that for Calvin “the chief point is not the self-centered personal salvation of the creature, and the universality of the Divine Will of Love, but it is the Glory of God.”⁵ The chief end of humanity, in the familiar words of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, is to glorify and enjoy God forever (Q1).

This distinctive Reformed vision of the nature of God can also be seen in the divine works, including God’s supremacy and majesty in the cosmos, history, salvation, and the human heart. To begin with, the supremacy of the triune God is evident not only in ex nihilo creation, but also in the deity’s caring sustenance of the cosmos. Indeed, according to Calvin divine creation and divine maintenance are inseparably joined (Institutes I.16.1.), this sustaining action a sort of creatio continuata, a continuation of the creative process. This is the providence of God. It is, as the Heidelberg Catechism eloquently expresses, “the almighty and ever present power by which God upholds heaven and earth and all creatures, and so rules them that leaves and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and unfruitful years, food and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, and everything else, come to us not by chance but from God’s sustaining hand” (Q27).⁶

Related to providence is divine sovereignty, a term familiar to ancient cultures. Sovereignty is the acting out of a king’s or queen’s reign and controlling governance. As the psalmist puts it, the Lord’s throne is established in the heavens, and God’s sovereignty rules over all (Psalm 103:19). From the biblical narrative we learn that God governs inanimate matter such as Egyptian plagues, Sodom’s hailstorm, the parting Red Sea, the stars (Matthew 2:9), and the elements of the earth (Psalm 147:15-18). Christ himself calms
the sea, heals sickness, and withers a fig tree. The biblical narrative further describes a benevolent divine governance of animals in cases such as wildlife drawn to the Noahic ark and cattle guided while pulling the arc of the covenant (1 Samuel 6), and as seen by divine curses of frogs and gnats in Egypt. In continuity with divine sovereignty elsewhere, God is also supreme in the human heart and will. God directs the hearts of kings (Proverbs 21:1), and while humans make their plans it is God who determines their steps (Proverbs 16:1). God is not reactively formulating divine intentions and plan, waiting to see what sort of decisions humans will make to see how history unfolds, but rather works all things after the counsel of the divine will (Ephesians 1:11-12). In this same vein Jesus Christ understands his earthly purposes in terms of the kingdom of God, that is, the dominion of God as King. “The term ‘kingdom of God,’” explains H. Richard Niebuhr, “puts all the emphasis on the divine initiative.”

So the first implication is that the doctrine of divine sovereignty necessitates a theocentric message. Reformed Christians will highlight the awe-inspiring supremacy of God in all things, including salvation. “The whole Christian enterprise must regard itself as witness of the ultimate majesty, which is sovereign over the whole of history...The servants of faith must not confuse this witness with their own puny interpretations of the divine sovereignty, which presides mysteriously over the drama of history.” Such a message extols the excellency of divine providence: the greatness, power, security, and steadfastness of God and of God’s Son Jesus Christ. Such a message must not portray the deity as one to be pitied, begging the unbeliever to change his or her mind in order that God not be disappointed. We dare not imply, “Poor God wants people to have faith and believe, but they just will not listen.” It will speak instead of the living God’s compassionate governance in the universe, of God’s power to restrain evil and to free a slave from whatever captivity binds him or her. No natural or human obstacle, addiction, or resistance is too powerful for the grace of a sovereign God. Sovereignty represents hope when confronted with the seemingly overwhelming darkness of the world and the blight of human evil.

**Human Inability and the Evangelistic Message**

In addition, Reformed Christians believe the sobering truth regarding the spiritual deadness of humanity due to sin and humanity’s natural inability to choose God. All human beings, male and female, are created in the image of the triune God, thus are relational beings intended for fellowship with our covenant-making Creator. However, human beings now find themselves, so to speak, “natural born sinners,” “dead men walking,” never to escape their sinful Alcatraz. As to the spiritual life and capacity to desire God, human beings are dead in their trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1). As to the scope of this spiritual death there is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is no one who seeks for God (Romans 3:11). As to the supposed spiritual freedom of human beings, they are in truth slaves of sin (Romans 6:17); in fact, Jesus himself declares that “everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin” (John 8:34). Because of this universal sinful disposition no one can come to Christ, “unless drawn by the Father who sent me” (John 6:44). This is affirmed often in our Reformed creeds. For instance, the Heidelberg asks, “But are we so corrupt that we are totally unable to do any good and inclined toward all evil?” The answer: “Yes, unless we are born again by the Spirit of God” (Q8).

Thus a second implication is that the message will make clear, in a sensitive yet forthright manner, the truth regarding human misery, alienation, and impotence. The biblical diagnosis of the human condition should not be compromised. It is not discouraging but liberating to finally come to terms with a chronic illness, especially when the cure is at hand. It is certainly good news to the person who feels dead inside to be offered new vitality. The gospel message will call for a response, but need not be preoccupied with the human decision. The Christian message should instead confute all human notions that imply that both God and humanity possess sovereign wills. It is not the sovereign choice of the human that
provides the sine qua non of the evangel, but rather the divine purposes. The gospel message will instead highlight that all persons desperately need God. “Thou hast formed us for Thyself,” cried Augustine, “and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in Thee.”

**Extravagant Grace and the Evangelistic Message**

The whole human race is not, however, left in corruption, guilt, and spiritual impotence. In continuity with God’s sovereign and caring providence, and due to humanity’s inability to choose reconciliation with their Creator, Reformed Christians believe our incomparable salvation to be accomplished by God’s extravagant and undeserved grace alone. “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God; not the result of works, so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9). This grace is commenced by the Father’s sovereign and merciful choice of the covenant people, based solely on God’s good pleasure and will, not contingent on a foreseen good or faith residing in given individuals or groups. In other words, since we are saved by grace alone, we must also be elected by grace alone. The theocentric focus of sovereign grace is continually set forth in Scripture: God’s affection was set on the Israelites though they were the fewest in number; God calls the elect according to God’s purposes, predestines us to be conformed to the Son’s likeness, and chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). God chooses the foolish, weak, and lowly things to shame the wise, strong, and privileged (1 Corinthians 1:27-30). God says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” So it does not depend on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy (Romans 9:10-24).

God’s sovereignty is demonstrated further by the sending of God’s Son, Jesus Christ, to atone for the sins of humanity (Matthew 1:21). The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ are the central content of the Christian gospel. In Christ’s perfect attitudes, actions, and life he demonstrates his supremacy over all human tendencies toward that which is corrupt, unjust, cruel, hateful, and petty. Christ’s death upon the cross reigns supreme over sin, death, and evil. Christ provides the mediatorial bridge of reconciliation between a holy God and a sinful people. Finally, Christ is raised from the dead in victory over death and ushers in a new age in which God’s good, acceptable, and perfect will reigns supreme, an age which fulfills the promise of resurrection life for God’s people.

This sovereign choice is demonstrated when God’s overwhelming grace is poured out in the human heart through the Holy Spirit’s initiation of the new birth. The Holy Spirit, in unison with the Word, transforms a human heart from a disposition toward love of self and corruption to love of God and repulsion toward sin. “God saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to God’s mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5). As Dort explains, “By the effective operation of the same regenerating Spirit, God also penetrates into the inmost being of people, opens the closed heart, softens the hard heart, and circumcises the heart that is uncircumcised. God infuses new qualities into the will, making the dead will alive, the evil one good, the unwilling one willing, and the stubborn one compliant. God activates and strengthens the will so that, like a good tree, it may be enabled to produce the fruits of good deeds” (Dort, III/IV, Art. 11). In other words, God’s renewing activity demonstrates that God is an evangelist, the supreme evangelist. God is the hound of heaven, seeking to save the lost, dead, and enslaved. God is compassionate, concerned, and active, wanting full restoration, redemption, and shalom for his (temporarily) broken universe, including his wayward people. Because of this sovereign, efficacious grace poured out through the Holy Spirit, God’s redemptive purposes are guaranteed to be successful. The new heavens and new earth will not be empty.

Thus a third implication is that the evangelistic message will draw special attention to God’s abundant, free grace in both creation and redemption. Such a message extols the
excellency of the divine mercy: the goodness, love, and compassion of God and of God’s Son Jesus Christ. Stories of grace and reconciliation abound in the biblical narrative and gospel parables: the prodigal son, the lost coin, the lost sheep, and, of course, none more so than the passion narratives. Communicating the goodness and efficacious grace of the sovereign God, and the promise of reconciliation, supremely expressed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, is the heartbeat of the evangel.15

*Cosmic Redemption and the Evangelistic Message*

God is concerned not solely for human creation but also for the redemption of the entire creation. The whole of creation fell with the first Adam, and now God is in the process of reconciling the world through the second Adam. “In Christ the world was reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:19). The “world” (Greek kosmos) here means that there is a cosmic effect from Christ’s reconciliation. This should not be taken as an endorsement of some form of salvific universalism, for it does not mean that every last person on earth has or will be reconciled to God. What it does mean is that though the creation groans for its redemption, longs for freedom from its slavery to corruption, and awaits release from its subjection to futility (Romans 8:19-22), God’s created order will ultimately receive its redemption, freedom, and release through Christ’s saving work. This demonstrates that God is concerned with material creation, not merely Platonic ideas or immaterial souls. The divine will is to make whole again the entire creation, and will do so when the new heavens and new earth is revealed (Revelation 21:1).

It may be further noted that because regeneration occurs before the eschatological consummation, and because God is concerned for material well-being in the here and now, salvation is not merely the obtaining of an afterlife. Salvation is not simply “living in heaven after death,” but a new life in the present now-and-not-yet of God’s kingdom. Biblical salvation involves the spiritual life of the believer before death and does not admit of any disregard for physical welfare, health, and goodness in this life. The resurrection implies the redemption of the whole person, and this holistic salvation begins at new birth, not at the parousia.

God’s sovereignty over all creation—not merely a “spiritual realm”—and God’s concern for its wholeness, imply a message which speaks not merely of “saving souls” but of redeeming creation. Hence the evangel construed broadly, while never a substitute for the saving message of new life in Christ, must also involve decisive action: feeding the hungry, stewarding the earth, clothing the naked, protecting the weak and vulnerable, and creating shalom for those in pain and grief (Matthew 25; Luke 4:16-21).

*Repentant Faith and the Evangelistic Message*

As a result of regeneration, faith is the necessary and inevitable response of a repentant sinner. With the new set of dispositions a born-anew, Spirit-infused believer inevitably casts her affections on the eminently loveable, gracious, and attractive sovereign God. It is therefore not surprising that a New Testament pattern can be detected affirming both the gratuitous and necessary character of faith and repentance. God gives the gift of salvation, appoints belief in Christ, and grants repentance from sin, but humans are nonetheless responsible to lift the beggar’s empty hand and through faith receive the gift, respond in belief, and turn in repentance. In Acts it is reported that when the Gentiles heard the gospel, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed (13:48). In the Pauline corpus we learn that “by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8). In the pastoral epistles we hear that “God may perhaps grant that they will repent and come to know the truth” (2 Timothy 2:25). The Heidelberg teaches us that true faith is “not only a certain knowledge by which I accept as true all that God has revealed to us in the
Word, but also a wholehearted trust which the Holy Spirit creates in me through the gospel, that, not only to others, but to me also God has given the forgiveness of sins, everlasting righteousness and salvation, out of sheer grace, solely for the sake of Christ’s saving work” (Q21).16

One further consequence is the life-giving spiritual union between believers and Christ. We have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer we who live, but Christ lives in us; and the life which we now live in the flesh we live by faith in the Son of God, who loved us and delivered himself up for us (Galatians 2:20).

The twofold implication is that an evangelistic message should not, first of all, pit human responsibility and divine sovereignty against one another. Stress should be placed on both human responsibility and divine sovereignty since both are stressed in the biblical text.17 Paul admonishes the Philippian Christians to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you” (Philippians 2:12-13). Christ and the apostles apparently had no hesitation in insisting on God’s absolute sovereignty and in the same breath the urgent need to place life-saving trust in Christ. The evangelistic message conveys a matter of life and death, thus it should be considered with all seriousness. Non-believers must choose this day whom they will serve, are urged to repent because the kingdom of God is at hand, for now is the day of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2)!

Secondly, the message should emphasize the lordship and sovereignty of God in all of life. Salvation requires a desire for obedience to God’s good and perfect will. Where there is no Lord, there is no Savior. Jesus Christ is prophet, priest, and king. The evangelistic message ought, therefore, as a matter of integrity, to make clear that Christians are responsible to live their lives in light of Christ’s kingship, lordship, and sovereignty. Christians are called to repent, to put their attitudes, thoughts, and behavior under the lordship of Christ. After Jesus mercifully grants reprieve, he commands the woman to go and sin no more (John 8:11). This is because the nature of true faith involves not merely an intellectual assent to the truth of the gospel, but a wholehearted commitment to the King and holy kingdom living. Once graciously adopted into the warmth and joy of the Father’s house, we are to live by the Father’s wise house rules. Faith without works is, as James states frankly, dead (James 2:20). In truth it is no faith at all. “Actual holiness of life,” says Calvin, “is not separated from free imputation of righteousness...Repentance not only constantly follows faith, but is also born of faith. For since pardon and forgiveness are offered through the preaching of the gospel in order that the sinner, freed from the tyranny of Satan, the yoke of sin, and the miserable bondage of vices, may cross over into the Kingdom of God, surely no one can embrace the grace of the gospel without betaking himself from the errors of his practice of repentance.”18 To explain the gospel in this honest manner does not imply a works-based salvation, but is rather a candid invitation to the unbeliever to sacrifice the opium of destructive sinfulness for life-giving fellowship with a holy and sovereign God. Jesus asks his audience to consider how a wise home builder needs to count the costs before beginning construction; likewise one called into communion with Jesus must weigh the expense of denying self daily and following the Lord Christ (Luke 9:23).

Last Things and the Evangelistic Message

Because believers have been elected from eternity based solely on God’s will and grace, and because our hearts have been transformed by the irresistible renewing grace of the Holy Spirit and consequently united to Christ, God’s fatherly and unbreakable embrace guarantees that we can never truly fall away from faith. We are comforted by those assuring words, “My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand” (John 10:27-28).
God is sovereign not only in ultimate blessing but also in final judgment. At the last day God, in righteous judgment, will reign supreme over all that oppose God’s kingdom and goodness (Revelation 20), bringing justice for evil done and the separation of gehenna for the wicked. This is not a peripheral teaching of the New Testament, nor a hideous accretion of the later church; of the fourteen recorded occurrences of the word gehenna, twelve come from the lips of Jesus. With wisdom and justice the sovereign Lord separates the sheep and the goats, for either a blessed life in the new heavens and new earth or due punishment eternally apart from God’s holy presence (Matthew 25). From an apostolic perspective it is not merely unrepentant sinners who are perishing, it is the whole present evil age. The old order is passing away, the new has come. The evangelistic message beckons those who are part of the old order to jump from its sinking ship to the terra firma of Christ Jesus. It compassionately warns those still shaking a fist at God to instead turn their life’s direction, receive the Holy Spirit’s cleansing, wear Christ’s robe of righteousness, and embrace the covenant God.

Nothing has been said so far regarding precisely how God exercises divine power in the cosmos or human heart. The attempt has been made merely to show that God is sovereign. It is less apparent from the biblical witness if God acts to apply sovereignty uniformly or in various ways. Scripture does not make clear by what mechanism God applies governance over creation. It simply declares God’s ultimacy, supremacy, and majesty in all things, and that history, events, and choices do indeed turn out the way God intends. This being said, however, it is clear that one of the appointed means by which God’s sovereign purposes are accomplished is the human proclamation of the evangelistic message: evangelism.

**What Difference Does Sovereignty Make to the Evangelistic Motive?**

**What Is Evangelism?**

Reformed Christians take seriously the necessity and urgency of evangelism and fidelity to Christ’s mandate to make disciples of all nations. But what is evangelism? In the New Testament the Greek verb euangelizo means “I communicate good news.” So to evangelize is to tell a good message, as in a victory. The verb form is found thirty-four times in the New Testament and frequently is translated as “preach the gospel.” A related term is kerusso (from which kerygma is derived), meaning “to proclaim in the manner of a herald,” implying the declaration of an event, which occurs in its verb form sixty-one times in the New Testament. Other associated terms are martureo (from which martyr is derived), meaning “to bear witness,” and matheteuo, meaning to “make disciples.” Evangelism thus involves communicating, preaching, proclaiming, bearing witness, and working toward the goal of making followers of Christ.

Various definitions of evangelism have recently been suggested. The RCA document “Faithful Witnesses” declares that “evangelism is winsomely and effectively sharing in word and deed the good news: that God, in Christ, has come to deliver the covenant 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).” The Lausanne Covenant (1974) offers this definition: “To evangelize is to spread the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures, and that as the reigning Lord he now offers the forgiveness of sins and the liberating gifts of the Spirit to all who repent and believe.”

Whether they emphasize “sharing” or “spreading,” these definitions reflect the fact that evangelism involves the communication of a specific message. It is not merely teaching general Christian views regarding ethics or God’s existence. Evangelism means to present
Christ as the living Savior and reigning Lord. It is also specific in that it does not merely report various historical facts about Jesus, but draws attention to his saving work on the cross, fulfilling his mediatorial office as priest and king.22

Evangelism also involves a specific application. It is not properly evangelism if one simply expounds “Christ Jesus as a subject for detached critical and comparative study...Evangelism means presenting Christ Jesus and his work in relation to the needs of fallen men and women.”23 It means inviting the nonbeliever to act, to place full trust in Christ as his or her Lord and Savior. It must be added, however, that while gospel proclamation extols the sinner to repent and put faith in Christ, evangelism is not to be understood in terms of the effect achieved in persons by the proclamation. Evangelism is a human effort; new birth in Christ is the work of the Holy Spirit. As the well-known maxim illustrates: we plant the seeds, God makes them grow.

**Why Do Evangelism if God Is Sovereign?**

There are many reasons the faithful Christian, including the Reformed Christian, ought to compassionately share the good news of God’s sovereign grace, especially in light of divine providence and election. The first motive for evangelism is to love and glorify God. Our chief end is to glorify God. The greatest commandment is to love God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind. We desire that God’s glorious name be extolled, God’s just will be done, and God’s magnificence be honored. With each new spiritual birth God’s kingdom grows and another is added to the jubilant chorus of worshipers and glorifiers. The truth of divine sovereignty presents an eminently compelling vision of God and his grace. It is utterly attractive and should be presented for universal acceptance. A light is not kept under the bed or in a jar, but in full sight so its brilliance is shown forth. We also have the delight of participating in God’s redemptive purposes, purposes that are sure to be fulfilled. The stones would shout God’s glory if we did not; how deeply satisfying to fulfill the human *telos*, to carry out our designed purpose to make God’s glory known. In fact, God’s elect are chosen for a purpose (Ephesians 2:10), not least of which is the proclamation of God’s sovereign grace through the gospel. Election is not for privilege but for service—service to God.

Christians are commanded to evangelize. God is sovereign, possessing universal authority, and ought therefore to be joyfully obeyed. Christians eagerly seek to faithfully walk according to God’s authoritative Word and wise counsel. Jesus says that we shall be his witnesses (Acts 1:8). The church has been given a great commission to go and make disciples by the authority of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). God commands “that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations” (Luke 24:47). Similar is the charge “to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me” (Acts 26:18). The faithful Christian walk will therefore necessarily be saturated with evangelistic desire and effort in joyful fulfillment of God’s revealed paths.

As Christians we are not only commanded to love our neighbor, but because of the new set of affections created in us through the Spirit, we long to bring life, healing, and wholeness to our fellow human beings. The believer mourns for those who live without Christ, and is troubled by the pain, meaninglessness, and emptiness of the lost. God is an evangelist. God demonstrates sovereign love and concern for humanity by mercifully choosing the underserving, by delivering up God’s own Son on the tree, and by the washing of new spiritual birth. Hence Christians ought also to exhibit this profound evangelistic love for persons. Love is not self-seeking; it is always self-giving, overflowing, and outreaching. Love risks vulnerability, offense, and even rejection for the possibility of bringing reconciliation and authentic personhood through Christ to a restless soul or tortured conscience. Karl Barth reminds us that “People naturally do not shout it out...But let us not be deceived by their
silence. Blood and tears, deepest despair and highest hope, a passionate longing to lay hold of that which, or rather him who, overcomes the world because he is its Creator and Redeemer, its beginning and ending and Lord, a passionate longing to have the word spoken, the word which promises grace in judgment, life in death, and the beyond in the here and now, God's word—this it is which animates our church-goers. In addition, loving concern generated by the immanence of final judgment and blessing will motivate towards urgent warning. Sovereign blessing is a heavenly feast worth sharing. Sovereign judgment is a terrible prospect for those wearing their own filthy rags, unadorned by Christ's gorgeous righteousness.

