RECENT OFFICERS OF GENERAL SYNOD

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.

PRESIDENTS

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<td>The Rev. Lester J. Kuyper</td>
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<td>The Rev. Christian H. Walvoord</td>
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<td>Elder Harry E. DeBruyn</td>
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<td>The Rev. Harvey T. Hoekstra</td>
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### RACIAL/ETHNIC COUNCILS

#### AFRICAN AMERICAN COUNCIL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

- Wilbur Jones, Chairperson
- Jo Anna Lougin, First Vice Chair
- Jimmie Stevenson, Treasurer
- Morine Thomas, Secretary
- Annie Lee Phillips, Immediate Past Chair

#### COUNCIL FOR HISPANIC MINISTRIES EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

- Jesús Serrano, President
- Eddy Aleman, Vice President
- Pavel Alas
- Leonor Caballero
- German Moreno
- Rolnand Pérez
- Carlos Rivera
COUNCIL FOR PACIFIC AND ASIAN AMERICAN MINISTRIES
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Norman Chen, Chairperson
Livingstone Chen, Ex-officio
Hak Ryong Kim
Hong-Jen Lin
Salome Ryew
Gerri Yoshida

COMMISSIONS

CHRISTIAN ACTION

Thomas Goodhart, Moderator ......................... 2008
Linda Hippenhammer ................................ 2010
Seth Kaper-Dale ....................................... 2008*
Samuel Kwon ......................................... 2009
Pamela Pater-Ennis .................................. 2010
Terry Provance (Reformed ecumenical observer) ... 2008
Jimmie Stevenson ..................................... 2010
Robert Van Dyken .................................... 2008*
Jeffrey Walton ....................................... 2009
Steve Young ......................................... 2009
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CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AND DISCIPLESHIP

Sharon Atkins ........................................ 2009*
George Brown ........................................ 2008*
James Daniels ........................................ 2010
David DeKuiper ...................................... 2010*
Irma Patterson ....................................... 2008*
Jacqueline Smallbones ............................... 2009*
Deborah Swanson, Moderator ....................... 2009*

CHRISTIAN UNITY

William Bennett ....................................... 2010
Judith Cobb .......................................... 2008 ELCA
Thomas Danney ........................................ 2009*
Harold Delhagen, Moderator ....................... 2008
Christopher Dorn .................................... 2008
Wesley Granberg-Michaelson (General Secretary) ... Ex-officio
Suzanne Hodges ....................................... 2008*
Lynn Hubers .......................................... 2009
G. Oliver Patterson .................................. 2009
Gretel Van Wieren ................................... 2010
**CHRISTIAN WORSHIP**

- Kathryn Davelaar ........................................ 2009*
- Christopher Grier ........................................ 2010
- Martin Tel .............................................. 2008*
- Timothy Ten Clay ........................................ 2010*
- Lisa Tice ............................................... 2008
- Lisa Vander Wal, Moderator ............................... 2009*
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**CHURCH ORDER**

- James Donkersloot ....................................... 2008
- Randy Kooy, Moderator .................................. 2008
- Stephen Norden ......................................... 2009*
- Jason Schnelker ......................................... 2009
- Lori Walber ............................................ 2010

**HISTORY**

- Douglas Carlson ......................................... 2010
- Mary Kansfield .......................................... 2008
- Hartmut Kramer-Mills .................................... 2009
- J. Jeffery Tyler, Moderator .............................. 2008
- Audrey Vermilyea ....................................... 2010
- Lori Witt ............................................... 2009

**JUDICIAL BUSINESS**

- Richard Baukema ........................................ 2010 R SGL
- Stephen Eckert, Moderator ................................ 2009* RSMAt
- Robert Kruger ........................................... 2010 RSA
- James Ramsey ............................................ 2009 RSC
- Anita Sherbanee ......................................... 2010 RSCFw
- Wayne Sneller ........................................... 2008 RSH
- Cary Winn ............................................. 2009 RSMAm
- John Wood ............................................. 2008 RSNY

**NOMINATIONS**

- Donald Broek ........................................... 2009 RSH
- John Chang ............................................. 2009 CPAAM
- Judy Duffy .............................................. 2010 RSFW
- Ruby Johnson ........................................... 2008* AAC
- John Kapteyn ........................................... 2009 RSC
- Bradley Lewis .......................................... 2008* PP, GS
- Carol Mutch, Moderator .................................. 2008 RSMAt
- Nolan Palsma ........................................... 2010 RSA
- Santos Rivera .......................................... 2010* CHM
- Kenneth Tenckinck ...................................... 2009* RSNY
- Sherwin Weener ........................................ 2010 RSGL
- Paul Wernlund ........................................... 2008 RSMAm
- Vacancy .............................................. 2008 NAIMC
RACE AND ETHNICITY

Armando Alas, Jr. ........................................ 2009* CHM
Mark Kellar, Co-moderator ............................. 2008 AAC
So Ae Lee ............................................... 2010 CPAAM
Todd McDonald ........................................... 2009* NAIMC
Ina Montoya, Co-moderator ................................ 2009* NAIMC
Barbara Pekich .......................................... 2008
Lois (Holly) Schut ....................................... 2010
Christian Spoor .......................................... 2008

THEOLOGY

J. Todd Billings ......................................... 2010
Jeanne Boland .......................................... 2010*
James Brownson, Moderator .............................. 2010*
Su Chang ............................................... 2010*
John Coakley ........................................... 2008*
James De Jong (Reformed ecumenical observer) ........ 2008
Steven Hoogerwerf ....................................... 2008
Scott Ickert (ELCA ecumenical observer) ............... 2008*
Angie Mabry-Nauta ..................................... 2009
John Miller ............................................. 2009*
Young Aie Na ........................................... 2008
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Mark Bush ............................................... 2009
Judie Butin ............................................. 2008
Joanne Fernandez-McDermott .......................... 2010
Stacey Midge ............................................. 2009
Steve Robbins ........................................... 2010*
R. Donald Rorapaugh ................................... 2008*
Lisa Tate .................................................. 2010
Cynthia Veldheer De Young, Moderator ................. 2009*

AGENCIES

BOARD OF BENEFITS SERVICES

Carol Bechtel ............................................ 2010* VP, GS
Barbara Boers, Treasurer
Thomas Bos .............................................. 2008*
Kenneth Bradsell, Assistant Secretary
Ellen Bylsma ............................................. 2009
John Chen ............................................... 2009
John De Koster ......................................... 2009
Philip Doeschot, President ............................... 2010*
Mary Draayer ............................................ 2009
Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, Executive Secretary
Daniel Kleinheksel ....................................... 2010
Janet Krueger ........................................... 2010
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John Ornee .............................................. 2009* P, GS
Paul Pratt .............................................. 2008
Douglas Struyk .......................................... 2010*
Donald Van Hemert ...................................... 2010*
Craig Vander Molen ...................................... 2009
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REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA CHURCH GROWTH FUND, INC.

Barney Beekma, President ................................ 2008*
Barbara Boers, Treasurer
Kenneth Bradsell, Assistant Secretary
Robert Carlson .......................................... 2010
Wesley Granberg-Michaelson ................................ 2010*  Ex-officio
Stephen Hammel, Secretary ................................ 2009*
Craig Hoffman, Vice President ............................. 2008*
Paul Karssen, Executive Vice President
Joetta Ritchey-Foreman ................................... 2009*
George Schneidermann ................................... 2010

REFORMED CHURCH PRESS

Paul Boice
Ken Bradsell
Thomas De Vries .......................................... 2010*
Lizbeth Moss ............................................... 2011*

EDITORIAL COUNCIL OF THE CHURCH HERALD

David Bach ............................................. 2010 RSMAt
Cindy De Glopper ........................................ 2009 RSH
Jane Derksen ........................................... 2009 RSMAm
Abram Hall ............................................... 2010
Timothy Rotman ........................................ 2008 RSFW
P. Stephan Sickler ........................................ 2008 PSNY
Cheryl Thacker ........................................... 2008
Douglas Van Bronkhorst, President ....................... 2010* RSGL
Robert Van Voorst ...................................... 2010
Mary Wisner, Vice President ................................ 2008 RSA
Willem Zwiep ........................................... 2009 RSC
Vacancy ............................................... 2009

MINISTERIAL FORMATION CERTIFICATION AGENCY BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Anne Bawinkel ........................................... 2009
James Brownson ......................................... 2010
Nancy Ann Callender .................................. 2008
Marjorie Giles ........................................... 2010*
Renee House ............................................. 2009
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I. FORMATION OF THE SYNOD

OPENING OF SYNOD

The General Synod opened on Thursday evening, June 5, 2008, with a worship service held in Dimnent Chapel, Hope College, Holland, Michigan. Participants in the service included the Rev. En Young Kim, pastor of the Reformed Church of Closter, Closter, New Jersey, who preached the Word; the Rev. Dr. Carol Bechtel, vice president of General Synod, the Rev. John Ornee, president of General Synod, the Rev. Ronald Rienstra, the Rev. Randall Smit, and Patricia Simmons liturgists.

WORSHIP

General Synod worship was coordinated by the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship. The team included Ronald Rienstra, Greg Scheer, and John Witvliet.

Thursday Evening
  Opening Worship Service—The Rev. En Young Kim

Friday Morning
  Opening Worship—The Rev. Celaine Bouma-Prediger
  Session Closing Prayer—The Rev. Clara Woodson, Brooklyn Classis

Friday Afternoon
  Opening Prayer—Elder Anna Gonzales, General Synod Council

Friday Evening
  Opening Prayer—The Rev. John Chang, New York Classis
  Evening Prayers—Jordan Clegg

Saturday Morning
  Opening Worship—The Rev. Denise Grier
  Session Closing Prayer—Elder Jimmie Stevenson, Illiana Classis

Saturday Evening
  Opening Prayer—The Rev. Samuel Kwon, California Classis
  Evening Prayers—Jordan Clegg
Sunday Morning
General Synod participants worshiped in area churches

Sunday Afternoon
Opening Prayer—Elder Elisabeth Kersten, General Synod Council
Closing Prayer—The Rev. Daniel Carlson, Classis of Schenectady

Sunday Evening
Opening Prayer—The Rev. Eddy Aleman, Central California Classis
Evening Prayers—The Rev. Ronald Rienstra

Monday Morning
Opening Worship—The Rev. Fred Harrell
Closing Prayer—The Rev. Paul Kim, Queens Classis

Monday Afternoon
Opening Prayer—Elder Susan Blankers, East Sioux Classis
Closing Prayer—The Rev. Newton Fairweather, Florida Classis

Monday Evening
Opening Prayer—The Rev. Shirley Heeg, Minnesota Classis
Evening Prayers—Jordan Clegg

Tuesday Morning
Opening Worship—The Rev. Fred Harrell
Closing Prayer—Elder John Chen, Classis of New York

Tuesday Afternoon
Opening Prayer—The Rev. Irving Rivera, Classis of New York
Closing Prayer—The Rev. Vicente Martinez, New Brunswick Classis

Tuesday Evening
Installation Service for New Officers

An installation service for the new officers of General Synod and a Communion service were held on Tuesday, June 10. Participants in the service included Rev. John Ornee, president of General Synod; the Rev. Dr. Carol Bechtel, vice president of General Synod; the Rev. James Seawood, vice president elect of General Synod; the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, general secretary; and the Rev. Randy Weener, preacher.
PRIVILEGE OF THE FLOOR

In order that the parliamentarian, process advisor, and executive staff may respond to questions for clarification and participate as requested by the General Synod president in presentations to the General Synod and in other activities that appear on the agenda, the General Synod:

VOTED: To grant privilege of the floor to the General Synod parliamentarian, the process advisor to the General Synod president, and the General Synod executive staff.

SEATING OF DELEGATES

The general secretary informed the synod that the City Center Network Classis was organized on May 24, 2008, and that Book of Church Order Chapter 3, Part I, Article 1, Section 1c provides that “[t]he configuration of classes and regional synods for determining delegates to the General Synod shall be as of December 31st of the year immediately preceding the year in which General Synod is convened.” Accordingly, members of the City Center Network Classis were not seated as delegates to the 2008 General Synod. The synod:

VOTED: To refer the question regarding the participation of members of the City Center Network Classis in the 2008 General Synod to the GSC Special Committee on Governance for review and report back to synod.

Upon a motion from the floor, the General Synod:

VOTED: To grant privilege of the floor and full participation in the work of the General Synod to members from the City Center Network Classis, but no right to vote or be eligible for election to any office.

A request was made for a clearer definition of the requirements for becoming a classis. The request was considered by the General Synod Council’s Special Advisory Committee on Governance. This committee reported that the formation of the City Center Network Classis was reviewed by the Commission on Church Order and discussed in its report to this General Synod, and that any further communications regarding this matter may be made through overtures or through a commission of the General Synod.

The possible membership of General Synod was 252, with enrolled membership at 242; therefore, a quorum was declared.

MINUTES AND JOURNAL

The Acts and Proceedings of the 201st regular session of the General Synod were read by title. The General Synod authorized its officers to approve the journal of actions.

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

General Synod Council members Mary Bechler and Mary Bryant, and Carol Mutch, moderator of the Commission on Nominations, were appointed as tellers. The following seminarians were also appointed as tellers:
APPROVAL OF THE SCHEDULE

The General Synod approved a schedule based on the agenda of General Synod prescribed in the Special Rules of Order (BCO 2003, Chapter 3, Part II, Article 1).

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

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

Address—Saturday evening
The Rev. Dr. Richard Mouw, president of Fuller Theological Seminary, addressed the synod regarding what it means to be 1) Reformed, 2) missional, and 3) Reformed and missional. Following his address on each of the three topics, delegates were invited to engage in table conversations in response to printed questions.

Panel discussion—Sunday evening
The Rev. Eddy Aleman, the Rev. Renee House, the Rev. Brian Keepers, Elder Cora Taitt, and the Rev. Rowland Van Es, Jr. were given the opportunity to present a question from their personal context to Dr. Mouw regarding what it means to be Reformed and missional. Rev. Dr. Bechtel also presented questions previously submitted by delegates.

Ecumenical presentations—Monday morning
Ecumenical Breakfast regarding Christian Churches Together:

• Bishop Richard Sklba, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops
• Rev. Lydia Veliko, United Church of Christ
• Rev. Steven W. Haas, Vice President, World Vision
• Rev. Richard Hamm, Executive Administrator, Christian Churches Together
• The Rev. Dr. Stephen John Thurston, President, National Baptist Convention of America, Inc.

Addressing the synod—The Rev. Gerald Dykstra, Christian Reformed Church in North America

Disabilities Task Force—Tuesday morning
Addressing the synod—Mrs. Martie Bultman

ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

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

VOTED: To approve the 2008 General Synod advisory committee list including revisions.
All regular and corresponding delegates were assigned to one of twenty “issue advisory committees.” Each of these advisory committees reviewed the same reports and recommendations pertaining to the business before synod. The president named one delegate to be moderator of each of these issue advisory committees. The named issues were: 1) inclusivity, and 2) being missional and Reformed.

A limited number of delegates were designated by the president to serve on advisory committees that will consider specific business on church order and governance, and overtures and new business.

The five Review Committees on Our Call were: 1) Multiplication, 2) Revitalization, 3) Discipleship, 4) Leadership, and 5) Global Mission.

**Moderators of the Review Forums on Our Call**

The Rev. Jeff Porte, Church Multiplication Forum  
The Rev. Mark Schwarz, Revitalization Forum  
The Rev. Gretchen Schoon-Tanis, Discipleship Forum  
The Rev. Michael Meyer-Veen, Leadership Forum  
The Rev. Eddy Aleman, Global Mission Forum

**Moderators of the Advisory Committees on Inclusivity and the Advisory Committees on Being and Becoming Reformed and Missional**

Kathleen Bateman  
Jonathon Brown  
Scott Brown  
Stephanie Doeschot  
Scarlet Gorton  
Daniel Griswold  
Craig Hoffman  
Toni Macon  
Janice Melichar-Utter  
Mary Lokers Merrill  
Howard Moths  
James O’Connell  
Bradley Olson  
Christopher Poest  
Jan Pottorff  
Eugene Roberts  
Robert Rook  
Jimmie Stevenson  
Keith Tanis  
Karsten Voskuil
FORMATION OF GENERAL SYNOD

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CHURCH ORDER AND GOVERNANCE

Moderator: Lori Walber, Classis of Minnesota

Ministers:

Abram Blaak, Classis of Ontario
Scott Brown, Classis of New Brunswick
Thomas Danney, Classis of Rockland-Westchester
Gary De Witt, Classis of Columbia-Greene
Howard Moths, Classis of South Grand Rapids
Ronald Opmee, Classis of Canadian Prairies
Norman Swier, Classis of Muskegon
Rodney Veldhuizen, Classis of Dakota

Elders:

Orville Buikema, Classis of Illinois
Sheila Friend, Classis of Brooklyn
Mary Linge, Regional Synod of New York
Marcia Westrate, Classis of Holland

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON OVERTURES AND NEW BUSINESS

Moderator: Daniel Gillett, Classis of Holland

Ministers:

James Brownson, General Synod Professor of Theology
Taylor Holbrook, Classis of Mid-Hudson
Samuel Kwon, Classis of California
Sophie Mathonnet-Vanderwell, Classis of Central Iowa
Eugene Roberts, Classis of Rochester
Jeffrey Van Der Weele, Classis of Central Plains

Elders:

Shirley Byers, Classis of Montgomery
Harry De Bruyn, Classis of Chicago
William Hertlein, Classis of Rockland-Westchester
Janet Koopman, Classis of North Grand Rapids
James Meyer, Regional Synod of the Great Lakes
Willem Spaans, Classis of Canadian Prairies
Alvin Van Marel, Classis of West Sioux

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 items of new business were accepted by the Committee of Reference.
First and foremost let me thank you for the privilege of serving you as president of General Synod this past year. It has indeed been a privilege and a rich experience to see and serve the church in the full breadth of its functioning. I have laughed with you and cried with you. I have traveled, planned, and struggled with you. I have broken bread and shared the cup with you. I have conversed with you in planes, trains, and automobiles. I have visited with you in committee meetings, in mud huts, in homes, and in auditoriums. I have celebrated new beginnings and brought things to conclusion. In all of this activity there has been a constant sense of worship, for it has all been done in the power and presence of the ever living and ever loving triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

I say that I have done all this with you because that’s exactly how I feel. I haven’t done anything alone. It was always with a team, with a committee, with a classis, in a gathering of some sort, large or small. And so the thing I want to do most of all this morning is to celebrate you, to commend you, and to encourage you because you are the church. And I want to encourage us this morning to continue to be the church because almost everything that I have seen and experienced this year as your president has only served to reinforce my innate optimism that the Reformed Church in America is alive and well. It is growing and prospering in new and innovative ways, it is persevering in old tried and true ways, it is responding to challenges across the country and around the world, and it is bringing light to the darkness and healing to a lost and broken world so loved by God.

I want to speak to you this morning initially about the power and the value of “one.” What is one person worth and what can one person do? Last year when I spoke to you as president-elect, I challenged you with the phrase, “If you didn’t know what you couldn’t do, what would you attempt for the cause of Christ?” I referenced then a movie titled Amazing Grace. That movie chronicled the life of William Wilberforce and his struggle against slavery in Great Britain. I want to reference another movie this morning. A number of years ago a powerful movie was produced and directed by Steven Spielberg called Schindler’s List. It chronicled a relatively short segment of time in the life of Oskar Schindler, a mostly unscrupulous German entrepreneur in Poland in the waning years of World War II. I say mostly unscrupulous because in the closing days of the war God used Mr. Schindler to save the lives of more than 1,100 Jewish detainees—men, women, and children who would have been sent to the gas chambers had not Oskar Schindler literally purchased their lives from the even more unscrupulous commandant of their detention camp.

I want you to see a short clip from the end of that movie. The war has ended and the tables are now turned. The Jews are about to be liberated and Oskar Schindler must now flee as a wanted war criminal. This clip shows the parting scene of the people’s gratitude and Schindler’s remorse. If only he had saved more.

Any number of powerful statements could be lifted from that short clip. For example, on the ring, the inscription from the Talmud: “Whoever saves one person’s life saves the world in time.”

I am intrigued by the concept of one-on-one evangelism. Each one wins one is an incredibly simple yet effective means of sharing the gospel and the best part is that it is exponentially effective. Did you know that by that simple formula, “each one wins one” the world could be won to Jesus in fewer than forty years? You do the math. Start with one and...
double it each year and see how long it takes to reach 8 billion people.

Oskar begins to reflect on what he didn’t do and he says, “I could have got one more.”

That’s why I want us to think together about the value of one. When it really comes down to it, when you begin to think about individuals in your life who don’t know Jesus, how important is it to you that they do know Jesus? What would you do, what could you do, so that one more person could come to a saving faith in Jesus Christ?

Itzhak Stern responds to Oskar by saying, “There are 1,100 people who are alive because of you. Look at them.”

What do you suppose it would be like to be able to look around and see all of the people that you have impacted for the cause of Christ? How large would that crowd be? Could you even call it a crowd?

Itzhak expands his thought and says, “There will be generations because of what you did.”

You see, when we introduce one person to Jesus we don’t just impact one person; we impact every person that person impacts. Very quickly we’re talking about exponential numbers again.

Oskar says, “I didn’t do enough,” and Itzhak responds, “You did so much.”

How much are we willing to do? To what lengths will we go to tell one person about Jesus? Will you go around the world? Will you go across the room?

The last phrase in the clip shows Oskar in tears saying, “One more person, I could have got one more person, and I didn’t.” He says it in almost a whisper and yet it resounds as if it were shouted: “I didn’t!”

How much is one person worth to you? What will you do, what will you give, how will you live so that one person will know the love of Jesus? Is one person worth your time spent in whatever ministry God calls you to? Is one person worth a simple conversation and an explanation of who Jesus is and what he means to you? Is one person worth an extra gift in a time of crisis or an increase in your regular gifts to the life and work of your church? What is one person worth to you? How about two? How about 1,100? How about generations that will grow and know about Jesus because of what you do right where God has placed you?

The life and work of the RCA is all about bringing life and hope to one person. One person in the Synod of Albany, Canada, the Far West, the Great Lakes, the Heartland, Mid-America, the Mid-Atlantic, New York. One person in Central or South America. One person in Europe or Asia. One person in Africa. One person who represents a hundred. One person who becomes a whole generation. How much do we care about one person? What will we do to introduce one person to the love of Christ?

We have lamented for a long time that we are a church in decline. I think it’s time we stopped speaking of ourselves in negative terms. Proverbs 12:14 says, “From the fruit of the mouth one is filled with good things.” That simply means that when we speak good things and when we expect good things we begin to discover good things. The opposite is also true: if we speak bad things then all we see and experience are bad things. The church of Jesus Christ is a church on the move—it doesn’t retreat, it doesn’t withdraw, it doesn’t diminish. The church of Jesus Christ does nothing but advance. The declaration of Jesus is, “I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.” If hell itself
cannot prevail against us, how can we speak of decline? Shame on us for believing lies, for believing that we are losing ground, for falling prey to discouragement and in some instances just giving up.

The truth is this:

We are starting more churches in the RCA than we have ever started in our history. When you factor in the number of people worshipping in those churches conservatively placed at around ten thousand people, even though they are not yet organized, we are turning the corner on declining numbers.

We are revitalizing existing congregations and strengthening and encouraging pastors through pastoral networks and encouraging the use of productive tools like Natural Church Development. One thing we know about healthy organisms and organizations is that they grow and they reproduce.

Leadership resources are being produced and promoted daily so that our churches are no longer primarily clergy centered; increasingly we are resourcing and releasing laity into meaningful, productive, and expansive ministry.

Discipleship is becoming more than just a New Testament concept or an interesting catchphrase, it is becoming a reality. Committed followers of Jesus Christ are looking outside of themselves and reaching outside of our walls to be the living presence of Christ in a lost and broken world so loved by God and increasingly loved by his disciples.

We are continuing to be a church in mission. A large portion of our time over the next few days is going to be given over to the discussion of what it means to be both Reformed and missional. We’re giving such significant time to this discussion not because it’s a new idea but because we don’t want to lose sight of the fact that it has always been our reality. The Reformed Church has never existed for itself. We exist for the world. We who have experienced the wonders of God are bound to declare his mighty acts to those who so desperately need to hear.

Each of these five themes is a part of our call: multiplication, revitalization, leadership, discipleship, and mission. This afternoon you’re invited to participate in one of the Our Call forums so that you can hear more about the wonderful things that are happening across the denomination. Then, when we gather here this evening, you’ll have the opportunity to share around your tables some of the things you’ve heard. From the fruit of our lips, we can be filled with good things.

I want to say just a little more about numbers. I’ve already told you that we are starting new churches and that when you add in the numbers of persons worshipping in those congregations we are clearly a growing denomination.

The number I want to talk to you about now is the number that we list as transferred in our statistical chart. For 2006 that number was 3,068 members; 3,068 members chose to leave our churches. They left for a wide variety of reasons, but my question to you is this, where did they go? The fact that they are recorded as transfers means that we sent them to other believing fellowships. The point that I want to make is that they didn’t leave the church, they went to another location, another believing community. I prefer to think of it this way: we are seeding other faith communities with some of our members and some other faith communities are doing the same with us. We received 3,409 members by certificate of transfer. Now to be sure some of that transferring is going on internally from one Reformed Church to another, but some of it is going on interdenominationally, and I want us to celebrate that. I’ll tell you a secret. Many of the people that you are going to meet some day
in heaven are going to be non-RCA folks. That’s right, sitting right next to you at the heavenly banquet are going to be people who believe in Jesus from every tribe and tongue and nation, most of whom have never even heard of the Reformed Church in America.

One of the most significant events that I was privileged to be a part of this past year was attending the Global Christian Forum meeting in Nairobi, Kenya, in November. We gathered from five continents and over seventy countries and nearly every believing community you can think of, and for four days we didn’t talk about a single thing that divided us. We talked only about what we had in common and we shared a single confession: “Jesus is Lord.” We spoke together about our journey with Jesus Christ, the Reconciler. We began our gathering in the same way that we began synod this morning, meeting in small groups and sharing with each other how we came to know Christ. It’s amazing, isn’t it, that when you know that someone else believes in Jesus, and that’s the single thing that you focus on, most of all the other clutter in our lives becomes unimportant. The things that separate us are far less important than the single thing that unites us. Perhaps it was no mistake that the single thing that Jesus said would enhance our witness to the world was our unity. “Father, let them be one.”

That same kind of Christian unity was experienced by those from our own denomination who participated in the “One Thing” event in San Antonio, Texas, back in January. What an extraordinary gathering of current and emerging leaders focusing together on what can be done in new and exciting ways as we lean into the remaining five years of our ten-year goal and beyond. Reggie McNeal challenged us to get outside of our four walls and be the church in a world that so desperately needs to know the love of Jesus.

Now where is this emerging unity coming from? How is it that as a denomination we are beginning to pull together around common themes and a common goal? Well, certainly the establishing of a ten-year goal has something to do with it. Without a goal there is nothing for us to gather around. But is there something deeper, something richer and fuller, something that is actually beginning to unite us? I believe that there is. I believe that the single most significant factor in all of the good things that are beginning and continuing to happen in our churches is a growing commitment to prayer. Even as I speak there is a coordinated effort to bathe this year’s General Synod in 24/7 prayer. Before you ever arrived here in Holland you were prayed for. In the months leading up to our gathering, churches and prayer teams were interceding on our behalf that God would guide and direct these proceedings by the power and presence of his Spirit. The fact is that our mission and vision statements were born out of prayer. The language that brought us our ten-year goal was born out of prayer. The successes that we are experiencing in each aspect of our goal are nothing if not direct answers to prayer.

The House of Prayer Equipping (HOPE) team was the vision that God gave to former General Synod president Steve Brooks. I was privileged to represent the denomination at Steve’s funeral last March. It was a wonderful celebration of the life of this exceptional man of prayer. The HOPE team has become something of a legacy within the denomination of Steve’s life and his ongoing commitment to prayer in the life of the Reformed Church in America. It is the HOPE team that has been working tirelessly since the year 2000 to promote and advance prayer as a dominant and underlying ministry in all of our churches, classes and synods. The HOPE team seeks to establish a prayer covenant with all of our churches—a covenant that encourages pastors to give prayer a priority in their own lives and the lives of the churches they lead. This covenant encourages each church to establish a prayer team and a prayer leader and to give prayer a prominent place in its life and ministry.

The irony in all of this is that even though prayer is arguably the single most important activity in the life of any believer or church, it has no permanent home or status in the
structure of our denomination. For three years the RCA had a part-time self-funded minister for prayer, but that position has slipped away. We need to keep the emphasis on prayer, because it is the underlying cause for all of our successes as a denomination. Steve Smallegan, classis pastor for the Zeeland Classis in the Synod of the Great Lakes, is fond of saying, although I don’t think the phrase is original with him, “When we work we work, but when we pray God works.” Who do you want working for us, ourselves or God?