One need look no further than the person of Jesus Christ for a motivating example of compassionate evangelistic engagement with persons of all kinds. Christ is fully divine and fully human—the sovereign Lord of the universe yet the most human of all. He is our model for authentic human living, and Jesus was an evangelist. While most holy men of his day were unapproachable, Jesus met persons in their own context: in their towns, in their homes, in their workplace, in the market. He shared intimate meals with the religious establishment and with the lowly commoner of first-century society. He dialogued freely, asked concerned questions, and told stimulating, probing stories. His parables were taken from the earthiness of everyday life and connected personally with people on a very practical, yet profoundly spiritual, human level. Jesus built honest trust with those he met, showed genuine concern for their well-being, and found a way to get to the deepest issues of life. In these relationships he did not hesitate to speak of the debilitating scourge of sin or the liberating love of his Father. The gospel was part of his normal conversation. In short, Jesus engaged people in loving evangelism as a way of life. He sensitively connected with all kinds of people—men and women, Gentile and Jew, poor and rich, old and young, ill and healthy, powerless and powerful—boldly beckoning them to repent due to the nearness of God's kingdom. As the one truly authentic human life, his way should be our way. Those united to Christ remain today his hands, feet, and mouth as he seeks to redeem those in bondage and build his kingdom of grace.

The many examples of evangelism throughout the history of God's people serve as further motivation. In the Abrahamic covenant his clan and their descendants were to be light to the nations. The apostle Paul, predestinarian author of Ephesians 1 and Romans 8-11, is well known for his many bold evangelistic exploits, recorded in the book of Acts along with the efforts of Barnabas, Silas, Luke, Philip, and Peter.

Especially germane to the subject of this paper, Reformed Christians have historically affirmed and participated in evangelism and missions. Calvin himself was firmly committed to evangelism, even in the midst of a difficult era forcing him to spend a considerable amount of his energy developing a church organization, writing theology, and training ministers. Calvin does not specifically address evangelism while treating the subject of predestination in the Institutes, but neither does he describe it as unnecessary. He explains his views more fully in his treatise on predestination:

Since we do not know who belongs to the number of the predestined and who does not, it befits us so to feel as to wish that all be saved. So it will come about that, whoever we come across, we shall study to make him a sharer of peace...even severe rebuke will be administered like medicine, lest they should perish or cause others to perish. But it will be for God to make it effective in those whom He foreknew and predestined.

Aside from his writings on predestination, Calvin also strongly supported the idea of evangelism and missions with passages widely scattered throughout his commentaries. For instance, commenting on Micah 2:1-4, Calvin states, “The Kingdom of Christ was only begun in the world when God commanded the gospel to be every where proclaimed and...at this day its course is not as yet complete.” In other words the great commission was
not fulfilled by the apostles and, consequently, this mission is still the responsibility of Christians.

Perhaps the best evidence of Calvin’s concern for missions is the mission activity of the Genevan church under his leadership. Under Calvin’s leadership, Geneva became “the hub of a vast missionary enterprise” and “a dynamic center or nucleus from which the vital missionary energy it generated radiated out into the world beyond.” Protestant refugees from all over Europe fled to Geneva; they came not merely for safety but also to learn from Calvin the doctrines of the Reformation so they could return home to spread the true gospel. Between 1555 and 1562 the Genevan Register records eighty-eight men by name who were sent out from Geneva to different places as “bearers of the gospel.” In reality many more than eighty-eight were sent. In one year, 1561, though the Register mentions only twelve missionaries, other sources indicate that at least one hundred forty-two missionaries were sent. Hundreds of persons were sent out, reaching Italy, Germany, Scotland, England, and practically covering France. In addition to the extensive work in Europe, one group of Genevan missionaries was sent to Brazil.

Evangelistic activity continued through Reformed churches in the following centuries. A few examples will suffice. The seventeenth-century Puritans were fully committed to a biblical, educational, and practical evangelism. Richard Baxter’s Call to the Unconverted and Joseph Alleine’s Alarm to the Unconverted were pioneer works in evangelistic literature. In the eighteenth century, Theodore Frelinghuysen of the Dutch Reformed Church in New Jersey emphasized evangelistic preaching and encouraged gospel proclamation through the work of helpers from the laity, in both church and home gatherings. The Tennent family witnessed awakening in the Presbyterian Church in Pennsylvania, influencing many later evangelists and church planters. Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield were integral in the First Great Awakening in New England. Edwards, the great theologian and practitioner of spiritual awakening, wrote Narrative of Surprising Conversions to give an account of the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration, faith, and repentance. William Carey, the father of modern missions, was a committed Calvinist, as was the great evangelistic preacher Charles Spurgeon. The RCA itself has been an active supporter of evangelism and missions, such as the significant work of Samuel Zwemer in the Middle East; John Kempers in Chiapas, Mexico; Albertus Peters in Japan; and the Scudder family in India and the Middle East.

The historic Reformed creeds and confessions reflect this evangelistic passion. It is fair to say that the entire Heidelberg Catechism is self-consciously structured in the form of a threefold gospel presentation (patterned after the Book of Romans): beginning with “Misery” (Part I), then “Deliverance” (Part II), and finally “Gratitude” (Part III). The Canons of Dort declare that the promise of the gospel, “together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be announced and declared without differentiation or discrimination to all nations and people, to whom God in his good pleasure sends the gospel” (III/IV, 8).

More recently the RCA has professed its evangelistic concern. Delegates to the 1997 RCA General Synod passed a resolution that declares that North America is a primary mission field for the Reformed Church in America in the first two decades of the twenty-first century, that every RCA congregation should be encouraged to think of itself as a “mission station,” and that RCA members “should be encouraged to think of themselves as missionaries, called to bear witness to the good news of God in Jesus Christ in the midst of a disbelieving culture” (Minutes of General Synod 1997, p. 33); in 2000 the RCA drafted a Pentecost Letter—it states the church’s intention “to be a people who can lead others into a saving relationship with [God].”
Does Divine Sovereignty Undercut the Evangelistic Motive?

Yet in spite of the foregoing evidence of Reformed evangelistic passion and activity, it has occasionally been suggested that the doctrines of divine sovereignty and election in some way impede the practice of evangelism. At this point it is helpful to distinguish between what views and attitudes towards evangelism Reformed Christians ought to hold, what they have held in the past, and what they presently hold. The first question about our imperative to speak and live the gospel has been directly addressed; an attempt has been made to partially answer the second question regarding the history of Reformed evangelism; but the third, a query about current Reformed views and attitudes, is more difficult to assess. Despite strong biblical, creedal, historical, and moral reasons entailing the urgent need for compassionate evangelism, it seems straightforwardly true that not all Reformed Christians, nor all Reformed churches, evangelize. The RCA itself has continued to slowly diminish in numbers of members and congregations, whereas the church universal, and many other denominations, have continued to grow. While there may be various factors for this diminishment, it is reasonable to ask why some or perhaps many Christians, including Reformed Christians, do not evangelize. Some have suggested that Reformed Christians cease from speaking the gospel due to their belief that God is absolutely sovereign. While the view that divine sovereignty renders evangelism unnecessary has only rarely been explicitly argued from within the Reformed tradition, let us consider whether belief in divine sovereignty and predestination may in fact play some inhibiting intellectual role or perhaps in principle run counter to the evangelistic task.

Notions that sovereignty impugns evangelism are usually based on assumptions regarding the Reformed doctrines of either spiritual inability, unconditional election, or irresistible grace. The first of these, the belief that nonbelievers are in a state of utter spiritual lifelessness, has led some to the conclusion that one need not evangelize dead people. Such a view assumes that the free offer of the gospel is not genuine if sinners are spiritually incapable of responding. In response it may be noted that no one but God knows who is regenerate and who is not. Since we do not know, we preach to all persons indiscriminately. In Jesus’ parables everyone who hears the gospel call has been invited to the wedding feast (Matthew 22:1-14) and great banquet (Luke 14:16-24). Humans are by nature spiritual stillbirths, their hearts for God as silent as a tomb. But the Reformed evangelist is confident that some, and perhaps many, have had their heart of stone replaced by a heart of flesh. Not every person will respond to the gospel call, but some will. Indeed, it is the promise of a harvest that gives the evangelist hope and motivation. Since the sovereign Holy Spirit is working to transform human affections and volition, it gives impetus to invite the broken and resistant sinner to embrace the life-giving Lord.

Conversely, the Reformed evangelist wonders why, in light of human corruption, one should do evangelism if God is not sovereign. Understanding human depravity gives new insight into the concept of resistant people or people groups. From a human point of view, some persons or cultures seem impossibly hardened toward the gospel. Even if there are centuries of distrust and animosity or vast cultural barriers, the Reformed evangelist still has reason for hope. No matter how hostile the cultural, intellectual, psychological, or religious background, new birth is possible through the omnipotent redemptive efforts of the Spirit of God. The evangelist, like Ezekiel, stands before a valley of dry bones, waiting for God to make them alive, and calls out like Jesus to Lazarus, that the dead may rise. We seek through proclamation to resurrect the spiritual vitality of the sinner and are confident that, even while they are dead and enslaved, the sovereign Creator never ceases breathing new life into the dust.

In addition some wonder whether evangelism is made meaningless and unnecessary if God has already unconditionally predetermined all events and choices, including those choices involving the salvation of individuals, families, and groups. Why evangelize if God has
already chosen who will be saved? The straightforward answer to this is that we evangelize for the reasons already given: because God commands us to; because Scripture shows that redeemed hearts will inevitably yearn to communicate the joy of faith; because we should be concerned for the eternal destiny of the lost; because of Christ’s model of compassionate evangelism, along with the examples of Paul, Peter, Barnabas, Calvin, Edwards, and so on. So while the Reformed Christian believes that Scripture unambiguously reveals the doctrine of God’s unconditional electing grace, it also clearly calls us to winsome evangelism. Whether or not we understand the exact theological relationship between sovereignty and evangelism, we evangelize simply because God in his Word tells us to.

Furthermore, evangelism is but one of the vast array of human actions which are practically, spiritually, and morally significant. It is meaningful and necessary because God has not only ordained ends, but also the means to those ends. We may be confident that if God graciously determines that an Ethiopian eunuch should place faith in Jesus Christ, that God has also graciously determined that a Philip will communicate to him the good news. Both the faith of the convert and the preaching of the gospel are ordained according to God’s good will and pleasure. Thus while Paul in Romans 8 states that we know that “God causes all things to work together” and “whom he predestined, these he also called; and whom he called he also justified,” he has no hesitation asking in Romans 10, “how then shall they believe in him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?” The preaching of the gospel is predestined just as is the believing of the gospel. Paul was set apart for his preaching ministry before he was born (Galatians 1:15), as was Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:5). “Just as the almighty work of God by which he brings forth and sustains our natural life does not rule out but requires the use of means, by which God, according to his infinite wisdom and goodness, has wished to exercise his power,” as the Canons of Dort say, “so also the aforementioned supernatural work of God by which he regenerates us in no way rules out or cancels the use of the gospel, which God in his great wisdom has appointed to be the seed of regeneration and the food of the soul” (III/IV, 17).

In God we live and move and have our being. In evangelism God is graciously working out his redemptive purposes through our faithful yet feeble attempts at proclamation. That proclamation, while an action that the evangelist performs, is simultaneously the fruit of God’s powerful work in the evangelist through the Spirit. If a Christian refuses to evangelize, it does not leave God’s plan to save the lost and broken. Instead it indicates that one’s failure to preach the good news to thirsty souls is also under God’s sovereign plan, and that perhaps God has other ends in mind. These ends may even include divine judgment on the disobedient believer and those to whom he or she should be preaching. As C. S. Lewis notes, “you will certainly carry out God’s purpose however you act but it makes a difference to you whether you serve like Judas or John.”

It is for this reason that unconditional election is not a form of fatalism. The fatalist holds that, since all things have been determined, human choices and actions do not make a difference. Fatalism further maintains that such determinism is not compatible with human freedom; there is no meaningful sense in which we can say that human beings are free. The fatalist therefore speaks of fate or destiny. But the Reformed doctrines of divine sovereignty and foreordination do not entail fatalism. The Reformed Christian does not claim some form of physical or genetic determinism; God does not monopolize the power; humans have some legitimate power of determination. Humans are not puppets, or hypnotized, or brainwashed. Instead the Reformed doctrine of predestination and foreordination holds that human choices are in some meaningful sense free and do make a difference.

This leads to a further question as to whether Christians are accountable to evangelize if God has ordained all things and whether unbelievers are culpable for choosing or refusing to place faith in Christ if such a choice is predetermined. If a human choice is predetermined, is it a free and responsible choice? There are several approaches that Reformed the-
ologians have taken to the relationship between divine predestination and human freedom; we shall focus on probably the most widely held and promising account. It is essential first to understand what is mean by the term freedom. We may distinguish spiritual or moral freedom from metaphysical or physical or psychological freedom. The former is the ability to choose the good; the latter is the ability to make non-moral choices. The former is a freedom to choose to please God, follow Christ, and desire holy living. The latter is a freedom to choose which jacket to wear, what book to read, whether to cross the road. Calvin himself makes a similar distinction between freedom from necessity by compulsion, freedom from sin, and freedom from misery. The first of these, he says, “so inheres in man by nature that it cannot possibly be taken away, but the two others have been lost through sin.” So as Reformed Christians we hold that human beings in their natural state no longer have a moral or spiritual freedom (“freedom from sin”)—it is this sort of freedom, or slavery, that Scripture predominantly addresses—yet they still have a genuine metaphysical freedom (“freedom from necessity by compulsion”). But what kind of metaphysical freedom do human beings have in light of God’s foreordination of all things?

Humans have a genuine (metaphysical) freedom, even though their choice and actions have been eternally decreed, in the sense that they are free from compulsion or coercion, and that a person does what she or he wants. People perform free acts when they are not forced in their action, when what they do flows without obstruction from their own over-riding preferences, dispositions, and set of affections. If a person has a gun put to his or her head and is told to leave the room, then the action of leaving the room is not free. The same would be the situation if such a person were physically forced by a mob to leave the room. A similar case can be made for internal compulsion, such as in the instance of drug addiction. But if a person leaves the room without such external or internal compulsion, simply because they want to leave the room, in accordance with their prevailing desires, character, and preferences, even if that action is divinely determined, then this is a free act and choice. Thus on this account human freedom is compatible with divine causal determinism; hence this view is called compatibilism.

But how is the Christian accountable to evangelize on the compatibilist view of freedom? Basic conditions of human responsibility must obtain for any action or choice: there cannot be any form of compulsion; the agent must know and have awareness of her or his actions, must consent to the action, and must have an appropriate measure of control. If these conditions are present, then a person is responsible for their action and choice. While some insist that free and responsible actions must be undetermined, the Reformed Christian sees no reason to accept this restriction. What this means is that Reformed Christians, although committed to the belief that God graciously foreordains all events, including the salvation of his elect, are still responsible to share the evangel so long as they are not physically forced to stop evangelizing, are aware of their call to make disciples, and are able to commence or withdraw their evangelistic actions. The fact that evangelistic efforts are predetermined is no excuse for inaction.

On the contrary, God’s loving predestination to salvation is a great inspiration for evangelism. There is no greater joy than to know not only that God has an infallible plan according to which, despite outward appearances, human history is flowing toward its appointed end of a new heaven and new earth, but also that we personally can participate in these ultimately victorious redemptive purposes. The Christian has the “assurance that the present and the future are not under the control of blind forces but are open to unlimited possibilities of new life,” says Lesslie Newbigin, “because the living God who was present in the crucified Jesus is now and always the sovereign Lord of history and therefore makes possible a continuing struggle against all that ignores or negates his purpose.” We need not despair if we do not possess the most charisma or skill of persuasion for it is God who ultimately saves. The evangelist can be greatly encouraged by the glorious truths of unconditional election since God has sovereign power. Despite what may seem like an
entrenched resistance in a person or people group, God has a chosen people among them. They were not chosen on the basis of their openness to the gospel, or their own desire to seek after God or to respond to him, nor indeed on the basis of any other virtue. Like all in the family of God, they were chosen simply because God, by grace alone and for God’s glory alone, decided to save individuals who do not deserve it and who would never choose God if left to themselves. And those whom the Father chose unconditionally, the Son redeemed individually and infallibly through his death and resurrection. And those whom the Son redeemed, the Spirit powerfully calls into salvation. It does not matter how hardened a nonbeliever may be. If the Father has chosen, and the Son has redeemed, the outward call of the proclamation of the Word will be accompanied by the irresistible inward call of the Spirit, and there will be fruit.

There may be many reasons for the neglect of gospel proclamation: fear of rejection, belief that one is not gifted, lack of experience, the attitude that one is too sophisticated, the notion that it is solely the pastor’s job, the view that religion is a merely private affair, or the fear of manipulating others. But Reformed Christians should not excuse such unbiblical attitudes with the smoke screen that divine sovereignty somehow removes the believer’s obligation to communicate the good news. We dare not capitulate to the sin of silence. Sovereignty does not undercut evangelism, but rather undergirds it.

What Difference Does Sovereignty Make to the Evangelistic Method?

We may now briefly explore the difference divine sovereignty makes in the way that evangelism is done. In light of the foregoing passage, it may actually be the case that many believers who mistakenly reject evangelism in toto are in fact rejecting a certain type (or stereotype) of evangelism. Indeed, Reformed Christians have long resisted evangelistic approaches which appealed to emotional manipulation, ecstatic tent revivalism, gimmicks such as the “anxious bench,” or the winning of arguments. Since God is sovereign, the evangelist need not resort to methods bent on overwhelming the human will. Evangelism should not be coercion.

An evangelist by all means should be winsome, articulate, and persuasive. But most importantly the evangelist must, like Jesus, treat non-Christians as persons and not as projects. It is in the context of trusting relationships that most fruitful evangelism takes place. Evangelism is best conceived as a process. We need not pressure ourselves into forcing conversions or pressing for a decision as if the salvation of the lost lies squarely on our shoulders alone, at this time and in this place. Nor does the evangelist need to put on appearances of being perfect and care-free; revealing personal weakness, ignorance, and vulnerability may in many cases be very appropriate. God is the evangelist; we may play only a subsidiary role, just one step along the way, in the ultimate conversion of one of God’s elect. In fact, an unbeliever may or may not finally embrace Christ.

The context for evangelism may vary as well. It may be a brief encounter or a longtime friendship. It may be a passing word of grace or a fully explained gospel invitation. It may be through a combination of sermons, conversations, stories, testimonies, apologetics, personal letters, or expressions of art and literature. It may be mass evangelism or personal evangelism. As with Jesus, it may be from a boat, on a hillside, at an intimate dinner, or in a church (or synagogue). Thus for the Reformed Christian, delighting in the knowledge of God’s glorious sovereignty, there is no single correct method of engaging unbelievers with the gospel. Nonetheless, evangelism ought always to reflect God’s sovereign power and grace in the gospel message, should be motivated by God’s sovereign call of compassion to make disciples, and will rejoice knowing that the Father has sovereignly chosen and the Spirit has sovereignly renewed his people, so that they may respond in joyous faith to the life-breathing invitation of salvation in Christ.
“Do not be afraid, but speak and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no one will lay a hand on you to harm you, for there are many in this city who are my people” 
(Acts 18:9-10).

2 Theologically speaking this is the *aseity* of God; God is *a se esse* (to be from himself). His creatures are *ab ablío* (from another); they are dependent.
4 Ibid.
8 Christians may appropriately proclaim divine sovereignty in the evangelistic message despite the postmodern critique of authority. Indeed there are biblical passages which criticize certain forms of human authority, but never divine authority, nor the concept of authority itself. Authority—or the exercise of “power”—is not inherently oppressive, privileged, or unjust. Jesus himself demonstrated and taught of correctly expressed authority through servant leadership (cf. Matthew 22:24-30).
10 Cf. Belgic Confession, Art. 14; Canons of Dort, II; Second Helvetic Confession, IX; Westminster Confession of Faith, IX.
11 Augustine, *Confessions* I.1.1.
12 Cf. Heidelberg, Q54; Belgic Confession, Art. 16; Canons of Dort, I; Second Helvetic Confession, X; Westminster Confession, III.
13 Cf. Heidelberg Catechism, Q12-22, 29-52; Belgic Confession, Art. 20-26; Canons of Dort, II, 2-4; Second Helvetic Confession, V:2-3; XI:6-8, 16-17; XV; Westminster Confession, VIII; XI.
15 It is perhaps a matter of wisdom and discernment as to whether the doctrine of election should be placed front and center in an evangelistic message. This crucial teaching in the life of a believer, while undergirding the message, is nowhere in Scripture the focus of evangelism.
16 Cf. Belgic Confession, Art. 22; Canons of Dort, I, Art. 2-6; II, Art. 6-7; III/IV, 13-14; Second Helvetic Confession, XVI; Westminster Confession, XIV.
17 In fact this message will avoid altogether making any false polarities regarding the divine attributes and character. It will not, say, contend for God’s love in contradistinction to his sovereignty, or his justice over his holiness. Such attributes are not appendages of God that can be lopped off in favor of another, nor do the sum of them exhaust God’s infinite nature. The attributes instead modify and condition one another: we may speak of God’s loving sovereignty as well as his sovereign love, and so on.
18 *Institutes*, III.3.1. Cf. also III.6.4.
20 Cf. Heidelberg Catechism, Q58, 123; Belgic Confession, Art. 37; Westminster Confession of Faith, XXXIII.
23 Ibid., 39.


29 Ibid., 46.


31 See also Heidelberg Q2: “What must you know to live and die in the joy of this comfort [of belonging to Jesus Christ]? A: Three things: first, how great my sin and misery are; second, how I am set free from all my sins and misery; third, how I am to thank God for such deliverance.”

32 In 1999 the number of confessing members of the RCA totaled 182,337. This was a decrease of 915 members from 1998. And 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 RCA showed an increase in membership was 1984. See *Minutes of the General Synod 1999*, 48.

33 There are in fact a few rare historical examples of Reformed Christians who have held just such a view. Joseph Hussey (1660-1694), one of the earliest formulators of a type of hyper-Calvinism, wrote a book the title of which testifies to its contents, *God’s Operations of Grace But no Offers of His Grace*. Perhaps the most famous theologian associated with this position was John Gill (1697-1771). In the Dutch-speaking world the question of the free offer of the gospel has been debated occasionally down the years, and this has impacted the American Dutch churches. Most notably, the denial of the well-meant gospel call was the position of Herman Hoeksema in the twentieth century.


36 See Belgic Confession, Art. 13-14.

37 Some have resorted to explaining the relationship of human freedom and divine foreordination by means of *antinomy*, which is the idea that there is no contradiction between human freedom and divine sovereignty, although there appears to be one. It is an *apparent* incompatibility. The trouble with this view is that it is hard to see the difference between antinomy and self-contradiction. Without an attempt at reconciliation, what is the difference between an apparent inconsistency and a real one? Such a view is too permissive. Antinomy is license to accept any nonsense. See Paul Helm, *The Providence of God* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 61-66. Others have held to a Molinist position, or middle-knowledge perspective, claiming that God knows all possible counterfactuals of human choice in the future. But such a view is inconsistent with the biblical teaching that God’s election is not based on human choices and it is doubtful that middle knowledge of free human actions is possible since God cannot actualize possible worlds with free actions without infringing on such (libertarian) freedom.

38 Calvin, *Institutes* 2.2.5.


40 While not using the exact terminology, both Augustine (especially the later Augustine) and Calvin can plausibly be interpreted to be compatibilists. See Paul Helm, “The Augustinian/Calvinist View,” in *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*, ed. James Beilby and
Paul Eddy (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 162, fn 3.


Such a view is called incompatibilism, or libertarian freedom, because it holds that determinism and necessity are incompatible with human freedom.


R-101
That the paper “God’s Sovereign Grace in Evangelism” be approved for study and discussion in local congregations of the Reformed Church in America. (ADOPTED)

The advisory committee recommended:

R-102
To instruct the Commission on Theology, in consultation with the appropriate offices of the General Synod Council, to create and make available a study guide based on the paper “God’s Sovereign Grace in Evangelism.” (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. A study guide will provide pastors and educators with a tool to assist in leading congregations to fuller understanding, appreciation, and application of the truths in this paper.

2. A study guide will advance the vision and mission of the RCA.

3. A study guide will encourage and equip RCA churches and members to engage in evangelism.
REPORTS ON WORLD MISSION

Report of the General Synod Council’s Mission Services Committee

REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF MISSION SERVICES

When following Christ in mission, the church is radically attentive to the world outside its doors. In the last year, RCA mission personnel and staff have not lost focus on the reconciling work of God in Jesus Christ. But in new and somewhat unsettling ways, our eyes have also scanned a troubled world. On a daily basis, reports are received about wars, rumors of wars, famine and disease exacerbated by violence, and attacks on indigenous Christians and Western missionaries, civilians, and military personnel. Dire consequences for vulnerable indigenous people and minority Christian populations have already been endured. New armed conflicts promise the spread of international violence as East is pitted against West, and Islam is pitted against Christianity. Of particular concern is the safety not only of civilian populations in general but of our global brothers and sisters in Christ in harm’s way, including RCA mission personnel. Without ceasing we pray and work for peace with justice.

Security and Crisis Management Policies

Following a training session by Crisis Consulting International professionals in the spring of 2002, Mission Services updated RCA crisis management policies. Approved by the General Synod Council on November 10, 2002, the updated policies make important correctives to previous assumptions, enable mission personnel to make risk assessments, identify appropriate behaviors for various levels of crisis, and require mission personnel to file potential evacuation plans with their supervisors after consulting with mission partners. In a time of full-blown crisis, chaos often prevails. Careful forethought can mitigate the effects of chaos and provide a plan of action to deal with them.

Historically, RCA mission personnel have not been quick to run. Commitment to the indigenous church and the call of God to serve God’s mission have prompted mission personnel to stay at home through thick and thin, leaving only when urged to do so by indigenous church leaders or required to do so by governments. Such is the case even in these very uncertain times. By God’s grace, the preparedness which is wisely put in place will prove to be an unused precaution.

Global Partners

A strategic planning paper entitled “Discipling All Nations: the Global Mission of the RCA into the Twenty-First Century” was approved by the General Synod Council in 2002 (GSC 02-30). In response to its challenges, the RCA entered into several new global mission partnerships in the last year.

Reformed Evangelical Church in Myanmar (RECM) was founded in 1998 as indigenous evangelists in Myanmar committed to the historical reformed tradition, creeds, and confessions covenanted together to pursue the goals of the following mission statement:

It is the mission of the Reformed Evangelical Church in Myanmar to carry out the great commission (Matthew 20:28) of our Lord Jesus Christ, to go out and preach the Gospel to those who have not heard of it, and make them disciples of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And to plant churches among every people group and help them grow into maturity and Christ-likeness so that the world will see Christ in and through our life and conduct and become light and salt to our community, society and nation.
Evangelical in its mission, the RECM is also holistic in its vision, seeking to address the needs of the poor and vulnerable, the addicted, and the uneducated.

God is blessing the zeal of the RECM as it reaches out with the gospel to over eight people groups in Myanmar. At the time of its formation in 1998 the RECM had a membership of sixteen hundred. Today they claim a membership of five thousand. It is anticipated that the RCA will assist the RECM in establishing churches among the unreached people groups of Myanmar.

Christian Evangelical Church in Minahasa (Gereja Masehi Injili de Minahasa, GMIM), established in 1934, is an indigenous church on the island of Sulawesi in Indonesia that grew out of the nineteenth-century work of Dutch and German missionaries. The GMIM is well established. Nine hundred pastors, of whom 65 percent are women, serve 777 congregations grouped into 85 presbyteries with a total membership of over 700,000. An extensive education program includes 305 Christian educators, 332 kindergartens, 364 elementary schools, 64 junior high schools, 20 senior high schools, 6 vocational and technical schools, a university with theological education, and 2 schools for the disabled. In its church-to-church relationships, the GMIM is both evangelical and ecumenical.

North Sulawesi is one of the most populated Christian areas in Indonesia, along with Sumba, Timor, Maluka, and Irian Jaya. All of these areas are in eastern Indonesia. Christians in Indonesia as a whole are a minority religious group. Out of over 200 million people in Indonesia, 87 percent are Muslim, 8 percent are Christian (both Catholic and Protestant), and the rest are Hindu, Buddhist, and followers of other traditional religions.

Tensions between Muslims and Christians in Indonesia have been high. The RCA will assist the GMIM to help the Christian refugees and provide scholarship funds for seminary students from Muslim-dominant areas. GMIM has also asked that a member of the Reformed Church be on the faculty staff of the seminary.

The Korean Presbyterian Church (KPC) was established in September 1978 as an indigenous church in the tradition of Reformed theology and the Presbyterian system. With 3,900 ordained ministers, licensed ministers, and minister candidates, the Korean Presbyterian Church has 2,410 local churches grouped into 53 presbyteries, with a total membership of about 820,000, including children. KPC runs several educational institutions: two seminaries, one university, and two colleges. The denomination has sent 130 missionaries around the world, strongly emphasizing missionary work in Northeast Asian areas, including China, Mongolia, North Korea, and far eastern Russia. The denomination has a mission agreement with the North Eastern Union of Evangelical Christian Churches to develop Christian leadership and church plantings in far eastern Russia. They are developing the Ussuriysk-branch campus of North East Technical University in Vladivostok, Russia, and supporting a seminary in Ussuriysk.

An agreement of mission cooperation was established in February 2003 between the Korean Presbyterian Church, the Reformed Church in America, and the North Eastern Union of Evangelical Christian Churches in order to reach out to far east Russia and develop Christian leadership in the area.

The Christian Reformed Church of Cuba (Iglesia Reformada en Cuba, IRC) came into being in the 1950s through the efforts of a missionary nurse from Paterson, New Jersey. In 1959 the Christian Reformed Church in North America adopted Cuba as a mission field, but the revolution forced all missionaries to leave and nationals assumed leadership of the church. The IRC has twelve churches, one in the Province of Habana and the others in the Province of Matanzas. Five ordained pastors and twenty lay leaders provide
leadership for the work of the church in the areas of evangelism, social witness, mercy, and education. Each church has developed prayer cells throughout their communities, which is providing them with significant growth.

Besides having to deal with shortages in food and medical supplies, some misunderstanding with authorities, and the constant pressure of limited resources, Christians in Cuba continue to be part of a living witness to the grace and power of the cross in changing and transforming lives. As a member of the Cuban Council of Churches, the IRC shares fellowship with twenty-two other expressions of the body of Christ.

The RCA’s Council for Hispanic Ministries initiated a relationship with the IRC in 1990, and since then Hispanic pastors have been visiting the churches and joining them in activities dealing with evangelism and discipleship. Through the council, the RCA has been involved in encouraging believers in Cuba and learning from them. The covenantal relationship entered into by both churches will be a blessing to Christians in Cuba and in North America.

Reformed Churches in Argentina (Iglesias Reformadas en Argentina, IRA) has more than one hundred years of life and witness in the country. This church traces its roots to the waves of European immigrants who arrived in Argentina at the end of the nineteenth century. The first group of Dutch immigrants arrived in the provinces of Santa Fe and Buenos Aires in the 1990s. During the 1950s and 1960s the churches developed a strong missional, diaconal, and evangelistic ministry, which allowed them to start new churches and new preaching points. During the 1970s and 1980s the church began working with marginalized people through social work types of ministries in the “barrios” and developing leadership for the community and the church.

The church’s leadership is highly committed, competent, and ecumenical. As a result, the churches are open to dialogue and worship with other Christian bodies and actively pursue involvement in ecumenical activities. The IRA is an active participant in a dialogue between churches of the Reformed tradition in the area: Iglesia Evangélica Luterana Unida, Iglesia Evangélica del Río de la Plata, Iglesia Luterana Alemana, Iglesia Evangélica Luterana Argentina, Iglesia Reformada Húngara, Iglesia Danesa, and the Iglesia Valdense.

The IRA has thirteen churches, seven with installed pastors and six without pastors; the six without pastors are served by the other seven pastors on a rotational basis. Altogether they have approximately 2,000 baptized members.

The IRA ministers in the midst of Argentina’s worst crisis in history:

- 53 percent of the country’s income goes to pay its foreign debt
- 2 million live on $1 a day; 45 percent of families now live below the poverty line
- 15.7 million people live in misery
- 24 percent of the population is unemployed; 2.1 million are underemployed
- 36.4 percent of the unemployed have college degrees
- 90 percent of workers now earn less than they did last year
- 300,000 adolescents drop out of school every year; 30 percent of youth have not completed primary school
- 15 percent of youth have no employment, neither are they in school
- 4.5 million (44 percent) of youth under age fourteen live in poverty
- 4,600 businesses in the capital city closed within the last five years
- The foreign debt is now 160,000 million dollars; next year the debt will rise to 220,000 million
MUTUAL MISSION AND VOLUNTEER SERVICES

In May of 2002, David Dethmers moved to the Grand Rapids office and assumed his duties as mutual mission coordinator. In this position he oversees the RCA’s new Classis Companionship program, linking RCA classes to groups of churches in other parts of the world. These partnerships provide our classes with the opportunity to share in worship and fellowship with international brothers and sisters, learning from them in the areas of ministry in which they excel and sharing our gifts and skills in the areas in which God has blessed us. This office also facilitates exchanges of pastors, seminary and college students, and work and learning teams between RCA institutions and their counterparts in parts of the world where the RCA has mission or ecumenical partners.

This has been a year of transition and restructuring for the RCA Volunteer Services office. A difficult decision was made to close the volunteer office in Chicago, which was staffed by Paul Nulton and Sandra Cornejo, in order to insure that Mission Services could continue to operate within a balanced budget. Happily, soon after this closure, Mission Services was able to join the Synods of the Mid-Atlantics and New York, along with Warwick Conference Center, in the creation of a new position to promote and facilitate mission teams and mission education opportunities within those two synods. Paul Nulton was ultimately hired to fill that position and works in close cooperation with the RCA Volunteer Services office.

Responsibilities within the office have also been realigned. Jay Harsevoort now serves as coordinator for individual volunteers and Amy De Kruyter as coordinator of group volunteers. Through this restructuring roles have been clarified and, it is believed, resources allocated more effectively. During this transition, document policies and procedures have been refined and new promotional and education resources for the Volunteer Office have been developed. Though still growing into their new roles, staff members are pleased with the results. The RCA currently has the largest number of individual volunteers in its history, and additional mission sites are actively being sought at which to place a growing number of mission teams.

New Church Building Construction

As the cost of new church building construction escalates, it becomes increasingly difficult for new church starts to construct facilities without allocating a disproportionate percentage of their overall budget to building loans. Perhaps providentially, interest in work group experiences has never been higher. In the spring of 2002 the Building and Extension Fund recommended to an RCA congregation seeking a church building fund loan that they explore utilizing RCA mission teams to assist in all appropriate areas of the construction in order to reduce the costs of the project.

As a result of this recommendation a Mission Cluster task force, composed of representatives from Evangelism and Church Development Services, Congregational Services, and Mission Services’ Volunteer Office, met to explore this request and opportunity. Ultimately, the task force recommended that RCA Volunteer Services coordinate volunteer teams to assist congregations with building facilities under the following conditions:

1. The church is a participant in the RCA’s denominational plan.
2. The church has applied for loan funding through the BEF, which has affirmed the appropriateness and viability of their building plan and has suggested that volunteer workers be one means of developing their ministry space.
3. The proposed project is their first unit.
4. The church is willing to provide sweat equity in the project—that is, to have their own members working side by side with volunteers from other churches.
5. The host church views this as a ministry opportunity through which both they and the guest teams from other churches will use and enhance their gifts in worship, fellowship, evangelism, and discipleship.

The last criterion is particularly important. When viewed from a ministry perspective, this becomes an exciting yet practical opportunity for established congregations to live out the Great Commission by assisting with the birth and growth of new congregations. If immersed in a context of worshipful work, not only the penultimate goal of building a structure is achieved, but also the ultimate goal of building up the body of Christ. This may also provide a practical way for many established congregations and Christians to contribute toward the proposed denominational goal of being 1,100 congregations by 2013.

Reformed Church World Service

The ministry of Reformed Church World Service (RCWS) has encompassed the entire globe this year. RCWS disbursed $1,038,393 from October 1, 2001, to September 30, 2002, to bring comfort and hope to those in need around the world. Highlights of the year included programs and projects that help develop long-term solutions; rehabilitate and rebuild shattered dreams, lives, and buildings; and provide emergency relief to people with little hope of surviving without assistance. Here are some concrete examples:

- Emergency relief (provided through RCA mission partners) to people in the Congo, Cuba, Ethiopia, Kenya (Kakuma Refugee Camp), Malawi, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Sudan.
- Goat restocking in Kenya and Malawi.
- Counseling and trauma recovery for caregivers and children affected by the September 11 tragedy.
- Rent and food assistance for members of RCA congregations affected by September 11.
- Respite supplies for September 11 caregivers and rescue workers.
- Food pantry grants in all eight RCA regional synods.
- Shelter kits and rehabilitation for refugees in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Egypt, and Indonesia.
- Rebuilding after storms, flooding, and wildfires in the far western U.S., Texas, Mississippi, and the Midwest.
- Mosquito nets to prevent malaria in Malawi and the Congo.
- Moringa trees for Africa, a seed project in the Balkans, and a garden and sewing project in Argentina.
- Quilt income generation and education project in Afghanistan.
- Volunteers in Nicaragua and Sudan.
- Famine relief in southern Africa.
- Housing reconstruction in Honduras and completion of health clinic in Syria.
- Hunger education materials and program support.
- Partner agency program support.

All of this has been made possible by the generosity of RCA members and friends. To God be the glory!

RCWS news and stories can be found on the new RCWS website, rcws.rca.org.

Diaconal Ministries

A recent survey of all RCA congregations indicated that 67 percent use current RCA programs to nurture and equip deacons. That figure corresponds to an increase in requests to the Office of Diaconal Ministries for consistory training. We have responded to as many of those requests as possible.
In addition, the newsletter *Called to Serve: Deacons and Elders Together* continues to be sent twice a year to every RCA congregation.

The tenth Diaconal Gathering was held in Zion, Illinois, on April 25 through 27, 2003. The Rev. Carolyn Holloway was the worship leader. Two diaconal concern areas provided focus for this weekend of training and inspiration: special individual and family concerns and disaster preparedness. Delegates also spent time preparing for classis diaconal conferences.

**Urban Ministries**

In the last year the denomination’s work of resourcing urban congregations has been refocused. The General Synod Council (GSC) Urban Ministries Team has identified twenty-two initiatives under the general heading “Life in the City.” The initiatives will marshal resources for the transformation of city leaders, churches, communities, relationships, and attitudes.

Key to accessing new funds for urban ministry was the formation of the Reformed Economic Development, Inc. (REDI), a new nonprofit corporation approved by the April 2002 General Synod Council (GSC 02-35). The initial board of directors was named by the GSC on November 10, 2002 (GSC 02-67). As a separate corporation of the GSC, REDI will enable the RCA to access grants from government agencies, foundations, and individuals. REDI will be staffed by Richard Rienstra, the director of development for urban ministry.

Resourcing congregations is best done collaboratively and face to face. In addition, sharing written resources and concepts is augmented through the publication of a newsletter entitled *Word on the Street*. Each issue of the newsletter is devoted to a particular urban ministry theme. It is published three times a year and mailed to every RCA congregation.

Funding for the Urban Ministries budget continues to be drawn from the urban ministries fund drive under the heading “Our Future Depends on the City.” In the GSC 2003 fiscal year the balance of funds in the account will likely be exhausted. In order to fund the initiatives identified by the Urban Ministry Team, the fundraising capacity of REDI will be needed, along with full payment of donors on pledges and the raising of new contributions. The challenges and opportunities of the RCA’s urban congregations are great. The health, diversity, vitality, and growth of urban congregations will be an important component in the realization of future RCA growth goals.

**Categories of Mission Personnel**

*RCA mission personnel* are appointed by Mission Services for specific ministry. Mission Services establishes salary and benefits and supervises the missionary. *Mission partner personnel* (MPP) are employed by partner organizations. They are under the supervision of the partner, which 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, 1992-2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>MISSYS</th>
<th>MPP</th>
<th>VOLUNTEERS</th>
<th>AFFILIATES</th>
<th>TOTALS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>162</td>
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<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>163</td>
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<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>155</td>
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<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>172</td>
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<td>1999</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>174</td>
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<td>2000</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>193</td>
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<td>2001</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>191</td>
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<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Funding

In the third consecutive year of a downturn in the United States economy, the good news is that contributions from all sources have fully underwritten all of the RCA's mission programs. The mission program of the RCA is supported entirely by voluntary contributions; it does not receive assessment allocations. In summary, RCA churches, individuals, mission partners, and investments contributed the following in 2002:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Designated Contributions (PIM shares, legacies, etc.)</td>
<td>$8,595,307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-Time Non-Budget Projects Contributions</td>
<td>$651,528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reformed Church World Service Contributions</td>
<td>$1,064,876</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Contributions</td>
<td>$10,311,711</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Several factors contributed to ending fiscal year 2002 in the black: 1) the loyalty, compassion, and generosity of RCA churches and members; 2) the response of supporting churches to an appeal requesting over-and-above contributions to offset major increases in medical insurance premiums; 3) strong legacy giving by the saints of God who remembered RCA missions in their wills; 4) conservative budget-making and tight budget management; and 5) a (relatively small) endowment and investment program. (While the income from investments and endowments is an important component of overall RCA mission funding, it accounts for only 7 percent of the total budget.) Denominations that have relied heavily on investments for their mission budgets have had to make severe cuts due to the sharp decline in the stock market. The strong foundation of RCA mission funding is the Partner-in-Mission (PIM) share, a personal, long-term investment in mission personnel by churches and individuals. In lean times, the relationship between mission personnel and supporting congregations sustains funding needs.