In response to this situation my first proposal is:

P-1
To instruct the GSC to appoint a study committee to work with the HOPE team to develop a proposal to be presented to General Synod 2009 that will ensure the continuation and funding for the team itself and to explore the need and propose a job description and funding for a denominational minister for prayer.

[Upon recommendation of the Committee of Reference, P-1 was referred to the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business. See page 130.]

I said earlier that almost everything that I have seen and experienced this year as your president has served to reinforce my innate optimism that the Reformed Church in America is alive and well. Let me return for a moment to the “almost” part. There is one thing that distresses me from my travels around the church this year. If I have an innate optimism about the life and times of the church, some of you seem to have an innate sense of mistrust about some of your leaders, whether they be at the congregational, classis, regional synod, or General Synod level. I call it an innate sense of mistrust because it doesn’t seem to have an origin in reality; it comes from inside of you, and you project it out onto others. I have met at every level of the church wonderful godly men and women who are pouring themselves heart and soul into ministry for the sake of and for the cause of Christ only to be met by some of you with opposition because of your own suspicion and mistrust. The trouble with this innate mistrust is that it cannot be dealt with on the outside nor do you attempt to deal with it in healthy, constructive ways. Your preferred method of dealing with persons whom you mistrust is to talk about them rather than to them.

There are of course wonderful exceptions to this practice. Some of you who have legitimate concerns about how something is going actually pick up the phone and make arrangements to talk to the person in question about the issue that is troubling you and, what do you know, you work things out. I offer somewhat tongue in cheek but with absolute sincerity my second proposal:

P-2
Play nice!

“If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other” (Galatians 5:15, NIV).

“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Ephesians 4:29-32, NIV).
Upon recommendation of the Committee of Reference, P-2 was referred to the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business. See page 130.

Last but not least let’s talk dollars and cents for just a few minutes. How many of you believe that the church has all the money it needs? Of course it does. Every ministry that your church, classis, regional synod, or General Synod would like to accomplish is sitting in the pockets and bank accounts of your church members. There is no shortage of funds. The problem is sometimes with allocation. How do we get it out of pockets and bank accounts and into ministry?

That’s a heart issue isn’t it? Jesus said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). And it’s true. The question is how do we get more of our people to want the blessing? I’m not sure exactly how we do that, but I’m quite sure that most people don’t feel blessed by assessments. In order to allow more of our people to experience the blessing of giving, I offer the following proposal:

**P-3**
To instruct the General Synod Council to form a task force to study current giving patterns and funding needs in the life of the RCA, and the assessment system, and to report to the General Synod of 2010 possible alternate ways to generate the necessary revenue.

Exodus 36 records an incredible event in the life of the people of Israel. Moses had invited the people to give for the construction of the Tabernacle in the desert. In verse 5 the various craftsmen report “that the people are bringing more than enough for doing the work the Lord commanded to be done.” So in verse 6 Moses gave an order and they sent this word throughout the camp, “No man or woman is to make anything else as an offering for the sanctuary.” And so the people were restrained from bringing more, because what they already had was more than enough to do all the work. Let’s pray into the day when we as the Reformed Church in America give more than enough to do all the work the Lord has commanded to be done.

Let me close with one more number from our statistical reports: 1,488. That’s the number of adult baptisms reported by all of our churches in 2006. That number thrills and challenges me. For the most part I believe that number represents persons who at the beginning of the year did not consider themselves to be part of the kingdom of God and by year’s end they were celebrating new life in Christ! The Spirit of God working in their hearts through one of our churches brought them to faith in Jesus. They came in a wide variety of ways and all sorts of different programs and presentations and conversations were used to bring them out of the darkness into the light. It doesn’t matter the particular program or the particular presentation. It doesn’t matter the particular church or the particular conversation. What matters is they came. And what matters is we could have done more. Oskar Schindler wept in the arms of those he had helped to save because he could have done more.

Jesus says, “Look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting” (John 4:35). Remember, you are the church. How much is one person worth to you? What will you do, what will you give, how will you live so that one person will know the love of Jesus?

To God be the glory!
It was one o’clock in the morning five years ago, and I was walking and praying a few blocks from here in the Pine Grove because I couldn’t sleep. General Synod was meeting here at Hope College, and that day it had debated a proposed ten-year goal in an uncertain and inconclusive mood. It seemed it all might be deferred, rejected, or, as we often do, “sent back to committee”—the procedural equivalent of being sent to a year-long purgatory. My spirit was troubled.

Three years of work hung in the balance. In 2000, the General Synod, responding to the words of the RCA’s Statement of Mission and Vision approved three years earlier, requested “a discernment process which engages all classes, regional synods, boards, and agencies, for the purpose of establishing a clear and compelling ten-year goal.”

The General Synod Council took that mandate seriously, investing three years in earnest discussion and discernment. The GSC sent proposals throughout the church, listening carefully for responses. Now, the final wording was before the 2003 General Synod.

But the decision belonged to the General Synod, and had to be theirs to claim or reject. And honestly not knowing what the outcome might be, I did the only thing I could do—I prayed for God’s Spirit and guidance.

Later I learned that on the same night I was pacing and praying, a group of delegates representing the various and often conflicting points of view in that day’s debate were themselves in earnest discussion and prayer. At the next day’s session this group of delegates brought fresh language, responding to voices and wisdom that had been shared. The General Synod listened, commented, and with a unifying enthusiasm, finally embraced these words:

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.

This is how Our Call, the RCA’s ten-year goal, was adopted by the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America. But it was clear that synod was never merely debating a set of words. I remember so well delegates at the time saying, “This is a call that I can give my life, and the rest of my ministry, to.” And that’s exactly what so many of us, including me, have done, and continue to do today.

Five years later, General Synod is again back at Hope College. We’re at the mid-point of this ten-year goal, halfway through the journey with Our Call. Do you remember Jesus’ response in Mark after sending out his disciples for the first time in mission among villages in the neighboring area? As they returned, we read in Mark 6:30-31, “The apostles gathered around Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, ‘Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.’” He wanted to share and reflect with them on all they had experienced in this time of missional engagement.
That’s what I have tried to do in preparation for this General Synod, and what I hope to offer you tonight—a means by which we might reflect together on what we have seen God doing, what we are learning, and how we are being challenged, halfway through the RCA’s journey with Our Call.

But first we need to remind ourselves why this matters. “We believe that God is calling the Reformed Church in America…” That’s what the General Synod declared five years ago, and that’s why we embarked on this journey. Not to breathe some institutional oxygen into bureaucratic denominational structures, but to follow a holy calling that compels our response. We yearn to know more fully the power of the gospel that transforms lives through Christ, the gospel that rebuilds communities, that is good news to the poor, that heals divisions, and that offers hope to the world. We have been called to follow Christ in mission. That’s why this matters. That’s what’s at stake. Responding to Our Call, many of our congregations are making deep and faithful commitments to place participation in God’s mission in the world at the center of their lives and identities.

So at this midpoint during this General Synod, let’s honestly ask ourselves: Are we being faithful to the call we discerned so clearly five years ago? What are we learning? What are our fears? What do we hope for? And where are the new places that the Spirit beckons us to join in God’s redeeming mission in the world?

From my perspective, I see five things happening in the life of the Reformed Church in America since we embraced Our Call. Each one reveals blessing and challenge; faithfulness and hope; ministry accomplished and ministry still to be done. Here’s what I see.

**Our Churches Are Multiplying**

When we began Our Call, we were closing about as many congregations as we were officially recognizing as newly organized RCA churches. But since then a movement of church multiplication has begun to take hold, based on a historic practice that is equally modern: new congregations are best started by existing churches. In all regions, congregations and classes are discovering a fresh vision and plan for planting new churches—often where this has not occurred for years.

For example:

- At this General Synod, we will celebrate nine new organized churches. In the last five years, 92 newly emerging churches have submitted what are called new congregational plans, and another 111 new congregations are either on the drawing board or already meeting in some form.

- In Southwest Michigan Classis, three churches have been organized in the past six months. There are 1,200 people worshiping in those three churches. There are another 750 worshiping in new churches spread across the Regional Synod of New York, and almost all of the people who attend these churches are of a different racial or ethnic group than the RCA’s Anglo majority—among others, they include Taiwanese, Indonesians, Ghanaians, and Hispanics.

- In Delaware-Raritan Classis, there are two new church plants—two more than in the last two decades. Central California Classis has started 16 new churches in the last twelve years, and wants to start 20 more during the remaining years of Our Call. Just one congregation, Tulare Community Church, has participated in the planting of 18 new congregations, a number of those in classes other than their own, and has six new starts that are under a year old.

- There are 115 emerging church planters “in the pipeline,” 75 churches with the mindset to be parent churches, and ten thousand new believers attending weekly worship.
The numbers can be breathtaking. But again, we’ve got to ask why this matters, and reflect theologically on what is happening here. We live in a society where only about 40 percent of the population regularly attends a place of worship. And that number may be generous—some studies suggest the actual number may be half that. New congregations express a focused passion and heart for the millions in North America who are spiritually homeless. They are the most effective vehicle through which the grace and love of God in Jesus Christ can touch the lives of people who have been alienated from God, and who often have shunned the established church.

Church multiplication is reenergizing the RCA because it is helping us rediscover our Savior’s persistent compassion for those outside our doors. It is reenergizing the RCA because of stories like this one I received recently by email from a new church pastor in Iowa:

Thought we would pass along an amazing conversation we just had with one of the visitors who came on Sunday. We have been praying for him for roughly nine months and on Sunday he came. Tonight, as we were leaving their place, he said, “See ya Sunday, if not before!” He may have been in church three or four times in his life, said he wasn’t brought up there and doesn’t feel comfortable there. At The Lighthouse, though, he felt real comfortable and told us that he will be coming back. Showing the love of Jesus to someone who desperately needs to see it but someone who would not have if The Lighthouse did not exist!

That is why we can rejoice, and praise God for the movement of church multiplication that has emerged in our midst. Because these developing congregations are not yet officially organized RCA churches, they are not in our statistics. But they are in our future. All this marks a significant change from where we were five years ago. We’ve provided you with a list of all the new congregations that have submitted their plans, and the additional one hundred or so that are just beginning.

Yes, multiplying congregations also multiplies concerns and challenges. For instance, are these new churches we are starting truly Reformed churches? How connected will they be to RCA tradition, mission, and culture? Further, how do we affirm and connect with these two hundred emerging congregations that are crucial to our life, but which our polity and procedures don’t recognize as being RCA churches until they are officially “organized”?

These issues are one lens through which we view the challenge of being “both missional and Reformed.” That is a central focus at this General Synod, and a critical dialogue for us to have as we move into the second half of Our Call.

But as we ponder these questions, let me share another story, one I experienced personally a few weeks ago. I attended the one-hundredth anniversary of Trinity Reformed Church in Grand Rapids. Several RCA churches existed in the Grand Rapids area when Trinity was founded, but Trinity was planted on Grand Rapid’s West Side in a largely Lithuanian neighborhood from a sense of vision and mission. Moreover, from the start, there was something different about Trinity: its language. Trinity was the first RCA church in Grand Rapids to worship in English. Further, from the start women were given the right to vote.

In that time, Trinity was a courageous new church plant that related Christian witness in a new cultural context. You can be sure that some worried about the effects of these changes on their tradition. But now, Trinity is celebrating one hundred years of bold mission on the West Side as a congregation that is thoroughly Reformed and unwaveringly missional.

That’s a model, being repeated and multiplied today, of how new church starts communicate the gospel across cultural boundaries and renew the life of the RCA.
Our Face Is Changing

When I looked out at more than seven hundred RCA members gathered in San Antonio last January at “One Thing,” a conference about being missionally engaged in today’s culture, the sight brought tears to my eyes. Younger pastors, new in ministry, both women and men, along with many African-American, Hispanic, and Asian faces, mingled amid long-time RCA leaders. Many women—pastors, elders, deacons, and congregational leaders—were present, along with pastors of “parenting churches.” Most of our new church planters were there; so were many of our chaplains.

These are the faces of the RCA, and that face is changing. Halfway through Our Call, we can see that this commitment is making us look different, helping us reflect more the whole body of Christ. Our goal of starting four hundred new congregations by 2013 includes a commitment that at least one-third of these will be different from the present racial and ethnic majority in the RCA—and right now, we’re exceeding that percentage. If you’re becoming missionally engaged in North America, that’s a must-do today—not as a political strategy, but as a missional necessity and a reformed commitment.

This doesn’t happen automatically. It takes intentional, consistent, courageous hard work. That’s what we’ve set out to do, in response to the direction of General Synod, guided by the efforts of Earl James, our new coordinator of multiracial initiatives and social witness, and lived out in congregations and classes across our denomination.

The examples are powerful. In October 1993, a traditional and white congregation in Closter, New Jersey, signed a beautiful, powerfully worded covenant with a group of Korean-speaking Christians about developing as a new congregation. Today, everything at the Reformed Church of Closter is done in Korean and English, traditions and holidays of both cultures are celebrated, and the church is lead by copastors, one of whom you heard preach last night—the Rev. En Young Kim.

Church of the Redeemer in Brooklyn, New York, is described as a small version of the United Nations for Latinos, with members who are Puerto Rican, Dominican, Argentinean, Venezuelan, Peruvian, Nicaraguan, Columbian, and Ecuadorian. Living Springs Community Church of Glenwood, Illinois, is more than 20 percent African American, African, Asian, and Hispanic, and uses a special ministry—Building Bridges—to help shepherd the congregation’s work at embracing its multiracial character. At Our Savior’s Church in Brooklyn Park, Minnesota, Liberians moving to the United States found a welcome—and a home—in that historically white congregation. Says pastor Lori Walber, who is a delegate here, “Our congregation has a greater global awareness. We have studied and prayed for lands around the world. And we have been encouraged in our Christian walk by people with great stories of persecution, faith, and prayer.” Right now, Liberians comprise more than 25 percent of the worshipping community at Our Savior’s.

A multiracial future is foundational for our denomination because it is rooted in the integrity of the gospel. It’s part of what it means to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Last year when the General Synod provisionally adopted the Belhar Confession as a fourth confessional standard for the Reformed Church in America, we were, in a very important way, prophetic. In a year when political life in the United States has focused a spotlight on the enduring challenge of racial divisions, the RCA has addressed the spiritual and theological roots of this social sin. The timing for congregational study of the Belhar Confession could not be more appropriate, and its final adoption next year would be an inspirational witness to the power of the gospel within our time.

Our Call is changing the face of the RCA. Yet here too we confront serious challenges. As I look out here, at you who gather in the highest assembly of the Reformed Church in
America, the picture I see is so different from the one in San Antonio. Don’t mistake me—that is not your fault! Each of you is privileged to be sent here as a delegate from your classis or region, and the church is privileged to have you here.

But the truth is that the changing face of the RCA, in terms of youth, women, and racial diversity, is simply not reflected in this room. And that makes a difference. My honest worry is this: I can’t see how we can have the best discernment, and listen to all the important voices, and come to the wisest decisions about the future of the RCA when so many people so critical in shaping that future are simply not in the room.

Consider the situation facing women as an example. A recent study by George Barna, looking at all Christians, finds that women, as compared with men, read the Bible more, attend church more often, participate more in small groups, pray more often, and more often believe that their faith is very important to them. Those statistics would likely be as true in the RCA, where 66 percent of our members are women. Yet, since Our Call was adopted in 2003, there has been virtually no change in the percentage of women delegates to General Synod—it’s about 20 percent, or one in five.

The absence of those from younger generations is just as troubling. We know that those who are under thirty—sociologists call them the Millennial Generation—are simply wired to see the world and relate to it differently. It’s neither right nor wrong, but it is different. If we can’t hear their voices in our assemblies, how can we fashion a church that is responsive to future generations?

We’re faced with a dilemma. A bedrock principle of Reformed polity is that decisions that govern the life of the church are made in assemblies by ministers of Word and sacrament and elders. We wisely entrust those called to these offices with this responsibility.

Yet an unintended consequence is that those who are of younger generations, those who are women, and those from non-white racial and ethnic backgrounds are not present in our assemblies in any manner close to their actual presence in our congregations. Practical issues also deepen this problem. Often, for instance, it is more difficult for younger elders, or those of modest incomes, to take time off work or claim vacation days to come to General Synod, compared to others—especially to those who are retired.

Perhaps there’s a way forward, at least in the short term. The bylaws of General Synod provide for corresponding delegates who have voice, although not vote. They represent various agencies and commissions as well as ecumenical participants. What if we expanded this category to bring more voices into the room—voices which we need to hear in order to discern God’s directions for our future? We could find a means to have corresponding delegates who would help our General Synod look more like the face of the church which we seek to become.

Therefore, I offer the following proposal as a means to explore this possibility:

P-1
That the moderator of General Synod Council (GSC), in consultation with the general secretary and the president and vice president of General Synod, appoint a GSC task force to study how to increase the participation of people from racial and ethnic backgrounds other than the majority in the life of General Synod, and to increase the participation of women and those of younger generations, so that these voices may be more fully heard and welcomed in the life of the General Synod; and further,
that the task force consider the feasibility of expanding the category of corresponding delegate to General Synod as a means to accomplish this end, as well as other strategies; and further,

that the task force report to the General Synod of 2009, bringing recommendations, including any possible changes in the Government, the Bylaws, and the Special Rules of Order of the General Synod.

[Upon recommendation of the Committee of Reference, P-1 was referred to the Special Advisory Committee on Inclusivity. See page 81.]

Our Leadership Is Renewing

The Lilly Foundation has spent millions of dollars researching what best prepares and nurtures pastors for fruitful ministry in the long term. What they’ve learned is that more than patterns of ministerial training, or courses taken, or languages studied, or CPE units experienced, the single most important factor supporting a faithful, fruitful, healthy pastoral ministry is whether a pastor has an effective and vital network of peer relationships—one that holds a pastor accountable and encourages growth. Going it alone doesn’t work.

The RCA came to a similar discovery a decade ago when we began sharing experiences of congregational revitalization. Pastors of growing, spiritually vibrant congregations that were turning inside out to the world—those pastors showed a distinct and common pattern: they were hungry for fellowship, spiritual support, and accountability with one another.

When Our Call named congregational revitalization as one of our two major initiatives over the next ten years, we knew that achieving this part of the goal depended on what could happen in the hearts and lives of pastors. That’s why we have placed so much emphasis on creating and nurturing pastoral networks. Today there are sixty of these networks, involving 380 RCA pastors from 372 of our congregations—almost 40 percent of our congregations. And it’s all being supported by a $2 million grant from the Lilly Foundation’s Sustaining Pastoral Excellence Program.

Parenthetically, it’s important to note that of all of Lilly’s grants through its pastoral excellence program, only three have been awarded directly to denominations across the U.S. The folks at Lilly are among the most knowledgeable about what is happening throughout denominational institutions today, and in our evaluation meetings they generously praise and commend the work being carried out today in the RCA.

Through participation in pastoral networks, we hope and pray that pastors will:

• Become increasingly clear about whom God is shaping them to be and what God is calling them to do;
• Engage in lifelong spiritual formation and transformational learning; and
• Work in partnership with congregational leaders to lead the congregation in missional engagement.

Are we seeing fruit from these efforts? Those who are participating witness to the difference that a pastors network is making in their lives and the lives of their congregations. This email from Chad Schuitema, pastor of Community Reformed Church in Lafayette, Indiana, is one example:

I was treading water in ministry. I felt like I was just floating from one problem to another, from one new fad to the next, and I didn’t feel like the person God had called
into ministry anymore. I was an effective pastor, but I wasn’t flourishing…Things are different now.

The pastors network I’m in was the catalyst for this transformation in my life. Through the Purposeful Living process I began to see what my real pastoral identity is and how to live that out…

My pastors network has been invaluable in my reformation. Through their loving accountability, through the coaching I have received and been able to give, and through our learning together, we have all grown. I’m a better pastor because of my network…I’ve been in other pastor groups before and they mostly seemed like a waste of time, but the intentionality that is built into our network keeps it vital and non-negotiable on my calendar.

Our goal is to have five hundred RCA pastors participating for at least five years in a pastoral network by the year 2013. It’s our conviction that this is one key strategy for opening the pathways for congregational revitalization.

At the same time, we know from our polity and from our experience that congregations are led not just by their pastor, but by those called and ordained into congregational leadership. Real change in a congregation’s missional engagement will come when consistories and congregational leaders also experience a freshly renewed sense of God’s calling on their lives, and share in these same patterns of transformational learning, support, and accountability.

For that reason we are placing a major emphasis on extending the resources and processes that sustain our pastoral networks to consistories and congregational leaders. In the next five years, we want congregational leaders in at least four hundred RCA congregations to be part of training experiences that can deepen their calling and sense of God’s purpose for their lives. Why? Not because that’s the definition of a successful program, or because we want to feel better about ourselves, but because we are called to follow Christ in mission, to proclaim good news to the poor, release of the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and freedom for the oppressed (Luke 4:18). Our desire is that every congregation in the Reformed Church in America would open itself to participate in this ongoing, transforming work of God in the world.

That’s our challenge. The programs, the grants, the networks, the time and effort involved—all this is done solely so we can place our participation in God’s mission in the world at the center of life and ministry, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Renewed congregational leaders nurture revitalized congregations. And those congregations seek the transformation of their communities, neighborhoods, and cities so they become more just and more gracious for all. And this is where multiplication truly happens—not only the multiplying of churches, but of leaders, of disciples, and of mission.

In early May, a group of RCA elders and deacons met in Minneapolis, at the request of last year’s General Synod, to look more deeply into their own role in the transforming work of God in the world. It was by all accounts a God-directed, Christ-honoring, Spirit-led gathering of people who passionately desire to see elders, deacons, and ministers of Word and sacrament—in true parity of office—working together to nurture revitalizing, multiplying congregations. Let me read you just a couple of sentences from a letter they prepared at the end of this weekend gathering:

We gathered as congregational leaders from across the RCA, expectant for how we would benefit in our common ministries of following Jesus Christ. We left convinced that we have been called on a mission, guided by the Holy Spirit—to remodel his church as Christ would want us to reshape it, letting no obstacle stand in our way.
We felt the fresh wind of the Spirit blowing out the idols and rituals we have erected and maintained in the selection of ordained leadership—the idols of aspiring to position rather than function; of popularity and influence rather than Christ-like character and calling; of availability rather than a growing relationship with Christ. We felt the Spirit blowing in new ways for congregations to call followers of Jesus Christ into leadership within the body of Christ.

We felt the fresh wind of the Spirit blowing out the idols of status, power, tradition, comfort, and financial influence, and blowing in true parity of office, equality in function, with servant hearts and a willingness to be actively engaged in relationships of mutual accountability and mentoring.

We felt the fresh wind of the Spirit blowing out our sense of having “arrived as leaders” and blowing in a commitment to continuously clarify and obey our call from God.

For far too long, too much of the church in North America has lived as a community settled far too comfortably in our culture. Through Our Call, the Holy Spirit is reminding us that God has chosen and gathered us into a covenanted community, not to be settled, but to be sent.

Our Anxiety Is Rising

Change produces anxiety—in individual lives, in families, in communities, in churches. In healthy circumstances, where anxiety is expected, where it is engaged and not ignored—indeed, where it is seen as a normal, albeit difficult, part of growth—anxiety can be accepted as part of the process of change. Our anxiety is rising in the RCA. The question is how we will deal with that anxiety, and in the process, how we will deal with each other.

When faced with this challenge, it’s not uncommon for some to recall Jesus’ warning about trying to pour new wine into old wineskins. But that’s not quite our challenge. I’m drawn to the other image in Mark 2, where Jesus warns against sewing an unshrunk piece of cloth onto an old garment. It will only tear away, Jesus says, leaving a worse tear. That speaks more to our life today.

Rapid change is a constant reality in our culture. This requires discerning, inspired, and adaptive change in the life of the church. There’s a truth rooted in the fabric of God’s creation: healthy organisms change with time as they grow; those that are static and can’t change in response to their environment eventually die.

For the church, the key is discovering how to draw on the strengths and values embedded in a particular tradition—in our case, the Reformed tradition—and meld these into the new forms, expressions, styles, and structures of the church’s ministry and mission that must flow into our future. This is a necessary, ongoing creative tension, and one that we should welcome, and never resist. Here is where Jesus’ words come into play. This valuable old garment—a denomination 380 years old—is worn thin with tears and holes in various places. But we won’t discard it, because we love it, and know it was given to us by grace. So we need to patch it, with many new pieces of cloth. But those pieces need to be preshrunk, meaning they’ve got to be washed a bit in our waters—so that they fit in as new pieces, giving new durability and flexibility—without tearing this old garment.

This whole process is intensified by Our Call. We’re sewing on a lot of new patches, and we need to. But as we do, we are also constantly testing and adapting new cloth to fit our old garment.
The examples in just these past five years are numerous, such as:

- Commissioned pastors
- New bylaws written and structures developed by many classes
- New practices for decision-making
- Natural Church Development
- New missional models of discipleship
- Foundational Coach Training
- 16 models for new church plants, with more emerging every month
- Parenting church strategies
- Policy governance
- Approved Alternate Route
- Distance learning
- Center City Classis
- Reformed Church in the Dominican Republic

This list goes on, and you can add to it from the experience of each of the congregations, classes, and synods represented here. We’re trying to preshrink and sew on a lot of new cloth. All this can raise anxiety, and strain the fabric of trust that, in the end, binds us all together.

Last year’s synod heard and felt the tension of change, and potential change, acutely. The synod ended on a strong and unifying note, but getting there took grace. That’s why, in this past year, I, as well as the officers of synod and other staff, have done a lot of listening throughout the church. For instance, I traveled through the Synod of Albany for several classis-based conversations and meetings, and attended the fall gathering of the Synod of New York, as well as a meeting of the Classis of New York. Brad Lewis, John Ornee, and I had a lengthy discussion at a special meeting of the Illiana Classis. Carol Bechtel and I met with a group called the Chicago Invitation. Another day was spent, along with Ken Eriks, with the Wisconsin Classis, followed by an informative time with the Chicago Classis.

I’ve heard a variety of concerns and anxieties. Some fear that our constitutional foundations are eroding, and that much of the church does not grasp how our order, confessions, and liturgy shape our identity and life. They wonder if we are “seduced by modernism,” and worry that the function of our assemblies in governing the church is diminished.

From others I heard more personal grief that long and dedicated years of faithful pastoral service, in areas where demographic trends make ministry more difficult every year, is simply unappreciated and devalued. Grief and loss weigh heavy in such pastoral hearts, and form the lens through which the rest of the denomination is perceived.

For others, anxiety is felt not around the integrity of our polity, but rather the purity of our theology. They fear a capitulation to cultural moral relativism that compromises God’s truth.

Our commitment to living in a covenanted community means that all voices are important. We listen to each other with care because we believe that the wisdom of God’s Spirit is discerned through our life and sharing together. During this past year, we’ve been learning more the value of talking with one another rather than about each other.

In my travels to classes and congregations this past year, however—and this is true in every corner of our denomination, with every group to whom I’ve spoken—our conversations have not been simply about those things that can cause anxiety. They’ve been even more about mission—about how God is calling and continues to call us into the future. In fact, there’s a crescendo of voices embracing Our Call to missional engagement in our society and world. I’ve watched one classis after another reorganize its life, and even rewrite
bylaws, to focus energy on church multiplication and congregational revitalization. I’ve heard classis presidents give reports urging that the classis “catch the wave” of the Spirit and discover a missional mindset to guide its life. In one classis meeting I listened to a report evaluating with courageous honesty the health and missional commitment of every congregation, a report that emerged out of rich times of dialogue with consistories. This thread weaves its way through every region and synod. What draws us together is what beckons us forward.

Today, we have a choice. We can stand together, in the midst of genuine differences, to listen for the leading of the Holy Spirit that calls us freshly into God’s mission, and then ask together how we can respond faithfully. That’s not always an easy road—just look at the early church—but it is a faithful road. Our anxieties will lessen as we listen.

Alternatively, we can allow anxieties to make us react in fear, and in that, we will begin to degenerate into factionalism. That’s a danger we face, and it’s a deadly one because it’s a serious sin. We then begin defining ourselves according to whom we’re against, rather than what we’re for. Our differences come to define our identity, and we retreat into protective enclaves. In so doing, we mimic the polarizing politics of our societies, and reveal how captive we are to the secular culture.

Here we have to return to our roots. In the Preamble to the Book of Church Order, under the heading “The Nature of the Church’s Authority,” we read this:

"All authority exercised in the church is received from Christ, the only Head of the church. The authority exercised by those holding office in the church is delegated authority. Their appointment to their special tasks is by the Spirit of the Lord, and they are responsible first of all to the Lord of the church."

This applies to all of us here. Our authority comes from Christ, and our accountability as General Synod delegates is to him, and through him to the whole church. This radical vision is part of the genius of our Reformed tradition.

Our unity as a denomination, and in our governing bodies, comes fundamentally from this way of understanding our life together. Regional, political, or theological factions vying for power and control, with primary loyalty belonging to specific constituencies, contradicts fundamentally how we are to govern ourselves.

Ours is a countercultural model of governance, but one which we must cling to for the sake of our unity and mission in the world. Change produces anxiety. That’s a given. But we must resist allowing our anxieties to push us into factionalism. Instead, we place our trust together in Christ, the only Head of the church, as the source of our authority and final point of our accountability. His nonanxious presence leads us from fear to hope.

Our Hope Is Deepening

There’s inspirational power in the clarity of purpose that comes in following God’s call. When I reflect on the past five years, the most significant change I see in the Reformed Church in America is the growing hope and confidence in the work of God’s Spirit through our efforts to be faithful as we follow Christ in mission. That’s because we yearn to participate in what God is already doing in the world.

Each of us here has heard God’s call, as ministers of Word and sacrament, and as elders, to equip the church for mission in the world, and we all made a holy promise to do so. We long to give ourselves away for this purpose, so that our lives and our service might be used in some providential way for the growth of God’s kingdom.
You’ve seen it in your midst, in each congregation and location of ministry—the growing “assurance of things hoped for” (Hebrews 11:1), the contagious excitement of taking part in the missional movement of God’s people in the world. In a pastors network, a new church plant, or a consistory training session; when you partake of bread and wine around the table; as you dig a well in Malawi, study a church health assessment, engage in ministry with those trapped in addictions, or celebrate the adult baptisms of new believers—you realize that you are caught up in work of the Spirit that is far beyond your control. You stand in awe suddenly recognizing that this is a “God thing.” And you want to give your life away to such a purpose.

No bureaucratic program will ever inspire such hope. No wish for denominational success will ever instill such spiritual calling and purpose. Rather, the hope that is deepening in our midst comes from hearing the call to join in God’s missional purposes in the world, and then witness what happens when we covenant with others to give our lives away.

In Romans 5, Paul writes:

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God...and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us (vv. 1-2, 5).

The direction of our hope, and our only motive for achievement, is the glory of God. That is the hope of all we do through Our Call: “empowering fruitful and faithful ministries for the glory of God.”

In San Antonio at “One Thing,” I met with pastors of congregations who were either considering or committed to becoming “parenting churches,” those that would begin at least one new congregation. The men and women in the room all were serving in RCA churches characterized by solid, stable ministry. These are pastors who are gifted and who most would call successful.

All of them could easily continue what they were doing, maintaining ministry, balancing budgets, serving needs, and basically running out the clock to retirement. I suspect there are many of us in this room who have that same option.

But is that what we signed up for? Is that what compelled us when we first heard and responded to God’s call? Or is our heart’s desire to give our lives away for the sake of God’s coming kingdom—for this kingdom to come, and God’s will to be done, on earth—in our neighborhood, our communities, our country, our world—as it is in heaven?

That was the driving vision five years ago when General Synod embraced Our Call. And this focused purpose is energizing pastors and congregational leaders, like those I met with in San Antonio, drawing them into new missional ventures. It’s also attracting new pastors into our life, particularly those from Hispanic, African American, and Asian backgrounds who seek a denominational home to exercise their gifts of ministry. The RCA’s focused mission and vision, carried out through Our Call, means that others see us in a covenanted denominational community united in missional purpose rather than bound by administrative regulation.

Hope inspired by the clarity of our missional purpose is also globally contagious. The newly established Reformed Evangelical Church in Myanmar had its birth and relationship with the RCA when Christians in this highly repressive country first read our Statement of Mission and Vision on the RCA website. Now this new denomination, as a strong mission
partner, is actively raising up leaders and planting churches throughout a country that is just four percent Christian.

Further, RCA pastors like Andres Serrano and Brigido Cabrera, both natives of the Dominican Republic and both inspired by our commitment to be missional and Reformed, have nurtured an amazing network of pastors and congregations in that country. In partnership with our global mission efforts, the plan now is to launch the Iglesia Reformada Dominicana—an indigenous Reformed denomination in the Dominican Republic in close partnership with the RCA.

This is what has been happening through the hope inspired by Our Call. But it also challenges us to ask more basic questions. How will we measure our faithfulness, and be held accountable, to Our Call in the coming five years? In other words, as Reggie McNeal challenged us at “One Thing,” what’s the scorecard?

Our focus, it seems to me, is still so much on what happens within our congregations. We slice and dice all the numbers about who’s coming in and who’s going out of our churches. But, friends, hear this: the church isn’t the final destination for God’s grace and love. The world is. It’s the world that God so loved…We’re called to be the very presence of Jesus Christ in the world…We follow Christ in mission in a lost and broken world…

Why do we only seem to measure what happens in our congregations? Why don’t we try to measure the missional engagement those in our congregations have in the world? In the second half of Our Call, how might this become our focus, and our constant preoccupation?

So many of our congregations, it seems to me, are still guided by the paradigm of “come and see.” Just come into the congregation. Show up. Sit in our pews, come to our classes, bring a dish to our potlucks. See what a good time of fellowship we have. And that is all true, and good.

But in our time, we need to be guided by a different paradigm: “go and be.” The church is gathered in order to be sent. The word we who are baptized most need to hear is “go.” Go in order to be Christ’s presence in the world. Go to be the bearer of good news, and the healer of broken places.

Don’t come and see the church. Go and be the church.

So at the mid-point of this common journey known as Our Call, begun by General Synod in 2003, we see that:

- Our churches are multiplying
- Our face is changing
- Our leaders are renewing
- Our anxiety is rising
- Our hope is deepening.

And in the end, five years from now, this hope will not disappoint us. Why? Not because of focused programs, or sound strategies, or careful plans, despite their importance. Rather, our hope will not be disappointed because God’s love has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

As we move into the next five years, let that be the wellspring of our hope, our creativity, our surrender, and our joy.

To God be the glory!
REPORT OF THE GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL SERVING AS THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL SYNOD

But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body’s growth in building itself up in love (Ephesians 4:15-16).

The Son of God gathers, preserves and protects the church by his Spirit and his Word (Heidelberg Catechism, Answer 54). The church exists to announce, teach, and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. The church speaks and it acts. For those of us in the Reformed tradition, the church governs its life and it determines how best to carry out its mission through its assemblies.

God seeks certain characteristics, and the world also watches to see if those characteristics are evident in our life and work together. Our ability to go forth and preach the gospel is the work of our congregations and the denomination. Together we are a body of committed believers in covenant with one another. Christ’s mission is enhanced when the Word of God and our love for each other is the foundation for order, discipline, and effectiveness. This Reformed understanding of the church and the manner through which we govern our life together is foundational to Our Call.

Our prayer throughout the year and as we meet as a General Synod body is that our unity and attention to governance will glorify God.

The General Synod Council is established by and responsible to the General Synod. It shall act as the executive committee of the General Synod and it shall administer the affairs of the Reformed Church in America between the sessions of the General Synod. It shall implement decisions, policies, and programs of the General Synod through proper channels and agencies. It shall support, strengthen, and coordinate the work of the several 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 (BCO, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 7, Section 1).

The General Synod Council serves “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” (BCO, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 6a).

For a full listing of the responsibilities of the General Synod Council, delegates will want to refer to the Bylaws of the General Synod (Book of Church Order, Chapter 3, Part 1, Article 3, Section 6). These bylaws are reprinted in this workbook and can be found behind the Index/Orientation tab.

The work of the General Synod Council (GSC) as directed by previous General Synods is being reported to the 2008 General Synod in two ways:

1. In this General Synod Workbook, where GSC reports on:
   • Matters of governance.
   • Work the GSC has done with respect to the meeting of the General Synod.
   • Matters of the GSC’s own organization, including oversight and stewardship of the financial resources given to GSC.
• GSC’s support and supervision of denominational staff and the general secretary.
• The work of the GSC committees, teams, and racial and ethnic councils.
• A general overview of the work of the church

2. Through Mission and Ministry Forums, which will bring General Synod delegates up to date on GSC’s oversight of the mission and ministry assigned to it by previous General Synods under the rubric of Our Call, the denomination’s ten-year goal. Referrals addressed to the GSC by previous General Synods will be dealt with throughout the forums.

Review of Regional Synod Minutes

The General Synod office received and read the 2007 minutes of the regional synods of Albany, Canada, the Far West, the Great Lakes, the Heartland, Mid-America, the Mid-Atlantic, and New York. The minutes were found to be in order.

Ad Interim Appointments

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

To the General Synod Council:

Rev. Ned Beadel (Regional Synod of the Far West, Class of 2010)

If members are serving on an ongoing basis, their names are submitted for General Synod approval in the report of the Commission on Nominations.

R-1
To approve the ad interim appointment. (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 agenda and schedule of the General Synod as presented in the General Synod Workbook. (ADOPTED)

General Synod Offering

The president of the General Synod designated the mission offerings for China earthquake relief, Myanmar cyclone relief, and the Kenya well project for drought relief.

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 on classes’ payments of 2007 and 2008 General Synod assessments and reported whether there were any delegates who could not be seated because of irregularities.
Amendments to the Book of Church Order

The General Synod of 2007 adopted and referred to the classes for approval two amendments to the Book of Church Order. The amendments are recorded in the 2007 Minutes of the General Synod as noted.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approved</th>
<th>Disapproved</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Judicial Bodies</td>
<td>*24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(MGS 2007, R-83, pp. 294-299)</td>
<td>(Chapter 2, Parts I through III and the Preamble)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Ministers in Union Churches</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(MGS 2007, R-85, p. 300)</td>
<td>(Chapter 1, Part I, Article 7, Section 2u)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-3</td>
<td>To declare amendment 2 to be approved and that it be incorporated into the 2008 edition of the Book of Church Order. (ADOPTED)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*The proposed amendment regarding judicial bodies did not receive the required approval by two-thirds of the forty-five classes and will not be incorporated into the 2008 revision of the Book of Church Order.

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

The General Synod voted in 2007 (MGS 2007, R-84, p. 299-300) a revision to the Book of Church Order (Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 6a) regarding membership of the General Synod’s Judicial Business Commission contingent upon the judicial bodies amendments, as noted above, being approved by the classes. Because those amendments did not receive the required two-thirds approval of the classes, the proposed amendment to Chapter 3 is no longer relevant; therefore, no declarative recommendation is offered.

Appointment of the 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). Upon the resignation of Susan Converse in February 2008 the General Synod Council appointed Barbara Boers as the acting treasurer during the transition period. At its annual meeting in March 2008 the GSC appointed Barbara Boers treasurer and chief financial officer.

R-4
To appoint Barbara Boers as 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, to have authority to sign legal documents for the corporation of the General Synod, it is necessary to approve the following recommendation:
To appoint the Rev. Kenneth Bradsell as assistant secretary of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America. (ADOPTED)

General Synod Planning Team

A General Synod planning team comprised of the General Synod president, current and former members of the GSC, delegates to former General Synod meetings, members of commissions, and staff work on behalf of the GSC annually to propose an agenda, schedule, worship, and special events and activities for the annual meeting. The team members this year were: Michelle Chahine, Eric Johnson, John Ornee, Dennis TeBeest, Lori Walber, and staff: Juel Grevenstuk, Jeffrey Japinga, Deborah Morris, Kenneth Bradsell (facilitator), and Sharon Van Gelderen (recorder). The team reported to the GSC at its spring meeting. The plan of meeting outlined below was reviewed and adopted.

The team understood from the beginning of its work on the 2008 synod that the meeting, including its worship, fellowship, guest speakers, and the conduct of business, as in recent years, must be designed in ways that convey to all participants the commitment of the RCA to its stated mission and vision, and to accomplishing the General Synod’s goals as described within Our Call.

The officers, the general secretary, and many commissions urged the team to keep in mind as it planned the 2008 synod to:

1. Continue the practice begun in 2007 of making provision for all delegates to discuss and respond to issues that seem to have the widest impact on the life and mission of the church.
2. Make better use of time so that reports of all General Synod commissions and other entities get fuller consideration by the delegates.
3. Utilize the arrangement of delegates at round tables for discussion, discernment, and the formation of community.
4. Give priority to the referrals to GSC from last year’s synod encouraging the church to give priority within Our Call to its stated commitments to become fully racially and ethnically diverse, to encourage a multiracial future denominationally and in our congregations, and to address racism in the church and in the communities where we engage in ministry.

The team has attempted to address these concerns in its plan for the meeting.

The team continues to understand that its ongoing task on behalf of the GSC is to offer ways to transform the meeting of the synod so that the manner in which the church does its work as an assembly reflects the church’s values—in essence, that we act with each other in ways that model the body of Christ in the world.

Values Established By the General Synod

The values established by the 2007 General Synod were reviewed and restated:

General Synod is a place where the church has the opportunity to live into its future. Hope is defined as God going before us and making all things new. The synod engages in transformational work when:

- It uses means that enable knowledge, understanding, and full insight...
  ...of issues.
  ...of the work of the larger church.
  ...of relationship/community.
• There is empowerment of everyone as a matter of faithfulness to the gospel (for example, for this year, emphasis on becoming a multiracial church).
• Delegates are affirmed in the knowledge that they are sons and daughters of Jesus Christ and recognize that identity in each other.
• Delegates trust and remember that the Spirit is working in and through local congregations; in and through the agencies, assemblies, and entities of the church; and in and through the General Synod.
• Delegates, guests, officers, and staff are hospitable to one another.
• The agenda for meeting integrates work, worship, fellowship, and prayer.

Plan for General Synod 2008

Opening worship, which includes communion, will be held in Dimnent Chapel on the campus of Hope College. The Rev. En Young Kim, pastor at Reformed Church of Closter in Closter, New Jersey, will be the preacher.

Evening prayers (prayer at the close of the day) will conclude the daily sessions in the DeVos Fieldhouse.

All worship services (with the exception of opening worship) will be held in a worship center within the DeVos Fieldhouse. The worship themes are:

- Friday: “A Missional Church Is a Communal Church”
- Saturday: “A Missional Church Is a Public Presence”
- Monday: “A Missional Church Has a Confident Witness”
- Tuesday: “A Missional Church Has a Local or Specific Context”

On Sunday the synod will worship in area churches.

Facilities/Arrangements

The General Synod will meet on the campus of Hope College in Holland, Michigan. The plenary meetings and worship will be in the DeVos Fieldhouse. Delegates will be seated at round-top tables. Seating will be arranged so that an equal number of ministers and elders are at each table. Seating will be assigned but delegates will no longer be seated alphabetically. Corresponding delegates (including GSC members and ecumenical delegates) will be seated throughout the plenary space.

Plenary Procedures

Issue Advisory Committees

All synod delegates have been assigned to one of twenty issue advisory committees. The committees will each receive and review items of business assigned to them in the agenda before the synod. The committees will:

• Review the reports and any overtures related to the issue.
• Advise the General Synod on the specific recommendation(s) contained in the reports they review.
• If necessary, recommend additional or alternative action in response to the reports.
• Recommend action in response to any overtures related to the issue.

The moderators of the advisory committees will select a subcommittee of their own number to develop a summary report that encompasses the work of all of the advisory committees; they will also create a combined report that includes recommendations for consideration and action by the General Synod.
In the plenary session delegates will have an opportunity to ask clarifying questions prior to debate. Debate will be carried out much as it has been done in previous years with the exception that clear time limits will be established at the start of debate and announced by the president or presiding officer. At the conclusion of debate the delegates will vote using electronic keypads.

“Our Call” Reports from the GSC

Reports related to GSC mission and ministry areas will be addressed in Mission and Ministry Forums. Delegates will self-select at their plenary tables which forums they will attend so that each plenary table has representation at each of the forums. Each forum will have a moderator and designated representation from GSC and agency staff, and from the Committee of Reference (GSC). The forums are designed primarily to inform delegates about the work of the GSC to fulfill Our Call as directed by previous General Synods. Recommendations within the various GSC Workbook reports (for example, the recommendation related to Partnership-in-Missions shares) will be considered in the forums and will be reported on in the plenary for action along with a summary review of the forum’s work.

Roundtable Discussion

Reports that will go directly to the plenary, and which will be discussed at tables for discernment and input, include:

- Reports from the RCA seminaries and the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency (except bylaws changes).
- Reports from the RCA colleges.
- Reports identified by the Committee of Reference as appropriate for a “consent” agenda.
- Reports that can benefit from discussions at each table during the plenary session (e.g., a commission seeking wider discussion of work in progress).

Overtures from Assemblies

Overtures related to the Issue Advisory Committees will be addressed in that process. Some overtures may be assigned to “technical” advisory groups (described below). The GSC has formed an Overtures and New Business Advisory Committee to handle items that cannot be addressed in other ways.

New Business

Synod is given two opportunities to bring new business, which is then referred automatically to the Committee of Reference (GSC) for assignment. New business will be sent to the Overtures and New Business Advisory Committee or be held and responded to directly by the Committee of Reference (as it has in past years).

Proposals from the President and General Secretary

Proposals from the President and General Secretary will be addressed in the same manner as new business.

Order and Governance Advisory Committee

Matters addressing church order and governance (e.g., bylaws) have been assigned to an Order and Governance Advisory Committee of ten to fifteen members. The committee will report its advice to synod.
General Synod Meeting Locations

The current locations for annual meetings of the General Synod are listed below. The General Synod is able to respond to invitations from the assemblies of the church to meet in other locations. Planning for the meeting requires invitations to be submitted at least two years in advance of the proposed meeting.

2009 - Hope College, Holland, Michigan (June 4-9)
2010 - Northwestern College, Orange City, Iowa (June 3-8)
2011 - Northwestern College, Orange City, Iowa
2012 - Central College, Pella, Iowa
2013 - Central College, Pella, Iowa

OVERVIEW OF THE GSC’S WORK ON MATTERS OF ITS INTERNAL GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

During the past year the General Synod Council continued to operate internally according to its modifications of a not-for-profit governance practice known as “policy governance” developed by Dr. John and Miriam Carver. Policy governance has allowed the GSC to enhance its ability to monitor various “ends” and objectives established by it to fulfill the General Synod’s directives regarding Our Call, the General Synod’s ten-year goal for mission and ministry. Policy governance has also enhanced the GSC’s ability to both support and monitor the work of its general secretary and the employed staff of the denomination through a series of “limitations” policies. The GSC has also established and holds itself accountable for its own work through polices concerning its internal “governance” and its relationships with the general secretary and staff.

Other agencies and committees of the General Synod and the General Synod Council including the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency and the Board of Benefits Services are currently reviewing the “policy governance” approach to their areas of responsibility and may begin implementation in the coming year. The GSC is able to provide staff support to entities and assemblies of the church interested in learning more about policy governance. Contact should be made through the General Synod office.

Office and Staff Location

Over the past year, the GSC has closely monitored the transition of the financial services and human resources staffs from its New York location to its Grand Rapids location. While the decision to transition these functions and staff to the Grand Rapids office was properly within the scope of the general secretary’s authority, the potential impact of such changes—on the finances, ministry, and personnel of the GSC, and on the overall fabric of the RCA—made this a matter for regular and ongoing GSC oversight and reporting.

The proposal to transition the finance office and staff from the New York office to the Grand Rapids office was presented to the GSC after an unsuccessful, year-long search during 2006 and 2007 for a new controller in New York within the GSC’s salary and benefits range. The decision to seek a controller in Grand Rapids, however, also required the transition of positions that report to the controller. In a presentation last June, GSC received estimates that the total cost for this transition would not exceed $500,000 and that this one-time expense would be fully recovered within four to five years, based on estimated savings in operating expenses of $110,000 annually. These transition costs also had the potential to lower RCA general reserves below the three-month operating expenses amount required by the General Synod Council, an action that had to be reported to and approved by the GSC.
In reality, the transition costs have been less than estimated and the savings have been significantly more. Actual transition costs have been $400,000, 20 percent below estimates, with the transition now fully completed, and overall savings in operating expenses are now estimated to be $250,000 annually. This will allow full payback of transition costs in less than two years. These savings have already been incorporated into this year’s budget, allowing, for example, the budget to absorb an unfunded mandate for the office of multiracial initiatives. In addition, the New York office space formerly occupied by finance staff will be sublet to another church organization, generating $70,000 per year in additional revenue (but also allowing for the reclaiming of that space if needed in the future). This revenue is included in the $250,000 cost savings.

Transitions, however, are not simply about dollars. Transitions affect people, and they affect the organizations served by those people and offices. That meant severance packages for outgoing finance staff needed to be at or above the accepted standard for non-profits in the New York metropolitan area, and they were. Similarly, because of the RCA’s commitment to a multiracial future, it was essential that the transition not result in an overall reduction in racial diversity present on GSC staff. In fact, the transition did not have an adverse affect on the overall racial diversity of the GSC staff. In addition, the commitment remains that Earl James, coordinator for multiracial initiatives and social justice, will begin working out of the New York office in 2009, after spending his initial eighteen months on staff in the Grand Rapids office.

As part of its commitment to a secure and ongoing staff presence in New York specifically, and within our Eastern footprint generally, the RCA has signed a new three-year lease for its office space at the Interchurch Center. The RCA is one of the founding partners in the formation of the Interchurch Center and continues to be among the building’s key tenants. About thirty staff working in the offices of the General Synod, Benefits Services, the racial and ethnic councils, women’s ministry, consistory training, and pastoral services are based in the New York office. This ongoing commitment to maintain staff serving on the East Coast will remain an essential part of RCA ministry, because of the number of RCA congregations and pastors there, because of our historic rootedness and legacy there, and because of the racial diversity this region of the church brings to the RCA and its ministries.

The RCA will also continue its decades-long practice of one staff dispersed in regions throughout the church, in order to best meet the needs of the full denomination. In addition to the thirty-plus staff in New York, other denominational staff are based in offices in Schenectady, New York (one GSC staff plus regional synod staff), Grand Rapids, Michigan (about fifty full- and part-time GSC staff, plus Church Herald and regional synod staff), Chicago, Illinois (two GSC staff), Orange City, Iowa (four GSC staff plus regional synod staff), and Paramount and Temecula, California (five GSC staff). Staff will continue to be placed in locations that best meet the needs of the denomination as a whole. In addition, all office-location decisions must address the RCA’s commitment to be a multiracial church, and must live out the GSC’s commitment to excellent stewardship of the church’s resources.

Significant change and transition is not easy and this process was no exception. Lessons were learned that will aid in future personnel matters. This includes making sure everyone affected is involved in these decisions and is aware of the process. It’s also important to recognize that those affected by this transition, both the outgoing staff and incoming staff, worked together to ensure uninterrupted financial service for the denomination. This was a remarkable effort and highlights the dedication and professionalism of these individuals. We praise God for these colleagues who have a legacy of exceptional service and continue to play a pivotal role in the mission and ministry of their RCA congregations.
RCA Salary Structure for FY2009

In order to carry out this policy a new salary classification system has been developed. The former classification system was first developed in the late 1960s under the direction of the General Synod Executive Committee by the Rev. Alvin J. Poppen when he served as the RCA’s coordinator for human resources on the staff of the General Program Council. This system remained unchanged for over thirty years. It has over the years proven to be an inequitable system due to lack of regional sensitivity as it pertains to cost of living.

The new system, developed by The Employers’ Association, a Grand Rapids, Michigan, not-for-profit human resources support group incorporated in 1939, considers two key factors. First, an evaluation system was utilized to ascertain that internal equity was re-established for all positions based on their ultimate contribution to the RCA’s mission and vision. Secondly, all internal positions were benchmarked against externally appropriate positions (by responsibility) through the use of salary compensation surveys in the private, non-profit, and church sectors, as well as relative comparison of jobs in national and regional areas. This new system is sensitive to regional differences in cost of living and takes into account our varied benefit package.

This new system moves away from our current six-level classification system to a model that utilizes fourteen levels. The new levels span from grade 10 to 23; Grade 10 represents the most junior clerical positions and Grade 23 represents the top executive position, general secretary. The following is a rough correlation between the two systems:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification(s)</th>
<th>Grade(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VIA and VIB</td>
<td>10 and 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>12 and 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>IIIA and III B</td>
<td>15, 16, and 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>18, 19, 20, 21, and 22</td>
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<td>I</td>
<td>23</td>
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The new classification system evaluates positions based on duties and tasks as identified by the position incumbent and as verified/validated by his or her manager. As positions change and duties are modified, the system allows for reevaluation and placement of employees into different appropriate ranges. It also provides management with objective criteria when informing employees what must be done to advance within both the organization and within his or her assigned pay range. The system, when reviewed and updated regularly based on competitive benchmark pay data (as opposed to applying across the board adjustments that may not reflect actual pay practices) will serve the church well as it seeks to advance God’s kingdom.

General Secretary’s Performance Review

Among the responsibilities assigned in the Book of Church Order to the General Synod Council (GSC) is “to select and supervise a General Secretary...” (Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section h). The GSC carries out its supervisory responsibility in three ways:

- In its standard practice of “policy governance” every meeting of the GSC has elements within it that provide a continuing review of the general secretary’s performance. At each meeting the GSC reviews the “monitoring reports” it has received from the general secretary. These monitoring reports are signed and dated by the general secretary, who, in the course of a year, will submit at least one for each of the GSC’s written “executive limitations” and “ends” policies. Each report uses a standard format and provides:
The general secretary’s interpretation of the GSC’s written policies governing his work and the work of the entire GSC staff.

- Actions taken in the review period to fulfill or respond to policies.
- Data to support the content of the reports.
- A statement of progress (for reports on “ends” such as revitalization) or compliance or non-compliance (for reports on “executive limitations” such as required financial procedures) for each policy reviewed.

Reports of noncompliance are accompanied by a written or oral report regarding reasons and a plan for returning to compliance. Agendas for the fall and spring GSC meetings provide ample time for the GSC to discuss these monitoring reports, to ask the general secretary and his direct reports for comments on the reports and the related policies, and to consider changes in the policies. The GSC reviews all policies at least annually.

- Through its Personnel and Evaluation Committee the GSC conducts an annual performance review of the general secretary’s work in relationship to the GSC; his broader responsibilities for the work of the General Synod and all of its related boards, agencies, and institutions; and his duties as the denomination’s ecumenical officer. The committee conducts this review in a full-day interview, and then prepares a written report that is shared in an executive session with the entire GSC. The committee also recommends to the GSC any adjustment in the general secretary’s annual compensation.

- Every third year the GSC conducts a “super-review” that includes an evaluation instrument that is completed by RCA leaders across the church, GSC executive personnel, and ecumenical colleagues. The results of this super-review together with a review of GSC monitoring reports and the standard annual review form the basis of a comprehensive written report prepared by the Personnel and Evaluation Committee that is shared with the GSC in executive session.

The GSC completed an annual review of the general secretary in the fall of 2007 and conducted the three-year super-review in February and March 2008. In its written report in March the committee noted for particular commendation: a) the wide embrace across all regions of the RCA of the General Synod’s ten-year goal, Our Call, and the progress in achieving/exceeding the ambitious benchmarks set by the GSC; b) the leadership provided by the general secretary to streamline and enhance the church’s finance operations, including the decision to relocate these functions to the Michigan Regional Center in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where the finance team is able to work more closely with ministry and mission personnel at a significantly reduced cost; c) the sense of teamwork and camaraderie expressed by senior staff colleagues attributed to the general secretary’s servant leadership style and attitude; d) the general secretary’s wide respect across the RCA and in the greater church in North America and worldwide where his work “is a blessing to the Church of Jesus Christ and reflects very positively on the RCA’s commitment to ecumenism.”

The GSC also noted some areas of ongoing concern. These included encouragement to build greater balance into his schedule, including working more strategically to delegate responsibilities and to give greater priority to writing; to continue to surround himself with staff colleagues who are able to provide wise advice and counsel; to work with his senior colleagues to improve communication across the entire staff; and to find opportunities to be more personally and informally present with members of the entire staff.

The GSC, as part of its continuing dialogue with the general secretary, is also reviewing the creation of a standing relationship and review committee, replacing the current Personnel
and Evaluation Committee, to oversee both the general secretary’s annual reviews and pastoral care for him, should the General Synod approve the GSC’s revised bylaws. In addition to responsibility for the regular performance review process, this committee would have an expanded role to provide pastoral care for the general secretary, and would be a group with whom he could seek informal counsel and advice. The committee would also ensure the GSC’s compliance with its own policies with respect to the general secretary.