The value of the PIM share in 2002 was $4,600. This amount was sufficient to meet the annual cycle of rising costs for salaries, benefits, and program. However, it was insufficient to cover unanticipated increases in medical premiums. As noted above, a special appeal aided these expenditures. The value of the PIM share in 2003 is $4,800.

Developing a balanced budget for 2004 was very challenging for Mission Services staff. The funding and budgeting patterns of recent years continue to hold true: rising fixed costs for salaries and benefits; sharp increases in medical insurance premiums; reductions in investment income of $100,000; and a $150,000 loss of support from Reformed Church Women’s Ministries over the last two years. In order to meet a very tight 2004 budget, Mission Services staff recommends an increase of $200 per share over the 2003 share amount ($4,800). This would bring a full share in 2004 to $5,000 and a half-share to $2,500.
R-103
To approve the mission share increase of $200 for the year 2004, bringing a full mission share to $5,000. (ADOPTED)

Changes in Mission Personnel and Mission Services Staff

The Rev. Duncan Hanson has joined the RCA as coordinator for mission stewardship and supervisor of mission programs in Eastern Europe and Russia. Hanson works within the Synod of Albany and the Classes of Mid-Hudson, Orange, and Rockland-Westchester. Duncan joins us after many years of service with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), where he held a similar position. He speaks several European languages and is very familiar with most RCA mission partners in Europe. Duncan’s office is located at 475 Riverside Drive in New York City.

The Rev. Steve Rheingans will be serving as co-chaplain of the Protestant Church in Oman. He will work with small-group development and discipleship for mission service in this largely expatriate church. Rheingans has served the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America as a church-planting missionary in Madagascar. He has moved to Oman with his wife, Jill, and their two children, Kelly, 13, and Paul, 12.

Peter Kapenga has been appointed as an RCA missionary to the Al Raja School in Bahrain. He is replacing Gary Brown as school principal. For the past twenty-five years Kapenga has been an Evangelical Lutheran Church in America missionary working as a school administrator with two Christian schools in Ramallah on the West Bank. He and his wife, Kathy, began their ministry in Bahrain in August.

COMPLETION OF ASSIGNMENT

Sue and Mitch Sorenson have resigned from their ministry at the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus. They have served in Ethiopia since August of 2000. The Sorensons have returned to western Iowa.

The Rev. Martin Weitz and his wife, Emilie, returned to the U.S. in May to take up a call- ing with Flatlands Reformed Church in Brooklyn, New York. Since 2000 the Weitzes had served in India, where Marty ministered as a chaplain, first at a medical center and then as a mentor to pastors of the Church of South India. They began their missionary service in 1994 when they accepted a call to Oman, where Marty copastored an English-speaking congregation and conducted a pastoral ministry with foreign workers, and Emilie provided Bibles and Christian literature for sale to people living in the interior region of Oman. Emilie also started one library in Oman and two in India.

MISSION PARTNER PERSONNEL

Bethany Buege has replaced Bethany Graves as youth pastor at Mescalero Reformed Church in New Mexico. Bethany is a graduate of Hope College from Evart, Michigan.

Pastor Jones Galang, a member of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, has been appointed as mission partner personnel for the RCA, serving migrant workers in Seoul, Korea. He is working to develop the community welfare and education system as he reaches out among Filipino workers and their families in Korea.

Nadia Kuprionok will be taking over from Arlene Vander Loon as supervisor of training for Christian educators for children’s ministries in the Ukraine. Kuprionok has been working with Vander Loon since the beginning of the program with the goal of taking over the ministry. Arlene Vander Loon will continue to be available for consultation for the next couple of years.
VOLUNTEER SERVICE ASSIGNMENTS

Africa: Bill and Carolyn Overway
Brazil: Bryan and Kristen Meyer
Cameroon: Rick Peterson
China: Jennifer Kaskey
East Africa: Ross Kane
Egypt: John and Irene DeJong
Estonia: Jessica Materson
Honduras: Sandy Wisner
Japan: Phil and Judy Admiraal
                Ruth Bavin
                Zach and Juli Bey
                Nathan Blakeslee
                Matthew Bosch
                Dawn Carowitz
                Myra Cubos
                Curtis De Pree
                Tyler Do
                Kathy Dorn
                Anita Dreise
                Karla Johnson
                Joel Koedyker
                Jane Marvel
                Bill Roberts
                Jessica Smit
                Kevin Tysen
                Susan Victor
                Sorell Yue
Oman: Willis, Pat, and Amy Jones
Southern Africa: Kristen Clark
Sudan: Alan and Martha Rice
Taiwan: Don and Jill Van Singel
United States: Nicole Heinen
              Randy and Shannon Kalmink

DEATHS

F. Belle Bogard, former RCA missionary to Japan and Iraq.

Charles Lee Crandall, retired missionary to Sudan.

Ethel (Beth) Scudder (Thoms) Dickason, former RCA missionary to India (1926-1930), Bahrain (1932-1937), and Oman (1937-1970).

Alice Elzinga, former missionary to Japan.

Alfred G. Pennings, retired RCA missionary to Oman, Kuwait, and Bahrain.

Gertrude Van Roekel, retired RCA missionary to the Jicarilla Indians in Dulce, New Mexico.
Report of Words of Hope

Those who are drawn to the ministry of Words of Hope share two basic passions. The first passion is for the Lord—that the glory of Jesus Christ would be enhanced throughout the world as people everywhere come to faith in him and the church grows in every nation. The second passion is for the Word. It arises out of the conviction that it is God’s Word—written, spoken, heard, understood, and obeyed—that causes the first passion to be realized. The Word of God is the instrument the Holy Spirit uses to make people worshipers and followers of the Lord Jesus.

There are millions of Christians living under difficult conditions of deprivation and persecution whose great hunger nevertheless is spiritual. They are eager to be fed with Christian teaching but have no one to explain the Scriptures to them. Like the Ethiopian eunuch, they ask, “How can I understand, unless someone guides me?” (Acts 8:31) Words of Hope is enthusiastically committed to the great cause of bringing the gospel to the unreached peoples of the world, and of encouraging believers by explaining God’s Word to them via the airwaves.

Ministry Highlights

Broadcasting

Albanian: Local FM stations in Tirana and Korce now broadcast Words of Hope Albanian programs twice each weekday. Radio 7 transmits from the highest mountain overlooking Tirana and hopes to expand its coverage through strategically placed repeater transmitters. With a signal reaching into northern Greece, Radio Emanuel is managed by an Albanian pastor who leads a large Korce congregation.

Arabic: Eleven weekly Arabic gospel broadcasts are being aired on the powerful medium-wave (AM) transmitters of Radio Monte Carlo to the Middle East and North Africa, where 330 million people in 23 nations speak the Arabic language. This is made possible by a growing cooperative effort of Words of Hope with Middle East Reformed Fellowship and the Back to God Hour of the Christian Reformed Church.

Bhojpuri: Words of Hope’s Bhojpuri broadcasts are bearing fruit in northern India, including the Hindu “holy city” of Varanasi. In that spiritual stronghold, which attracts thousands of Hindu pilgrims every day, local residents testify to the life-changing impact of these Bhojpuri programs, which air five nights each week from a powerful shortwave transmitter in southern Russia.

Dinka and Nuer: Since late August, Words of Hope Dinka and Nuer producers have been living and working at the new Lokichogio ministry center on the Kenya-Sudan border. This multipurpose facility features a solar-powered recording studio, which allows for program production in much closer proximity to the peoples of South Sudan.

Kashmiri: Four pilot programs have been produced in the Kashmiri language and distributed by cassette. The scripts, written by Words of Hope’s India Director Stephen Paul, dealt with general topics such as beauty, love, compassion, and friendship. This initial research phase indicates a 90 percent favorable response obtained from a sample of over a hundred Kashmiri Muslims who expressed definite interest in hearing more such programs via radio. A possible full-time producer has been located and provisions for a recording facility have also been made. Words of Hope plans to partner in this new venture with Sweden-based IBRA Radio.

Persian: Words of Hope’s Persian (Farsi) broadcasts are reaching a growing audience of spiritually hungry Iranian listeners who are increasingly disillusioned by their country’s harsh theocratic rule. Discipleship training conferences presented by Words of Hope and its partners as follow-up to these radio programs have benefited dozens of Iranian believers.
**Specialized English:** Expansion continues for “Spotlight” programs produced in Specialized English, with daily broadcasts on about twenty stations and satellite systems worldwide (Middle East, Africa, India, Southeast Asia, Russia, Europe, North and South America, and the Pacific Rim). This has provided a unique avenue for spreading Christian truth as non-English speakers learn and practice the English language. In Ecuador, for example, more than four hundred people in “listener clubs” receive the scripts each day via email so they can follow along as they listen to the programs.

**Tibetan:** Radio is the only practical way of sharing the gospel with many hard-to-reach Tibetans. Recent travels to the Tibetan capital of Lhasa reveal a profound, even overwhelming, sense of spiritual darkness in this ancient Tibetan-Buddhist stronghold. Ethnic Chinese now outnumber Tibetans four to one in Lhasa. Tibetans encounter increasing difficulty finding jobs even in their own capital, where ethnic Chinese applicants are now generally favored and tend to be better educated. Tibetan-Buddhism does show signs of serious erosion, including a definite decline in the population of monks. Many in the monasteries actually listen to Words of Hope Tibetan broadcasts.

**Turkish:** Words of Hope has reached a partnership agreement with a gifted young Turkish pastor who will produce Turkish programs to be aired over Radio Shema, a full-time FM station in Turkey’s capital of Ankara. Words of Hope is also providing assistance to the station in the areas of equipment, training, and staffing.

**Internet Outreach**

The Words of Hope website is www.woh.org. The devotional “Daily Reflections” is available there in three formats: web text, printable format (PDF), and audio format (Real Media). In addition, the weekly English-language radio program is accessible on the internet in web text, printable format (PDF), and audio format (Real Media live streaming and downloadable MP3). These programs, as well as the devotional “Reflections,” are also sent out monthly on cassette or CD to subscribers. The “Ministry News” area of the website gives a brief glimpse of gospel outreach around the world, including stories, testimonies, and pictures. The devotional archives are complete from 1994 and the English radio messages from 1988. These are tied to a Bible search allowing visitors to access materials according to a Scripture reference. Both the Daily Reflections and weekly Words of Hope sermons are also distributed to a growing list of email subscribers. Currently a database of Words of Hope sermons is being compiled going back to the 1960s. This will have both scriptural and topical indexes, and will be available to internet users.

**Literature**

Each quarter Words of Hope publishes one hundred thousand copies of the “Daily Reflections” meditations for worldwide distribution. In addition to this pocket-size devotional, a large-print version is also available. Editor Paul Hostetter incorporates both new writers and proven favorites, who reflect with discernment on the Word of God and its impact on daily lives.

**Resources**

The quarterly *Update* newsletter is produced by Words of Hope for use in church bulletins or mailboxes, with over six hundred RCA congregations receiving this free resource. In addition a new promotional brochure is now available in quantities; it highlights the mission of Words of Hope to reach the world’s unreached by radio and literature. The latest video presentation, entitled “Moving Closer,” is also available at no cost to congregations and individuals, and illustrates the desire of Words of Hope to operate in closer proximity to its audiences.
Staff

In 2002, Words of Hope welcomed Randy Bohl as its new director of church relations. Randy directs church activities relating to fundraising, and is also establishing direct contacts with classis and board representatives. He joins the director of development, Todd Schuiling, along with regional representatives Don Broek for the Synod of the Heartland and Tom VanderLee for the Synod of the Far West.

Grateful Thanks

Words of Hope is very thankful for the prayer support of RCA members and congregations. It is an integral component to the continuing success of the ministry. Monthly prayer lists of concerns from listeners and ministry partners are distributed to over a thousand individuals and numerous prayer groups. Local prayer partners gather each month both in Grand Rapids and Holland, Michigan, for breakfast, fellowship, and an extended time of prayer.

During 2002, RCA congregations contributed a total of $1,001,290, including $669,145 in regular giving and $332,145 in specially designated gifts. With sincere gratitude to God and thankful for the faithful support provided by RCA members and congregations, the strategic ministry of Words of Hope continues to touch hearts and lives around the world with the saving good news of Jesus Christ.

From the Report of the President

In response to P-3 from the report of the president (p. 41), the advisory committee recommended:

R-104
To instruct the General Synod Council to expand opportunities for North American and international short-term mission assignments for RCA congregations. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. Short-term mission builds connections with the global church.

2. Short-term mission stimulates congregations as they learn from the global church.

In response to P-4 from the report of the president (p. 41), the advisory committee recommended:

R-105
To instruct the General Synod Council to develop resources that will encourage pastors, consistories, other church leaders, and youth to use their gifts in short-term mission opportunities; and further,

to encourage consistories to release pastors to participate in short-term mission assignments. (ADOPTED)

Reason:

Appropriate resources will inform RCA leaders and invite them to become involved in short-term mission.
In response to P-5 from the report of the president (p. 41), the advisory committee recommended:

R-106
To instruct the General Synod Council to encourage and facilitate the development of mission partnerships between congregations and classes in the United States and Canada and global partner churches. (ADOPTED)

Reason:

Partnerships characterized by both giving and receiving will revitalize and encourage both RCA and global partner churches and members.

In response to P-6 from the report of the president (p. 41), the advisory committee recommended:

R-107
To instruct the General Synod Council to expand opportunities for global continuing education and inspirational mission journeys that will encourage, inspire, and enhance the ability of RCA pastors to initiate new models for ministry and evangelism; and further,

to adopt a goal that at least 10 percent of RCA pastors will have participated within three years. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. Pastoral leadership is key to the involvement of the local church in mission that is both global and local.

2. Providing opportunities for pastors to be involved in global continuing education and inspirational mission journeys will inspire them with stories about the witness of the global church and introduce them to new models of revitalization and church planting.

In response to P-7 from the report of the president (p. 41), the advisory committee recommended:

R-108
To affirm the General Synod Council and Mission Services for regular and periodic evaluation of global and North American mission fields; and further,

to encourage Mission Services to continue to evaluate as necessary the appropriateness and effectiveness of the ministries, including personnel assigned to these fields, by determining objectives and action steps that will strengthen the ministries. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. The rapid growth and maturation of the global church require new approaches to the deployment of long- and short-term Western mission personnel, and the support of indigenous church leaders.

2. Constant changes in the mission field, both local and global, make regular and comprehensive evaluation of personnel and assignments necessary.

In the work of mission, it is important to make good use of time and resources.
REPORT OF THE COMMISSION ON NOMINATIONS

The Commission on Nominations met in person on February 27, 2003, and again by conference call on April 11, May 1, and May 20, 2003. Between these meetings members of the commission actively sought out qualified candidates, solicited Talent Bank Forms (a brief two-page application), and checked references on those who were interested in serving on a commission or agency of the Reformed Church in America. In these ways the commission was 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 have 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. Thus, 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

This year the Commission on Nominations faced the formation of a new commission, the Commission on Christian Education and Discipleship, as well as preparation for a newly reconfigured General Synod Council. The task of finding the entire membership of a commission, rather than just replacements, took extra effort. The commission is grateful to those who were asked for nominations and spent much time inquiring and suggesting.

The task of nominating members for the newly reconfigured General Synod Council was daunting. Balancing the need for members with particular skills, the requirements of the bylaws (i.e., one-half elders/one-half ministers, and not less than one-third women), and the desire for racial-ethnic representation and regional balance was a complex task. The Commission on Nominations wrestled with each of those factors and is pleased to present a well-balanced slate of nominees. As we adjust to this new structure, members of the commission may make future suggestions for modifying the bylaws to simplify the selection process.

The commission wrestled with another matter relative to the membership of the Board of Directors of the Building and Extension Fund (BEF). The BEF’s bylaws give that body the sole right to name its board members. In this the BEF is unique, as it leaves the Commission on Nominations no role other than to pass on board nominees without comment. The BEF is in the process of revising its constituting documents. The Commission on Nominations has written to the BEF, suggesting alternative methods of nomination that would allow the commission the opportunity to fulfill its responsibility for assuring representation of the full diversity of the church.
In these ways, the Commission on Nominations has proactively filled its responsibility to “search the denomination” (Book of Church Order, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 8.c.2) and believes those nominated have the spiritual gifts, heart, abilities, and other traits that make them particularly well-suited for the work of the positions to 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 is pleased to report once again that it has fulfilled its responsibility for ensuring that the requirements of the Book of Church Order are upheld.

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 and submit it to the Commission on Nominations as indicated on the form. Forms are available from the Commission on Nominations staff person, Shari Brink (1-212-870-2711 or sbrink@rca.org), or from the RCA website at www.rca.org/synod/talentbank.php.

Note: * indicates a final term.
# indicates an official nomination from the assembly, institution, or agency listed.

**GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL**

**Class of 2004**
- Sharon Hayes
- The Rev. Greg Alderman
- Norman Donkersloot
- The Rev. Pacia Vamvas
- Rex Schultz
- Ted Dykstra
- Regional Synod of New York
- Regional Synod of the Heartland
- At-large

**Class of 2005**
- *The Rev. William Donkersloot
- *The Rev. Barbara Fillette
- *Joyce Wfrage
- *Jhonnie Lovejoy
- *Eugene Ligtenberg
- *The Rev. Bob Terwilliger
- Regional Synod of Mid-America
- Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics
- At-large

**Class of 2006**
- *The Rev. Nolan Palsma
- *The Rev. Daniel Beyer
- *Carl VerBeek
- *The Rev. Stephanie Kaper-Dale
- *The Rev. Pedro Windsor
- *Annie Lee Phillips
- Regional Synod of Albany
- Regional Synod of the Far West
- At-large

**Class of 2007**
- *Ruth Webb
- *The Rev. Richard Veenstra
- *Bradley Lewis
- *The Rev. Hung Yong Song
- *William Vermilyea
- *The Rev. Karyn Ratcliffe
- Regional Synod of Canada
- Regional Synod of the Great Lakes
COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN ACTION

Class of 2006

*Christina Barthel
*The Rev. Stephen Mathonnet-VanderWell
*Ai-Lan Wang

COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AND DISCIPLESHP

Class of 2004
The Rev. Michael VandenBerg
Jerilyn Leuders

Class of 2005
The Rev. George Brown
Irma Patterson

Class of 2006
Jackie Smallbones
The Rev. Sharon Atkins
Deborah Swanson

COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN UNITY

Class of 2006

*The Rev. Anna Melissa Jackson
*The Rev. Pedro Windsor
The Rev. Thomas Danney

COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Class of 2006

The Rev. Kathryn Davelaar
The Rev. Lisa VanderWal

COMMISSION ON CHURCH ORDER

Class of 2004
The Rev. Allan Janssen

Class of 2006
The Rev. Stephen Norden
*Andrea Van Beek

COMMISSION ON HISTORY

Class of 2006

*The Rev. Melody Meeter
*Jesus Serrano
COMMISSION ON JUDICIAL BUSINESS

Class of 2006

*The Rev. Janet Johnston-Fries  Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics#
*The Rev. Thomas Meyer  Regional Synod of Canada#
*Daniel Vande Zande  Regional Synod of Mid-America#

COMMISSION ON NOMINATIONS

Class of 2006

*The Rev. Madeline Fuentez  Council for Hispanic Ministries#
Ruby Johnson  African American Council#
*The Rev. Samuel Kwon  Council for Pacific and Asian American Ministries#
Audrae Philips  Regional Synod of the Heartland#
*Jake Roobol  Regional Synod of Canada#
The Rev. Kenneth D. Tenckinck  Regional Synod of New York#

COMMISSION ON RACE AND ETHNICITY

Class of 2006

Armando Alas Jr.  Council for Hispanic Ministries
Todd McDonald
Ina Montoya

COMMISSION ON THEOLOGY

Class of 2006

The Rev. De’Lafayette Awkward
*The Rev. David Landegent
John Miller

COMMISSION FOR WOMEN

Class of 2006

*The Rev. Evelyn Diephouse
*Sandra Fisher
The Rev. Cindi Veldheer DeYoung

BOARD OF BENEFITS SERVICES

Class of 2006

*Craig Neckers
Merle Prins
*The Rev. Nancy Ryan
Jeff Tolsma

BUILDING AND EXTENSION FUND

Class of 2006

Stephen Hammel
EDITORIAL COUNCIL OF THE CHURCH HERALD

*John Buntsma
Ken Neevel
*The Rev. Ron Sanford
*The Rev. Joe Veltman

Class of 2006
Regional Synod of the Heartland#
At-large
Regional Synod Mid-America#
Regional Synod of Canada#

MINISTERIAL FORMATION COORDINATING AGENCY

The Rev. Samuel Cruz

Class of 2004

*The Rev. Andrea Godwin-Stremler
The Rev. Ben Lin
Loretta Rolle

Class of 2006

RCA FOUNDATION

Vacant

NEW BRUNSWICK THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

All nominees to the boards of the seminaries are the official nominees of the board. However, some of them have been made in consultation with a regional synod (MGS 1993, R-4, p. 300). These are indicated in the list that follows.

Virginia Allen

Class of 2005
New Brunswick Theological Seminary#

Thomas Bos
*Gordon Dragt
*Janice Moddejonge
*Gloria Norton
*Gilberto Pagan

Class of 2007
New Brunswick Theological Seminary#
New Brunswick Theological Seminary#
Regional Synod of Canada
New Brunswick Theological Seminary#
New Brunswick Theological Seminary#

Additionally, terms of several board members have been adjusted to accommodate a change from three- to four-year terms.
All nominees to the boards of the seminaries are the official nominees of the board. However, some of them have been made in consultation with a regional synod (*MGS 1993, R-4, p. 300*). These are indicated in the list that follows.

**Class of 2006**

- Wilbert Hamstra Western Theological Seminary#
- David Hooker Western Theological Seminary#
- Cathy Koop Western Theological Seminary#
- *Dirk Kramer Regional Synod of Canada*
- *Myung Woo Lee Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics*
- *Christopher Moore Regional Synod of New York*
- *Phyllis Palsma Regional Synod of Albany*
- *Carol Wagner Western Theological Seminary#

**CENTRAL COLLEGE**

**Class of 2007**

- *Bruce Heerema*
- *Harold Molenaar*
- *Ronald Schipper*

**HOPE COLLEGE**

**Class of 2004**

- The Rev. Timothy Brown

**Class of 2006**

- Gary De Witt

**Class of 2007**

- Sandra Church
- Thomas Claus
- The Rev. Stephen Norden

**R-109**

To elect the above-named nominees to General Synod agencies and commissions as indicated. (ADOPTED)

**R-110**

To elect Everett Zabriskie III moderator of the Commission on Nominations for the 2003-2004 term. (ADOPTED)
REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE OF REFERENCE

In response to P-2 from the report of the president (p. 40) the Committee of Reference recommended:

From the Report of the President

R-111
To instruct the general secretary and senior staff to develop a plan to reassess the priorities and objectives of all General Synod Council executive personnel so that more of the time and expertise of these church leaders can be made available for the work within regional synods, classes, and congregations and to report this plan to the General Synod Council no later than the spring 2004 meeting. (ADOPTED)

Resolutions

The Committee of Reference presented the following resolutions:

R-112
WHEREAS the delegates, staff, and guests of General Synod were most graciously welcomed and received in the Spirit of Christ by Hope College and Western Theological Seminary and the Classis of Holland;

WHEREAS the well-equipped and maintained buildings and meeting spaces have been conducive to the work, sustenance, engagement, productivity, and discernment of the delegates; and

WHEREAS the local trains began to serve as alarm clocks through the night and into the day;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-seventh General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the eleventh day of June 2003, expresses its gratitude to the entire staff provided by Hope College, Western Theological Seminary, and the Classis of Holland for its hospitality in hosting delegates of the General Synod. (ADOPTED)

R-113
WHEREAS the consistory and members of area churches within the vicinity of Holland, Michigan, opened their houses of worship to the delegates for Sunday worship; and

WHEREAS these Christian brothers and sisters offered us refreshments, food, and table fellowship and graciously welcomed us into their churches with eagerness and openness; and

WHEREAS members from congregations of the Greater Holland and West Michigan area provided cheerful welcomes at airports and efficient transportation;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-seventh General Synod of the Reformed Church in America,
meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the eleventh day of June 2003, expresses its sincere appreciation to the consistories and members of the churches of the Greater Holland and West Michigan area. (ADOPTED)

R-114
WHEREAS the worship design team of the Commission Worship and President John Chang planned inspiring morning worship in Dimnent Chapel; and

WHEREAS we were welcomed into the traditions of worship found in our racial/ethnic councils through the preaching of Elzie Richardson, Samuel Kwon, Ina Montoya, and Irving Rivera and through the participation of liturgists Anna Jackson, Byung Kim, Rosalie Attocknie, Esa Attocknie, and Carlos Rivera; and

WHEREAS we were grateful to meet the living Christ through their leadership and that of Linda Strouf, who directed our choir, encouraged us all to learn a new song (and often in a new language), and played the organ, piano, drums, and other helpful instruments;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-seventh General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the eleventh day of June 2003, expresses its sincere gratitude to God for receiving the blessings of the ministry of Word and the ministries of music. (ADOPTED)

R-115
WHEREAS the Rev. John Chang has presided with persistent calls for prayer and song during his tenure as president of General Synod, calling and challenging us to open our eyes to new ways of doing ministry and mission; and

WHEREAS he has chaired the meetings of the General Synod with the help of his presidential bell, and his quick wit, and a joke or more, and he has not led us in a circle, but forward, so at least his sense of direction has improved over the years; and,

WHEREAS he has presented his presidential message in a passionate and encouraging way, reminding us all, “I am not ashamed of the gospel” (Romans 1:16), and with a witness empowered by the Holy Spirit to seek justice for those in need and a view of how the Spirit is working in our brothers and sisters in the Pacific Asian region,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-seventh General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the eleventh day of June 2003, expresses its heartfelt gratitude to our Lord God for the energetic, joyful, and strong leadership of the Rev. John Chang; with thanksgiving to his family and his congregations, Grace Christian Church in Staten Island and Flushing, New York, for allowing him to serve the larger church as its president. (ADOPTED)
WHEREAS the Rev. David Schutt has been elected president of General Synod; and

WHEREAS the Rev. Stephen Vander Molen has been elected vice president of General Synod;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-seventh General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the eleventh day of June 2003, expresses its congratulations, and commends the Rev. David Schutt and the Rev. Stephen Vander Molen to the utterly reliable care and keeping of the Triune God. (ADOPTED)

WHEREAS the Saturday Evening in the Pines started with tours, followed by a wonderful picnic and a musical montage, followed by an ice cream social; and

WHEREAS all of this was blessed with foresight in planning and the good weather requested (we actually saw the sun!);

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-seventh General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the eleventh day of June 2003, expresses its appreciation for the thoughtful planning for the Evening in the Pines. (ADOPTED)

WHEREAS the General Synod was privileged to have among its distinguished guests five synod ecumenical delegates representing churches in Asia: the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan; the Presbyterian Church of Korea; the Reformed Evangelical Church in Myanmar; the Christian Evangelical Church in Minahasa, Indonesia; and the United Church in Japan; and

WHEREAS we heard of the work of the Spirit in the words of the Rev. Noboru Takemae as the Rev. Gordon Laman faithfully translated his good wishes for continued relationships with the Reformed Church in America;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-seventh General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the eleventh day of June 2003, expresses the joy of our long relationship in Asia and our continued effort in prayer and conversation with these brothers and sisters. (ADOPTED)

WHEREAS the General Synod was privileged to have Gretel Van Wieren and Dr. Oliver Patterson from the Commission on Race and Ethnicity share their understanding of the Belhar Confession; and
WHEREAS their addresses continued to urge the Reformed Church in America to study, discuss, and take to heart this living document of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa as we continue to struggle with the issues of racism, oppression, and justice-making within our own bounds;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-seventh General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the eleventh day of June 2003, asks God to continue to bless our understanding of and work with the Belhar Confession and our continuing conversations among ourselves and with our partners throughout the world for the glory of the kingdom of God. (ADOPTED)

R-120
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 that he is still technologically impaired when it comes to testing microphones (but miracles continue to happen: a voice said, “can you hear me now?”);

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-seventh General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the eleventh day of June 2003, expresses its sincere appreciation and thanks to its general secretary and praises God for the gifts it receives through his leadership. (ADOPTED)

R-121
WHEREAS the moderators and vice moderators of the various advisory committees; staff members; and resource persons have facilitated the work of the advisory committees 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, a willingness to wait upon the Lord for discernment, and a constant awareness of the Spirit’s presence and labors among and within the members of its assembly; and

WHEREAS during marathon sessions, synod celebrated accomplishments in mission and ministry and people, the candy bowls were emptied, the delegates stretched, the heat rose, the delegates were led in songs by the Rev. James Brumm and pianist Itike Prins, and prayers were lifted up for guidance and strength;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-seventh General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the eleventh day of June 2003, expresses its heartfelt thanks for the dedicated service of all those mentioned above. (ADOPTED)
WHEREAS the many elder delegates offered their tireless energies, attention, and careful consideration to the sometimes mysterious work and complex deliberations of the General Synod; and

WHEREAS many delegates have sacrificed personal vacation time and shown a willingness to endure cold, wet breezes and then a warming trend toward the end;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-seventh General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the eleventh day of June 2003, 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)

WHEREAS the staff and personnel of the Reformed Church in America have once again facilitated the remarkably smooth and efficient operation of the General Synod, serving the servants of God with a commitment and attention to detail that should never be taken for granted, whether under the glaring lights of the dais or behind the scenes in the small hours of the night, with the kind of love, joy, peace, and patience that only the Spirit makes possible;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-seventh General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the eleventh day of June 2003, expresses its sincere appreciation to each and every one of the RCA denominational staff and offers its prayers for God’s blessings upon them and their families. (ADOPTED)

WHEREAS Russell Paarlberg has served the General Synod as its parliamentarian with competence and alertness, and despite long stretches of being underemployed still sprung to action when there was a call of “out of order”;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-seventh General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the eleventh day of June 2003, expresses its thanks to Russell Paarlberg for his dedication to the work of the synod. (ADOPTED)

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-seventh General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the eleventh day of June 2003,
expresses its heartfelt appreciation to these dedicated servants of the church. (ADOPTED)

R-126
WHEREAS the 2003 General Synod was blessed with discernment leaders who led even in discerning the discernment process itself and sacrificially surrendered their final scheduled session to allow the Spirit to work through the prolonged deliberations on the future of leadership roles in the church; and

WHEREAS the faithful members of many churches have acted as our intercessors before, during, and as we leave this General Synod meeting; and

WHEREAS the Seminarian Seminar participants have exercised their important servant roles during the elections and in the passing out of various addresses, even though it is not a MFCA requirement, and had a good supply of the best candy;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-seventh General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the eleventh day of June 2003, commends these angels in disguise for their contagious generosity of Spirit. (ADOPTED)

R-127
WHEREAS the attendees of the 2003 General Synod were invited to a well planned series of forums on important issues facing the synod, and Sunday “Afternoon Stories”; and

WHEREAS we express our gratitude to members of the 375th Anniversary Committee, and to anniversary celebration participants, including members of Christ Memorial Church, for an evening of reminiscing and celebrating our past, present, and future;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the one hundred ninety-seventh General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the eleventh day of June 2003, gladly gives thanks for scholarship, listening presences, and joyful celebrations as we embrace these gifts of the Spirit and take hold of who we are and what the Lord God has called us to offer to the world so lost and broken, in the name of our Living Savior, Jesus Christ, to whom be all glory and honor, now and forever. Amen. (ADOPTED)
ELECTION OF OFFICERS

The Rev. David Schutt, senior pastor of Christ Community Church in Carmichael, California, was elected president. The Rev. Steven Vander Molen, pastor of First Reformed Church in Orange City, Iowa, was elected vice president.

III. CLOSE OF GENERAL SYNOD

CLOSE AND ADJOURNMENT

President John Chang presented president-elect David Schutt with the traditional bell.

The 197th General Synod concluded its business and adjourned at 12:06 p.m. on Wednesday, June 11, 2003, with a closing worship that included the installation of officers and communion.

The next regular session of the General Synod will be held in Wheaton, Illinois, June 4-9, 2004.
STATISTICAL REPORTS OF THE CLASSES

The statistics given in the Statistical Tables are for the calendar year ending December 31, 2002, unless otherwise indicated. Churches and pastors are listed as of the latest reports from the stated clerks received before printing deadlines.

ABBREVIATIONS

AAC—African American Council  
Adh—Adherents  
AP—associate pastor  
Assmnts—Assessments (General Synod, Regional Synods, Classes)  
Bapt—Baptisms  
Bapt Mbrs—Baptized Members  
Conf—Received on Confession  
Conf Mbrs—Confessing Members  
Cert—Received on Certificate  
CH—Church Herald  
CHM—Council for Hispanic Ministries  
Congr Purpose—Congregational Purposes  
Contrib—Contributions  
CPAAM—Council for Pacific and Asian American Ministries  
CS—Congregational Services  
Decd—Deceased  
FND—Foundation  
FS—Finance Services  
Gen Syn/GS/Gen S—General Synod  
Houshld—Church Households  
Inact Mbrs—Inactive Members  
M/C—Ministers under Contract or Assistant Pastors  
M/Cntrct—Ministers under Contract or Assistant Pastors  
NAIMC—Native American Indian Ministries Council  
New Mbrs Clas—New Membership Classes  
Other—Other Removals from Roll  
Other Contrib—Non-RCA Contributions  
Other Educ Pgms—Other Educational Programs  
PE—Preaching Elders  
RET—Retired Minister  
RS—Regional Synod  
RSA—Regional Synod of Albany  
RSC—Regional Synod of Canada  
RSFW—Regional Synod of the Far West  
RSGL—Regional Synod of the Great Lakes  
RSN—Regional Synod of the Heartland  
RSM—Regional Synod of Mid-America  
RSM-AT—Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics  
RSNY—Regional Synod of New York  
ST—Student under Contract  
Sun Sch—Sunday Church School  
Total Mbrs—Total Membership  
Trans—Transferred

KEY TO FOOTNOTES

Headings “A,” “B,” “C,” and “D” relate to Column 18 and reflect amounts included from the following categories:

“A”— Income from bequests and/or investments.

“B”— Major capital funds received for local church expansion, replacement property investment—including funds for land purchases, new building construction, or major renovation.

“C”— Funds received from RCA assemblies or institutions; e.g., salary supplement, program aid.

“D”— Income from other programs/associations.
### Statistical Reports of the Classes

**Alphabetically by classes:**

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**Summary by regional synods/classes:**

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**Grand totals** ............................................. 459
### New York

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#### Education

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Specialized Ministry

David L. Brower
Sandra Damhof
Pamela Pater Ennis
Boyd J. Heldring
Gregg A. Mast
Ronald C. Stockhoff
Norman J. Tellier
W. Ross Westhuis
William E. Wilbur

Without Charge
Joseph Favale
Peter E. Krug
Barbara Morgan

Retired
Charlene Baird
Leonard De Beer
Frank Guinta
Carl W. Hiemstra
Lynn T. Joosten
Thomas A. Kendall
Richard E. Lake
Benjamin E. Le Fevre
Herman E. Luben
Victor Lawrence Nuovo
Robert N. Peterson
LeRoy Suess
Glenn N. Van Oort
Sylvester D. Van Oort

FOOTNOTES

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### Regional Synod of Albany CLASSIS OF COLUMBIA-GRENE

**Stated Clerk**
John L. Bowen, 10 Willis Ave., P.O. Box 874, Catskill, NY 12414; 518/943-5918

**Treasurer**
Bonnie Pflegl, 50 Kipps Trailer Park, Lot 5, Hudson, NY 12534; 518/828-6425

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* SEE SUPPLEMENT D
### Specialized Ministry

A. Martha Rammelkamp

**Without Charge**
- Stephen Allison
- Jeffrey T. Gowman

**Retired**
- Harry J. Almond
- John L. Bowen
- Richard E. Detrich
- Warren Fullerton
- George Jacob Holler
- Merle Hoogheem
- Richard Pruiksma
- Gerald E. Shibley

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### Regional Synod of Albany CLASSIS OF MONTGOMERY

#### Stated Clerk
James N. Foster, 607 Pine Ave, Herkimer, NY 13350; 315/866-6126

#### Treasurer
Kenneth Palmer, 19 Walnut St, Mohawk, NY 13407-1311; 315/866-6253

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(4) 69,883 (8) 42,195 (12) 10,300
(5) 706    (9) 5,039
(6) 8,726  (10) 430
(7) 3,096  (12) 8,961
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## Regional Synod of Albany CLASSIS OF ROCHESTER

### Stated Clerk
Anita Manuele, Trinity Reformed Church, 909 N Landing Rd, Rochester, NY 14625; 585/385-1157

### Treasurer
Eugene Ligtenberg, 52 Marble Dr, Rochester, NY 14615-3813; 585/621-3813

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* SEE SUPPLEMENT D
### Specialized Ministry

Juan A. Carmona  
Jonathan C.B. Cooper  
F. Peter Ford  
John J. Kotun  
Richard H. Otterness  

### Inactive

Suzanne L. Hodges  

### Retired

Gordon H. Curtis  
Gordon G. Damsteegt  
Barclay Fishburn  
Anne L. Guild-Donovan  
William H. Hoffman  
Kermit G. Hogenboom  
John H. Ludlum  
Paul R. Meyerink  
Russell F. Pater  
Nicolaos Tsianiklides  
Nicholas J. Vander Weide  
John Vandertuin

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**FOOTNOTES**

(1) 106,481 (2) 23,297 (3) 500 (4) 6,850 (5) 464 (6) 73,211 (7) 158,867 (8) 95,131 (9) 791,364 (10) 679 (11) 9,426 (12) 30,558 (13) 10,751 (14) 3,288 (15) 28,400 (16) 723 (17) 1,950 (18) 2,055 (19) 3,168 (20) 723
| CHURCHES | PASTORS | Handy (1) | Conf Mbrs (2) | Inst Mbrs (3) | Bapt Mbrs (4) | Total Mbrs (5) | Average Worship Attendance (6) | Gain (7) | Gain (8) | Gain (9) | Yearly Income (10) | Trans (11) | Loss (12) | Other Income (13) | Bapt Sch (14) | Infant Sch (15) | Sun Sch (16) | RCA Contrib (17) | Other Contrib (18) | Total Contrib (19) | Congr Pledge (20) |
|----------|---------|-----------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|-----------------------------|---------|---------|---------|-----------------|-----------|---------|---------------|---------------|----------------|-------------|----------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| New York |         |           |              |              |              |               |                             |         |         |         |                 |           |         |               |               |               |               |                |                |                |                |                |
| (1) | Amsterdam, Cranesville | Jacob G. Marvel | 09/01 | 54 | 82 | 35 | 38 | 155 | 26 | 85 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 30 | 3 | 30 | 102,644 | 4,872 | 1,050 | 850 | 6,772 | 95,872 | (1) |
| (2) | Amsterdam, First | Derek DeJager | 04/01 | 19 | 21 | 47 | 32 | 100 | 0 | 15 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 7 | 30,175 | 1,391 | 0 | 0 | 1,391 | 28,784 | (2) |
| (3) | Amsterdam, Florida | Derek DeJager | 04/01 | 36 | 49 | 73 | 1 | 123 | 10 | 35 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 32 | 0 | 6 | 70,639 | 3,498 | 1,695 | 488 | 6,698 | 66,508 | (3) |
| (4) | Berne, First | Robert G. Hoffman | 06/94 | 45 | 80 | 118 | 26 | 226 | 16 | 65 | 9 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 24 | 9 | 14 | 60,208 | 2,573 | 2,336 | 200 | 6,090 | 60,099 | (4) |
| (5) | Fonda | Christopher DeGruyf | 06/02 | 89 | 133 | 81 | 70 | 284 | 30 | 105 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 60 | 0 | 105 | 134,000 | 7,633 | 17,865 | 3,906 | 29,404 | 104,596 | (5) |
| (6) | Fultonville | Vacant | 12/03 | 26 | 39 | 71 | 8 | 118 | 7 | 24 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 12 | 0 | 3 | 32,280 | 2,274 | 776 | 1,936 | 4,998 | 27,303 | (6) |
| (7) | Fultonville, Glen | Vacant | 06/02 | 37 | 46 | 114 | 14 | 174 | 28 | 32 | 10 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 22 | 8 | 5 | 61,572 | 2,411 | 2,290 | 4,092 | 10,053 | 51,219 | (7) |
| (8) | Hugman, Calvary | Frederick P. Van Kempen | 06/03 | 32 | 41 | 48 | 25 | 114 | 7 | 35 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 50 | 42,306 | 2,078 | 1,464 | 750 | 5,192 | 37,114 | (8) |
| (9) | Hoopes Cove, Second | Vacant | 05/01 | 11 | 9 | 4 | 17 | 11 | 25 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 11 | 0 | 0 | 10,116 | 704 | 1,200 | 550 | 2,454 | 7,662 | (9) |
| (10) | Johnstown | Jack H. Millard | 11/76 | 78 | 91 | 186 | 97 | 374 | 22 | 104 | 9 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 89,380 | 6,010 | 7,265 | 315 | 13,610 | 75,770 | (10) |
| (11) | Leatherstock | Gretel Van Wieren | 03/02 | 50 | 76 | 0 | 0 | 76 | 10 | 60 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 12 | 0 | 8 | 89,584 | 5,790 | 5,263 | 2,066 | 11,229 | 78,345 | (11) |
| (12) | Middleburgh | Mary Winer | 06/02 | 35 | 63 | 99 | 21 | 183 | 15 | 60 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 53 | 0 | 0 | 54 | 7 | 1 | 106,488 | 2,789 | 760 | 1,500 | 5,089 | 100,999 | (12) |
| (13) | Prattsville, Reformed Dutch | Diana L. Smith | 02/01 | 20 | 30 | 0 | 3 | 33 | 15 | 31 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 10 | 1 | 20 | 47,210 | 2,066 | 600 | 659 | 3,425 | 43,895 | (13) |
| (14) | Roxbury, John Gould Memorial | Richard A. Dwyer | 06/01 | 70 | 83 | 70 | 50 | 205 | 25 | 80 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 23 | 6 | 28 | 120,713 | 4,331 | 2,907 | 701 | 7,939 | 120,714 | (14) |
| (15) | Schoharie | Vacant | 05/01 | 51 | 78 | 90 | 18 | 186 | 58 | 65 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 22 | 0 | 0 | 86,016 | 2,255 | 0 | 0 | 7,285 | 81,661 | (15) |
| (16) | Sharon Springs, Sharon | Gretel Van Wieren | 03/02 | 17 | 26 | 2 | 1 | 29 | 9 | 32 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 33 | 0 | 15 | 25,532 | 1,245 | 493 | 620 | 2,356 | 23,174 | (16) |
| Total | 670 | 947 | 1,038 | 410 | 2,395 | 289 | 53 | 54 | 15 | 13 | 33 | 58 | 15 | 5 | 365 | 46 | 271 | 1,125,882 | 57,170 | 45,884 | 19,253 | 122,307 | 1,003,575 |
### Specialized Ministry