**General Synod Council Bylaws**

It was determined by the General Synod Council that the council bylaws required amendment and restatement to facilitate the council’s ability to operate according to a policy governance organizational model and to take fuller advantage of certain provisions of the New York State not-for-profit corporation laws. The proposed amendments to the bylaws were presented to the 2007 General Synod, which instructed the Commission on Church Order in consultation with the Commission on Theology to review the proposed bylaws as to their conformity with the Constitution of the RCA and report to the 2008 General Synod (MGS 2007, R-7, p. 51).

Neither commission found anything in the proposed bylaws that did not conform to the Constitution of the RCA. However, both commissions noted that non-constitutional improvements could be made—which was communicated to the GSC. The issues raised by the commissions were addressed by the GSC with the resulting version of the bylaws, which are found here, better reflecting the intent and spirit of the RCA Constitution. The full report of the Commission on Church Order (CCO) can be found in the “Commissions” section of these minutes.

To facilitate a clearer understanding of the final version of the bylaws, the amendments offered at synod are presented, then the bylaws are presented as adopted by the 2008 General Synod. The originally proposed strike out and underline version is provided after the adopted version for comparison.

The Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance offered amendments to the proposed GSC bylaws revision which were adopted by the synod. These additions and deletions to the proposed strikeout and underline version found on pages 56-57 and 61-62 are in italic.

5.5 A majority of the voting members of the GSC shall constitute a quorum. An affirmative vote of a majority of the voting members of the GSC shall be necessary to take any action, but a lesser number present may adjourn the meeting to a later date. Any written or electronically transmitted (including e-mail or facsimile transmission) consent by any member of the GSC to any action taken at a meeting of the members of the GSC shall for all purposes (including determining the effectiveness of the action and determining the presence of a quorum for such meeting) be treated in the same manner as if the member providing the written or electronically transmitted consent had in fact attended the meeting and cast a vote in favor of the action consented to.

Reason:
“It is a fundamental principle of parliamentary law that the right to vote is limited to the members of an organization who are actually present at the time the vote is taken in a legal meeting” (Robert’s Rules of Order, Newly Revised, p. 408).

5 All meetings shall be opened and closed with prayer. Brief written summaries of actions taken by GSC shall be published for general distribution not later than thirty days after the conclusion of any GSC meeting. Complete minutes shall be published for general distribution in a timely manner.
Reason:
No mention of the general distribution of the minutes was found in the bylaws.

8.4 The GSC may terminate the employment of the general secretary.

Reason:
No mention was made of the power to terminate the general secretary in the proposed bylaws.

9.1 The duties and responsibilities of the general secretary shall be such as are established in the Book of Church Order and, to the extent not inconsistent therewith, as are specified by these bylaws or as are assigned from time to time by the members of the GSC.

Reason:
The new sentence provides a more comprehensive statement of the duties of the general secretary and is similar to the previous bylaw.

VOTED: To adopt the amendments.

A motion was made to further amend R-6 as follows (deletions are stricken; additions are underlined):

8.4 The GSC may terminate the employment of the general secretary. The GSC may recommend termination of the employment of the General Secretary to the General Synod. Should the general secretary be unable or unwilling to perform the duties of the office, the GSC may appoint an interim general secretary who shall serve until a successor is appointed by the General Synod or until he/she is able to resume the duties of the office.

VOTED: To not adopt the amendment to the amendment.

R-6
To adopt the following revised bylaws of the General Synod Council. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

BYLAWS OF THE GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL OF THE REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA

PREAMBLE

This corporation—the General Synod Council of the Reformed Church in America (GSC)—is established by and responsible to the General Synod. It acts as the executive committee of the General Synod (which is the highest assembly and judicatory in the Reformed Church in America), and it administers the affairs of the Reformed Church in America between the sessions of the General Synod. It implements decisions, policies, and programs of the General Synod through proper channels and agencies, and it supports, strengthens, and coordinates the work of the several 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. (See Reformed Church in America Book of Church Order [BCO] Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 7, Section 1). These bylaws are intended to direct and equip the GSC as it seeks to accomplish the foregoing.
ARTICLE I  NAME

The name of this corporation is “General Synod Council of the Reformed Church in America.”

ARTICLE II  PURPOSE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

2.1 The purpose and responsibilities of the GSC shall be as set forth in its certificate of incorporation, as the same may be amended from time to time, and as set forth in the Bylaws of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America (General Synod), as the same may be amended from time to time (BCO Chapter 3, Part I). Subject to the foregoing, the GSC shall have the power and authority to engage in any and all activities and pursuits that are lawful, reasonably related to the purposes set forth in the certificate of incorporation of the GSC, and not inconsistent with any other provisions of these bylaws.

2.2 The purposes and responsibilities of the GSC shall be fulfilled on a nonprofit basis. No part of the GSC’s earnings shall inure to the benefit of any individual or organization, but such earnings may include reasonable charges designated for administrative services. The GSC is not a “private foundation” as that term is defined in Section 406 of the New York not-for-profit corporation law.

ARTICLE III  MEMBERSHIP

3.1 The GSC is a Type B corporation under the New York not-for-profit corporation law. As such, it has no members within the meaning of New York not-for-profit Corporation Law Section 601. For other purposes (including compliance with certain provisions of the BCO applicable to the corporation), the GSC shall have members who shall be elected or appointed pursuant to, and the number and constituency of which shall be consistent with, BCO Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3. Eligibility for membership on the GSC, the method of election or appointment to such membership, and the term of office for such members shall be as provided for the GSC in the BCO.

3.2 All members shall possess fiduciary responsibilities toward the GSC, including but not limited to the fiduciary duties of care and loyalty. By serving as such, individuals elected as members agree that their personal interests must at all times be subordinated to the best interest of the GSC. Each member is prohibited from using his or her position as a member to advance any personal interest or the interest of any third party or constituency.

ARTICLE IV  RELATIONSHIP TO GENERAL SYNOD; SUBMISSION TO BCO

The BCO (as the same may be amended from time to time) is incorporated herein by reference as though fully set forth. Any amendment to the BCO shall be effective and applicable to the GSC immediately upon its effectiveness. The GSC is and at all times shall be subject to the BCO. Without limiting the generality of the foregoing, the GSC is an “agency” of the General Synod (solely as the term “agency” is defined in BCO Chapter 3, Part I, Article 6). As such, and as the Executive Committee, the Board of Trustees and the Committee of Reference of the General Synod, guidelines and requirements of the GSC are (and in the future may continue to be) established by the General Synod through the BCO. If at any time any conflict or inconsistency exists between the BCO and these bylaws, the BCO shall control.
ARTICLE V MEETINGS

5.1 Meetings of the GSC shall be held as prescribed in the BCO.

5.2 Special meetings may be called by the moderator of the GSC from time to time, and shall be called by the moderator of the GSC upon the written request made to the moderator of the GSC by any five members.

5.3 A written notice of each regular and special meeting, together with an agenda, background information, and proposed actions shall be mailed or sent electronically to each member at least ten days before each regular meeting or five days before a special meeting. The location of each regular or special meeting of the members shall be specified by the moderator of the GSC in the notice 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 and those who are present do not protest their failure to have received such notice.

5.4 The meeting immediately preceding each annual meeting of the General Synod shall be designated as the GSC’s annual meeting unless problems arise which necessitate holding the annual meeting at another time. The location of each annual meeting of the members shall be specified by the moderator of the GSC in the notice of the meeting.

5.5 A majority of the voting members of the GSC shall constitute a quorum. An affirmative vote of a majority of the voting members of the GSC shall be necessary to take any action, but a lesser number present may adjourn the meeting to a later date.

5.6 Any one or more members of the GSC or of any committee of the GSC may participate in a meeting of such board or committee by means of a conference telephone or similar communications equipment allowing all persons participating in the meeting to hear each other at the same time. Participation by such means shall constitute presence in person at a meeting.

5.7 Any action required or permitted to be taken by the members of the GSC or of any committee of the GSC may be taken without a meeting if all such members consent in writing or by electronic transmission (including email and electronic transmission) to the adoption of a resolution authorizing the action. The resolution and the written or electronically transmitted consents thereto by such members shall be filed with the minutes of the proceedings of the GSC or such committee.

5.8 All meetings shall be opened and closed with prayer. Brief written summaries of actions taken by GSC shall be published for general distribution not later than thirty days after the conclusion of any GSC meeting. Complete minutes shall be published for general distribution in a timely manner.

ARTICLE VI OFFICERS

6.1 Officers of the GSC and the terms and conditions governing their election, responsibilities and duration of service all shall be as provided in the BCO. The GSC shall have a moderator who will be elected annually from among the voting members. The election shall be held at the annual meeting of the GSC. The moderator shall hold office until the expiration of the term for which he or she was elected and until his or her successor has been elected and qualified, or until his or her earlier death, resignation or removal. In addition to the officers established in the BCO, the assistant secretary and treasurer of the General Synod shall be the assistant secretary and treasurer, respectively, of the GSC. If
the moderator is not able to serve (whether due to death, resignation or removal), the members may elect such other person as they shall in their discretion select; provided, however, that the office of moderator and of secretary shall not be occupied by the same person.

6.2 The duties and responsibilities of the officers of the GSC shall be such as are established in the BCO and, to the extent not inconsistent therewith, as are assigned from time to time by the members.

6.3 Subject to the foregoing provisions of this Article VI, the secretary shall be responsible for the minute books and other records of the GSC and of the corporate seal, and shall be responsible for the maintenance of regular records of all business transacted by the GSC, including minutes of the meetings of the members of the GSC, and shall otherwise perform such duties and exercise such authority as the GSC may from time to time direct, and the treasurer shall be responsible for the keeping of all monies of the GSC, for the administration of all loans, and for the maintenance of regular records of the financial transactions, and shall make an annual report as well as such other reports as the GSC may from time to time direct.

ARTICLE VII INDEMNIFICATION

7.1 To the fullest extent permitted by applicable law, the GSC may indemnify any person made, or threatened to be made, a party to an action or proceeding other than one by or in the right of the GSC to procure a judgment in its favor, whether civil or criminal, including an action by or in the right of any other corporation of any type or kind, domestic or foreign, or any partnership, joint venture, trust, employee benefit plan or other enterprise, which any member or officer of the GSC served in any capacity at the request of the GSC, by reason of the fact that he or she, or his or her testator or intestate, was a member or officer of the GSC, or served such other corporation, partnership, joint venture, trust, employee benefit plan or other enterprise, against judgments, fines, amounts paid in settlement and reasonable expenses, including attorneys’ fees actually and necessarily incurred as a result of such action or proceeding, or any appeal therein, if such member or officer acted in good faith, for a purpose which he or she reasonably believed to be in, or, in the case of service for any other corporation or any partnership, joint venture, trust, employee benefit plan or other enterprise, not opposed to, the best interests of the GSC and, in criminal actions or proceedings, in addition, had no reasonable cause to believe that his or her conduct was unlawful.

7.2 To the fullest extent permitted by applicable law, the GSC may indemnify any person made, or threatened to be made, a party to an action by or in the right of the GSC to procure a judgment in its favor by reason of the fact that he or she, or his or her testator or intestate, is or was a member or officer of the GSC, or is or was serving at the request of the GSC as a director or officer of any other corporation of any type or kind, domestic or foreign, of any partnership, joint venture, trust, employee benefit plan or other enterprise, against amounts paid in settlement and reasonable expenses, including attorneys’ fees, actually and necessarily incurred by him or her in connection with the defense or settlement of such action, or in connection with an appeal therein, if such member or officer acted in good faith, for a purpose which he or she reasonably believed to be in, or, in the case of service for any other corporation or any partnership, joint venture, trust, employee benefit plan or other enterprise, not opposed to, the best interests of the GSC, except that no indemnification under this paragraph shall be made in respect of (a) a threatened action, or a pending action which is settled or otherwise disposed of, or (b) any claim, issue or matter as to which such person shall have been adjudged to be liable to the GSC, unless and only to the extent that the court in which the action was brought, or, if no action was brought, any court of competent jurisdiction determines upon application that, in view of all the circumstances of the case, the person is fairly and reasonably entitled to indemnity for such portion of the settlement amount and expenses as the court deems proper.
ARTICLE VII  EMPLOYMENT AND TERMINATION OF THE GENERAL SECRETARY

8.1 The general secretary shall be employed by the GSC upon the recommendation of its search committee and only following the prior approval thereof by the General Synod.

8.2 The identification of a general secretary for employment by the GSC shall be accomplished through a search committee. The search committee for the general secretary shall be appointed by the GSC (subject to the remaining provisions of this Section 8.2). The search committee shall have not less than ten nor more than twelve members. Membership on the search committee may include the moderator of the GSC, two other members of the GSC who are appointed by the GSC, and such other members as are needed to provide a committee broadly representative of the Reformed Church in America. All members shall be confessing members of a local church (as that term is defined in the BCO), but need not be members of the GSC. The GSC shall designate the moderator of the search committee. The current general secretary shall not be a member of the search committee.

8.3 The GSC shall be responsible for the supervision of the general secretary. The GSC shall review the performance of the general secretary annually in a manner that is consistent with the GSC’s policies. Not less frequently than every three years the GSC’s review of the general secretary shall be a comprehensive performance review that solicits data from various leaders throughout the Reformed Church in America. For all such reviews of the performance of the general secretary, the GSC may appoint a committee of its own membership to conduct interviews (including with the general secretary), gather data, and prepare a report. The report shall be submitted to the GSC at its annual meeting.

8.4 The GSC may terminate the employment of the general secretary.

ARTICLE IX  DUTIES OF THE GENERAL SECRETARY

9.1 The duties and responsibilities of the general secretary shall be such as are established in the Book of Church Order and, to the extent not inconsistent therewith, as are specified by these bylaws or as are assigned from time to time by the members of the GSC.

9.2 The general secretary shall be a member of the GSC, ex-officio and without vote and shall serve as the secretary of the GSC.

9.3 The general secretary may propose to the GSC policies for its consideration that will enable the GSC to carry out its responsibilities as identified in the BCO and as directed from time to time by the General Synod.

9.4 The general secretary shall be responsible for oversight of staff, implementation of goals and objectives as adopted from time to time by the GSC and the General Synod, and the general administration of the responsibilities and affairs of the GSC.

ARTICLE X  EARNINGS AND ACTIVITIES

No part of the net earnings of the GSC shall inure to the benefit of, or be distributable to, its directors, officers, or other private persons, except that the GSC shall be authorized and empowered to pay reasonable compensation for services rendered and to make payments
and distributions in furtherance of its purpose. No substantial part of the activities of the GSC shall be the carrying on of propaganda, or otherwise attempting to influence legislation, and the GSC shall not participate in, or intervene in (including the publishing or distribution of statements) any political campaign on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate for public office. Notwithstanding any other provision of these bylaws, the GSC shall not exercise any power or carry on any other activities not permitted to be carried on (i) by a corporation exempt from federal income tax under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, or the corresponding section of any future federal tax code, or (ii) by a corporation, contributions to which are deductible under section 170(c)(2) of the Internal Revenue Code, or the corresponding section of any future federal tax code.

ARTICLE XI DISSOLUTION

Subject to an order of a Justice of the Supreme Court of the State of New York, in the event of a liquidation, dissolution, termination or winding up of the GSC (whether voluntary, involuntary or by operation of law), the property and assets of the GSC shall be distributed to a corporation or other organization that is located within the United States, that is specifically designated by the General Synod, and that qualifies as exempt from income tax under Section 501(a) as an organization described in Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1954 as the same may be amended from time to time. The GSC shall designate any such qualifying organization in the plan for the dissolution of the GSC and distribution of its assets. If the GSC is unable to designate such qualifying organization then its designation shall be made by a court of competent jurisdiction in the State of New York.

ARTICLE XII CORPORATE SEAL

The GSC shall have a seal, which shall carry the GSC’s name and such other legend as the GSC may direct.

ARTICLE XIII AMENDMENTS

These bylaws may be amended only if (a) such proposed amendment has been submitted in writing to the members with the notice of the meeting of the GSC at which such amendment is to be considered, (b) such proposed amendment is approved by a majority vote of the voting members at such meeting, and (c) thereafter such proposed amendment is approved by a majority vote of the General Synod. Any such proposed amendment shall become effective promptly upon its approval by the General Synod.

The originally proposed GSC Bylaws in strike-out and underline found below is for reference purposes only. The preceding unmarked version found above was voted upon by the synod.

BYLAWS OF THE GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL OF THE REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA

PREAMBLE

This corporation—the General Synod Council of the Reformed Church in America (GSC)—is established by and responsible to the General Synod. It acts as the executive committee of the General Synod (which is the highest assembly and judiciary in the Reformed Church in America), and it administers the affairs of the Reformed Church in America between the sessions of the General Synod. It implements decisions, policies, and
programs of the General Synod through proper channels and agencies, and it supports, strengthens, and coordinates the work of the several 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. (See Reformed Church in America Book of Church Order [BCO] Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 7, Section 1). These bylaws are intended to direct and equip the GSC as it seeks to accomplish the foregoing.

ARTICLE I NAME

The name of this corporation is “General Synod Council of the Reformed Church in America.” (GSC).

ARTICLE II PURPOSE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

2.1 The purpose and responsibilities of the GSC shall be as set forth in its certificate of incorporation, as the same may be amended from time to time, and as set forth in the Bylaws of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America (General Synod), as the same may be amended from time to time (BCO Chapter 3, Part I). Subject to the foregoing, the GSC shall have the power and authority to engage in any and all activities and pursuits that are lawful, reasonably related to the purposes set forth in the certificate of incorporation of the GSC, and not inconsistent with any other provisions of these bylaws.

2.2 The purposes and responsibilities of the GSC shall be fulfilled on a nonprofit basis. No part of the GSC’s earnings shall inure to the benefit of any individual or organization, but such earnings may include reasonable charges designated for administrative services. The GSC is not a “private foundation” as that term is defined in Section 406 of the New York not-for-profit corporation law. of this corporation is:

2.1 to serve as the Executive Committee of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America (General Synod), 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 (all as more particularly set forth in the provisions of the Reformed Church in America Book of Church Order (BCO), Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 6);

2.2 to serve as the Board of Directors of the General Synod (as provided in the Act of the Legislature of the State of New York that incorporated the General Synod, as amended); and

2.3 to enable the General Synod’s participation in God’s work in the world and to equip congregations and assemblies of the Reformed Church in America (RCA), of which the General Synod is the highest assembly and judiciary, for mission and ministry. As such, it shall establish and review policies for such programs as fulfill these purposes, and its staff shall implement and administer such programs. It shall work with other assemblies, agencies, commissions, institutions, and offices of the RCA to which the General Synod assigns specific responsibility, and as the General Synod directs (all as more particularly set forth in the provisions of BCO Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 6).

ARTICLE III MEMBERSHIP

3.1 The GSC is a Type B corporation under the New York not-for-profit corporation law. As such, it has no members. GSC shall have no “membership” within the meaning of New York Not-for-Profit Corporation Law Section 601. For other purposes (including
compliance with certain provisions of the BCO applicable to the corporation), the GSC shall have twenty-seven members who shall be elected or appointed pursuant to, and the number and constituency of which shall be consistent with, BCO Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3. Eligibility for membership on the GSC, the method of election or appointment to such membership, and the term of office for such members directors shall be as provided for the GSC in the BCO.

3.2 All members shall possess fiduciary responsibilities toward the GSC, including but not limited to the fiduciary duties of care and loyalty. By serving as such, individuals elected as members agree that their personal interests must at all times be subordinated to the best interest of the GSC. Each member is prohibited from using his or her position as a member to advance any personal interest or the interest of any third party or constituency.

ARTICLE IV RELATIONSHIP TO GENERAL SYNOD; SUBMISSION TO BCO

The BCO (as the same may be amended from time to time) is incorporated herein by reference as though fully set forth. Any amendment to the BCO shall be effective and applicable to the GSC immediately upon its effectiveness. The GSC is and at all times shall be subject to the BCO. Without limiting the generality of the foregoing, the GSC is an “agency” of the General Synod (solely as the term “agency” is defined in BCO Chapter 3, Part I, Article 6). As such, and as the Executive Committee, the Board of Trustees and the Committee of Reference of the General Synod, guidelines and requirements of the GSC are (and in the future may continue to be) established by the General Synod through the BCO. If at any time any conflict or inconsistency exists between the BCO and these bylaws, the BCO shall control.

ARTICLE V MEETINGS OF GSC

5.1 Meetings of the GSC shall be held as prescribed in the BCO. Written notice of meetings shall be sent electronically or by mail to each member at least ten days in advance of the meeting.

5.2 Special meetings may be called by the moderator of the GSC from time to time, and shall be called by the moderator of the GSC upon the written request made to the moderator of the GSC by any five members.

5.3 A written notice of each regular and special meeting, together with an agenda, background information, and proposed actions shall be mailed or sent electronically to each member at least ten days before each regular meeting or five days before a special meeting. The location of each regular or special meeting of the members shall be specified by the moderator of the GSC in the notice 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 and those who are present do not protest their failure to have received such notice.

5.4 The meeting immediately preceding each annual meeting of the General Synod shall be designated as the GSC’s annual meeting unless problems arise which necessitate holding the annual meeting at another time. The location of each annual meeting of the members shall be specified by the moderator of the GSC in the notice of the meeting.

5.5 A majority of the voting members of the GSC shall constitute a quorum. An affirmative vote of a majority of the voting members of the GSC shall be necessary to take any action, but a lesser number present may adjourn the meeting to a later date. Any written or electronically transmitted (including email or facsimile transmission) consent by any
member of the GSC to any action taken at a meeting of the members of the GSC shall for all purposes (including determining the effectiveness of the action and determining the presence of a quorum for such meeting) be treated in the same manner as if the member providing the written or electronically transmitted consent had in fact attended the meeting and cast a vote in favor of the action consented to.

5.6 Any one or more members of the GSC or of any committee of the GSC may participate in a meeting of such board or committee by means of a conference telephone or similar communications equipment allowing all persons participating in the meeting to hear each other at the same time. Participation by such means shall constitute presence in person at a meeting.

5.7 Any action required or permitted to be taken by the members of the GSC or of any committee of the GSC may be taken without a meeting if all such members consent in writing or by electronic transmission (including email and electronic transmission) to the adoption of a resolution authorizing the action. The resolution and the written or electronically transmitted consents thereto by such members shall be filed with the minutes of the proceedings of the GSC or such committee.

5.8 All meetings shall be opened and closed with prayer. Brief written summaries of actions taken by GSC shall be published for general distribution not later than thirty days after the conclusion of any GSC meeting.

A meeting may be held without notice if all members are present or if those not present waive due notice of the meeting and those who are present do not protest their failure to have received such notice. A majority of the members shall constitute a quorum. Any one or more members of the GSC may participate in a meeting of GSC by means of a conference telephone or similar communications equipment allowing all persons participating in the meeting to hear each other at the same time. Participation by such means shall constitute presence in person at such meeting.

ARTICLE VI OFFICERS

6.1 Officers of the GSC and the terms and conditions governing their election, responsibilities and duration of service all shall be as provided in the BCO. The GSC shall have a moderator who will be elected annually from among the voting members. The election shall be held at the annual meeting immediately prior to the annual meeting of the GSC General Synod. The moderator shall hold office until the expiration of the term for which he or she was elected and until his or her successor has been elected and qualified, or until his or her earlier death, resignation or removal. In addition to the officers established in the BCO, the assistant secretary and treasurer of the General Synod shall be the assistant secretary and treasurer, respectively, of the GSC. If the moderator any officer is not able to serve (whether due to death, resignation or removal), the members may elect such other person as they shall in their discretion select; provided, however, that the office of moderator and of secretary shall not be occupied by the same person; and provided further that any election so made by the members may be superseded by a subsequent action of the General Synod. The new term of service shall be as provided in the BCO.

6.2 The duties and responsibilities of the officers of the GSC shall be such as are established in the BCO and, to the extent not inconsistent therewith, as are assigned from time to time by the members.

6.3 Subject to the foregoing provisions of this Article VI, the secretary shall be responsible for the minute books and other records of the GSC and of the corporate seal.
and shall be responsible for the maintenance of regular records of all business transacted by the GSC, including minutes of the meetings of the members of the GSC, and shall otherwise perform such duties and exercise such authority as the GSC may from time to time direct, and the treasurer shall be responsible for the keeping of all monies of the GSC, for the administration of all loans, and for the maintenance of regular records of the financial transactions, and shall make an annual report as well as such other reports as the GSC may from time to time direct.

ARTICLE VII

COMMITTEES

7.1 Continuous Committees.

a. GSC shall have four continuously existing committees, each of whose term and composition shall be as hereinafter set forth. They shall be a Steering Committee, a Ministry and Mission Committee (M&M Committee), a Finance and Administration Committee (F&A Committee), and a Personnel and Evaluation Committee (P&E Committee). Each committee shall present its recommendations for action to the entire GSC in plenary session.

b. GSC generally shall operate as a committee of the whole to carry out its responsibilities for long range and strategic planning, communication, development, and personnel policy. Notwithstanding the foregoing, however, GSC may in its discretion assign tasks to one of its four continuously existing committees, to a special committee established by GSC, to a task force or working group established by GSC, or to a committee, council, or agency made up, in whole or in part, of individuals that are not members of GSC. In addition to the foregoing, the four continuously operating committees may operate through subcommittees as needed and may assign work to teams, work groups, and advisory committees made up of individuals that are not members of GSC (all as more particularly set forth in Section 7.5 below). Any one or more members of any such committee or subcommittee may participate in a meeting of such committee or subcommittee by means of a conference telephone or similar communications equipment allowing all persons participating in the meeting to hear each other at the same time. Participation by such means shall constitute presence in person at such meeting.

7.2 Steering Committee

a. The Steering Committee shall consist of the GSC’s officers as provided in the BCO, the president, vice president, the immediate past president of General Synod, the moderator of the GSC, and the chair of the M&M Committee and the F&A Committee. The general secretary of the RCA shall serve on the Steering Committee ex officio and without vote.

b. The moderator of the GSC shall serve as moderator of the Steering Committee.

c. The Steering Committee shall meet at least three times each year. Additional meetings may be scheduled when and as needed. Written notice of 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 and those who are present do not protest their failure to have received such notice. A majority of the members shall constitute a quorum.

d. The Steering Committee shall propose the agenda and schedule for regular and special GSC meetings, and shall propose the assignment of business to committees.
7.3 M&M Committee, F&A Committee

a. Membership of GSC shall, to the extent practicable, be divided evenly between the M&M Committee and the F&A Committee. GSC members shall be appointed by the GSC annually to either the M&M Committee or F&A Committee upon recommendation of the moderator of GSC. Such appointments shall be made at the first meeting of members of GSC following the annual meeting of the General Synod. The beginning of the term of service shall be as provided in the BCO. Chairs for the M&M Committee and F&A Committee shall be elected by GSC annually upon recommendation of the moderator of GSC at the first meeting of members of GSC following the annual meeting of the General Synod. The beginning of the term of service shall be as provided in the BCO.

b. The M&M Committee and F&A Committee each shall meet when and as determined by the agenda and schedule for regular and special meetings of GSC. Additional meetings may be scheduled by the committee chair when and as needed. Notice of regular meetings shall be sent electronically or by mail to each member at least ten 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 and those who are present do not protest their failure to have received such notice. A majority of the members shall constitute a quorum.

c. The duties and responsibilities of the M&M Committee shall be to assist GSC with oversight and continuing development of, and recommendations regarding, the RCA's local and worldwide mission programs. The M&M Committee shall (i) give direction and support to the Ministry staff and the Mission staff, and the staff assigned to support the racial and ethnic councils, (ii) provide liaison with the RCA seminaries and General Synod Commissions, and (iii) facilitate relations between the General Synod and the Ministerial Formation Coordinating Agency.

d. The duties and responsibilities of the F&A Committee shall be to assist GSC with oversight and development of, and recommendations regarding, the financial, legal and administrative governance, business, and other affairs and concerns of the General Synod and GSC. The F&A Committee shall (i) give direction and support to the Finance staff and the Operations and Support staff, and (ii) provide liaison with General Synod Commissions. Issues related to governance, financial oversight, organizational documents, and risk management for each “agency” (solely as the term “agency” is defined in BCO Chapter 3, Part I, Article 6) shall be referred to the F&A Committee.

7.4 Personnel and Evaluation Committee

a. Membership on the P&E Committee shall consist of six people. One member shall be nominated annually by the moderator of GSC, one member shall be nominated annually by the M&M Committee, and one member shall be nominated annually by the F&A Committee. These three members shall be elected annually at the first meeting of members of GSC following the annual meeting of the General Synod. The beginning of the term of membership shall be as provided in the BCO. The general secretary shall serve ex officio and without vote. The final two members shall be nominated by the Commission on Nominations and elected by the General Synod. They shall be confessing members of a local church (as that term is defined in the BCO), they shall have demonstrated expertise in the field of human resources, and they need not be members of GSC. They shall serve a four-year term and may be nominated and appointed for a second four-year term. Following their service (whether for two full four-year terms or for any lesser time period), they shall be ineligible for nomination and appointment for two years.
b. The duties and responsibilities of the P&E Committee shall include the following:

(i) to provide support, counsel and direction for the RCA general secretary.
(ii) to conduct the performance evaluation of the RCA general secretary and report the results thereof to GSC.
(iii) to advise the general secretary on personnel policy including salary ranges, benefits, the performance review process, and position descriptions.

7.5 Use of Subcommittees, Teams, Working Groups, and Advisory Committees

a. GSC (for itself or for committees) may create such subcommittees, teams, working groups or advisory committees as it may from time to time deem necessary or appropriate to focus on particular issues or fulfill particular responsibilities. Any such group so appointed by GSC shall be referred to herein as a “subcommittee.” Members of subcommittees shall be approved by the moderator of GSC, shall be confessing members of a local church (as that term is defined in the BCO), but need not be members of GSC.

b. At the time GSC creates any subcommittee GSC shall specify such subcommittee’s responsibilities or tasks, size, duration of existence, reporting requirements, sources of funding, any particular expertise required of its members, and whether members serve for specified terms (and if so the length of such terms and any criteria for reappointment).

7.6 Racial/Ethnic Councils. In addition to any provisions in the BCO applicable to them, the racial/ethnic councils shall have bylaws. Such bylaws and any amendments thereto shall not be inconsistent with the BCO or these bylaws, and shall be effective only following their review and approval by the GSC.

ARTICLE VII INDEMNIFICATION

7.1 To the fullest extent permitted by applicable law, the GSC may indemnify any person made, or threatened to be made, a party to an action or proceeding other than one by or in the right of the GSC to procure a judgment in its favor, whether civil or criminal, including an action by or in the right of any other corporation of any type or kind, domestic or foreign, or any partnership, joint venture, trust, employee benefit plan or other enterprise, which any member or officer of the GSC served in any capacity at the request of the GSC, by reason of the fact that he or she, or his or her testator or intestate, was a member or officer of the GSC, or served such other corporation, partnership, joint venture, trust, employee benefit plan or other enterprise in any capacity, against judgments, fines, amounts paid in settlement and reasonable expenses, including attorneys’ fees actually and necessarily incurred as a result of such action or proceeding, or any appeal therein, if such member or officer acted in good faith, for a purpose which he or she reasonably believed to be in, or, in the case of service for any other corporation or any partnership, joint venture, trust, employee benefit plan or other enterprise, not opposed to, the best interests of the GSC and, in criminal actions or proceedings, in addition, had no reasonable cause to believe that his or her conduct was unlawful.

7.2 To the fullest extent permitted by applicable law, the GSC may indemnify any person made, or threatened to be made, a party to an action by or in the right of the GSC to procure a judgment in its favor by reason of the fact that he or she, or his or her testator or intestate, is or was a member or officer of the GSC, or is or was serving at the request
of the GSC as a director or officer of any other corporation of any type or kind, domestic or foreign, of any partnership, joint venture, trust, employee benefit plan or other enterprise, against amounts paid in settlement and reasonable expenses, including attorneys’ fees, actually and necessarily incurred by him or her in connection with the defense or settlement of such action, or in connection with an appeal therein, if such member or officer acted in good faith, for a purpose which he or she reasonably believed to be in, or, in the case of service for any other corporation or any partnership, joint venture, trust, employee benefit plan or other enterprise, not opposed to, the best interests of the GSC, except that no indemnification under this paragraph shall be made in respect of (a) a threatened action, or a pending action which is settled or otherwise disposed of, or (b) any claim, issue or matter as to which such person shall have been adjudged to be liable to the GSC, unless and only to the extent that the court in which the action was brought, or, if no action was brought, any court of competent jurisdiction determines upon application that, in view of all the circumstances of the case, the person is fairly and reasonably entitled to indemnity for such portion of the settlement amount and expenses as the court deems proper.

ARTICLE VIII EMPLOYMENT AND TERMINATION OF THE GENERAL SECRETARY

8.1 The general secretary shall be employed by the GSC upon the recommendation of its search committee, in consultation with the Personnel and Evaluation Committee, and only following the prior approval thereof by the General Synod.

8.2 The identification of a general secretary for employment by the GSC shall be accomplished through a search committee. The search committee for the general secretary shall be appointed by the GSC (subject to the remaining provisions of this Section 8.2). The search committee shall have not less than ten nor more than twelve members. Membership on the search committee may include the moderator of the GSC, two other members of the GSC who are appointed by the GSC, first vice moderator and second vice moderator of GSC, and shall include all members of the P&E Committee (other than the current general secretary) and such other members as are needed to provide a committee broadly representative of the Reformed Church in America and the diversity of the church. All members shall be confessing members of a local church (as that term is defined in the BCO), but need not be members of the GSC. The GSC shall designate the moderator of the search committee. The current general secretary shall not be a member of the search committee.

8.3 The GSC shall be responsible for the supervision of the general secretary. The GSC shall review the performance of the general secretary annually in a manner that is consistent with the GSC’s policies. Not less frequently than every three years the GSC’s review of the general secretary shall be a comprehensive performance review that solicits data from various leaders throughout the Reformed Church in America. For all such reviews of the performance of the general secretary, the GSC may appoint a committee of its own membership to conduct interviews (including with the general secretary), gather data, and prepare a report. The report shall be submitted to the GSC at its annual meeting.

The P&E Committee shall be responsible for the performance evaluation of the general secretary. GSC may terminate employment of the general secretary in consultation with the P&E Committee.

ARTICLE IX DUTIES OF THE GENERAL SECRETARY

9.1 The general secretary shall be a member of the GSC, ex-officio and without vote
and shall serve as the secretary of the GSC. The duties and responsibilities of the general secretary shall be such as are established in the BCO and, to the extent not inconsistent therewith, as are assigned from time to time by the members.

9.2 The general secretary may propose to the GSC policies for its consideration and adoption that will enable the GSC to carry out its responsibilities as identified in the BCO and as directed from time to time by the General Synod, including but not limited to personnel and financial policies.

9.3 The general secretary shall serve as the chief executive officer of the GSC and shall be responsible for oversight of staff, implementation of goals and objectives as adopted from time to time by the GSC and of the General Synod, and the general administration of the responsibilities and affairs of the GSC as stated in the BCO and as directed from time to time by the General Synod.

ARTICLE X EARNINGS AND ACTIVITIES

No part of the net earnings of the GSC shall inure to the benefit of, or be distributable to, its directors, officers, or other private persons, except that the GSC shall be authorized and empowered to pay reasonable compensation for services rendered and to make payments and distributions in furtherance of its purpose. No substantial part of the activities of the GSC shall be the carrying on of propaganda, or otherwise attempting to influence legislation, and the GSC shall not participate in, or intervene in (including the publishing or distribution of statements) any political campaign on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate for public office. Notwithstanding any other provision of these bylaws, the GSC shall not exercise any power or carry on any other activities not permitted to be carried on (i) by a corporation exempt from federal income tax under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, or the corresponding section of any future federal tax code, or (ii) by a corporation, contributions to which are deductible under section 170(c)(2) of the Internal Revenue Code, or the corresponding section of any future federal tax code.

ARTICLE XI DISSOLUTION

Subject to an order of a Justice of the Supreme Court of the State of New York, in the event of a liquidation, dissolution, termination or winding up of the GSC (whether voluntary, involuntary or by operation of law), the property and assets of the GSC shall be distributed to a corporation or other organization that is located within the United States, that is specifically designated by the General Synod, and that qualifies as exempt from income tax under Section 501(a) as an organization described in Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1954 as the same may be amended from time to time. The GSC shall designate any such qualifying organization in the plan for the dissolution of the GSC and distribution of its assets. If the GSC is unable to designate such qualifying organization then its designation shall be made by a court of competent jurisdiction in the State of New York.

ARTICLE X CORPORATE FUNDS

All funds of the corporation shall be deposited with such financial institutions as GSC may select through its treasurer or other authorized agent, and shall be subject to withdrawal electronically or by checks signed as authorized or directed by GSC.
ARTICLE XII CORPORATE SEAL

The GSC shall have a seal, which shall carry the GSC’s corporation’s name and such other legend as the GSC may direct.

ARTICLE XII FISCAL YEAR

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

ARTICLE XIII AMENDMENTS

These bylaws may be amended only if (a) such proposed amendment has been submitted in writing to the board members with the notice of the meeting of the GSC at which such amendment is to be considered, (b) such proposed amendment is approved by a majority vote of the voting board members at such meeting, and (c) thereafter such proposed amendment is approved by a majority vote of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America. Any such proposed amendment shall become effective promptly upon its approval by the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America.

REPORT OF THE GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL ON FINANCE

You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God (2 Corinthians 9:11-12).

Financing the Denominational Programs of the Reformed Church in America

Congregational Giving

The funds that support the RCA’s denominational programs and services come primarily from congregations and individuals in the form of voluntary contributions (such as Partnership-in-Mission shares) and assessments. In 2006 the Reformed Church in America’s 166,921 confessing members each contributed, on average, $2,021 to their local congregations. Of that total, 87 percent was spent at the local level for minister salaries and benefits, supplies, utilities, construction and building improvements, and local benevolence programs. General Synod agencies (including the General Synod Council, Board of Benefits Services, Ministerial Formation Certification Agency, Western Theological Seminary, and New Brunswick Theological Seminary) received 2 percent of total congregational giving in the form of assessments and approximately 4 percent in the form of voluntary contributions from individuals and congregations.

Assessments imposed independently by regional synods and classes added an additional 2 percent to the amount provided to the General Synod Council (GSC). Note that the amount of the total assessment varies from one classis to another, based on classis and regional synod charges. However, the General Synod assessment is consistent for all classes. The total assessment for 2008 is $38.37 per confessing member. It is comprised of a $32.34 per-member assessment for the General Synod Council, $1.50 for the Board of Benefits Services Assistance Fund, and $4.53 for theological education. General Synod was asked to approve the 2009 assessment, which information is contained on pages 76-79 of this section.
Funding Sources for Denominational Programs and Services

Financing for the programs and services provided by the denominational agencies listed above comes from a variety of sources. For the General Synod Council and the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency, 31.6 percent of the 2008 budget is projected to come from the General Synod assessment. In addition, it is projected that voluntary contributions from congregations and individuals will provide almost half of the denomination’s total sources of revenue. These funds are primarily designated for specific programs within Global Mission, Church Multiplication and Discipleship, and Leadership and Revitalization that support Our Call, the RCA’s ten-year goal. Other sources of revenue include income from investments.

The Board of Benefits Services is primarily funded from fees paid by retirement and insurance plan participants. In addition, the Board of Benefits Services receives $1.50 per member from assessments for the assistance grant program.

The RCA Church Growth Fund is primarily funded from interest on church building loans and investments.

### Financial Summary - FY2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fiscal Year ending 9/30/07</th>
<th>Assets</th>
<th>Liabilities</th>
<th>Net Assets</th>
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<tr>
<td>General Synod Council</td>
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<td>$(30,158)</td>
<td>$63,746,427</td>
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<td>$15,810,651</td>
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<td>RCA Church Growth Fund</td>
<td>$2,092,111</td>
<td>$855,875</td>
<td>$1,236,236</td>
<td>$9,473,597</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Spending for all corporations in fiscal year 2007 was within the constraints of budget and funds available. Emphasis during the fiscal year and budget planning process was placed on funding the priorities in Our Call. Sufficient unrestricted, undesignated funds are available as a reserve to cover operating expenses according to policy.

The Board of Benefits Services produced positive results for the year and has continued to strengthen its overall financial condition in both the pension and the insurance areas. Pension administrative costs remain stable and the amount of financial assistance provided in addition to standard pension distributions is currently down. The insurance fund’s reserve position has continued to improve.

The RCA Church Growth Fund’s loan portfolio continues to grow; it expanded from $35.57 million in 2006 to $37.53 million in 2007. Please see the more detailed report of the Church Growth Fund on page 138.

### Annual Audit

The 2007 financial statements of the General Synod Council, Board of Benefits Services, and RCA Church Growth Fund were audited by Crowe Chizek and Company LLP,
Certified Public Accountants. Delegates are invited to visit the RCA website to download the complete set of audited financial statements (www.rca.org/finance). The GSC Audit Committee received and reviewed the audited financial statements and management letters for the corporations listed above. Each corporation received an unqualified audit opinion.

The RCA’s Investment Programs

The RCA’s investments are managed by outside investment managers. The treasurer, the Investment Advisory Committee, and the various boards are responsible for ensuring that the RCA’s funds are prudently invested; 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, the RCA Retirement Plan, and the GSC Planned Giving Programs. Individual investments in the RCA Fund and RCA Investment Program are listed in separate audited financial statements that can be found on the RCA website (www.rca.org/finance).

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 (now called the RCA Church Growth Fund). Up to 20 percent of the RCA Fund’s outside depositor assets may be invested in RCA Church Growth Fund (RCACGF) investment notes; however, at present, none of the RCA Fund’s investments are comprised of RCACGF investment notes. In addition to providing a vehicle for raising new capital for the building of churches, the RCA Fund makes it possible for local churches, classes, agencies, and regional synods to receive a competitive rate of return for the short-term investment of surplus funds.

The Bank of New York actively manages a portfolio of fixed income securities (including corporate bonds, U.S. Treasuries and Agencies, and mortgage backed securities), which comprises the bulk of the RCA Fund’s assets. At September 30, 2007, 7.3 percent of its assets were held in two money market accounts to provide liquidity. The total rate of return (which includes unrealized gains and losses) of the assets managed by the Bank of New York was 5.46 percent for fiscal year 2007 versus a 5.80 percent return for the benchmark. RCA Fund participants receive distributions of earned income, i.e., cash earnings, on a quarterly basis. The average distribution to RCA Fund participants was 4.01 percent in fiscal year 2007. At September 30, 2007, the RCA Fund held a reserve of $1,916,446, which represents the accumulated unrealized gains in the fund.

The investment objectives and guidelines for the RCA Fund marketable securities are as follows:

1. **Investment Objectives:** To preserve capital, maximize current return on investments 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 Merrill Lynch U.S. Corporate & Government 1 to 5, A Rated, and above Index. Individual investments may not exceed five 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 quality of the portfolio shall be maintained at a minimum of AA, on a weighted-average 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 securities 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. Legg Mason Investment Advisors serves as investment manager for the portfolio. The investment objective is to generate long-term preservation and growth of capital after inflation. Portfolio investments are diversified among high-quality companies and industry sectors 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 60 to 80 percent stocks and 20 to 40 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 Investment Program’s policy for the fiscal year 2007 was to pay out 5.2 percent of a five-year rolling average market value to be distributed in four equal quarterly installments. The investment policy for future years is to reduce the payout rate to 5.0 percent for the fiscal year 2009 and thereafter. At 12/31/07 and 12/31/06, the market value of the Legg Mason portfolio was $13,317,817 and $14,377,196, respectively. Performance summary statistics follow.

RCA Investment Program - Performance Summary

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 Year</td>
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<tr>
<td>Equity</td>
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<td>Portfolio</td>
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*S&P 500 Total Return Index with Dividends Reinvested
**Lehman Brothers U.S. Aggregate Intermediate Index
RCA Retirement Plan Investments

Since January 2001, Fidelity Investments has served as investment manager and record keeper for the RCA 403(b) Retirement Program and the RCA Retirement Plan. Plan participants may select from a variety of Fidelity and socially screened mutual funds that have been approved by the Board of Benefits Services. Additionally, participants have the option of transferring their account balances from one fund to another within the guidelines established by the Board. A summary of investment returns as of December 31, 2007, follows. Plan participants receive quarterly information concerning performance versus benchmarks of all mutual funds that are part of these plans.

<table>
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<th>Retirement Plan Investment Options - Performance Summary</th>
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<tr>
<td>Balanced/Hybrid</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fidelity Balanced Fund</td>
<td>8.99</td>
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<td>Pax World Balanced Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>60% S&amp;P 500 / 40% LB Agg</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Fidelity Equity Income Fund</td>
<td>1.40</td>
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<td>Russell 3000 Value</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fidelity Disciplined Equity Fund</td>
<td>10.84</td>
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<td>NB Socially Responsive Fund</td>
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<td>S&amp;P 500</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fidelity Growth Co. Fund</td>
<td>19.89</td>
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<tr>
<td>Calvert Large Cap Growth Fund</td>
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<td>Calvert Social Inv. Fund Equity</td>
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<td>Mid-Cap Value</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russell Midcap Value</td>
<td>-1.42</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mid-Cap Growth</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>Fidelity Small Cap Value Fund</td>
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<td>MSIF Sm Co Gr. Portfolio</td>
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<tr>
<td>Calvert World Value Int’l Equity</td>
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<td>Fidelity Diversified Int’l Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>MSCI EAFE (Net MA)</td>
<td>17.33</td>
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Past performance is not necessarily indicative of future results.

Planned Giving Programs

The General Synod Council manages a gift annuity fund and a pooled income fund and acts as trustee for several charitable remainder trusts. State Street Global Advisors has provided investment management and recordkeeping services for the RCA’s planned giving programs. At December 31, 2007, State Street managed RCA planned giving assets totaling $3,187,002. The primary investment objective is to provide for long-term growth of
principal and income without undue exposure to risk. The portfolios are invested in equities, fixed income, and cash equivalents based upon an acceptable asset mix which is conducive to participation in rising markets, while permitting adequate protection in falling markets. The investment mix takes into consideration factors such as the type of life income vehicle, the payout requirements, beneficiary income requirements, and the overall investment policy of the RCA. The investment vehicles are selected State Street mutual funds, which have performed as follows:

GSC Planned Giving Programs - Performance Summary
As of December 31, 2007

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Mutual Fund:</th>
<th>1 Year</th>
<th>3 Year</th>
<th>5 Year</th>
<th>10 Year</th>
<th>Since</th>
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<tr>
<td>Large Cap Equity</td>
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<tr>
<td>SSGA S&amp;P 500 Fund</td>
<td>5.41</td>
<td>8.46</td>
<td>12.69</td>
<td>5.74</td>
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<td>3.45</td>
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<td>12.83</td>
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<tr>
<td>SSGA Small Cap Fund</td>
<td>-13.42</td>
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<td>9.75</td>
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<td>16.41</td>
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<td>Russell 2000 Index</td>
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<td>6.80</td>
<td>16.24</td>
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<tr>
<td>International Equity</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>SSGA Int’l Stock Selection Fund</td>
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<td>17.76</td>
<td>23.08</td>
<td>9.34</td>
<td>7.63</td>
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<tr>
<td>SSGA International Alpha CTF</td>
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<td>16.65</td>
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<td>N/A</td>
<td>21.81</td>
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<td>21.59</td>
<td>8.70</td>
<td>8.57</td>
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<td>Fixed Income</td>
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<td>Vanguard Total Bond Market</td>
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<td>4.60</td>
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<td>Lehman Bros. Intermediate Gov/Credit</td>
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<td>4.32</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>5.76</td>
<td>5.93</td>
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</table>

Mission Investments

In 1970 the General Synod Executive Committee (GSEC) established a mission investment policy, which directed the General Program Council to make “available for mission investment purposes ten percent of the appropriated and unappropriated operating reserve” (GSEC Action 70-50). The main operating criteria for this policy was to assist projects owned and/or controlled by “minority” individuals, groups, or local organizations whose goal was to assist in building economic participation or growth in the community. Maximum returns on investments are not the main objective of mission investments. Rather, factors considered include social impact, need, geographic proximity to RCA mission endeavors and investment participation by other denominations and institutions.

At 9/30/07, mission investments in thirteen banks, credit unions, and other organizations totaled $502,537. Mission investment monies are placed with firms such as the NCC Minority Bail Bond Fund; the Shared Interest Group (which invests in South Africa’s democratic development); Navigators-Kenya (which makes small business loans in impoverished parts of Kenya); Oikocredit USA, Inc. (which makes small business loans in impoverished parts of the world); the Central Appalachian People’s Federal Credit Union; Fonkoze USA, Inc. (which makes micro-credit loans in Haiti); the Wisconsin Coordinating Council on Nicaragua (which makes micro-credit loans and encourages fair trade practices in Nicaragua); and the Reformed Church in Mozambique.
A committee whose members are GSC staff meets regularly to analyze the portfolio, and is currently seeking additional opportunities for mission investing.

**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 2007, listed six newly formed churches to be added, seventeen name/address changes, one revised tax identification number assigned by the IRS, and two 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 or agency’s tax exempt status under section 501(c)(3) of the IRS code.

**FY2009 PROPOSED GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL BUDGET**

The fiscal year 2009 budget for the General Synod Council continues to focus on the Our Call initiatives, including the reallocation of assessment funds for church multiplication and communication.

**General Framework and Assumptions:**

- Assessments are used to cover infrastructure costs as well as expenses related to Our Call. Assessment income is budgeted at a 3.5 percent increase per RCA member.
- The 2009 budget includes increased support for the work of church multiplication.
- The Global Mission budget is funded primarily by Partnership-in-Mission share contributions and designated investment income.
- The GSC Development Office provides fundraising services for all areas of GSC, including Global Mission. Contribution income is budgeted at $600,000, which is approximately the same amount as the 2008 amount.
- Basic service charges are charged to the Board of Benefits Services and RCA Church Growth Fund based on services provided by GSC staff for administrative functions such as finance services and information technology support.
- Investment income is provided to budget areas based on designations. Undesignated investment income is allocated to program and infrastructure budget areas based on decisions made by the general secretary and cluster facilitators.
- A percentage of the overall Global Mission budget will continue to be used to create a “Mission Is One” fund to support the work of church multiplication and discipleship. The amount is reduced by $100,000 in FY2009.
- Funding for the 2009 budget from restricted funds has been reduced by approximately $300,000, allowing these funds to be available in case of an unanticipated emergency.
Major Assumptions and Strategies for the FY2009 General Synod Council Budget

These are the major assumptions and principles supporting the proposed FY2009 General Synod Council budget.

1. Resources are being allocated to support the ten-year goal of revitalizing existing congregations and starting new congregations. Of the $600,000 that the GSC Development Office has committed to raise, $250,000 is targeted to fund programs in Church Multiplication and Discipleship; $200,000 to programs in Leadership and Revitalization; $98,000 to the Office of the General Secretary for subsequent allocation as needed; and $45,000 to Operations and Support.

2. The program activities of Church Multiplication and Discipleship are supported not only by contributions and assessments, but also by funds transferred from Global Mission via the “Mission Is One” fund, designated investment income, transfers from accumulated cash accounts and temporarily restricted funds, a $200,000 grant from the RCACGF to fund matching grants for new ministries, and GSC Development Office fundraising efforts. The Church Multiplication and Discipleship budget area is fully staffed, with additional staff included in the 2009 budget for administrative support. The 2009 budget also includes an expanded budget for Multiracial Initiatives.

3. The Leadership and Revitalization budget continues to be funded and resourced in order to meet the denominational priority of providing future pastoral leadership, which includes ministers of Word and sacrament, elders, and deacons. An application for renewal of the Lilly Grant is being submitted, as the current grant expires on December 31, 2008. This grant supports the office of the coordinator of revitalization. The Ministerial Formation Certification Agency (MFCA) budget continues to be administered as part of the Leadership and Revitalization budget. Note that the assessments received by MFCA are part of the assessment for theological education, not the GSC assessment.

4. The Global Mission budget will continue to be supported by designated contributions and designated investment income. A major assumption is that spending can occur to the level of anticipated contributions, but the cluster must balance itself. In FY2009 Global Mission will provide a grant of $40,000 for the Office of Women in recognition of the support that office provides in raising Partnership-in-Mission share revenue, and a grant of $15,000 to Multiracial Initiatives.

5. The “Mission Is One” fund will continue to provide funds for local mission through church multiplication and discipleship programs. The amount of funding provided will be reduced from $417,000 in FY2008 to $317,000 in FY2009.

6. With the allocation of increased assessment funds to Communications over fiscal year 2008, we will be able to provide new, diverse communications initiatives that support Our Call, including expansion of website capabilities and the mailing of communications to RCA members’ homes.

7. The budgeted increase in Operations and Support costs in 2009 allows for the greater availability of general counsel to both the GSC and the regional synods.

8. Expenses for Finance have been greatly reduced as a result of the transition of the accounting functions to Michigan, and reduced rent space in New York.

9. Staff capacity has been added in Multiracial Initiatives and Social Witness to encompass the broader objective of providing support for multiracial initiatives. In addition, the Office of Personnel has been increased to full-time status.
## Preliminary Budget FY 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Revenue/Expenses</th>
<th>Church</th>
<th>Multiplication</th>
<th>Discipleship</th>
<th>Leadership</th>
<th>Global Mission</th>
<th>Mission</th>
<th>Revitalization</th>
<th>GSC</th>
<th>Office of ( \star )</th>
<th>O &amp; S</th>
<th>General Secretary</th>
<th>IT</th>
<th>Finance</th>
<th>Subtotal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td><strong>REVENUE</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>450,400</td>
<td>2,152,282</td>
<td>691,626</td>
<td>598,177</td>
<td>899,195</td>
<td>15,592,934</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>EXPENSES</th>
<th>Church</th>
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<th>Discipleship</th>
<th>Leadership</th>
<th>Global Mission</th>
<th>Mission</th>
<th>Revitalization</th>
<th>GSC</th>
<th>Office of ( \star )</th>
<th>O &amp; S</th>
<th>General Secretary</th>
<th>IT</th>
<th>Finance</th>
<th>Subtotal</th>
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| **Net Revenue/(Expense)** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

| Add: Cash Transfer from RCA Fund Balance | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

| Net Budget Impact | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
## Preliminary Budget FY 2009

### Revenue:

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<th>Description</th>
<th>GSC</th>
<th>GSC</th>
<th>GSC</th>
<th>GSC</th>
<th>GSC</th>
<th>GSC</th>
<th>GSC</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sub-Total</td>
<td>Development Fund</td>
<td>Fundraising</td>
<td>Mailroom</td>
<td>Comm.</td>
<td>Production</td>
<td>Eliminations</td>
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### Expenses:

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### Net Revenue/(Expense)

- (132,350)  
- (114,536)

### Add: Cash Transfer from RCA Fund Balance

- 132,350  
- 114,536

### Net Budget Impact

- 0  
- 0
**GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL**

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<th>Global Mission</th>
<th>Leadership/Revitalization</th>
<th>MFCA</th>
<th>O &amp; S</th>
<th>Office of Gen'l Sec'y</th>
<th>IT</th>
<th>Finance</th>
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**Expenses:**

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<tr>
<td><strong>Sales of Goods &amp; Services</strong></td>
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**Net Revenue/(Expense)**

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**Add: Cash Transfer from RCA Fund Balance**

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**Net Budget Impact**

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## Proposed Budgets FY2008

### REVENUE:

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<th>Contributions</th>
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<td>Partner Income</td>
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<td>Legacy Income</td>
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<td>Investment Income - Undesignated &amp; Allocated</td>
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<td>Mission Is One</td>
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**Total Revenue:** 16,330,517

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<td>Basic Service Cost Charged</td>
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**Total Expenses:** 16,446,541

### Net Revenue/(Expense) (B):

- (116,024)  
- 0

**Add: Cash Transfer from RCA Fund Balance:** 116,024

**Net Budget Impact:** 0

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### GSC Subtotal

#### GSC Development Fund

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**Total:** 0

#### GSC Fundraising

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<td>Legacy Income</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment Income</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment Income - Undesignated &amp; Allocated</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCA Fund Earnings</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lilly Interest</td>
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</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Fees Billed</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales of Goods &amp; Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grants from Other Budget Areas</td>
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<td>Other Income</td>
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**Total:** 0

#### GSC Mailroom

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<tr>
<td>Partner Income</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment Income - Theological Assessment</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Assessment Income to Balance</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Assessment Income - California</td>
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<tr>
<td>Legacy Income</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fees Billed</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
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**Total:** 0

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**Total:** 0

#### GSC Production

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<td>0</td>
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**Total:** 0

### GSC Total

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<td>Partner Income</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assessment Income - Theological Assessment</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assessment Income to Balance</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Total:** 7,323,338
2009 PROPOSED GENERAL SYNOD ASSESSMENT

The General Synod Council budget is based on a fiscal year ending September 30th, whereas the assessment budget approved by General Synod is on a calendar year basis. Therefore, in FY 2009, GSC will receive assessments based on the 2008 rate for the first quarter of the year (10/1/08-12/31/08) and assessments based on the 2009 rate for the last three quarters of the year (1/1/09-9/30/09).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment Summary</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confessing Members, 12/31/06</td>
<td>166,921*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Per-Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009 GSC Assessment</td>
<td>$5,586,510</td>
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<td>2008 GSC Assessment</td>
<td>$5,397,594</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assessment change</td>
<td>$+1.13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percent Assessment Change</td>
<td>+3.49%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2009 BOBS &amp; Theol. Ed. Assessment</td>
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<td>2008 BOBS &amp; Theol. Ed. Assessment</td>
<td>$1,007,211</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assessment change</td>
<td>$+0.18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percent Change</td>
<td>+2.98%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2009 Total General Synod Assessment*</td>
<td>$6,623,736</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008 Total General Synod Assessment</td>
<td>$6,404,805</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assessment change</td>
<td>$+1.31</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percent Change</td>
<td>+3.41%</td>
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</table>

*These numbers were adjusted at General Synod based on final tabulation of the annual consistorial reports, which provides the confessing member numbers for 2007. With the addition of the disabilities assessment (R-8) the total General Synod assessment for 2009 becomes $39.91.