Orville J. Hine

**Without Charge**

Jennifer Minier-Elliott

Karen Jacobsma Patterson

**Retired**

Paul C. Ferenczy

Charles B. Hesselink

Wilbur E. Ivins

Peter Shortway

Carlton Van Schaick

Jared Van Wagenen

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**Specialized Ministry**
- James Moerman
- Murray Moerman
- Stephen Swift

**Without Charge**
- John Kaptein
- Cornelis B. Koolhaas
- Robert Trotter

**Retired**
- William Hudson
- Rudolf Katerberg
- John J. Opmeer
- Douglas Weatherburn

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### Regional Synod of Canada

**CLASSIS OF CANADIAN PRAIRIES**

**Stated Clerk**
Fred Algera, 2436 Sperring Ave, East St. Paul, MB  R2E 1A7; 204/663-9392

**Treasurer**
Wayne Silk, 14 Aldgate Rd., Winnipeg, MB  R2N 2X6; 204/474-8392

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## Regional Synod of Canada CLASSIS OF ONTARIO

**Stated Clerk** Abram M. Blaak, Bethel Reformed Church, 506 West St, Brantford, ON

**Treasurer** Thomas Meyer, 171 295 Water St, Guelph, ON  N1G 2X5; 519/822-5548

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### Statistics Printed from Previous Year

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SEE SUPPLEMENT A: Changes in Church Status/Name

# STATISTICS PRINTED FROM PREVIOUS YEAR
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**FOOTNOTES**

- (1) 226
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- (3) 5,372
- (4) 267
- (5) 18,748
- (6) 6,200
- (7) 901
- (8) 86,888
- (9) 3,100
- (10) 2,610
- (11) 26,832
- (12) 1,301
- (13) 3,528
- (14) 4,101
- (15) 1,402
- (16) 107,427
- (17) 31
- (18) 283
- (19) 311
- (20) 2,015
### Regional Synod of the Far West CLASSIS OF CALIFORNIA

**Stated Clerk**
Roger G. Beukelman, Synod of the Far West, 2740 Jefferson Ave, Ste 202, Temecula, CA 92590; 909/693-1600

**Treasurer**
John Bos, 37396 Pine Knoll Ave, Palm Desert, CA 92211-2132; 760/772-9738

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<td>California</td>
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1. **Artesia, New Life Community**
   - Keith W. Tanis 07/99
   - Ralph J. Venstrom AP 08/00
   - David Hartono AP 01/00
   - Terry L. Nyhus AP 07/99
   - Glenn A. DeMaster AP 03/93
   - Robert Schuller AP 01/02
   - Juan Carlos Ortiz AP 01/96
   - Lawrence Wilkes M/C 09/96

2. **Bellflower, Bethel**
   - Richard J. Decker RET M/C 04/01
   - Richard Mysse *PE 06/01
   - Robert Schuller AP 01/02
   - Terry L. Nyhus AP 07/99
   - Lawrence Wilkes M/C 09/96

3. **Buena Park, Church Community**
   - Douglas A. Scholtzen 03/99
   - Wayne A. Hoglin 03/99

4. **Canyon Lake, Community**
   - Peter Van Dyke 03/97
   - Brian David Anderson 04/01

5. **Cerritos, Korean Eden**
   - SanneOldeKloov 06/99
   - Terry A. Madera 06/01

6. **Chino, Chino Valley**
   - Vacant 03/02

7. **Chula Vista, Community**
   - Vacant 07/00
   - Robert Schuller AP 01/02

8. **Corona, Iglesia Reformada la Sierra**
   - Vacant 08/01
   - Richard Mysse *PE 06/01

9. **El Monte, Trinity**
   - John G. Bales 08/00
   - Daniel R. Allred 08/99

10. **Escondido, Community**
    - Terry L. Nyhus AP 07/99

11. **Garden Grove, Crystal Cathedral**
    - Robert H. Schuller 02/55

12. **Glenoaks, New Hope Community**
    - Vacant 10/02

13. **Hemet, Calvary Community**
    - Edward N. Baker 02/97

14. **Hesperia, CrossWinds Community**
    - Vacant 03/97

15. **Ivy Hills, Lake Hills**
    - Brian David Anderson 04/01

16. **Lakewood, Mayfair Community**
    - Vacant 09/98

17. **Long Beach, El Dorado Park**
    - Vacant 07/00

18. **Los Angeles, Hope Community**
    - Vacant 10/02

19. **Los Angeles, Park Hills**
    - Denver B. Richardson 03/94

20. **Monrovia, Palm Canyon**
    - William (Bill) W. Martin 04/00

21. **Moorpark, Oak Springs**
    - Douglas McChliss 01/01

22. **Norco, Church on the Hill**
    - William Koster 03/97

23. **Norwalk, Faith**
    - Vacant 04/03

24. **Palm Desert, Desert Winds**
    - Vacant 04/03

### Membership

- **Churches (1)**
- **Pastors (2)**
- **Household Mbrs (3)**
- **Mbrs (4)**
- **Bapt (5)**
- **Total Mbrs (6)**
- **Total Worshp Gains (7)**
- **Bapt Sun (8)**
- **Mbrs Educ (9)**
- **Total RCA Other (10)**
- **Total Congr (11)**

### Education

- **RCA Contrib (12)**
- **Contrib (13)**
- **Total Amount (14)**
- **Congr Purpose (15)**

### Stewardship

- **Assmnts (16)**
- **Contrib (17)**

### Contributions

- **Total (18)**

### Average Worship Attendance

- **Cong (19a)**
- **Trans (19b)**
- **Deed (19c)**
- **Other (19d)**

### Presbyterian Church USA

- **RCA Other Congr (20)**

### Synod of the Far West

- **Regional Synod of the Far West CLASSIS OF CALIFORNIA**

### Stated Clerk

- Roger G. Beukelman, Synod of the Far West, 2740 Jefferson Ave, Ste 202, Temecula, CA 92590; 909/693-1600

### Treasurer

- John Bos, 37396 Pine Knoll Ave, Palm Desert, CA 92211-2132; 760/772-9738
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<td>Randal Jay Wild</td>
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<td>11055</td>
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<td>Ronald T. Smith</td>
<td>MC 10195</td>
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<td>Redlands, Bethany</td>
<td>Leon R. Fiske</td>
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**Total** | 7,666 | 7,644 | 5,502 | 5,853 | 18,999 | 8,479 | 484 | 648 | 123 | 124 | 168 | 1,161 | 122 | 219 | 6,883 | 788 | 8,318 | 26,190,002 | 524,341 | 399,057 | 604,244 | 1,527,642 | 24,662,360

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**Specialized Ministry**

David Alexander
Jhonny Alicea-Baez
Peter Bai
Alan Baker
Roger G. Beukelman
Michael Blankers
Charles D. Bordner
Bruce L. Bugbee
Eric Carpenter
Thomas De Vries
John C. Foster
Jesus M. Garcia
Andrea Godwin-Stremler
William Godwin-Stremler
Linda K. Hodson
Eun Mok Kim
Peter Kim
Kenneth Kolenbrander
Cornelis Kors
Jae Bong Lee
Lucas Leys
Steven D. McNary
John M. Scholte
David W. Schreuder
Samuel Setyawan

**Without Charge**

Gregory Simpson
Keiji Soga
David Son
Charles Van Engen
Eugene H. Van Zee
Jerry A. Zandstra

**Footnotes**

| (2) | 6,240 | (5) | 19,000 | (10) | 233,606 | (21) | 2,320 |
| (4) | 11,577 | (10) | 745 | (8) | 600 |
| (9) | 2,901 | (17) | 233,606 | (21) | 2,320 |
| (10) | 60,035 | (18) | 5,000 | (23) | 4,274 |
| (11) | 190,000 | (20) | 2,320 | (25) | 4,274 |
| (12) | 14,499 | (21) | 1,430 | (26) | 9,898 |

| (2) | 25,854 | (30) | 12,476 |
| (15) | 5,000 | (17) | 679,612 |
| (16) | 57 | (28) | 2,000 |
| (17) | 28,127 |
| (18) | 12,425 |

| (18) | 12,425 |
| (21) | 469 |
| (22) | 17,800 |
| (23) | 128,332 |
| (24) | 25,801 |
| (25) | 3,651,724 |

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See Supplement A: Changes in Church Status/Name
* See Supplement D

**Statistical Tables 2002**

385
## Regional Synod of the Far West CLASSIS OF CASCADES

### Stated Clerk
Larry G. Martinsen, 1589 E Polnell Rd, Oak Harbor, WA 98277-8603; 360/675-3802

### Treasurer
Larry G. Martinsen, 1589 E Polnell Rd, Oak Harbor, WA 98277-8603; 360/675-3802

### Membership

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<th>Average Worship Attendance</th>
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<th>Losses</th>
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<th>Infant Adoptions</th>
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<th>Appropriations</th>
<th>Other Contributions</th>
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<tr>
<td>(1) Boise, Valley Life Community</td>
<td>Thomas L. Katsma 03/98</td>
<td>47 107 0 52 159 50 105 10 0 0 4 0 0 50 2 105 208,075 6,850 0 16,355 23,205 184,870</td>
<td>(1)</td>
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<td>(2) Twin Falls</td>
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### Education

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<td>Thomas L. Katsma 03/98</td>
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### Idaho

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Total 1,559 2,984 390 1,112 4,486 1,211 214 107 50 37 37 92 50 50 1,385 192 2,325 4,374,954 199,426 116,910 262,922 579,258 3,795,696

SEE SUPPLEMENT A: Changes in Church Status/Name
### Specialized Ministry

- Paul J. Bach
- Charles Blom
- Mark A. Bonnema
- Everett D. Bosch
- C. Keith Geense
- Wesley Granberg-Michaelson
- Frank Vernon Love
- Vernon Wayne McNear
- John Park
- Gerald Lawson Sittser
- P. Wayne Townsend
- Kevin Ver Hoeven

### Inactive

- Bernard Brower
- John De Haan
- Stephen Tamminga
- Paul J. Bach
- Charles Blom
- Mark A. Bonnema
- Everett D. Bosch
- C. Keith Geense
- Wesley Granberg-Michaelson
- Frank Vernon Love
- Vernon Wayne McNear
- John Park
- Gerald Lawson Sittser
- P. Wayne Townsend
- Kevin Ver Hoeven

### Without Charge

- Joel A. De Boer

### Footnotes

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* SEE SUPPLEMENT D
Specialized Ministry
Valerie De Marinis
Maynard Nieboer
Keith Henry Poppen

Without Charge
Timothy J. Boeve
Warren G. Bovenkerk

Retired
Raymond DeDoes
Richard A. Evers
Edward Fikse
David A. Laman
G. Lloyd Menning
Peter Mondeel
Carl B. Vogelaar
Erwin R. Voogd
Samuel Williams
Moody Yap

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Regional Synod of the Far West CLASSIS OF ROCKY MOUNTAINS

Stated Clerk
Ronald D. Gray, Springs Community Church, 1860 Dublin Blvd, Ste A, Colorado Springs, CO 80918; 719/590-1705

Treasurer
Ronald D. Gray, Springs Community Church, 1860 Dublin Blvd, Ste A, Colorado Springs, CO 80918; 719/590-1705

| CHURCHES | PASTORS |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
**Specialized Ministry**

Wendell L. Brenneman
David W. Grooters
Robert Harrison
Robert C. Laning
Timothy R. Miller
Eugene Van Dusseldorp
Wayne A. Van Kampen

**Without Charge**

Eric Ishimaru
Nancy Van Wyk Phillips
Young C. Yoo

**Retired**

John E. Bandt
Ronald Thomas Gross
Thomas J. Harris
Harold L. Hiemstra
James L. Moore
Sanford B. Morgan
Willis J. Vander Kooi

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**FOOTNOTES**

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# Regional Synod of the Far West
## CLASSIS OF SOUTHWEST

**Stated Clerk**
Lynn Fischer, 3521 E Suncrest Ct, Phoenix, AZ  85044-3509; 480/893-8933

**Treasurer**
Lynn Fischer, 3521 E Suncrest Ct, Phoenix, AZ  85044-3509; 480/893-8933

### Membership

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<td>(1) Gilbert, New Hope Community</td>
<td>Richard H. Koerselman</td>
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<td>Keith Lewis Krebs</td>
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<td>(3) Mesa, Desert Harves Community</td>
<td>Marvin E. Jacobs</td>
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<td>(4) Phoenix, Longview Community</td>
<td>Kenneth B. Petty</td>
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<td>(5) Prescott, Community</td>
<td>Warren C. Thompson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) Scottsdale, Glass and Garden</td>
<td>Patrick Shetler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) Scottsdale, Hope Community</td>
<td>Fred R. Duvall</td>
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<tr>
<td>(8) Tucson, Cortes Vista Community</td>
<td>Ted Vandenberg</td>
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<td>(9) Tucson, Rosemont Community</td>
<td>Judith Marvel</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>New Mexico</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>(10) Los Alamos, United**</td>
<td>Jay Dee Conrad</td>
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<td>(11) Mescalero</td>
<td>Robert L. Schut</td>
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### Statistics

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* SEE SUPPLEMENT D
** LINE 10—A FEDERATED CONGREGATION WITH THE AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES USA, CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST), MONOVAN CHURCH, UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST, AND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.) IT MAINTAINS SEPARATE MEMBERSHIP ROLLS FROM WHICH STATISTICS ARE OBTAINED.
## Specialized Ministry

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<td>(3) 18,825</td>
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<tr>
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<td>(4) 150,391</td>
<td>(5) 1,458</td>
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<td>(5) 3,482</td>
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<td>John C. Stapert</td>
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<td>Byron White</td>
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<tr>
<td>John E. Busman</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paul B. Caley</td>
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<td>Floyd Goulooze</td>
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<td>William Heynen</td>
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<td>John E. Lucius</td>
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<td>Robert A. Otto</td>
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## Retired

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<td>Paul B. Caley</td>
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### Regional Synod of the Great Lakes CLASSIS OF HOLLAND

**Stated Clerk**
Larry L. Schuyler, 513 E 8th St., Ste 23, Holland, MI 49423; 616/394-0550

**Treasurer**
Marylynn Redder, 2586 Floral Dr, Zeeland, MI 49464; 616/772-9226

#### Average New Other Contributions

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<td>Blaine Newhouse 02/95 327 581 78 191 850 58 470 29 10 17 14 1 12 19</td>
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<td>Louis Ortega 01/02 166 273 48 87 408 46 182 6 7 9 8 19 19 19 19</td>
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<td>Michael Gene Ploenberger 08/01 1,405 2,848 104 922 3,874 19 1,931</td>
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<td>(5) Holland, Crossroads Chapel</td>
<td>Andrea S. Fieno 01/02</td>
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<td>(6) Holland, Fellowship</td>
<td>Kenneth W. Erks 03/03 556 1,046 98 520 1,664 36 639</td>
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<td>(7) Holland, First</td>
<td>Daniel N. Gillett 02/92 335 529 15 174 718 2 450 6 19 1 12 1 16 0</td>
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<td>Reggie R. Park 05/01 90 145 14 39 196 14 140 5 9 9 3 0 3 0 1 0</td>
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<td>(9) Holland, Grace</td>
<td>Theodore A. Lindman 08/02 101 292 49 151 492 18 200 13 3 24 5 0 4 0</td>
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<td>(10) Holland, Hope</td>
<td>Kathryn L. Davaine 10/98 297 525 37 183 745 30 340 11 14 8 11 11 5 0</td>
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<td>(11) Holland, Maple Avenue Ministries**</td>
<td>David J. Sterngla 05/03 63 79 13 39 131 45 145 2 1 2 0 0 4 7 40 8 45</td>
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<td>(13) Holland, Rose Park</td>
<td>Carl M. Balx 04/02 197 318 95 265 686 18 245 13 8 14 4 0 10 0</td>
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<td>Steven Scott Sten 04/02 433 732 98 290 1,019 10 475 13 11 9 17 7 5</td>
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<td>David Douglas Bailey 10/01 48 80 10 45 135 75 118 15 4 3 0 0 3 3 75 18 50</td>
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**Total**
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*SEE SUPPLEMENT D*

**LINE 11—A UNION CONGREGATION WITH THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH. STATISTICS GIVEN ARE 1/2 OF ACTUAL TOTALS."
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<th><strong>Retired</strong></th>
<th><strong>Without Charge</strong></th>
<th><strong>Footnotes</strong></th>
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<td>Paul J. Alderink</td>
<td>C. Bruce Wierks</td>
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<td>Christopher B. Kaiser</td>
<td>Louis H. Benes</td>
<td>Ruth Zwold</td>
<td>(B) 119,604</td>
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<td>Paul Smith</td>
<td>Marvin C. Beukelman</td>
<td>(C) 76,837</td>
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<td>Robert E. Van Voorst</td>
<td>Arie William Blok</td>
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<td>Allen Verhey</td>
<td>William Brownson</td>
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<td>Elton J. Bruns</td>
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<td>(9) 3,908</td>
<td>(11) 120,000</td>
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<td>H. Paul Colenbrander</td>
<td>(4) 1,096</td>
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<td>Wilbur D. Daniels</td>
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**Footnotes**

(A) 3,375 (B) 119,604 (C) 76,837 (D) 2,250

(A) 76,837 (B) 164,315 (C) 63,080 (D) 2,250

(A) 1,096 (B) 130,291 (C) 50,000 (D) 30,500

(A) 6,295 (B) 36,216 (C) 15,000 (D) 40,600

(A) 7,372 (B) 227,396 (C) 3,908 (D) 120,000

(A) 129 (B) 31,512 (C) 129 (D) 3,908

(A) 13,276 (B) 10,000 (C) 129 (D) 3,000
# Regional Synod of the Great Lakes

**CLASSIS OF LAKE ERIE**

**Stated Clerk**
Donald R. Veltman, 27142 Newberry Blvd, Brownstown Twp, MI 48134; 734/379-9191

**Treasurer**
Malcom Cox, 1309 Fountain St, Ann Arbor, MI 48103-2962; 734/769-0635

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### CHURCHES PASTORS

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Total 1,156 1,911 432 541 2,884 681 96 144 28 19 35 81 53 22 1,117 164 1,193 2,695,328 109,280 92,988 114,981 317,249 2,378,079

*See Supplement D*
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Total 2,771 4,685 722 1,651 7,256 975 255 135 71 84 84 216 101 24 1,811 181 3,197 6,549,268 260,801 206,721 253,928 721,028 5,828,240
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FOOTNOTES:

- (1) 8,066
- (2) 792,585
- (3) 3,000
- (4) 74,957
- (5) 59,594
- (6) 10,000
- (7) 10,088
- (8) 10,759
- (9) 12,800
- (10) 500
## Regional Synod of the Great Lakes CLASSIS OF NORTH GRAND RAPIDS