Assessment Amount
Each percent change in the GSC Assessment requires a $66,237 change in amount of the GSC Assessment.

R-7
To approve the General Synod Council 2009 assessment of $5,586,510, which is $33.47 per confessing member. (ADOPTED)

R-8
To approve a special 2009 assessment for disability ministry in the amount of $37,500, which is $0.23 per confessing member. (ADOPTED)
## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL SYNOD

### REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA

#### PROPOSED 2009 GSC ASSESSMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Budget Area</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2008 %</th>
<th>2009 %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communications</td>
<td>602,000</td>
<td>954,609</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>638,520</td>
<td>424,441</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office of General Secretary</td>
<td>597,730</td>
<td>313,626</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Technologies</td>
<td>402,664</td>
<td>436,261</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership/Revitalization</td>
<td>489,413</td>
<td>569,132</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church Mult./Discipleship</td>
<td>627,478</td>
<td>524,119</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operations &amp; Support</td>
<td>1,731,624</td>
<td>2,012,544</td>
<td>31.8%</td>
<td>35.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GSC Development Fund</td>
<td>358,418</td>
<td>378,018</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church Herald</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>5,447,847</td>
<td>5,612,750</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2008 %</th>
<th>2009 %</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Our Call</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership/Revitalization</td>
<td>298,738</td>
<td>361,464</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communications</td>
<td>225,000</td>
<td>534,605</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church Mult./Discipleship</td>
<td>350,000</td>
<td>162,827</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Our Call</strong></td>
<td>873,738</td>
<td>1,058,896</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>RCA Communication Vehicles</td>
<td>377,000</td>
<td>420,004</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance Structure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commissions</td>
<td>88,457</td>
<td>130,415</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Synod</td>
<td>531,480</td>
<td>549,500</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>General Synod Council</td>
<td>94,287</td>
<td>96,400</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Synod Operations</td>
<td>790,646</td>
<td>982,538</td>
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<tr>
<td>General Secretary</td>
<td>396,663</td>
<td>102,828</td>
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<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecumenical</td>
<td>93,915</td>
<td>187,798</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Racial Ethnic Councils</td>
<td>594,367</td>
<td>677,960</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2,727,439</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finance Services</td>
<td>638,520</td>
<td>424,441</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
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</tr>
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<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel</td>
<td>107,040</td>
<td>131,191</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning &amp; Development</td>
<td>459,070</td>
<td>394,518</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>5,447,847</td>
<td>5,612,750</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA
### PROPOSED 2009 GSC ASSESSMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Budget Area</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2009 vs 2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communications</td>
<td>602,000</td>
<td>954,609</td>
<td>58.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>638,520</td>
<td>424,441</td>
<td>-33.5%</td>
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<td>5,612,750</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2009 General Synod Assessment for the BOBS Assistance Program and for Theological Education Administration

At least as far back as 1971, the Board of Benefits Services has been the recipient of a General Synod Assessment that provides funding to help support retired pastors who have not received adequate retirement benefits and who have demonstrated financial need. For FY 2008, the $1.50 per member assessment totaled $250,381 towards the assistance grant budget of $544,500.

Typically, additional funds are transferred from the General Fund to the Assistance Fund to make up any shortfall that may occur after inclusion of donations and investment income. It is expected that approximately $300,000 will need to be transferred from the General Fund in FY 2009.

Therefore, for 2009 the Board of Benefits Services recommends the continuation of the $1.50 assessment to go to the assistance of pastors who have not received adequate retirement benefits and have demonstrated financial need.

R-9
To approve the $1.50 per-confessing-member assessment for the Board of Benefits Services to provide sufficient assistance funding in 2009 for retired pastors who have a demonstrated need. (ADOPTED)

2009 General Synod Assessment for Theological Education

Until about 1960, the RCA provided theological education “tuition free” for its ministerial candidates as an expression of its deep and abiding commitment to raising up new generations of pastoral leaders. During the 1960s and 1970s, there was a slow but steady growth of tuition that remained modest in comparison to the tuition charged at college or graduate schools. In the 1980s, an assessment partially replaced the substantial subsidies the denomination had historically provided the seminaries, and the tuition charged by seminaries became comparable to many other graduate institutions, causing a financial burden for a number of our candidates.

In 1997, the theological assessment was set at 13.4 percent of the General Synod Council assessment plus the Board of Benefits Services assessment. Since 1997, the assessment for theological education has risen at the same rate as the denominational assessment and has been divided equally between Western Theological Seminary, New Brunswick Theological Seminary, and the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency.

The assessment for theological education clearly helps to form and deploy new generations of pastoral leaders, especially in this time in which we are endeavoring to plant many new congregations as well as renew our present churches. The proposed assessment for 2009 is $4.71 per member.

R-10
To approve the $4.71 per-confessing-member assessment for theological education in 2009. (ADOPTED)

The total General Synod assessment per confessing member for 2009 is $39.91.
THE RCA’S MULTIRACIAL FUTURE

In the past two years alone the General Synod has adopted nineteen recommendations that in one way or another address the transformation of the Reformed Church in America from a predominantly Caucasian denomination to a fully multiracial and multicultural church. The recommendations ranged from encouragement to consistory and congregations, to directives to the General Synod Council concerning staffing and ministry priorities, to requests for a broader engagement in global mission with peoples in developing regions where the RCA has previously not been involved. In addition to these recommendations the General Synod in 1998 approved nine recommendations in direct response to a report from the synod’s Commission on Christian Action entitled, “Bringing Racism to Light for a Decade Freed from Racism” (MGS 1998, pp. 119-134). The first of the nine recommendations was:

“To designate the decade 2000-2010 as the ‘Decade Freed from Racism in the Reformed Church in America’; and further, as the Reformed Church in America works to become freed from racism, to advocate for a society freed from racism” (p. 131).

In the years following 1998 the General Synod Council took several steps to respond to the initiatives from that General Synod and following meetings of the synod. These steps included a contract with the Lutheran Human Relations Association to provide anti-racism training among staff and throughout the regions of the church, a church-wide “Race/Ethnicity Awareness Survey” (2005) of congregations, leaders, and pastors conducted by Hope College, and a closer working relationship between the GSC and the church’s racial and ethnic councils and executive staff. The GSC also encouraged and affirmed steps taken by the general secretary to increase significantly the racial/ethnic diversity on the denominational staff, particularly at the executive levels. Diversity in hiring at all levels is now a fundamental part of the GSC staff “practices and procedures” documents. In 2006 the GSC also supported the formation of a Multiracial Congregation Team to assist with the formation of strategies for transforming a growing number of RCA congregations into multiracial communities of faith.

By 2006 it was clear to elected leaders in the GSC and several of the commissions, including the Commission on Race and Ethnicity and the Commission on Christian Unity (in its work to seek provisional adoption of the Belhar Confession), and to the general secretary and executive staff that a transformation in the life and witness of the RCA called for in the 1998 recommendations and those from later synods would require far more intentional focus, including added personnel and greater financial resources. One of the recommendations adopted by the 2006 General Synod was “to instruct the General Synod Council (GSC) to create a GSC staff position by General Synod 2007 to be responsible for intentionally and strategically moving the denomination toward its goal of being freed from racism” (MGS 2006, R-44, p. 145).

In January 2007 the general secretary hosted a “Multiracial Future” conference involving key constituencies in a conversation to provide clear direction for the position the General Synod had called for in June 2006. The GSC approved the position description presented to it by the general secretary for a “coordinator for social justice and multiracial initiatives.”

In October 2007 Earl James was introduced to the General Synod Council as the new coordinator for social justice and multiracial initiatives. In addition to his responsibilities to provide leadership in these areas of ministry, including fulfillment of the various recommendations adopted by General Synods over the past few years, the coordinator provides staff support and guidance to the work of the General Synod’s Commissions on Race and Ethnicity and Christian Action.
Since October the numerous recommendations from previous synods have been addressed. Several of these, such as ongoing anti-racism training (MGS 2006, R-43, p. 144) are being developed in partnership with other agencies (e.g., Congregations Organizing for Racial Reconciliation) and will be continuous programs made available throughout the church. In October 2008 the coordinator for multiracial initiatives and social justice will provide leadership for the first anti-racism training day for all elected leaders of the GSC and the General Synod’s commissions. The GSC anticipates this to be an annual event required for all newly elected leaders beginning in 2009. The coordinator has been working alongside colleagues in all five areas of Our Call, with our personnel coordinator, and with staff in our administrative areas to implement the various initiatives that will encompass a church-wide response to the call to be fully multiracial and multicultural in our congregations and throughout all of the RCA’s assemblies, institutions, and agencies.

A “Continuum of Multiracial Congregational Living in the RCA,” a document designed to help congregations think clearly about where they are and identify next steps to take as they move towards their multiracial future, is now available through the RCA website and the office of the coordinator of multiracial initiatives and social justice. A seven-person Social Justice Stimulus Team is also now in the initial stages of formation. This racially and ethnically diverse team will play a key role in making social justice stimulus grants for RCA congregations and related ministries.

In March 2008 the GSC had before it a proposal to revise its “ends” policies by adding a policy statement addressing a multiracial future. Ends policies are the documents the GSC uses to remain focused on the mission and ministry of the church as it gives direction to the general secretary and staff. The coordinator for multiracial initiatives and social justice addressed the GSC and led an evening working session and discussion as the GSC drafted new policy statements. The GSC adopted the following statements to be added to its “global ends” policy, the policy that is designed to capture the substance of all the statements beneath it:

Congregations and assemblies of the Reformed Church in America will reflect God’s vision of the kingdom, embracing complete unity—every race, tribe, people and language, every disability and special need, including those living on the margins—in reaching all people for Jesus Christ with grace and justice for all, actively engaging in love, acceptance, and forgiveness (John 17:23; Revelation 7:9).

Guided by God’s kingdom vision, congregations and assemblies of the Reformed Church in America will resist the sin of racism, commit to a multiracial future engaging all God’s people in mission and ministry, and equally share the resources and responsibilities of Our Call.

The General Synod Council looks forward to continuing progress in responding to this call for transformation of the life and witness of the Reformed Church in America. It also looks forward to ongoing dialogue and partnership in this work with its racial and ethnic councils and staff, and with the other General Synod entities including the commissions as together we respond to that 1998 report to be a church freed from racism, the directives of General Synods since that date, and the wisdom of synods to come.

In response to P-1 from the Report of the General Secretary (p. 30) the special Advisory Committees on Inclusivity recommended:

R-11
To instruct the moderator of the General Synod Council, in consultation with the general secretary and the president and vice
president of General Synod, to appoint a GSC task force to study how to increase the participation of people from racial and ethnic backgrounds other than the majority in the life of General Synod, and to increase the participation of women and those of younger generations, so that these voices may be more fully heard and welcomed in the life of the General Synod; and further,

to instruct the task force to consider the feasibility of expanding the category of corresponding delegate to General Synod as a means to accomplish this end, as well as other strategies; and further,

to instruct the task force to report and bring recommendations to the 2009 General Synod, including any possible changes in the Government of the Reformed Church in America, and the Bylaws and Special Rules of Order of the General Synod. (ADOPTED)

Reason:
There is a strong and urgent desire to explore this subject more deeply.

REPORT OF THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COUNCIL

The African American Council (AAC) continues to conduct ministry in the name of Jesus, the Christ, within the RCA, impacting the lives of people of the African Diaspora, as well as others. It serves as a conduit for blacks in the RCA to come together in a cohesive manner to address ongoing issues such as racism and other injustices which affect black people in North America and other countries, such as Africa and the Caribbean.

This past year has been a challenge for the council. Members of the council felt a tremendous sense of loss in the death of their chairperson, the Rev. Dr. Carolyn Holloway. The council would like to thank the General Synod Council (GSC) for its participation in the funeral service, as well as its cosponsorship of the council’s memorial service for our dear sister.

Due to the high cost of the fall 2006 Annual Caucus gathering the council’s operating budget for most of calendar year 2007 was frozen. This culminated in the cancellation of meetings of the full council body throughout the year.

The council was urged by GSC officials to consider cancelling its 2007 Annual Caucus and instead move the event to coincide with the RCA’s first all-church leadership conference, “One Thing: A Gathering of Leaders Seeking First the Kingdom of God,” in January 2008 in San Antonio, Texas. One explanation for encouraging the change was the effort of the event planners to bring together in one place all of the constituencies of the RCA so the church leadership could better see and experience its increasing diversity. Council members, however, continue to remain concerned about the cancellation of one of the most important gatherings of blacks in the RCA since the inception of the council in 1969.

The council registered for the One Thing event in San Antonio, Texas, with record attendance. Attendees felt that the event was spiritually enriching; however concerns remain about the lack of time and space allotted for people of color to gather and discuss issues that are relevant to their plight. One Thing was a historic event for the RCA, but African American/black participants perceived that commitments from the planners for full inclusion in leadership, worship, and workshops were not honored, leading once more to a sense of marginalization. It was just as important to us to be included in the worship, in the workshops, and as leaders in the RCA.
The AAC continues its ministry through its four regions (Eastern, Western, Southern, and Midwestern). Representatives of these regions, along with the full council, work within the confines of Our Call toward the revitalization of existing churches, as well as the development of new churches and ministries. The council, which has always operated within the theological construct of a holistic approach to the gospel of Jesus, remains concerned about the continuing, as well as the resurgence of, institutional and internalized racism within this country.

Institutional racism has affected our people to the point that an egregious number of African Americans are falsely imprisoned or have been executed by the system. The use of DNA evidence to overturn the convictions of many black men has clearly shown that an unequal justice system has been imposed on our people. Once again, statistics show that more young black men and women are in prison than are in college; members of black communities continue to experience under- and unemployment; AIDS and other diseases continue to keep black communities in bondage; and young black males experience a sense of violence and discrimination disproportionate to other communities.

While the council feels a sense of pride that America has allowed Senator Barack Obama to rise to the height of perhaps becoming the first black president of the United States of America, it remains skeptical because of the many attacks that are being perpetrated upon him simply because of the color of his skin and not, as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. stated, “the content of his character.”

It is in this light that the council feels a renewed sense of call to the missional and prophetic ministry of its founders and most importantly, Jesus, the Christ, who proclaimed, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor...to proclaim release to the captives” (Luke 4:18-19). With this prophetic stance in mind, the council voted at its brief meeting during the One Thing event to adopt for its next caucus the theme “Racism: What’s a Christian to Do?” The Belhar Confession will also play a pivotal role in this caucus.

The gathering will take place at New York LaGuardia Airport Marriott Hotel, October 10-12, 2008. The executive committee is urgently requesting the moderator and other officials of the GSC to attend this gathering and to be willing to answer questions concerning the future of blacks in the RCA. In addition the council believes that it is time to discuss other relationship issues, such as the role of the Multiracial Congregation Team, the council’s representation on the GSC, a realistic budget for the council’s ministry, and the role of the director of African American/Black Ministries in relationship to the council.

The council has been engaged over the past year in training and workshops that were designed to enhance spiritual and numerical growth, as well as new church starts, consistent with Our Call. It is the desire of the council to continue to be an integral part of the RCA family, as together we seek to be faithful to the gospel of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

REPORT OF THE COUNCIL FOR PACIFIC AND ASIAN AMERICAN MINISTRIES

On March 14, 1980, the Reformed Church in America gathered its Asian American constituents and people interested in forwarding ministry among these people. In the years following that first consultation, the Council for Pacific and Asian American Ministries (CPAAM) was created by the General Synod of the RCA. It approved the following four-fold mandate received from its constituents:
• To identify, communicate, and interpret Pacific and Asian American concerns, needs, and gifts.
• To advocate on behalf of Pacific and Asian Americans before the assemblies of the Reformed Church in America.
• To effect empowerment of Pacific and Asian Americans within the Reformed Church so that they can become fully-included participants in the design and implementation of the denomination’s mission.
• To advise the General Synod, its commissions and boards, and other assemblies regarding the ways Pacific and Asian Americans can enrich the worship and enhance the witness of the denomination.

In 2007 CPAAM, in addition to the original mandate approved by General Synod, continued to focus its priorities on the concerns and issues of “Our Call,” the RCA’s ten-year goal to revitalize existing congregations and plant new congregations, building on a foundation of discipleship, leadership, and mission.

At the annual consultation that was held July 11 and 12 in Los Angeles, the CPAAM pastors held small-group discussions about the different areas of Our Call and shared how these areas were being implemented in their churches.

**Church Multiplication**

Three new Korean churches have been organized: New Covenant Korean Reformed Church in Oradell, New Jersey; Hanaim Church in Paramus, New Jersey; and Korean Choong Hyun Church of Orlando, Florida. The Classis of Greater Palisades recognized two mission churches: First Zion Presbyterian Korean Church in Ridgefield, New Jersey, and Podonamu in Fort Lee, New Jersey.

New Hope Reformed Church in Yonkers, New York, is parenting a new ministry, Atlanta Dongson Community Church, in Georgia, with the Rev. Kyu Hun Lee.

The Rev. Chris Theodore reported that he is working on a church plant through the Anglican Church that will help Asian Indian healthcare workers with immigration issues.

The Rev. Salome Ryew, under the staff of New Hope Reformed Church, has been building up a Korean counseling center through her work as a hospital chaplain.

**Church Revitalization**

Grace Gospel Christian Church in San Mateo, California, used Rick Warren’s *40 Days of Purpose* for revitalization, while the Rev. John Chang of Grace Christian Church in Staten Island, New York, used special materials emphasizing spiritual gifts to train his congregation.

Taiwan Union Christian Church in Astoria, Queens, Winfield Reformed Church in Woodside, New York, and four other churches in Queens Classis held a summer retreat.

Shin Kwang Church of New York in Bayside, New York, is revitalizing through a discipleship program from Natural Church Development. They also held a New York Vision conference focusing on cooperation between first and second generations with the president of JAMA (Jesus Awakening Movement for America) as guest speaker.

Grace Christian Church in Flushing, New York, is currently meeting in a Korean church but will need a new location in the near future. Fair Lawn Community Church in Fair Lawn, New Jersey, celebrated the completion of an addition to their educational building.
Some Chinese churches are experiencing internal conflicts and prayers are solicited for these situations.

**Discipleship**

The 2008 annual consultation on May 2 and 3 at Shin Kwang Reformed Church in Queens focused on “Two Generations: One Mission” and examined the transition of leadership from the first generation immigrant churches to outreach to the “1.5” and second generations. The guest speaker was the Rev. Dr. Hak Joon Lee, associate professor of ethics and community at New Brunswick Theological Seminary.

The annual Korean youth retreat, Jesus 2007, was held in August and about 250 youth from New Jersey and New York attended. About two hundred people attended a lay leadership event.

A Summer Joy Camp for youth was held by Reformed Church of Newtown in Elmhurst, New York, to help children identify spiritual gifts.

The 2007 revision of the *Book of Church Order* into Korean and Chinese is now available online at the RCA website.

**Leadership**

The Gracious Welcome program is being implemented to facilitate bringing Pacific and Asian American ministers from other denominations into the RCA.

The CPAAM executive committee was asked to approve recommending an Asian American student for a full scholarship to Western Theological Seminary.

The Rev. J. Jeremiah Coe was installed as pastor for Chinese ministry at Fujian Evangelical Church in Richmond, British Columbia, on January 20, 2008.

Thirteen new Korean pastors in Los Angeles are exploring membership in the RCA.

The Rev. Jimmy Lim was elected to serve as executive director for the Council of Churches of the City of New York.

The Rev. Paul Bong Woo Nam of Ridgefield Park, New Jersey, will be examined by the Classis of Greater Palisades. The Rev. Sebastian Ong has become pastor of the Chinese Congregational Church in San Francisco. The Rev. En Young Kim was installed as senior pastor at the Reformed Church of Closter in Closter, New Jersey. Pastor Grace J. Rim, English minister at New Hope Reformed Church in Yonkers, New York, has come under the care of Rockland-Westchester Classis.

The Rev. Marianne Lin was ordained and installed as associate pastor at Taiwan Union Christian Church in Astoria, Queens, New York.

**Mission**

Shin Kwang Church, Choongsyn Church, and Kew Gardens Sung Shin Church sent mission trips to Kazakhstan. Shin Kwang Church also sent members to Guatemala and the Dominican Republic.

Reformed Church of Newtown, under the leadership of the Rev. Norman Chen, took a short-term mission trip to Taipei, Taiwan, that was very successful.
The Rev. Chris (Christudoss) Theodore has formed New York Tamil Voices to compose, record, and perform Christian music for the thirty thousand Asian Indians living in New Jersey and New York. There are plans to launch a radio/TV ministry to reach this community with this music and a CD that will be supported by Queens Classis and the Synod of New York.

The Rev. Nathan Brownell and his family moved to Yokohama, Japan, in April 2007, where he is teaching at Ferris Junior and Senior High Schools. They hosted three parties for Japanese students at a youth ministry center called the Green House, with increasing attendance at each event. Nozomi plans to start a Children and Worship center to train Sunday school teachers in Japan.

At the CPAAM executive committee meeting in January in San Antonio, RCA Global Mission staff members Roger De Young and John Lee invited CPAAM churches to increase their participation in world and local missionary work. At the 2008 annual CPAAM consultation, Lee addressed the issue of bridging the generation gap in Pacific and Asian American churches through involvement in intergenerational mission work.

**Turning the Corner**

CPAAM opened a new chapter in its twenty-nine-year history with the retirement of staff coordinator Ella Campbell in January 2008. A retirement party held for her in December 2007 at a restaurant in Queens had about thirty CPAAM members in attendance.

One of the major priorities for CPAAM this year will be the hiring and training of a new staff person. It is hoped that this person will continue the work begun by Ella Campbell and at the same time bring new energy, ideas, and focus for the future development of Asian American ministers, ministries, and churches in the RCA.

The annual CPAAM consultation held on July 12, 2007, coincided with “Spirit of Wholeness in Christ: A Racial Ethnic Multicultural Event,” which was held July 12-15 in Los Angeles, and organized under the partnership of the RCA, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Many CPAAM pastors attended workshops; they learned a great deal from brothers and sisters in other denominations and celebrated the various ethnic and racial heritages represented: African American, Hispanic, Asian American, Arab Christian, and European American.

CPAAM looks forward to working in partnership with Earl James, the new coordinator of multiracial initiatives and social justice, to combat racism within the RCA and to promote increased understanding, awareness, and participation of Asian and Pacific Americans in the RCA. To that end CPAAM continues to fully support the implementation of Our Call and other directives of the General Synod.

**REPORT OF THE COUNCIL FOR HISPANIC MINISTRIES**

Members of the Council for Hispanic Ministries, as Christ’s ambassadors, are following the RCA in its mission to be the very presence of Jesus Christ in the world. We believe God has called us as part of this great denomination to focus our efforts in the next ten years on starting new congregations. The Hispanic Council has accepted the challenge of starting fifty churches by the year 2013. We have confidence that we will achieve this goal with the help and support of God and the denomination’s Church Multiplication Team.
Discipleship

“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 28:19-20).

Hispanic congregations in each region are going back to the simple way of fulfilling the great commission of our Lord and Christ in a constant attempt to be more effective in regard to discipleship. Congregations are overcoming obstacles in order to reach people and make them not just followers of Jesus, but disciples who can reproduce. Some of our churches are making disciples in homes, churches, restaurants, and other settings.

The numbers of disciples are increasing; we celebrate what is happening with Hispanic congregations, hoping this becomes a movement throughout the denomination, for the glory of God. With growth comes responsibilities and challenges. We need materials in Spanish to facilitate a permanent process for the health of churches in these particular areas, with the Lord’s blessing.

Church Multiplication

“Oh the word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7). We have a great expectation that through God, in the next ten years, there will be a multiplication movement in our RCA family.

New churches are emerging from this great vision of the ten-year goal, which is becoming a movement throughout the denomination, and part of our DNA; our work has been to come alongside for encouragement, orientation, and spiritual support.

We are fulfilling the goals. Classes are opening new churches or Hispanic ministries, which is wonderful. Central California has Hispanic staff working in these areas, planting churches. The Synods of the Heartland and the Far West have new churches being planted in central Iowa and Texas. Ministries are getting ready to launch in the Midwest and in the East, where a new ministry is being started in New Jersey.

Let’s rejoice and join together in this great endeavor. The Lord is calling the body of Christ, his church, to participate. The movement of multiplication is happening because of his grace. The “One Thing” leadership conference held in San Antonio was great! It included over 140 church planters and 70 leaders of “parenting” churches (churches that provide nurturing support for a new church plant), and a significant number of them are involved in ministry with Hispanic people.

Church Revitalization

Several Hispanic ministers have been trained as coaches. This will allow work with the Spanish congregations in revitalization.

We will face church revitalization in a different context; our Hispanic congregations are realizing the time for revival and growth is now. Facing a modern and postmodern mentality, some of our existing churches will be aware that we need revitalization to affect the churches and communities so we can be healthy congregations or parenting churches.

Some specific ways Hispanic congregations pursued revitalization this year included
attending church retreats and conferences; seeking God’s grace with prayer, fasting, and Bible study; and reflecting on God’s guidance for wisdom in setting objectives, goals, and actions that must be done well or developed to achieve the vision of the church.

Revitalization always starts with the pastor, then leaders, and finally the whole church. The training and orientation will bring focus and define what needs to be done for the health of the congregations.

Mission

The council is well aware of our partnership in mission as part of the RCA. The Hispanic Ministries office, in cooperation with various RCA agencies and RCA Global Mission, has entered into new relationships in order to establish Reformed churches in the Dominican Republic.

Our goal is that Global Mission will use council members’ expertise in Latin America to establish, relate to, and work with existing congregations interested in the church of the Reformation, understanding that we have a legacy with our solid theology and structure that could inspire churches to reach their purpose as the church of Jesus Christ.

Members of the Hispanic Council are convinced that mission starts with our neighbors—this is something we emphasize in preaching the gospel. Our description of mission is to support the RCA’s vision of church planting. The Hispanic Council has a vision of mission that includes local and foreign regions.

We mentioned some of these in our last report and they are becoming a reality, specifically in the Dominican Republic, where the RCA is coaching the birth of a new denomination named the Dominican Reformed Church. Theologically and structurally, they would like to be like us. We are in the process of helping them develop their vision for the glory of God. We are asking the Lord that this new model could be utilized as a pattern for missions of the new millennium.

Leadership

It’s a priority to develop leadership in our Hispanic churches. We are taking the initiative to train, guide, and develop leaders so they will have a clear vision and can be effective in our denomination. We are training them in a very solid Reformed theology through Miami International Seminary, in Spanish, because some Spanish speakers are not able to master the English language yet. With God’s help we are having good results.

Western Theological Seminary, the Hispanic Council, and the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency have put a program together for training Hispanic leaders in RCA standards in their own language. This is just the beginning of a long-term program for the benefit of our leaders—goals include courses taught in RCA seminaries in Spanish by Hispanic faculty and curriculum in Spanish.

The council can say that new leaders are emerging from within. We are also establishing relationships with other denominations to discuss the possibility of future joint ventures. Our discussions have also included the exchange of theological points of view for study and dialogue.

We are currently looking for people with a vision for reaching the lost and with a willingness to be trained as church planters. Our study centers are being intentional about training and developing good leadership for the Reformed Church. However, we are challenging our Hispanic brothers and sisters to study, train, and develop their God given skills so that our goal of establishing fifty or more churches during the ten years’ vision can be attained.
REPORT OF THE GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL ON DEVELOPMENT

The purpose of the GSC’s Development office is to connect people and their resources to the kingdom of God through the Reformed Church in America. Its focus is to provide opportunities for people to become involved in the following three programs: 1) RCA Global Mission, which has connections with over forty countries, 2) Our Call, which enables new congregations to be started, provides resources for existing congregations to grow, and enables children’s, youth, and discipleship issues to be explored, and 3) the RCA Church Growth Fund, which has been in existence since 1861 and enables RCA churches to borrow money to build new or renovate existing buildings to carry out ministry to their communities. In the past ten years it has also given over $2 million in grants for new congregations.

The Van Bunschooten Bequest

The RCA continues to recognize those who respond through membership in a giving society known as the Van Bunschooten Society.

The summary for use of the Van Bunschooten bequest is as follows:

At a meeting of the General Synod in New York City on 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 pious youth for ministry.

On January 10, 1815, in his seventy-seventh year, Dominie Van Bunschooten went home to his reward and was buried in the churchyard of First Reformed Church in New Brunswick, New Jersey. In his last will and testament he added more than $3,000 to his former donation, making a total of more than $17,000—a princely sum for those days.

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 a 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 2004, R-47, pp. 187-188).

In honor of Dominie Elias Van Bunschooten, the Van Bunschooten Society was formed in the Reformed Church in America to honor those who have included the Reformed Church in America in their wills.

GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL’S APPOINTMENT OF A PASTORAL CARE COMMITTEE FOR THE REV. DR. NORMAN KANSFIELD

At its annual meeting in March 2008 the General Synod Council (GSC) affirmed the moderator’s appointment of a new pastoral care committee to work directly with the Rev. Dr. Norman Kansfield, who continues to be under discipline by action of the 2005 General Synod. The committee was appointed when the GSC was officially informed this past winter that the General Synod’s request that Dr. Kansfield be transferred under suspension to the Classis of Orange had not yet been accomplished because the Declaration for Ministers had not yet been signed. The committee has been charged with responsibility to:
• Provide ongoing pastoral care and oversight for the Rev. Dr. Norman Kansfield.
• Ascertain what steps might be taken, and by whom, to resolve the conflicted relationship that exists between the Classis of Orange and the Rev. Dr. Kansfield that has resulted in the Rev. Dr. Kansfield not signing the Declaration for Ministers and therefore not being properly received into the membership of the classis.
• Advise the GSC of what action it should take, or what action(s) the GSC should recommend the General Synod take, to move beyond the present impasse in establishing the ecclesiastical “home” for the Rev. Dr. Kansfield.

The new team members are the Rev. Dr. George Brown, the Rev. Barbara Fillette, and the Rev. Tom DeVries.

R-16/CONTINUING THE MISSIONAL AND REFORMED CONVERSATION

In 2005, in response to observations and a proposal made by the general secretary regarding the relationship of the RCA’s mission to its structure—and especially, whether our structure was supporting our mission or standing in the way of change—the General Synod approved the following recommendation:

To instruct the officers of General Synod to initiate a denomination-wide conversation of “missional reflection” on the structure of our present four assemblies, in wide consultation with those from regional synods, classes, and consistories as well as the Commission on Church Order and other bodies; and further,

to give attention to “best practices” of emerging cooperation between regional synods and classes in carrying out the task of equipping congregations for mission and ministry; and further,

to gather suggestions, ideas, and models of how our present structure and relationship of assemblies might be adapted to more effectively carry out the mission of the church; and further,

to share the results of this reflection with the General Synod no later than 2007, and with the church at-large along the way, in order to determine what future steps, if any, might be undertaken (MGS 2005, R-42, p. 171).

In the fall of 2005, the officers of General Synod appointed people to serve on a Missional Structures Task Force. That task force, following two years of work, presented an extensive report to the 2007 General Synod, including recommendations that called for a three-year period of “open space” in which experimentation with new models of structure and governance could be attempted and the establishment of a working group to look at possible formation of a new middle assembly structure. Those recommendations were not adopted; in their place, synod took the following action:

R-16
To instruct the Executive Committee of General Synod to continue the denomination-wide dialogue and data collection with written survey and other means on the missional purpose and work of the Reformed Church in America, its assemblies and congregations; and further,

with all regional synods, all classes, consistories, and other bodies, to facilitate this conversation in order to gather wisdom, share ideas, and encourage experimentation, so that the RCA might discover new means by which to more effectively equip congregations for mission and ministry with measurable outcomes; and further,
to share the results of these actions with the General Synod no later than 2010, in order to
determine what future steps, if any, might be undertaken (MGS 2007, R-16, pp. 101-102).

Reasons:
1. The advisory committees expressed a clear mandate that all of us in the RCA must
continue our conversation around mission that the task force has started with their
report and that the regional synods continued with their overtures. The substitute
both commends the learnings of the previous work and directs us to deeper inquiry.
2. A wider, more thorough consultation across all of our assemblies and regions is not
only desired by those assemblies and regions, it is also essential for our missional
future together as a denomination.
3. There is a deep desire to learn from each other’s stories.
4. There is a similar desire to dig deeper into the assumptions and challenges of the
work of the task force, and especially, to gather more specific measurable data
around the barriers we face to being a missional church and the effectiveness of cur-
rent experimentation and change.
5. There are positive stories of mission happening within present structures and of
structural flexibility. There are also expressions of frustration and longing. Continued
conversation that is intentional and inclusive will spark the further
advancement of our missional commitment.
6. A detailed report based on this continuing action, with both data and dialogue clear-
ly articulated, will better allow those leading this process to make and support rec-
ommendations that will move the RCA forward as a missional church.

In the fall of 2007, in response to the decisions of the 2007 General Synod, the General
Synod Council, acting as the Executive Committee of the General Synod, took two sepa-
rate actions. It created an “R-16 working group” that would be asked to form the means by
which the action and intent of the General Synod could be implemented. In keeping with
its own commitment to use policy governance principles in its work, the GSC, also in
response to the decisions of the 2007 General Synod, established two “sub-ends” to its
global ends policy, as a means to guide its own oversight of the process.

GSC GLOBAL ENDS POLICY

Empowered by the Holy Spirit and in covenant with the general secretary and staff, the
General Synod Council will carry out its responsibilities in order to ensure that the
Reformed Church in America will be a denomination where congregations are follow-
ing Christ in mission, equipped and empowered for faithful and fruitful ministry, which
requires all we have and all we are to the glory of God.

SUB-END #1

Congregations and assemblies of the Reformed Church in America and those who pro-
vide leadership in them will have broad consensus on the missional purpose and work
of the church and how it applies specifically to the missional purpose of the RCA.

SUB-END #2

Congregations and assemblies of the Reformed Church in America will come to an
understanding of the skills and resources that are available to them to accomplish the
missional purpose of the RCA.

General Synod vice president Carol Bechtel was appointed by GSC to convene the R-16
working group “to develop possible means by which to carry out R-16.” That team met in
December 2007 and February 2008, and crafted the outlines of a process where General Synod 2008 would become both the foundation and launching point for a two-year, denomination-wide conversation on “the missional purpose and work” of the RCA by deeply exploring our understandings of and commitments to being both Reformed and missional in who we are and what we do. This work would be informed by Scripture, by our traditions and our order, by our current contexts for and experiences in ministry, and by our understandings of how the Spirit is calling us forward in ministry.

The working group understood R-16 as requesting to engage in a far-reaching examination not only of our theological understanding, but also our understandings of one another, our actual experiences of missional engagement, and our structures. With that in mind, the work of this proposed process includes the elements outlined below.

**General Synod 2008 Kickoff**

The synod meeting will be the formal kickoff of two major initiatives: the Missional and Reformed DVD Project and the RCA Story Project. Information about both projects will be extensively communicated to the church prior to and following the synod meeting.

**Missional and Reformed DVD Project**

The Missional and Reformed DVD Project will provide the whole church with a *kairos* moment: the opportunity to hold the kind of conversation that our missional and Reformed calling demands of us, at the deepest possible level, in every corner of our church. It will do so by utilizing key elements of the 2008 General Synod in an educational DVD format. Those key elements include guest speaker Richard Mouw, a panel of RCA respondents; and a synod-wide conversation, using the advisory committee structure, that will capture key insights and responses to help guide the formation of the DVD resource.

This DVD resource will be provided to all delegates of synod, all congregations, and all classes and to appropriate parts of RCA-related agencies and institutions, with an invitation to make this conversation a high priority. The content of the DVD will be flexible enough for a variety of uses, will capture the energy and content of this conversation, and will invite people into the conversation by focusing on three questions: What does it mean to be missional, and so what? What does it mean to be Reformed, and so what? What does it mean to be missional and Reformed, and so what? It will include a clear process guide to enable effective use in a variety of settings, as well as a specific response form to capture both insights and real data in the responses.

**RCA Story Project**

The RCA Story Project will collect and gather the stories, hopes, and dreams of RCA members from across our denomination. It will seek out those transformative moments in the lives of our congregations—moments of courageous missional identity that, together, can provide inspiration for the church and a grassroots window into the missional practices that can guide us into the future. In addition, the RCA Story Project can be implemented widely in individual congregations and become a local catalyst for missional revitalization and discipleship. The project is modeled loosely on National Public Radio’s StoryCorps project, but in a form much simpler to duplicate across the denomination. Clear instructions and technology are already being developed, as well as a pilot project that will be complete by General Synod.

The Missional and Reformed DVD Project and the RCA Story Project both will explore the missional purpose and work of the RCA, but from opposite angles: one a guided theological discussion using key leaders and thinkers; the other a grassroots quest for the best of our missional activity. Both will provide the insights and feedback that will help us shape the key next steps in our missional future.
Continuing the Conversation

Beyond the activities scheduled for General Synod 2008, the working group developed the following schedule of action and response:

**Fall 2008 through spring 2009:** The working team will receive responses from these church-wide DVD-prompted conversations, as well as summaries of findings sessions, and from those responses prepare an interim report to the 2009 General Synod. In addition, in consultation with specialists, the team will prepare a written survey of the denomination, as mandated by R-16. This survey would seek the kind of empirical data on missional understandings, activities, impediments, and outcomes from across the church.

**General Synod 2009:** The interim report would allow synod to discuss preliminary findings, identify areas in which further work was required, and make recommendations, if necessary, to assist in the completion of the dialogue. We will not accomplish our end—building a broad consensus on the missional purpose and work of the church and how it applies specifically to the missional purpose of the RCA—simply through conversation and storytelling. Both are necessary, but only when used to help identify the next steps in this essential journey.

**General Synod 2010:** A final report to synod will be generated, with future steps, if any, that might be undertaken. The working team made no attempt to predict the content or exact outcome of this report; the church will dictate the outcome through its participation in the process.

**Values and Practices**

The following values and practices will be used in guiding the implementation of all aspects of this work:

- *Intentionality and commonality.* The church will benefit from talking about the same subjects using the same parameters, while acknowledging that individual contexts for ministry, and the language to describe them, might be very different from each other.
- *Cooperation.* The church needs to live out this process together. No one group “owns” this; it is “our” work, as the whole church, and through it, we would hope that our trust for each other begins to grow as well.
- *Explicit feedback.* As participants, we’re not talking just to hear ourselves talk. We want to learn from each other and, from that, together chart a common missional future.
- *The importance of story, both story told and story heard.* There is much innovation and creative ministry happening throughout the church; we all need to hear and celebrate those stories.
- *Faithfulness.* As participants, we affirm that the Holy Spirit is guiding our work, and the process has been designed with that expectation.

The 2008 General Synod created twenty special Advisory Committees on Being and Becoming Reformed and Missional in order to discuss the issue in depth. These committees produced the following recommendations.

**R-12**

To instruct the Commission on Theology, in consultation with the Commission on Christian Education and Discipleship and the R-16/Reformed and Missional Task Force, to compile a brief
theological dictionary in order to provide a common language for continued conversation, giving particular attention and emphasis to the terms “Reformed” and “missional,” with report to General Synod 2009 and, pending approval by General Synod 2009, distribution to all congregations (both organized and those yet to be organized) of the Reformed Church in America. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. Currently, there are a variety of understandings and uses of these terms.
2. To facilitate meaningful conversations, an agreement on our terminology would be extremely helpful.

A motion was made from the floor to amend R-12:

. . . Christian Education and Discipleship, the Commission on Church Order, the Commission on Christian Worship, the Commission on Race and Ethnicity as well as a representative from the Church Multiplication Team, and the R-16/Reformed and Missional Task Force . . .

VOTED: To not adopt the amendment.

R-13
To urge the R-16/Reformed and Missional Task Force to continue its work of bringing this vital conversation to the broader church, encouraging motivational presentations and discussions at regional synod and classis meetings throughout the denomination. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. This conversation was greatly appreciated by the delegates of the synod, and it would be valuable to share it with the broader church.
2. The task force is producing and distributing a resource from this General Synod that will aid classes and congregations in this task.

R-14
To encourage the delegates of the General Synod to share the advisory committee conversations about being Reformed and missional with their churches and classes. (ADOPTED)

Reason:
This conversation was greatly appreciated by the delegates of the synod, and it would be valuable to share it with the broader church.

R-15
To urge the congregations of the Reformed Church in America to engage in study and celebration of the foundations of the Christian faith in services of Sunday worship and in opportunities for Christian education, drawing on the richness of the best of our Reformed tradition, past and present, so that our understanding of the faith and our ability to share it may be enriched. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. The Reformed tradition provides great resources for missional practice, and worship is a good opportunity to celebrate this.
2. Such study and celebration would be fitting preparation for our celebration of the
500th anniversary of John Calvin’s birth in 2009.

Report of the General Synod Council’s Task Force on Disabilities

The 2004 General Synod, in response to overtures from the Classes of Chicago, Greater Palisades, and Illiana asking for the establishment of a commission on disabilities, approved the following recommendation:

R-89
To instruct the General Synod Council to appoint a special three-year task force on disabilities to assess Reformed Church in America policies and practices related to ministry to and with disabled persons and their families; and further,

to offer advice and direction to the General Synod regarding ministry to and with disabled persons and their families; and further,

to instruct the Commission on Church Order, in consultation with the General Synod Council, to prepare changes in the Book of Church Order, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, that will establish a commission on disabilities that will equip congregations to embrace, include, and value all persons with disabilities, together with their families, for report to the 2005 General Synod. (MGS 2004, p. 324)

In 2005 the General Synod Council established the Task Force on Disabilities with the following members:

Louise Shumaker, chairperson
Emily Blauw
Rev. Judith Broekeer
Martie Bultman
Rev. Randy Smit
David VanNingen
RCA Staff: Jeff Japinga (later to include Kirsty DePree and Kathy Dykhuis)

The 2005 General Synod, acting on a recommendation from the Commission on Church Order, chose not to establish a commission on disabilities. That action, however, did not change the basic mandate of the task force: to look broadly and comprehensively at ministry with, for, and by persons with disabilities in the Reformed Church in America and its congregations. In doing so, the task force has offered reports and interim recommendations annually. In this, its final report to the General Synod, the task force provides an overview on the state of disability ministry within the RCA and possible means by which this ministry could—and should—be strengthened.

Our stand with people with disabilities and their families

The task force stands firmly on this truth: that God’s saving grace is intended for all people. This is God’s doing, not ours.

As the RCA Task Force on Disabilities, we embrace the scriptural mandate we have been given:

• Psalm 139:13-14: “For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.”
• Ephesians 2:10: “For we are what he made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.”
• 1 Corinthians 12:4: “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.”

These verses, joined by the entire Word of God, teach that all people, including people with disabilities, are equally valued by God, equally loved by God, and equally embraced by his son Jesus Christ. These verses, joined by the entire Word of God, affirm that all people, including people with disabilities, have been given exactly what they need as an indispensable and necessary part of creation and the church.

For that reason, the Task Force on Disabilities calls on the Reformed Church, its structures, congregations, and members:

• To affirm the belief in the worth and dignity of all people, including persons with disabilities, and to offer them by virtue of baptism every right to participate in the life of the church.
• To embrace as their own accountability for the barriers built to exclude persons with disabilities from full inclusion in the community of believers, and to commit to the active removal of those barriers.

The Task Force on Disabilities envisions the RCA’s stand for the inclusion of people with disabilities in the full life of the church, with all its accompanying blessings and responsibilities, will be lived out as a witness of God’s grace and Christ’s love through:

• The elimination of physical barriers—that all RCA church facilities, and all RCA gatherings, will be appropriately accessible to people with disabilities and their families.
• The elimination of attitudinal barriers—that the RCA will commit to providing advocacy and education on issues of disability and for persons with disabilities, both within our own structures and congregations, and as an extension of our missional outreach to the communities in which we do ministry.
• The embrace of God’s Word—that, as it ministers to and with people with disabilities in the church and in the community, the RCA will speak and act out of a strong biblical and theological basis for its ministry.

This is already happening in many places. The task force affirms those congregations that have demonstrated God’s grace through efforts to include people with disabilities by:

• Building ramps so that all may enter the house of God and join in worship.
• Installing personal listening devices or loop systems for those who are hard of hearing.
• Providing interpreters for those who are deaf.
• Making large print bulletins for those with limited vision.
• Adapting Sunday School, Catechism, and vacation Bible school to those with special needs.
• Encouraging families with members who have disabilities.
• Teaching by example that God’s love is for all and all people deserve to treated with respect and dignity.
• Seeking and discovering ways to embrace people with disabilities and encourage the use of the gifts God has given to all his people.

It is our prayer, our dream, that all congregations will follow God’s lead and by doing so will eliminate:

• The heartbreak of a parent whose disabled son is not welcome in Sunday school.
• The father’s fear that his daughter will be teased at Bible school.
• The desperate lonely despair of feeling unwelcome, excluded, a burden.
• The grandmother who won’t see her grandchild baptized because she can’t manage the steep stairs of her daughter’s church.
• The parents who wonder if their child’s disability is God’s punishment.
• The teen left behind while the others head out to a church’s youth retreat.
• The one who isn’t welcome to make profession of faith because he can’t describe his faith using words or concepts similar to other young people of the same age.
• The waste of God’s gift, unrealized and unused.

During its life and work, the task force has forwarded several recommendations to the General Synod Council or to the General Synod. The recommendations have included:

1. Asking the Commission on Theology, in conjunction with the Task Force on Disabilities, to take a fresh look at the issue of disability and the witness of the church, and to present a paper to the General Synod of 2008, potentially with study guides to equip our congregations.

The task force is grateful to the Commission on Theology, and especially to the Rev. Dr. Jim Brownson, for a series of conversations that led to the development of the paper entitled “Spirituality and Hospitality: What the Church Can Learn by Welcoming Persons with Disabilities.” The task force strongly endorses this paper; it urges the General Synod to support the recommendations that accompany the paper, including the development of study materials, and it calls on all of our congregations to utilize the paper and study materials in examining its ministries with and for persons with disabilities.

2. Offering the resources and support of the Task Force on Disabilities to plan and lead worship centered around the theme “Fearfully and Wonderfully Made” at the 2007 General Synod or at a subsequent synod.

We appreciate the consideration of this request by our General Synod presidents, and especially the opportunity to meet with the Rev. John Ornee. We understand that it is the prerogative of the synod president to choose the theme of the worship services of General Synod. We wish to extend this invitation to upcoming leaders of synod. While the focus of our ministry is always at the congregational level, the structures and assemblies of our church can model and reflect not simply the church that we are, but the church we are called to be.

3. Encouraging all congregations to participate in the celebration of an RCA Disability Awareness Sunday, held annually the first Sunday of March, and asking that the RCA provide supportive materials to equip congregations in achieving this goal.

We acknowledge that the RCA church calendar now includes the designation of a Sunday as Disability Awareness Sunday. The task force has provided resources for distribution to interested congregations. As individual members of the task force, we offer our continuing assistance to the denomination in further promoting Disability Awareness Sunday in all RCA congregations.

4. Urging that by 2013 all RCA church buildings be appropriately accessible and that the RCA develop resources to equip congregations in achieving this goal.

The 2006 General Synod adopted this recommendation with an amendment instructing the General Synod Council, in consultation with the Task Force on Disabilities, to identify financial resources to assist churches to become handicapped accessible, for report to the General Synod 2007. We are grateful to RCA Church Growth Fund (formerly RCA Building and Extension Fund) staff for their concerted effort to support and cooperate with the Task Force on Disabilities toward the achievement of this recommendation. We recog-
nize that the RCA CGF has limited funds to assist congregations. We encourage the General Synod Council or another designated group to consider taking an active role in implementing this recommendation. The task force has provided information about accessibility to the RCA.

In addition, the task force continued to enhance the resources for congregations available on the RCA website (mouse over “Discipleship” and choose “Disabilities Ministry” from the drop-down menu). All of these actions, we believe, can provide assistance to congregations committed to a ministry with and for persons with disabilities, and have done so during the time the task force has served the denomination.

But while 2008 is the end of the task force, it is not the end of the need for awareness and resources connected to this ministry. Indeed, that need will only grow over the years, while resources provided by the task force will become outdated and its visibility will fade. How the RCA addresses this ongoing need will finally speak the loudest about its commitment to a ministry with and for persons with disabilities. That is why, in February 2007, the task force offered the General Synod and the General Synod Council a lengthy report entitled “People with Disabilities, their Families, and the Church.” That report, after surveying the continuing needs before the church, came to this conclusion, as expressed in its single recommendation to the General Synod Council in spring 2007:

To create a new denominational position (part-time, preferably half-time) focused on ministry with, for, and to persons with disabilities, their families, and their congregations; and further,

to establish this position prior to the June 2008 termination of the current Task Force on Disabilities; and further,

to instruct the General Synod Council to develop an ongoing funding plan for this position, including acceptance of the offer of the Classis of Greater Palisades to provide $25,000 in matching funds for this position over a two-year period and with the understanding that the person hired for this position would be expected to seek a portion of the ongoing funding to continue this position.

The General Synod Council, in reviewing this report in March 2007, took the following action, reflected in its minutes:

**Disabilities Task Force:** The GSC reviewed the report from the GSC Task Force on Disabilities. The task force is scheduled to complete its work in 2008. The GSC appreciates the level of committed work and invested time that this task force demonstrated. The GSC directed the moderator to develop a draft Ends Policy regarding disabilities. Upon recommendation of its moderator, the GSC:

**GSC 07-19 VOTED:** To direct the General Secretary to investigate possible partnerships with one or more other denominations to support program initiatives for, by, and with persons with disabilities.

The general secretary directed staff—specifically Jeffrey Japinga and Kirsty DePree—to begin conversations with other denominations, and specifically with the Christian Reformed Church in North America, in light of its twenty-five-year-old ministry in this area and the ongoing working relationships that continue to be developed with the CRCNA. Staff has both sought and received input from the task force during the course of these conversations.

The GSC received, at its March meeting, a report advocating for the addition of a part-time
staff person in disability ministries for the RCA, and for that person to work in intention-
al and defined partnership with the already established ministry in the Christian Reformed
Church. The report also asked the GSC to include necessary funding for this plan in its
2009 budget.

The proposal for this position reflects the hopes and dreams of the task force, by acknowl-
edging both the need to have an RCA staff person committed to this ministry and the ben-
efits of this work as part of a collaborative process. We strongly encourage the GSC and
General Synod to fully endorse this proposal. We choose not to offer a recommendation to
this end, but simply to say, as our concluding statement to the General Synod, that the cre-
ation of this position is critical if the RCA is to move forward in its commitment to people
with disabilities and their families.

In this the final report of the Task Force on Disabilities to the General Synod we wish to
extend our appreciation to the General Synod for having authorized the task force. In doing
so, the RCA acknowledged its responsibility to reach out to people with disabilities in the
name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the opportunity within our congregations to benefit
from the gifts God has given to all his people, including those with disabilities. We espe-
cially want to thank the GSC for providing the task force with the guidance, encourage-
ment, and support of the Rev. Jeff Japinga for the duration of the work of the task force,
and more recently, for the assistance of the Rev. Kirsty DePree and Kathy Dykhuis.

While officially the work of the task force will end in 2008, we will continue to make our-
selves available to the RCA, and we again extend our appreciation for the opportunity to
serve.

REPORT OF THE GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL ON A DISABILITIES
MINISTRY INITIATIVE FOR THE REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA

The 2004 General Synod, in response to overtures from the Classes of Chicago, Greater
Palisades, and Illiana requesting the establishment of a denominational commission on dis-
abilities, took the following action:

To instruct the General Synod Council to appoint a special three-year task force on dis-
abilities to assess Reformed Church in America policies and practices related to min-
esty to and with disabled persons and their families; and further,

to offer advice and direction to the General Synod regarding ministry to and with dis-
abled persons and their families; and further,

To instruct the Commission on Church Order, in consultation with the General Synod
Council, to prepare changes in the Book of Church Order, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5,
that will establish a commission on disabilities that will equip congregations to
embrace, include, and value all persons with disabilities, together with their families,

In February 2007, the Task Force on Disabilities, as part of its mandate from General
Synod, offered to the General Synod and the General Synod Council a lengthy report on
“People with Disabilities, their Families, and the Church.” That report, after surveying the
continuing, and growing, need before the church connected to ministry with and for per-
sons with disabilities and their families—and the few resources and support the RCA has
been able to offer over the years—came to this conclusion, as expressed in its single rec-
ommendation:
To create a new denominational position (part-time, preferably half-time) focused on ministry with, for, and to persons with disabilities, their families and their congregations; and further,

to establish this position prior to the June 2008 termination of the current task force; and further,

to instruct the General Synod Council to develop an ongoing funding plan for this position, including acceptance of the offer of the Classis of Greater Palisades to provide $25,000 in matching funds for this position over a two-year period and with the understanding that the person hired for this position would be expected to seek a portion of the ongoing funding to continue this position.

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GSC 07-19 VOTED: To direct the general secretary to investigate possible partnerships with one or more other denominations to support program initiatives for, by, and with persons with disabilities.

The general secretary directed staff—specifically, Jeffrey Japinga, who had worked with and supported the task force since its inception, and Kirsty DePree, coordinator for discipleship—to initiate conversations with other denominations, and specifically, with the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC), in light of its twenty-five-year-old ministry in this area and the ongoing working relationships that continue to be developed with the CRC. GSC staff held a series of meetings with staff of the CRC’s Office of Disability Concerns, exploring a variety of means and possible partnerships that would allow for significant ministry within the RCA and for RCA congregations. Staff also continued to seek and receive input from the task force during the course of these conversations.

At its March 2008 meeting, the GSC asked that staff initiate a ministry with and for persons with disabilities in keeping with its ends policy on discipleship, and affirmed the strategy of partnership with the CRC.

To carry out the plan as stated, the RCA will require intentional effort and commitment, beginning with a champion to establish this ministry—a visible, one-of-its-own person to be the face of the program and to wave the flag on its behalf and on behalf of persons with disabilities and their families, both with RCA congregations and with our own staff. Starting such an effort from scratch, however, would fail to exercise appropriate stewardship both of the financial resources currently available in the RCA and the excellent work in this area already being done by sister denominations from which we can benefit.

The ministry plan, beginning in FY2009, requires the establishment of an RCA ministry to, with, and for persons with disabilities and their families led by a new, part-time staff person, and the concurrent establishment of a working partnership with the Office of Disability Concerns of the CRC.

While identifying more specific goals, objectives, and measurable data for this new initiative would be part of the work of the new office, there are three areas in which the RCA would benefit from the outset through a partnership with the CRC:
• **Resources.** Resources for congregations are absolutely urgent in this ministry, offering both the guidance and skills often necessary for congregational confidence and action. Resource development and communication will be essential to success. These resources, however, are not and need not be denominationally specific (even if they are now in current forms). For example, most of the content of the CRC’s Office of Disability Concern’s newsletter could be used in a newsletter directed to the RCA, and indeed, it would be relatively simple for the two offices to develop a joint newsletter. Curriculum material is also able to be widely used and shared, along with the basic knowledge of people and programs.

• **Training.** Research clearly shows that a congregation with one or more persons who have received specific training in disability ministry will significantly increase the probability that this ministry will be both effective and long-term. Here again, reinvention of the wheel isn’t necessary, and cooperation could produce economies of scale. The RCA’s new staff person, both initially and in an ongoing way, could be trained by the CRC’s experienced staff person, and the possibility of joint training for congregational volunteers and advocates for this ministry could benefit the congregations of both denominations.

• **Office space.** There is significant merit in housing a part-time RCA staff person in disability ministries primarily at the CRC office, alongside CRC disability staff, rather than at the RCA offices. It would foster cooperation, build synergy between the two programs, allow for shared administrative support, and decrease the sense of isolation. (From all accounts, work with and for persons with disabilities is unique to the point of being lonely work, even when a staff person is surrounded by colleagues in other ministries.) If the RCA staff person were to be housed in CRC office space, the CRC would be compensated by the RCA at regular rates for space and staff support.

Why not simply one ministry for both churches? Beginning this work with a unique and denominationally dedicated RCA staff person would avoid the structural and governance issues that would arise in immediately attempting to form a single, common ministry that would serve both denominations. Since the Christian Reformed Church already has a fully functioning, fully funded, denominationally-named and specific ministry, with an in-place governing board, there were key questions about 1) how a single, common ministry would be governed without exacting a significant sense of loss within the CRC of identity—giving up denominational references in its name, for example, and 2) how to navigate partnership issues where one participant (the RCA) would be coming on board clearly as a junior partner, both financially and in experience. In a model where the respective ministry offices remained independent structurally, the CRC could retain its current name, structure, and practice. The RCA could similarly establish its own identity, passion, and energy for this ministry, while holding clear lines of accountability. Once the RCA has a clearer sense of its own identity and ability in this ministry work, both denominations would be in a stronger position to talk about the possibility of a single, common structure for ministry.