### Stated Clerk
Richard J. Bates, 111 Oswego NW, Grand Rapids, MI 49504; 616/453-4714

### Treasurer
Janice Myers, 2428 Rockhill Dr NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49505; 616/363-0962

### Membership

| CHURCHES | PASTORS | Conf Mbrs | Inact Mbrs | Bapt Mbrs | Mrs Mbrs | Total Adh |  ______ |  ______ |  ______ |  ______ |  ______ |  ______ |  ______ |  ______ |  ______ |  ______ |  ______ |  ______ |  ______ |  ______ |
|----------|---------|-----------|-----------|-----------|---------|-----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Michigan |         |           |           |           |         |           |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |
| (1) Ada, Community | Vacant | 0902 | 92 | 158 | 9 52 | 219 18 | 135 2 5 2 0 5 0 | 61 2 48 | 185,351 | 8,320 | 13,929 | 7,215 | 29,464 | 155,887 |
| (2) Casnovia | Raymond J. Steingenga | 0608 | 64 | 82 | 25 | 66 173 | 20 80 3 0 4 0 2 1 1 40 3 25 | 108,270 | 6,469 | 0 | 1,965 | 6,614 | 101,665 |
| (3) Flint, Resurrection | Paul David Pratt | 1003 | 124 | 242 | 35 | 46 323 | 103 200 14 4 1 1 1 13 | 6 145 27 197 | 327,089 | 11,892 | 5,995 | 22,621 | 40,406 | 287,521 |
| (4) Grand Rapids, Abide Here | Roger E. Ennisse | 1009 | 74 | 158 | 10 | 46 | 194 11 | 108 9 4 1 4 1 1 14 45 | 8 | 40 | 177,454 | 7,047 | 9,979 | 3,253 | 20,279 | 157,175 |
| (5) Grand Rapids, Central | Louis Evans Lotz | 0403 | 370 | 605 | 28 | 228 | 861 17 | 359 8 11 18 5 7 14 0 135 | 12 60 | 796,855 | 54,402 | 75,512 | 3,356 | 113,270 | 683,585 |

### Education

|        |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |
|        |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |

### Stewardship

|        |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |
|        |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |

### Contributions

|        |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |
|        |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |

### Tennessee

| (1) Franklin, Franklin Fellowship | Thomas S. Moncka | 0309 | 11 | 21 | 0 | 0 | 21 42 | 51 0 | 0 2 0 0 | 0 0 18 0 26 | 115,785 | 1,370 |

### Total

|        |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |
|        |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |

### Notes

- **Michigan**
  - Ada, Community: Vacant
  - Casnovia: Raymond J. Steingenga
  - Flint, Resurrection: Paul David Pratt
  - Grand Rapids, Abide Here: Roger E. Ennisse
  - Grand Rapids, Central: Louis Evans Lotz

- **Tennessee**
  - Franklin, Franklin Fellowship: Thomas S. Moncka

### Additional Information

- **Total**:
  - 2,764
  - 474
  - 268
  - 1,883
  - 6,830
  - 663
  - 234
  - 138
  - 134
  - 113
  - 52
  - 157
  - 106
  - 22
  - 1,993
  - 259
  - 2,100
  - 6,747,272
  - 255,906
  - 340,807
  - 258,444
  - 863,757
  - 5,883,515

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**Note:** The table includes data on church membership, education, stewardship, and contributions for various locations and periods.
### Specialized Ministry

- Andrew Atwood
- David P. Baak
- Richard J. Bates
- Mary Ellen Bos
- David Dalenberg
- Evelyn Jean Diephouse
- Charlotte Ann Ellison
- Carol Faas
- William H. Fennema
- Roger Grandia
- Robert P. Huizenga
- Diane Lynn Konyenbelt
- Henry M. Kroondyk
- Diane Maodush-Pitzer
- Bruce A. Menning
- Victoria M. Menning
- Arthur Oberg
- Barbara Pekich
- Ronald L. Redder
- Janet Rogacki
- James Schuen
- E. Jay Sowers
- Richard J. Ter Maat
- Lisa Hansen Tice
- Amy L. Van Gunst
- Julie VanDerVeen
- Susan Vanderwall-Post
- Thomas J. Woudstra
- Bonita Zobeck

### Without Charge

- Andrew L. DeBraber
- Marcia Elders
- Lisa Greene Henderson
- Bradley Olson
- Ronald Rienstra

### Retired

- Robert W. Bedingfield
- Lawrence Doorn
- Neva J. Evenhouse
- Donald Hoffman
- Charles W. Krahe
- Truman Raak
- James P. Rozeboom
- Thurman P. Rynbrandt
- Gerald A. Vander Velde
- Kenneth E. VanderBroek

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### Regional Synod of the Great Lakes

**CLASSIS OF SOUTH GRAND RAPIDS**

**Stated Clerk**

Pamela R. De Windt, 2530 Angela St, Jenison, MI 49428-8178; 616/662-0696

**Treasurer**

Randy Vander Lugt, 2900-28th St SW Ste B, Grandville, MI 49418; 616/494-9030

#### CHERCHES

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**PASTORS**

**Indiana**

(1) Fort Wayne, Christ’s Community

- **Pastor:** Dale D. Matthews
- **Date:** 06/97
- **Household Mbrs:** 61
- **Church Mbrs:** 288
- **Avg New Othr Contributions:** 126

**Michigan**

- **Byron Center, Corinth**
  - **Pastor:** Kevin Hamery
  - **Date:** 11/89
  - **Household Mbrs:** 30
  - **Church Mbrs:** 115
  - **Avg New Othr Contributions:** 25

- **Byron Center, First**
  - **Pastor:** Bruce R. Kuiper
  - **Date:** 03/00
  - **Household Mbrs:** 50
  - **Church Mbrs:** 200
  - **Avg New Othr Contributions:** 5

- **East Lansing, University**
  - **Pastor:** Donald Porter
  - **Date:** 05/96
  - **Household Mbrs:** 14
  - **Church Mbrs:** 50
  - **Avg New Othr Contributions:** 10

- **Grand Rapids, Fifth**
  - **Pastor:** Bruce D. Mulder
  - **Date:** 05/01
  - **Household Mbrs:** 12
  - **Church Mbrs:** 40
  - **Avg New Othr Contributions:** 2

- **Hudsonville, Fair Haven**
  - **Pastor:** David P. Breen
  - **Date:** 10/93
  - **Household Mbrs:** 1,021
  - **Church Mbrs:** 2,184
  - **Avg New Othr Contributions:** 20

- **Jenison, Hager Park**
  - **Pastor:** David W. Lantz
  - **Date:** 02/00
  - **Household Mbrs:** 268
  - **Church Mbrs:** 388
  - **Avg New Othr Contributions:** 12

- **Jenison, Rosewood**
  - **Pastor:** Richard Baukema
  - **Date:** 02/99
  - **Household Mbrs:** 248
  - **Church Mbrs:** 461
  - **Avg New Othr Contributions:** 10

- **Middleville, Peace**
  - **Pastor:** Todd A. Van Ek
  - **Date:** 10/99
  - **Household Mbrs:** 248
  - **Church Mbrs:** 461
  - **Avg New Othr Contributions:** 10

- **Wyoming, Beverly**
  - **Pastor:** Elvert D. Zwart
  - **Date:** 01/96
  - **Household Mbrs:** 211
  - **Church Mbrs:** 363
  - **Avg New Othr Contributions:** 10

- **Wyoming, Eighth**
  - **Pastor:** Roberto Jara
  - **Date:** 09/01
  - **Household Mbrs:** 116
  - **Church Mbrs:** 170
  - **Avg New Othr Contributions:** 10

- **Wyoming, Faith**
  - **Pastor:** Bruce Osbeck
  - **Date:** 12/97
  - **Household Mbrs:** 151
  - **Church Mbrs:** 252
  - **Avg New Othr Contributions:** 10

**Churcshes**

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FOOTNOTES

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(4) 184 | (3) 80,256 | (10) 17,483
(6) 20,864 | (5) 25,502 | (18) 15,507
(7) 955 | (11) 12,129 | (28) 5,000
(8) 474,203 | (12) 117,752
(9) 120,750 | (13) 17,902
(10) 1,188 | (15) 514,000
(11) 935 | (17) 48,468
(12) 29,103 | (18) 3,310
(13) 10,558 | (19) 72,130
(15) 4,539 | (20) 118,990
(16) 1,410 | (21) 132,968
(18) 15,701 | (22) 522
(20) 5,066 | (23) 77,605
(21) 6,497 | (28) 20,025
(23) 8,669
(24) 15,600
(27) 181,023
### Regional Synod of the Great Lakes
**CLASSIS OF SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN**

**Stated Clerk** Jennifer Liggett, Classis of Southwest Michigan, 302 Academy St, Kalamazoo, MI 49007; 269/349-6260

**Treasurer** Barbara Patterson, 302 Academy St., Kalamazoo, MI 49007; 616/349-6359

**Membership**

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**Average Worship Attendance**

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### Contributions

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### Education

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### Other Congregation

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### Chemistry

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Total | 5,091 | 10,204 | 485 | 5,219 | 15,906 | 776 | 374 | 325 | 330 | 250 | 126 | 94 | 238 | 42 | 5,835 | 386 | 6,562 | 10,211,311 | 559,907 | 1,125,706 | 886,375 | 2,592,348 | 13,217,783 |
### Regional Synod of the Heartland CLASSIS OF CENTRAL IOWA

#### Stated Clerk
Forrest Harms, 3011 Pleasant St, West Des Moines, IA 50266-2022; 515/277-6969

#### Treasurer
Wayne Van Heuvelen, 2400 86th St Ste 19, Urbandale, IA 50322-4306; 515/252-0796

#### Membership

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(1) Altoona, Adventure Life
David Lee Bonselaar
07/01 146 240 39 151 430 37 287 9 24 6 0 1 6 4 49 32 196 490,755 15,509 8,500 30,090 54,099 436,656 (1)

(2) Ankeny, Prairie Ridge
Michael Jon Van Rees
03/02 75 125 0 100 225 500 534 20 10 8 0 0 20 21 0 40 300 513,077 0 6,000 1,000 7,000 506,077 (2)

(3) Des Moines, Bethany
Larry L. Wyvaceen
06/00 94 147 18 40 205 46 148 2 7 7 3 0 0 1 115 6 175 226,682 10,852 18,325 10,317 39,494 187,188 (3)

(4) Des Moines, Calvary
Glen A. Blume
06/00 94 175 11 56 242 37 162 17 6 1 0 21 4 2 112 9 237 264,671 10,472 4,706 4,000 20,000 74,097 (4)

(5) Des Moines, Meredith Drive
Anthony D. Vis
05/04 681 1,298 74 459 1,831 48 941 63 29 31 5 69 44 7 700 92 750 1,712,541 92,296 176,000 65,570 333,866 1,378,675 (5)

(6) Eddyville, Faith Community*
Vacant
05/99 15 23 19 2 44 9 24 1 0 2 1 0 0 2 13 0 5 28,831 0 0 5,509 5,509 23,322 (6)(7)

(7) Newton, Community
Dean Ulmer
09/98 85 159 0 43 202 22 123 4 0 1 3 0 3 0 135 0 188,949 7,830 42,229 19,542 69,601 115,388 (7)

(8) Okoboji, Central
Donald D. Eagles
09/97 75 125 19 61 205 16 119 2 4 3 0 2 0 100 16 75 465,657 38,455 100,356 32,000 170,811 314,846 (8)

(9) Oskaloosa, Central
Vance Elsinger
07/02 124 203 21 95 319 28 148 2 4 3 1 0 3 0 135 0 187,188 18,325 10,317 39,494 187,188 (9)

(10) Pella, First
Raymond G. Tilmott
05/03 265 485 87 69 641 1 240 15 1 27 18 24 2 100 16 75 465,657 38,455 100,356 32,000 170,811 314,846 (10)

(11) Pella, Second
Stephen Mathonnet-vanderwell
02/99 255 345 140 129 614 35 270 5 8 3 14 9 2 1 175 20 120 425,127 23,676 90,050 9,186 122,912 302,215 (11)

(12) Pella, Third
Kevin E. Korver
02/93 625 1,000 200 682 1,972 0 1,800 22 52 13 5 3 43 5 875 57 570 3,144,969 74,360 101,600 182,585 358,545 2,786,424 (12)

(13) Prairie City, First
Douglas Dobbe
10/02 98 185 18 82 285 41 205 1 4 3 3 0 7 0 84 0 111,712 14,731 12,426 6,434 35,391 138,121 (13)

(14) Waukee, Westview
Jay Redland
11/96 71 143 30 127 500 44 200 14 3 13 0 0 12 3 105 40 150 405,143 7,684 20,000 8,135 35,391 459,634 (14)

SEE SUPPLEMENT A: Changes in Church Status/Name

*LINE 6—A UNION CONGREGATION WITH THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST. STATISTICS GIVEN ARE 1/2 OF ACTUAL TOTALS.
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## Regional Synod of the Heartland CLASSIS OF CENTRAL PLAINS

### Stated Clerk
Timothy Peters, 6801 S 52nd, Lincoln, NE 68516; 402/421-1641

### Treasurer
Timothy Peters, 6801 S 52nd, Lincoln, NE 68516; 402/421-1641

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### Specialized Ministry

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### Without Charge

Curtis R. Liesveld
### Regional Synod of the Heartland CLASSIS OF DAKOTA

#### Stated Clerk
Lawrence Namminga, Jr., PO Box 317, Springfield, SD 57062-0317; 605/369-4417

#### Treasurer
LeRoy Ligtangen, 903 West Ash, Mitchell, SD 57301; 605/996-6873

#### Membership

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### Notes
- *M/C: Miner or Pastor of Missionary Charge
- *ST: Stated Visitor
- All financial figures are in thousands of dollars.
## Specialized Ministry

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**B**
- Footnotes

**C**
- Footnotes

**D**
- Footnotes

### Specialized Ministry

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### Footnotes

**SEE SUPPLEMENT D**

**LINE 31—A UNION CONGREGATION WITH THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.). STATISTICS GIVEN ARE 1/2 OF ACTUAL TOTALS.**
### Regional Synod of the Heartland CLASSIS OF EAST SIOUX

**Stated Clerk**
Alvin L. Honken, 913 2nd Street NE, Sibley, IA 51249; 712/754-4747

**Treasurer**
Leon H. Koele, 1120 S 8th Ave, Sheldon, IA 51201

#### Membership

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### Stated Clerk

Lori L. Walber, Our Savior’s Church, 8209 Zane Ave N, Brooklyn Park, MN 55443; 763/561-7129

### Treasurer

Gerald Vande Garde, 7316 Auto Club Rd, Bloomington, MN 55438-2415; 952/944-9409

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- (9) 116
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- (16) 1,730
- (20) 30,722
- (21) 1,420
- (21) 15,711
- (22) 1,299
- (23) 10,819
### Regional Synod of the Heartland CLASSIS OF PLEASANT PRAIRIE

**Stated Clerk**
Melvin J. Voss, 712 Third Ave NE, Belmond, IA 50421-1234; 641/444-7150

**Treasurer**
Melvin J. Voss, 712 Third Ave NE, Belmond, IA 50421-1234; 641/444-7150

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**SEE SUPPLEMENT A: Changes in Church Status/Name**
### Specialized Ministry

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Regional Synod of the Heartland CLASSIS OF RED RIVER

Stated Clerk 
James J. O’Connell, Jr., Hope Reformed Church, 1400 W Frankford Rd, Carrollton, TX 75007; 972/492-2131

Treasurer 
James J. O’Connell, Jr., Hope Reformed Church, 1400 W Frankford Rd, Carrollton, TX 75007; 972/492-2131

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Total | 798 1,372 476 612 2,460 1,129 164 70 18 18 12 151 34 14 822 257 1,128 2,498,981 102,399 86,200 170,437 359,000 2,139,975 |

General Synod/June 2003
Specialized Ministry
Paul S. Andreasen
Martin Batts
Michael S. Bos
Richard J. Chavarria
James De Hoog
Sarah Ellen Henseler
Jeong Yeop Lee
Kathryn L. Roberts
Kenneth L. Sampson
Thomas Michael Stewart
Jonathan Tice

Retired
Ross L. Arnold
George (Brick) C. Bradford
Douglas J. Groen
Barbara Nauta

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FOOTNOTES

(1) 101 (3) 1,100 (1) 26,259 (6) 26,562
(3) 5,665 (4) 132 (2) 2,000 (7) 30,602
(4) 59  (7) 71,701 (5) 12,500
(6) 49  (7) 2,825

FOOTNOTES

(1) 101 (3) 1,100 (1) 26,259 (6) 26,562
(3) 5,665 (4) 132 (2) 2,000 (7) 30,602
(4) 59  (7) 71,701 (5) 12,500
(6) 49  (7) 2,825

FOOTNOTES

(1) 101 (3) 1,100 (1) 26,259 (6) 26,562
(3) 5,665 (4) 132 (2) 2,000 (7) 30,602
(4) 59  (7) 71,701 (5) 12,500
(6) 49  (7) 2,825
## Regional Synod of the Heartland CLASSIS OF WEST SIOUX

### Stated Clerk
Brian Hellenga, Salem Reformed Church, 215 First Ave; Box 276, Little Rock, IA 51243; 712/479-2214

### Treasurer
John Hulshof, 1205 S Carroll St, Rock Rapids, IA 51246-2069; 712/472-2537

### Membership

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### Education

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### Regional Synod of Mid-America CLASSIS OF CHICAGO

**Stated Clerk**

Ronald D. Sanford, Faith Community Church, 910 Main St., West Chicago, IL 60185; 630/231-8230

**Treasurer**

Ronald D. Sanford, Faith Community Church, 910 Main St., West Chicago, IL 60185; 630/231-8230

---

**Membership**

<table>
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<th>Pastor Name</th>
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<td>Alsip</td>
<td>Phillip L. Frens</td>
<td>110 92</td>
<td>703-555-5555</td>
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<tr>
<td>Berwyn</td>
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<td>0700 01</td>
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<td>0800 02</td>
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| Herbert Du Mont                       |                  |
| Blaise Levai                          |                  |
| Donald P. Lindskoog                   |                  |
| James C. McDonald                     |                  |
| John H. Muller                        |                  |
| William E. Nelson                     |                  |
| Albert Studley                        |                  |
| Harry D. Vanderbilt                   |                  |

FOOTNOTES
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### Notes

- The table above details the membership, education, and stewardship statistics for various churches and pastors in the Mid-America region of the Reformed Church in America (RCA).
- Membership includes new members by category and total congregation members.
- Education statistics cover membership growth, new members, and total congregation.
- Stewardship data includes income, assessments, and purpose.

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**Stated Clerk**

Randy Kooy, Regional Synod of Mid-America, 524 W Division St, De Motte, IN 46310-8621; 773/693-0138

**Treasurer**

Randy Kooy, Classis of Illiana, 524 W Division St, De Motte, IN 46310-8621; 773/693-0138
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## Illinois

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<td>Raritan</td>
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<td>Rockford, Hope</td>
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<td>Sterling, Bethel</td>
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### Iowa

- Clinton Community: Donnie De Vries
- Des Moines, Christ's Family: Brian Akker
- Des Moines, Christ's Community: Stephanie Dreschot
- Des Moines, Christ's Community: Philip E. Dreschot

### Missouri

- Saint Peters, Christ's Community: Stephanie Dreschot

### States

- **Total**: 2,469 | 3,920 | 591 | 1,592 | 6,103 | 491 | 140 | 99 | 81 | 62 | 64 | 38 | 69 | 6 | 1,585 | 135 | 2,065 | 1,721,978 | 235,145 | 374,163 | 127,951 | 737,259 | 2,984,719

*SEE SUPPLEMENT D*
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FOOTNOTES

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(3) 416 (6) 1,754
(7) 420 (9) 5,518
(10) 12,500 (13) 25,900
(12) 4,891 (14) 14,210
(13) 7,398 (15) 2,175
(14) 2,358 (18) 4,255
(15) 23,013 (19) 8,417
(16) 34,770 (22) 15,648
(17) 2,358 (18) 4,255
(18) 18
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(21) 4,107

433
# STATISTICS PRINTED FROM PREVIOUS YEAR
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### Inactive

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<td>(6)Bridgeport, North Branch</td>
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<td>Joy Carroll</td>
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<td>Stephen Yon</td>
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**Membership**

- **Total** = 2,155,609
- **2003** = 2,008,905

**Education**

- **Total** = 4,155,151
- **2003** = 4,043,151

**Contributions**

- **Total** = 1,526,009
- **2003** = 1,444,177
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FOOTNOTES

(1) 6,557 (1) 6,635 (11) 6,500 (4) 1,025
(2) 27,598 (4) 325 (18) 6,500 (10) 26,000
(3) 92,499 (6) 169,997 (28) 7,900 (11) 25,600
(4) 382 (7) 31,366 (29) 9,804 (12) 13,800
(5) 10,089 (9) 10,820 (33) 17,500 (14) 3,483
(6) 124,016 (17) 7,732 (16) 7,800
(7) 10,000 (19) 5,000 (17) 5,107
(8) 107,202 (25) 119,853 (21) 8,800
(9) 15,279 (29) 4,101 (23) 12,500
(10) 7,676 (30) 9,215 (28) 13,693
(11) 1,504 (31) 7,000 (30) 2,440
(12) 6,621 (32) 4,952 (32) 14,441
(13) 8,000

* SEE SUPPLEMENT D
### Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics CLASSIS OF GREATER PALISADES

**Stated Clerk**
Faith Michelle Link, Community Church of Hoboken, 606 Garden St, Hoboken, NJ 07030; 201/488-8963

**Treasurer**
Raymond Warner, 353 Leonia Ave, Bogota, NJ 07603-1116; 201/488-8963

### Membership

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| Without Charge       |                  |                      |
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* SEE SUPPLEMENT D

# STATISTICS PRINTED FROM PREVIOUS YEAR

**LINE 1—A UNION CONGREGATION WITH THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.). IT MAINTAINS SEPARATE MEMBERSHIP ROLLS FROM WHICH STATISTICS ARE OBTAINED.

**LINE 2—A FEDERATED CONGREGATION WITH THE BAPTIST AND THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCHES. STATISTICS GIVEN ARE 1/3 OF ACTUAL TOTALS.

**LINE 3—A UNION CONGREGATION WITH THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH. STATISTICS GIVEN ARE 1/2 OF ACTUAL TOTALS.

**LINE 4—A UNION CONGREGATION WITH THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.). STATISTICS GIVEN ARE 1/2 OF ACTUAL TOTALS.
### Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics CLASSIS OF NEW BRUNSWICK

**Stated Clerk**
Paul J. Walther, The Church in Brielle, 821 Riverview Dr at Rankin, PO Box 25, Brielle, NJ 08730; 732/528-7070

**Treasurer**
Frederick Mold, Jr., Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics, 564 Pompano Ave, Manasquan, NJ 08736-3923; 732/223-2010

---

#### Membership

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<td>Maryland</td>
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<td>(1) Frederick, Monocacy Valley</td>
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<td>(4) Edison, Grace</td>
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<td>(6) Fairhold</td>
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<td>(27) Toms River, Pinelands</td>
<td>Elke J. Braunerney</td>
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#### Average Membership

- **Churchnal (1)**
- **Congregational Mbrs (2)**
- **Inact Bapt (3)**
- **Bapt (4)**
- **Total Mbrs (5)**
- **Total Worshp (6)**
- **RCA Other Congr (16)**
- **RCA Contrib (18)**
- **Contrib Amnt (19a)**
- **Contrib Purpose (20)**

---

#### Stated Clerk Paul J. Walther, The Church in Brielle, 821 Riverview Dr at Rankin, PO Box 25, Brielle, NJ 08730; 732/528-7070

#### Treasurer Frederick Mold, Jr., Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics, 564 Pompano Ave, Manasquan, NJ 08736-3923; 732/223-2010

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#### Stated Clerk Paul J. Walther, The Church in Brielle, 821 Riverview Dr at Rankin, PO Box 25, Brielle, NJ 08730; 732/528-7070

#### Treasurer Frederick Mold, Jr., Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics, 564 Pompano Ave, Manasquan, NJ 08736-3923; 732/223-2010
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#### Books

- MOC: 09/84
- AP: 09/84
- ST: 05/02
- PE: 06/00
- *PE: 08/00
- AP: 03/02

#### Synod Information

- Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics
- Classis of Passaic Valley
- Stated Clerk Everett L. Zabriskie, III
- Treasurer Andrew Lee

#### Contact Information

- Stated Clerk Everett L. Zabriskie, III: 32 Franklin Ave., Oakland, NJ 07436; 201/405-0623
- Treasurer Andrew Lee: Holland Home, 151 Graham Ave., North Haledon, NJ 07508; 973/427-4087

#### Statistics

- Average New Other Contributions
- Conf Inact Bapt Total Worshp Gains Losses Bapt Sun Mbrs Educ Total RCA Other Total Congr

### Notes

- New Jersey
- Belleville
- Bloomfield, Brookdale
- Clifton, Athenia
- Clifton, Hope
- Clifton, Primera Iglesia Reformed
- Harrison
- Hawthorne, First
- Hawthorne, Rea Avenue
- Highland Lakes, Christ Community
- Irvington, Second
- Kinnelon
- Little Falls, First
- Little Falls, Second
- Maplewood
- Midland Park, Faith
- Montville
- Newark, First Hispanic
- Newark, Grace
- Newark, North
- Newark, Trinity
- North Haledon, Seth
- Paterson
- Passaic, Iglesia Reformada Bethel
- Paterson, Faith Chapel

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**FOOTNOTES**

(1) Paterson, Iglesia Cristiana Ebenezer
(2) Paterson, People's Park
(3) Pompton Lakes, Pompton
(4) Pompton Plains, First
(5) saddle Brook, First
(6) Upper Montclair, Montclair Heights
(7) Westside
(8) Wayne, Pequannock
(9) Wayne, Preakness
(10) Wyckoff
(11) Wyckoff, Second

SEE SUPPLEMENT A: Changes in Church Status/Name
SEE SUPPLEMENT D: STATISTICS PRINTED FROM PREVIOUS YEAR

**FOOTNOTES**

(4) 1,436
(6) 16,378
(8) 42,428
(9) 7,500
(10) 1,241
(12) 71
(14) 74
(15) 1,250
(16) 3,628
(17) 25,425
(20) 10,000
(21) 11,966
(23) 69,050
(24) 74,673
(25) 1,729
(26) 353
(27) 7,500
(28) 375,891
(29) 74,093
(30) 84,466
(31) 153,383
## Regional Synod of New York CLASSIS OF BROOKLYN

**Stated Clerk**
Daniel D. Ramm, Ref Prot Dutch Church, 890 Flatbush Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11226; 718/284-5140

**Treasurer**
Alice Williams, 145 Lincoln Road #1G, Brooklyn, NY 11225; 718/284-6464

### CHURCHES PASTORS

| CHURCHES | PASTORS | HOUSEOLD | Conf Mbrs | Inact Mbrs | Bapt Mbrs | Total Mbrs | Conf Alt | Conf Gains | Conf Losses | Watts Alt | Watts Gains | Watts Losses | Infant Alt | Infant Gains | Infant Losses | RCA Alt | RCA Gains | RCA Losses | OTHER Alt | OTHER Gains | OTHER Losses | TOTAL Alt | TOTAL Gains | TOTAL Losses | R.A. Alt | R.A. Gains | R.A. Losses | OTHER Alt | OTHER Gains | OTHER Losses |探究目的 | 去年 | 探索 | 探讨 | 探索 | 探讨 | 探索 |
| New York | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| (1) Brooklyn, Bay Ridge United | Christine Dyke | 06/00 | 32 | 45 | 20 | 9 | 74 | 20 | 27 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 25 | 8 | 25 | 61,257 | 2,776 | 1,319 | 4,906 | 9,001 | 54,256 | (1) |
| (2) Brooklyn, Canarsie Community | Felix Busby | 01/97 | 14 | 59 | 2 | 0 | 61 | 9 | 45 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 86,109 | 2,668 | 5,454 | 0 | 8,122 | 77,987 | (2) |
| (3) Brooklyn, Flatbush | Daniel D. Ramm | 10/90 | 176 | 194 | 97 | 90 | 381 | 100 | 150 | 8 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 97 | 20 | 50 | 343,202 | 15,568 | 26,322 | 15,981 | 55,401 | 287,891 | (3) |
| (4) Brooklyn, Flatlands | Vacant | 07/02 | 24 | 28 | 0 | 0 | 28 | 4 | 33 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 18 | 0 | 0 | 352,674 | 11,057 | 86,190 | 27,510 | 124,757 | 227,917 | (4) |
| (5) Brooklyn, Ghanaian** | Samuel Airoti | 10/01 | 60 | 52 | 16 | 4 | 72 | 28 | 100 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 21 | 9 | 85 | 155,725 | 0 | 1,000 | 41,824 | 42,824 | 112,901 | (5) |
| (6) Brooklyn, Grace | Douglas Banks | 04/02 | 90 | 120 | 15 | 3 | 130 | 16 | 100 | 15 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 10 | 3 | 0 | 38 | 9 | 45 | 298,879 | 9,044 | 850 | 3,000 | 12,894 | 106,985 | (6) |
| (7) Brooklyn, Gravesend** | A. William Paulsen | *M/C | 06/77 | 15 | 18 | 0 | 4 | 22 | 22 | 20 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 7 | 3 | 7 | 69,677 | 2,236 | 610 | 1,154 | 4,000 | 65,677 | (7) |
| (8) Brooklyn, Greenpoint | Vacant | 06/00 | 8 | 9 | 0 | 1 | 10 | 7 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 6 | 25,825 | 1,044 | 1,000 | 800 | 2,844 | 22,981 | (8) |
| (9) Brooklyn, New Brooklyn | Barbara P. Alexander | 01/95 | 32 | 39 | 16 | 0 | 55 | 30 | 60 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 25 | 0 | 35 | 0 | 27 | 63,206 | 3,606 | 755 | 5,161 | 58,045 | (9) |
| (10) Brooklyn, New Lots | Vacant | 05/00 | 147 | 246 | 0 | 0 | 246 | 45 | 128 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 48 | 9 | 20 | 368,835 | 7,700 | 800 | 1,000 | 9,500 | 359,335 | (10) |
| (11) Brooklyn, New Utrecht | Vacant | 07/91 | 30 | 42 | 20 | 13 | 75 | 17 | 40 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1,154 | 213,754 | 6,367 | 3,893 | 700 | 10,960 | 202,794 | (11) |
| (12) Brooklyn, Old First | Daniel J. Meeter | 01/02 | 66 | 89 | 6 | 16 | 139 | 53 | 95 | 11 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 7 | 1 | 46 | 14 | 21 | 288,205 | 9,404 | 897 | 2,560 | 12,864 | 273,386 | (12) |
| (13) Brooklyn, Redemption | Carlos H. Rivero | 01/04 | 41 | 51 | 4 | 0 | 55 | 5 | 92 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 32 | 0 | 20 | 108,647 | 3,064 | 200 | 1,310 | 4,548 | 104,999 | (13) |
| (14) Brooklyn, South Bushwick | Kenneth L. Cumberbatch | 06/85 | 25 | 34 | 8 | 16 | 56 | 20 | 30 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 20 | 0 | 35 | 55,022 | 605 | 1,990 | 5,247 | 5,482 | 49,180 | (14) |
| Virgin Islands | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| (15) Saint Croix | Rodney J. Koopmans | 06/97 | 39 | 54 | 11 | 20 | 91 | 64 | 90 | 3 | 8 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 29 | 6 | 14 | 159,244 | 4,288 | 0 | 14,516 | 18,894 | 140,440 | (15) |
| (16) Saint Thomas | Jeffrey Gargano | 01/96 | 133 | 175 | 17 | 109 | 301 | 62 | 160 | 22 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 19 | 4 | 5 | 78 | 22 | 46 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | (16) |
| **Total** | | 932 | 1,255 | 301 | 310 | 1,795 | 502 | 79 | 103 | 10 | 11 | 14 | 36 | 20 | 8 | 518 | 104 | 402 | 2,563,396 | 79,411 | 131,210 | 116,901 | 327,523 | 2,235,874 | |

**NOTE:**
- **(1)** — A UNION CONGREGATION WITH THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.). STATISTICS GIVEN ARE 1/2 OF ACTUAL TOTALS.
- **(2)** — A UNION CONGREGATION WITH THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.). STATISTICS GIVEN ARE THOSE SUPPLIED BY THE CONGREGATION.
- **(3)** — A UNION CONGREGATION WITH THE ADVENT LUTHERAN CHURCH. STATISTICS GIVEN ARE 1/2 OF ACTUAL TOTALS.
- **(4)** — See Supplement D

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**GENERAL SYNOD/JUNE 2003**
### Specialized Ministry

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<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
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### Without Charge

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### Regional Synod of New York
**CLASSIS OF MID-HUDSON**

**Stated Clerk**
David M. Brechter, St Remy Reformed Church, CPO Box 2736, Kingston, NY 12402; 845/338-2262

**Treasurer**
Alice V. Mongin, 286 Flatbush Ave, Kingston, NY 12401-2740; 845/338-2262

**Membership**

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<td>New York</td>
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**Education**

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**FOOTNOTES**

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(4) 136,400 (4) 48,000 (15) 4,000 (4) 11,040
(5) 2,714 (6) 7,376 (20) 3,000 (5) 5,094
(6) 1,682 (7) 180,857 (23) 4,300 (7) 3,000
(7) 10,054 (8) 4,999 (25) 2,743 (9) 18,521
(8) 4,111 (9) 1,200 (28) 3,656 (11) 8,000
(9) 392 (10) 1,952 (16) 1,180
(10) 5,850 (11) 156,522 (19) 4,744
(11) 132,548 (14) 89,000 (20) 8,200
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(15) 10,368 (22) 17,860 (24) 13,540
(16) 1,186 (26) 16,420 (30) 2,100
(17) 52,623 (27) 270 (31) 15,820
(18) 20,339 (30) 4,770 (32) 2,481

* See Supplement D
# Statistics printed from previous year
** Line 14—a federated congregation with the United Methodist Church and the Quaker Church. It maintains separate membership rolls from which statistics are obtained.
### Regional Synod of New York CLASSIS OF NASSAU-SUFFOLK

**Stated Clerk**
Daniel C. Heemstra, New Life Community Church, 380 Lakeland Ave, Sayville, NY 11782; 631/589-5890

**Treasurer**
Robert C. Engel, 418 Willow St, Westbury, NY 11590; 516/938-1233

### Membership

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**Total**
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*SEE SUPPLEMENT D*
### Specialized Ministry

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### Inactive

- Young Ae Na

### Retired

- Randall B. Bosch
- J. Harry Hall
- Jack H. Hascup
- Thomas Lamont
## Membership

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* STATISTICS PRINTED FROM PREVIOUS YEAR
**LINE 7—A UNION CONGREGATION WITH THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST. STATISTICS GIVEN ARE 1/2 OF ACTUAL TOTALS.
**LINE 14—A FEDERATED CONGREGATION WITH THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH. STATISTICS GIVEN ARE 1/2 OF ACTUAL TOTALS.
### Specialized Ministry
- Robert Anderson
- Brent Backofen
- Kenneth R. Bradsell
- Ronald W. Cadmus
- Micheal Edwards
- Debra L. Jameson
- Raymond Rivera
- Wilfredo Rodriguez
- Franklin Simpson
- Terry Troia

### Graduate Study
- Holly K. Vollink-Lent

### Retired
- James Anderson
- Andrew Kuo
- John S. Peale
- Gerald F. Phelan
- Daniel K. Poling
- Ian S. Todd
- Walter N. Van Popering
- David E. White

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- (2) 6,150
- (8) 111,850
- (5) 11,127
- (14) 4,700
- (5) 10,550
- (14) 41,770
- (8) 3,422,960
- (12) 800
- (14) 2,370
- (14) 30,046
- (13) 10,760
- (17) 23,959
- (17) 1,853
- (14) 8,392
- (18) 22,708
- (18) 4,073
- (19) 11,500
- (19) 12,882
## Regional Synod of New York CLASSIS OF ORANGE

**Stated Clerk**
Kenneth B. Kobza, New Hurley Reformed Church, 1145 Rt 208, Wallkill, NY 12589; 845/895-3794

**Treasurer**
Judith Joyce Randazzo, 489 Rt 17K, Rock Tavern, NY 12575; 845/567-1369

### Membership

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| Total | 1,194 |

### Line 6—A Federated Congregation with the United Methodist Church. Statistics given are 1/2 of actual totals.

### Line 21—A Union Congregation with the Evangelical Church. Statistics given are 1/2 of actual totals.

### Notes:
- **#** Statistics printed from previous year
- **** Line 6—a federated congregation with the United Methodist Church. Statistics given are 1/2 of actual totals.
- **** Line 21—a union congregation with the Evangelical Church. Statistics given are 1/2 of actual totals.
### Specialized Ministry

- Richard S. Bierwas
- Kim MacDonald Donahue
- Alan M. Koller
- John Christian Nodop
- Kenneth D. Tenckinck
- Gerald L. Wondra

### Without Charge

- Kenneth J. Barnes
- John H. Jenner
- Thomas Neuviller
- Kenneth M. Zorgdrager

### Retired

- Owen T. Bechtel
- Vernon L. Dethmers
- Glenn A. Hine
- Warren G. Martens
- Theodore C. Muller
- Harlan P. Nyhof
- Bruce E. Penn
- Bert E. Van Soest
- James E. Vincent

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# STATISTICS PRINTED FROM PREVIOUS YEAR
**LINE 9—A UNION CONGREGATION WITH THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST. STATISTICS GIVEN ARE 1/2 OF ACTUAL TOTALS.**

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Total 1,776 1,997 737 371 3,015 746 58 110 96 230 64 92 43 60 103 1,375 204 925 6,237,124 776 170,502 92,021 208,913 92 2,195 18,168 41,486 26 5,765,688 5,986,688
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* SEE SUPPLEMENT D
** LINE 11—A UNION CONGREGATION WITH THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST. STATISTICS GIVEN ARE 1/2 OF ACTUAL TOTALS.
Specialized Ministry
Ann Weathers Callender
David G. Dethmers
George Fiencke
Jon N. Norton
A. Rand Peabody
Nancy Sorokoff
Walter B. Tennyson
C. Carter Via
Carol Westphal

Without Charge
Jack E. Wahlberg
Michael A. Weber

Inactive
Santi Phattanachitchon

Retired
George J. Ammerman
Theodore L. Chandler
Robert R. deForest
Robert F. Dorer
James B. Parsons
Richard J. Skoog
Gerald P. Vander Hart

FOOTNOTES

A  B  C  D

(1) 1,189,472  (1) 763,803  (15) 9,000  (1) 83,000
(2) 26,000  (3) 25,222  (16) 6,100  (2) 5,500
(3) 41,100  (12) 11,141  (5) 10,500
(4) 11,826  (13) 30,000  (8) 9,500
(7) 63  (14) 2,000  (9) 66,000
(8) 6,808  (16) 1,200  (10) 69,380
(11) 71,773
(12) 6,473  (13) 11,356
(13) 70,700  (14) 72,458
(14) 9,234  (16) 34,296
(16) 616
(17) 62,806
### Statistical Summary 2002

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165
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211
209
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10,737

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915 5,536,534
695 4,045,102
904 12,467,590
450 2,404,880
925 6,237,124
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5,765,688
3,889,105
33,446,588
232,776,369

STATISTICAL REPORT

REGIONAL SYNOD OF THE HEARTLAND
Central Iowa
18
3,611
6,341
727
2,652
Central Plains
10
843
1,539
192
718
Dakota
32
2,778
4,841
523
2,017
East Sioux
16
2,928
5,255
432
1,678
Minnesota
23
2,763
4,880
465
1,943
Pleasant Prairie
22
2,291
3,804
688
1,440
Red River
7
798
1,372
476
612
West Sioux
22
3,898
7,020
325
3,534
TOTALS
150 19,910
35,052
3,828 14,594
REGIONAL SYNOD OF MID-AMERICA
Chicago
17
1,844
2,931
296
1,167
Florida
16
749
1,108
177
162
Illiana
25
3,869
6,479
401
2,595
Illinois
23
2,469
3,920
591
1,592
Wisconsin
25
4,439
7,607
439
3,375
TOTALS
106 13,370
22,045
1,904
8,891
REGIONAL SYNOD OF THE MID-ATLANTICS
Delaware-Raritan
33
3,291
4,693
2,121
2,341
Greater Palisades
39
2,434
3,703
1,433
1,154
New Brunswick
29
2,837
3,854
1,791
1,191
Passaic Valley
41
3,289
4,556
1,548
1,660
TOTALS
142
11,851
16,806
6,893
6,346
REGIONAL SYNOD OF NEW YORK
Brooklyn
16
932
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230
310
Mid-Hudson
33
2,702
4,096
1,868
2,215
Nassau-Suffolk
15
1,190
1,706
416
557
New York
19
3,411
3,924
3,059
394
Orange
21
1,194
1,757
1,048
880
Queens
28
1,776
1,997
737
371
Rockland-Westchester
17
1,593
2,409
1,010
272
TOTALS
149 12,798
17,144
8,368
4,999
GRAND TOTAL
943 110,625 175,207 39,416 72,684

459


### SUPPLEMENT A: CHANGES IN CHURCH STATUS/NAME DURING THE STATISTICAL YEAR 2002

#### JANUARY THROUGH DECEMBER 2002

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<th>CHANGE</th>
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<td>organized, 2/02</td>
<td>New Life Evangelical Reformed Church</td>
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<td>(Igreja Evangelica Vida Nova)</td>
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<td>Riverside, California</td>
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<tr>
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