The RCA staff person would be accountable to the RCA structure alone, likely to Kirsty DePree, the coordinator for discipleship. However, particular areas of cooperation between the RCA and CRC would be specified (see the “working agreement” section for the proposed partnership agreement), and the staff persons in each denomination expected and held accountable for making this partnership work.

The annual estimated budget of this plan/strategy would be approximately $50,000, whether the structure was a mixed independent-partner agreement (as is being proposed) or a full partnership. Since the General Synod clearly asked the task force to look at pos-
sible work in disability ministry, and the GSC supported this direction at its March 2008 meeting, in response to a report from the task force, the General Synod Council will ask the General Synod to support this work through an annual assessment. The amount of that assessment is being reduced by $12,500 per year for two years, through the generous offer of a two-year, matching-fund grant from the Classis of Greater Palisades. The proposed assessment amount will be voted on by the General Synod separately, when it considers all assessments.

As the RCA takes its first steps toward the vision for disability ministry set out by its task force, it will benefit most from a combination of uniquely held responsibility and some cooperative work with the CRC. The RCA should capitalize on both the momentum created from the task force and on the CRC’s willingness to share its experience and wisdom.

Appendix

A WORKING AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA AND THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA IN A MINISTRY TO, WITH, AND FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Introduction
Since 1982, the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) has supported a ministry with and for people with disabilities to assist the denomination and its member churches “to include all of God’s people in their life and ministry so that all members know that they belong and can use their gifts fully.” In 2007 the General Synod Council of the Reformed Church in America (RCA), through its staff, initiated conversation with the CRC about a possible partnership in disability ministry. At that time, the RCA had no formal structure for ministry with or for persons with disabilities, but recognized a growing demand for such a ministry and recognized the expertise already at work in the CRC.

Fruitful conversations followed. At their core, these conversations revealed a ministry where key opportunities and essential actions were common across denominational lines. More importantly, it showed clearly that cooperative efforts could yield benefits for both denominations and especially for the congregations of our denominations committed to ministry with and for persons with disabilities. Thus, our two denominations enter into this partnership agreement in hopes of sharing, where appropriate and most beneficial, aspects of our ministry of inclusion of people with disabilities, while holding separate those particular areas where unique identity has benefit. This agreement is not seen as an end, but a beginning, with the intention of eventually creating one integrated disability ministry that will serve both denominations.

While respecting the unique needs and resources of each denomination, the disability ministries of both denominations can be more effective by sharing knowledge, support, and resources; by building a broader network of relationships; and by allowing disability ministry to be yet another step in the increasingly fruitful shared ministries between our two denominations. Furthermore, the extensive experience of the CRC in disability ministry will benefit the RCA as they grow their own fledgling ministry—a gift the CRC is honored to give.

Ministry Purpose
Together in purpose, the disability ministries of the CRC and the RCA will, individually and in partnership, help CRC and RCA churches to become hospitable, inclusive, and healthy communities that intentionally seek:

• To end the isolation and disconnectedness of persons with disabilities and their fam-
lies;
- To nurture the spiritual lives of people with disabilities so that they become professing and active members of their churches; and
- To encourage the gifts of people with disabilities so that they can serve God fully in their churches.

Structure, Governance, and Budget
Each ministry will have its own unique name. Christian Reformed Disability Concerns will retain the identity, in name and in practice, that it has built over the past twenty-five years. The RCA will seek to build a new identity. The structure, governance, and budget of the RCA disability ministry and CRC disability ministry will remain separate. The staff and volunteers of each ministry will be accountable to the structures established within their respective denominations. Budgets, donations, and other income would be separate. Costs for shared aspects of ministry would be divided between the CRC and RCA ministries as appropriate.

Staff and Programming
The leaders of the CRC and RCA disability ministries would have a peer relationship, meeting together as often as necessary in order to benefit from and facilitate shared ministry. For the first three years of this partnership, the RCA staff person will lease office space adjacent to the director of CRC Disability Concerns in the CRC denominational building. Programming priorities within the respective denominations will be established separately by the leaders of disability ministry for each denomination. However, this partnership agreement also assumes and expects cooperative work in the following areas: newsletter, website, training/conferences, and web and print resources for use by congregations. Costs for shared aspects of ministry would be divided between the CRC and RCA ministries as appropriate. Furthermore, both parties commit themselves to early communication of any concerns related to the actions of the other party or to the partnership agreement itself, and to search for solutions that affirm the ministry and personnel of each denomination.

Review
This ministry agreement will be reviewed yearly. Both parties agree to consult the other concerning any strategic changes they are considering that might have impact on the ministry of the other party or on the partnership agreement. If adjustments to the agreement are needed, proposed changes will be brought to the CRC Board of Trustees and the RCA General Synod Council. A major review will take place after year three, with the goal that the ministries will share more deeply in ministry as we continue this relationship.

RCA DIALOGUE ON HOMOSEXUALITY
The RCA’s Dialogue on Homosexuality (MGS 2005, R-94 [substitute], p. 372) program advanced significantly during the 2007-2008 year. The “listening” phase of the program was largely completed by mid-year. A major component of the “listening” consisted of a survey of RCA members on the subject of homosexuality; nearly 4,000 responses were received.

The four-session Dialogue series “went public” in the autumn of 2007. By early spring 2008 the series had been conducted in the classes of Nassau-Suffolk, East Sioux, Central Iowa, Pleasant Prairie, and North Grand Rapids, and in the southern portion of the Synod of the Mid-Atlantics. Scheduled for mid- and later-spring dates were the Synod of Albany and the classes of Chicago and Ontario.

Facilitation for the dialogue sessions has been provided by the Rev. Dr. John Stapert, coordinator of the dialogue program, and by various members of the dialogue’s steering com-
mittee. Additional facilitators, who will be available for future events, are being identified and trained as the program advances across the church.

The dialogue will continue to be available across the RCA in the autumn of 2008 and early spring of 2009. The scheduling strategy has been to conduct dialogue sessions first in those geographic locations where there is the highest interest and eagerness.

At the close of each dialogue session, participants are asked to complete an evaluation form. Ratings and comments on these forms have been strongly positive. Participants generally have felt safe in expressing their views and have appreciated the opportunities to engage each other on the subject.

GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL’S RESPONSE TO GENERAL SYNOD 2007

REFERRALS

MGS 2007, R-12, p. 82
To affirm and continue to pursue strong ecumenical relationships between the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan and the Reformed Church in America, and in doing so, to celebrate our common commitment to the evangelical mission of Christ’s church on earth; and further, to also affirm and continue the ecumenical relationship between the China Christian Council and the Reformed Church in America, and in doing so, to celebrate our common commitment to the evangelical mission of Christ’s church on earth; and further, to request the general secretary to write letters on behalf of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America to the leadership of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan and to the leadership of China Christian Council, reaffirming our commitments to these ecumenical partnerships.

MGS 2007, R-13, p. 83
To reaffirm the historic support of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America for the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan and its advocacy for human rights, democracy in Taiwan, and the role of Taiwan in the world community; and further, to request the general secretary of the Reformed Church in America to write letters on behalf of the General Synod to the president of the United States, the leaders of the United States Congress, the prime minister of Canada, and the leaders of the Canadian Parliament, expressing the continued support of the Reformed Church in America for the role of Taiwan in the world community and for the peaceful resolution of political disputes between the governments of Taiwan and China; and further, to encourage congregations and members of the Reformed Church in America to pray for the upcoming electoral process in Taiwan and for the participation of the Taiwanese people in the determination of the political future of Taiwan.

The correspondence requested in R-12 and R-13 was sent in the fall of 2007.

MGS 2007, R-21, p. 103
To instruct the General Synod Council, in cooperation with appropriate commissions, RCA institutions and agencies, and ecumenical partners, to identify and/or develop resources and learning opportunities that will assist the RCA’s congregations and all members to better understand and claim as their own a commitment in Christ to missional engagement as core to their life and faithfulness.

As reported to the GSC in October 2007, because of the commitment to missional engagement of the RCA and its congregations explicit in Our Call, this broad-ranging instruction of General Synod is already being implemented in a number of ways. Additionally, the formation of the dialogue called for in R-16 must also influence and guide the kind of resources made available to congregations. When that direction is clearer, the general secretary can assign this mandate to appropriate staff.
To request the General Synod Council, in consultation with the Commission on Judicial Business, to explore ways to facilitate retrieval of documents of previous judicial cases in order to meet the need for more awareness of discipline already imposed in the church at large.

At the fall 2007 meeting it was reported that the RCA’s general counsel, in consultation with the General Synod’s Commission on Judicial Business, would do the following:

1. Research General Synod minutes (starting with more recent minutes and working back in time) with respect to judicial matters and attempt to develop an indexing system for categorizing judicial matters according to the allegations made.
2. Attempt to index judicial matters that have been appealed to the General Synod in accordance with the indexing system that is developed.
3. Ask each regional synod and classis for copies of (or access to) minutes of meetings (as assembly or judicatory) so they can be reviewed and catalogued in a similar manner.

Many disciplinary matters that have the potential to be dealt with judicially may in fact be resolved pastorally instead (e.g., through admonition or rebuke). To provide as full a picture as possible, the general counsel intends to include such matters in the indexing process as well.

Steps 1 and 2 have been completed in draft form. The office of the general counsel has requested material from regional synods and from the RCA Archives so it can begin working on step 3 in the coming months.

RESPONSE TO THE 2007 GENERAL SYNOD’S R-48
(The Fresh Wind Letter)

The 2007 General Synod of the Reformed Church in America passed the following recommendation:

To instruct the General Synod Council, in consultation with the general secretary, to arrange for a conference of elders and deacons, representing our diversity, from across the denomination to discuss how the RCA should best proceed to increase the effectiveness of its ordained leadership in revitalization, multiplication, leadership, discipleship, and mission, with particular emphasis on the following:

1. living into the parity of office that we theoretically embrace;
2. assuring that the gifts of those who are already serving are available to serve the broader church; and
3. determining what formative experiences, training, consultations, etc. are most effective in encouraging elders and deacons to be missionally minded;

and to report findings of the conference to the 2008 General Synod (MGS 2007, R-48, p. 165).

This conference took place May 2-4, 2008, at Peace Reformed Church in Eagan, Minnesota. Leaders throughout the RCA were asked to nominate deacons and elders who play a significant role in their congregation, classis, or regional synod and who have contributed to more faithful and fruitful ministry. Forty-five people were invited. The following thirty-one people, representing eight states and two countries, were able to attend the conference:
Arthurlene Adams, California Classis  
Desiree Albizu, Mid-Hudson Classis  
Ted Ault, Minnesota Classis  
Karen Bader, Holland Classis  
Mary Bechler, West Sioux Classis  
Karen Breuker, North Grand Rapids Classis  
John Chen, New York Classis  
Steve DeYoung, Holland Classis  
Judy Dirkse, West Sioux Classis  
Cindy Heinen, Wisconsin Classis  
Rhonda Johnson, Minnesota Classis  
Henry Jungling, Pleasant Prairie Classis  
Joann Koning, South Grand Rapids Classis  
Brad Lewis, Schenectady Classis  
George Lohmer, Minnesota Classis  
Curt Patterson, Central Iowa Classis  
Irma Patterson, Queens Classis  
Oliver Patterson, Queens Classis  
Annie Lee Phillips, Queens Classis  
Ellen Ratmeyer, Albany Classis  
Duane Schecter, Muskegon Classis  
David Schmitt, Wisconsin Classis  
Karen Seitz, North Grand Rapids Classis  
Bart Strong, Ontario Classis  
Cora Taitt, New York Classis  
Elmer Van Drunen, Illiana Classis  
Wayne Vermeer, West Sioux Classis  
Ted Vonk, Southwest Michigan Classis  
Peg Weaver, South Grand Rapids Classis  
Don Werkhoven, Central California Classis  
Ruth Wilson, Lake Erie Classis

Bradley Lewis, moderator for General Synod Council, Kenneth Eriks, director of congregational mission, Kirsty DePree, coordinator of discipleship, and Ellen Ratmeyer, coordinator of consistory training and ministry services, provided leadership for the conference. Elizabeth Varin, a member of Christ Community Church in Carmichael, California, facilitated the conference using a process called Appreciative Inquiry.

The focus of the conference was vibrant ordained leadership. The vision for the gathering was to facilitate a process of discovery,

- allowing us to appreciate and trust each other,
- igniting our spirit of cooperation and willingness to learn from one another, and
- moving us along in a quest for developing increasingly vibrant ordained leadership throughout the RCA.

The conference participants shared stories of vibrant ordained leadership and its impact on consistories and classes throughout the RCA. They gathered insights from the stories they heard. They dreamed new dreams of what the impact of vibrant ordained leaders—deacons, elders, and ministers of Word and sacrament, collaborating as equals—could be on the RCA, and wrote provocative statements that arose out of those dreams—present-tense statements of a future reality.

They worshiped, prayed, meditated, listened to one another, and listened to God. They read
the Pentecost Letter, addressed to the Reformed Church in America by the General Synod of 2000, and they were moved by what the Holy Spirit said to the church through that document.

In the spirit of that letter, the participants wrote the following letter to all leaders in the RCA—those who hold office and those who lead ministry in other ways—extending the message of the Pentecost Letter specifically to RCA leaders.

**The Fresh Wind Letter**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

We, your sisters and brothers, came together at a gathering of deacons and elders in the Reformed Church in America, on the weekend between Ascension and Pentecost, in the year of our Lord 2008. We have felt as one a Fresh Wind—the Holy Spirit—commanding us to go back to the leaders of our churches, our assemblies, and our communities to testify to the urgent call we felt this weekend.

We gathered as congregational leaders from across the RCA, expectant for how we would benefit in our common ministries of following Jesus Christ. Through an intentional process of sharing our stories and learning from one another, we found that a vision for servant leadership within the church we have come to love began to take root. We felt anew the manifold ways Christ reaches us as a young minister’s sermon gave us the words “Fresh Wind” to capture what we were experiencing as we met. We left convinced that we have been called on a mission, guided by the Holy Spirit—to remold his church as Christ would want us to reshape it, letting no obstacle stand in our way.

We felt the fresh wind of the Spirit blowing out the idols and rituals we have erected and maintained in the selection of ordained leadership—the idols of aspiring to position rather than function; of popularity and influence rather than Christ-like character and calling; of availability rather than a growing relationship with Christ. We felt the Spirit blowing in new ways for congregations to call followers of Jesus Christ into leadership within the body of Christ.

We felt the fresh wind of the Spirit blowing out the idols of status, power, tradition, comfort, and financial influence, and blowing in true parity of office, equality in function, with servant hearts and a willingness to be actively engaged in relationships of mutual accountability and mentoring.

We felt the fresh wind of the Spirit blowing out our sense of having “arrived as leaders” and blowing in a commitment to continuously clarify and obey our call from God.

As we breathed in the fresh wind of the Spirit and heard God’s word of truth, we were convicted of our need for repentance as we fall short of what Christ wants us and our churches to be, we experienced the grace of God and the fresh wind of the Spirit that carries us on, and we were flooded with renewed gratitude for the abundant gifts and life-giving work God entrusts to us.

We felt the fresh wind of the Holy Spirit calling leaders in the RCA to a deeper, more intimate relationship with Jesus Christ as evidenced by the fruit of his Spirit in their lives, their congregations, and their assemblies. We felt that fresh wind challenging us to be Spirit-filled leaders—God-pleasers who exalt Christ and give God alone glory and honor.

We felt the fresh wind of the Spirit calling us to follow Christ’s example in serving oth-
ers. The Spirit reminded us that Christ’s presence will be manifested as we lead his people in prayer and worship, as we share our faith, as we renew our commitment to equip the saints for the work of ministry, and as we recommit to faithful spiritual disciplines in our own lives. In the power of the Holy Spirit, we urge all RCA leaders to walk this path we gladly follow. The price of avoidance and delay is too high.

We felt the fresh wind of the Holy Spirit calling us to remove the blinders and boundaries that separate us from our sisters and brothers who may live next door, miles away, or even oceans apart from us. The Holy Spirit told us that as disciples of Jesus Christ, we must confront institutional, economic, and environmental injustices and seek unity, healing, reconciliation, and peace. We understood a fresh Christ’s call to end poverty, to heal the brokenhearted, and to end all forms of enslavement. We envisioned the possibility of God’s kingdom in heaven as a reality on earth.

In response to the breathing of this fresh wind of the Holy Spirit, we commit ourselves, and call the church, to action. We covenant with God and one another to the following leadership practices.

*We look at the world with Christ’s eyes and let his spirit within us lead our feet to join him in mission.*

Where we have grown lukewarm like the Laodiceans, we repent from our self-centeredness and lack of passion. The Spirit calls us to move from our comfortable pews to not only see and hear the needs of our world but to be active participants—following Jesus Christ in meeting these needs. The Spirit calls us to be vibrant leaders who mobilize members to use their educational, financial, and human resources to join Jesus in mission locally and globally; to show compassion for others; and to advocate for the “least of these.” The Spirit challenges us to build intentional, sustainable relationships with other churches, educational institutions, and community-based organizations in order to understand and meet the needs and challenges of our communities—to be missionaries in our own backyards.

*We lead our congregations and the denomination to become receiving and diverse.*

We hear an unmistakable call from the Holy Spirit to live into the powerful vision of Revelation 7:9-10, in which God gathers all nations around the throne in worship. The Spirit calls us to help transform congregations already in diverse neighborhoods; to actively seek partnerships with churches and organizations that reflect the diversity of North American society; to help all people learn, individually and collectively, about other cultures and the history of race relations; and to reconcile and heal differences between and among those we encounter. Christ compels us to look afresh at the growing economic and educational gaps between and among our community members and to seek to end the disparity, to participate in RCA and other global mission projects that nurture and sustain long-running partnerships in all parts of the world, and to aid efforts to mobilize and organize resources for advocacy in social justice.

*We equip and empower all disciples to serve in areas where God has best gifted them.*

We hear the Holy Spirit affirming the challenge found in 1 Peter 4:10: “Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received...” We yearn and work for the day when all in Christ’s church discover, recognize, develop, and use their gifts to advance God’s kingdom in our churches, communities, and world.
Christ calls us to serve in those areas where the Holy Spirit has gifted us; to serve everyone in our communities, crossing cultural and racial/ethnic boundaries; and to empower, support, and encourage all people in the discovery and use of their gifts. The Spirit calls the church to select vibrant ordained leaders who will serve according to their giftedness in unity alongside pastors and other church leaders in true parity of office.

_We nurture vibrant leaders who put God’s interests before any and all personal interests._

We hear the words of John 17—that Jesus wants his disciples to be unified in order to be a powerful witness to God’s love. As Spirit-led leaders we build a well-articulated vision, shared by leadership and the congregation, to live in union with God and one another. We claim Christ’s call for pastors, ministry staff, elders, deacons, and other lay leaders to serve as equal partners in ministry, with separate roles while pursuing a common mission for the church. We identify and resolve issues before they become conflicts, so that the world sees our unity in following Christ.

In obedience to the fresh wind of the Spirit, we call the church to action, believing that God is calling all of us into a personal intimate relationship with Jesus Christ as evidenced by the fruit of the Holy Spirit in our lives and our faithfulness as Christ’s disciples. God’s call to leadership requires more of us—continuing training, accountability, spiritual growth, and a commitment to grow a community of servant leaders in our congregations and assemblies.

We have asked the General Synod to create a task force to answer the question of how we might better select, empower, and aid in the training and spiritual growth of lay ordained leaders.

We are convinced that the Holy Spirit is calling us to live obediently, serve gladly, and risk freely, right now. We cannot wait—obedience demands our response.

Let those who have ears to hear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the leaders of the Reformed Church in America.

**R-16**  
To instruct the General Synod Council to send the Fresh Wind Letter to every consistory and assembly in the RCA, including the steering committees of congregations not yet organized, asking them to read the letter aloud in their congregations and assemblies and to be open to what the Spirit says to them through it; and further,

that the General Synod Council, in consultation with the general secretary, create a task force charged with the responsibility to propose ways for the Reformed Church in America to better select, equip, empower, encourage, and nurture growth in leaders throughout the RCA, with an update brought to the General Synod in 2009. (ADOPTED)

_MGS 2007, R-57, p. 215_  
That the General Synod direct the General Synod Council to establish a “Committee for Standards, Call, and Care” with the responsibility to 1) evaluate and recommend standards for ministerial preparation to the General Synod, 2) develop strategies to identify and call
forth gifted persons for the ministry of Word and sacrament, and 3) nurture a healthy climate within congregations and classes for ministerial formation; and further, to direct the General Synod Council to report on the composition, accountability, and progress of this committee at the 2008 meeting of the General Synod.

GSC will report to the 2009 General Synod.

**MGS 2007, R-65, p. 253**
To distribute the paper “Immigration and the Reformed Church in America” with a list of current immigration legislation via the RCA’s monthly combined resource mailing, as well as through the RCA website, encouraging members, churches, and staff to extend the welcome and love of Christ to the undocumented immigrant populations in the United States and Canada and advocate for legislation that will protect and serve them.

**MGS 2007, R-66, p. 253**
To instruct the General Synod Council to commission a brief study guide to be available by General Synod 2008 that will educate and inform congregations about the plethora of issues that drive the immigration debate; and further, to encourage congregations to assist immigrants to become citizens of the United States or Canada and to welcome them into the Reformed Church in America.

The paper referred to in R-65 has been made available on the RCA’s website: http://images.rca.org/docs/synod/Synod2007ImmigrationReport.pdf. The requested study guide noted in R-66 has not yet been completed. It will be posted with the paper when it is finished.

**MGS 2007, R-68, p. 255**
To increase awareness of incidents of persecution by requesting that the General Synod Council identify and provide links to websites, organizations, and publications that monitor religious persecution and that provide information on the persecution of Christians in the Philippines, as well as other countries as situations arise.

This recommendation was assigned to the new coordinator of multiracial initiatives and social justice when he joined staff in late fall 2007. The coordinator will complete the work assigned in this referral by the fall of 2008.

**MGS 2007, R-69, p. 255**
To direct the General Synod Council, in consultation with the Council on Pacific and Asian American Ministries, to produce resources for World Communion Sunday 2007 that lead local congregations in prayer for our brothers and sisters in the Philippines as they face persecution, and that give thanks to God for those who have suffered and died while living their faith; and further, to advocate for an end to violations of human rights in the Philippines by encouraging the people of the RCA to participate in a letter writing campaign to their elected officials, encouraging the United States and Canadian governments to use their influence upon the government of the Philippines that is inherent in the “Visiting Forces Agreement” to bring an end to the persecution, and further, to encourage RCA members to write letters communicating to the leadership of the United Nations, the international agency charged with monitoring and responding to violations of human rights in general, the need to address human rights violations in the Philippines.

Worship material, including resources for World Communion Sunday, was placed on the RCA website worship page in the fall of 2007. This will be highlighted again in 2008.

**MGS 2007, R-72, p. 258**
To call RCA employers to review the compensation packages they offer their employees
with an aim to provide a just living wage, and to assign the Commission on Christian Action to survey RCA congregations regarding compensation for employees other than ministers of Word and sacrament, providing a report in light of a living wage no later than General Synod 2010.

The general secretary reported to the GSC in the fall of 2007 that salaries paid to full-time, part-time, and contract employees of the GSC—including those employed by the GSC but assigned to support other General Synod corporations (e.g., Board of Benefits Services, RCA Church Growth Fund)—are all within the salary ranges reported annually to General Synod (MGS 2007, p. 51) in the GSC’s Executive Committee report. Benefits provided to personnel are in accordance with existing personnel policies and meet or exceed applicable federal and state laws. A revised GSC staff compensation system, the first revision of the system in over forty years, is being implemented at this time. A report on the revised compensation system is found on p. 46, titled “RCA Salary Structure for FY2009.”

MGS 2007, R-78, p. 265
To instruct the General Synod Council to refer to the General Synod Council’s Discipleship Team, in consultation with the Commission on Christian Education and Discipleship, the responsibility to formulate the means by which training, mentoring, and support can be offered to those persons in education, discipleship, or youth ministries in RCA congregations; and further, to instruct the team to work specifically in the following four areas:
- Design of a mentoring, coaching program for those working as educators and youth workers within the RCA;
- Creation of professional standards for educators and youth workers;
- Exploration of online resources, potentially in cooperation with the seminaries or other educational institutions;
- Consideration of advocacy needs of educators and youth workers and how to address those needs;

and further, to instruct the team to conclude its work and report to the General Synod Council no later than March 2009.

The GSC’s coordinator for discipleship, in cooperation with the GSC’s Discipleship Team and the Commission on Christian Education and Discipleship, has incorporated this General Synod recommendation into the strategies for discipleship. GSC’s Discipleship report is found behind the “General Synod Council” tab.

MGS 2007, R-86, p. 301
That the president of the General Synod reconstitute the task force originally established in 2005 with the mandates included in that action:
1. to clarify the processes of accountability, appeal, and pastoral care for General Synod professors of theology currently outlined in the Book of Church Order, including any needed revisions to the Book of Church Order;
2. to coordinate the development of relevant policies and practices within the seminaries and/or commissions or agencies of the church that do not require changes to the Book of Church Order, but that relate to the role of General Synod professors within the seminaries and within the life of the church; and further,
3. to review the nature of the office of General Synod professor;
4. to review the criteria for eligibility to that office;
5. to clarify the responsibility of the office of General Synod professor of theology to the General Synod;
6. to examine means by which the General Synod professors could be established as an ongoing body within the order of the church;

with report to the General Synod of 2009.
The president of General Synod has appointed this task force. The Rev. Dr. James Brownson serves as chair. Other members are the Rev. Nathan Busker, the Rev. Phyllis Palsma, the Rev. Dr. John Coakley, the Rev. Dr. Allan Janssen, and the Rev. Stephen Norden. The Rev. Kenneth Bradsell has been assigned as staff. The task force held its first meeting by conference call on March 4, 2008, and convened an in-person meeting at the end of May.

**MGS 2007, R-97, p. 336**

To instruct the General Synod Council to develop and hold a youth conference on anti-racism and other forms of social justice.

The coordinator of multiracial initiatives and social justice and the coordinator of discipleship have begun work on accomplishing this recommendation. An event will be scheduled in 2009.

**MGS 2007, R-98, p. 336**

To urge the seminaries, colleges, classes, and congregations of the RCA to develop strategies for studying the Belhar Confession and to incorporate it in worship.

Following the joint meeting of the General Synod Council and the General Synod's commissions in October 2007 a Belhar Implementation Team was created to assist the church in carrying out this recommendation. By mid-April 2008, resources on the RCA website were greatly expanded (and located under a simpler domain name, www.rca.org/belhar), including a new section of worship resources for congregational and classis use. The majority of classes have been contacted directly (through their stated clerk) about their commitment to engage in study of the Belhar Confession. Each of the named assemblies and/or institutions will be contacted and invited to respond once the resources are in place.

**MGS 2007, R-99, p. 337**

To instruct the General Synod Council to develop by January 30, 2008, a set of hiring strategies and practices that fully ensure a diverse slate of candidates for all new staff hires.

The following draft strategies have been developed by the personnel office and are currently under review:

1. Target our recruitment and job postings in spheres which attract applicants who are racially and ethnically diverse.
2. Re-open the recruitment process if the applicant pool is not 20 percent racially and ethnically diverse.
3. Include a statement regarding commitment to diversity in all job postings: “Consistent with the RCA’s commitment to Equal Employment Opportunity, people of all ethnicities are welcomed to apply.”
4. Request applicants to state in their cover letters their experiences with racially and ethnically diverse workforces.

In addition, a revision of the equal employment opportunity statement for GSC employed personnel has been completed and is also under review at this time.

**MGS 2007, R-100, p. 345**

To approve the paper “Who May Present Children for Baptism?” and to encourage boards of elders to use the paper for study and reflection on baptismal practice and the spiritual care of children and families.

This paper is available on the RCA website at http://images.rca.org/docs/synod/PresentChildrenBaptism.pdf.
To direct the General Synod Council, in consultation with the Commission on Theology, to design and implement an appropriate process or processes through which church members, congregations, assemblies, agencies, and institutions may submit to the Commission on Theology theological inquiries arising in connection with the provisional adoption of the Belhar Confession; and further, to provide opportunity and resources for the commission or individual members thereof to participate in dialogues, workshops, or other forums that may be planned to engage with the Belhar as part of its provisional reception.

The Commission on Theology initiated action to help form a Belhar Implementation Team. See the response to R-98 above.

Referrals from Previous Synods

To instruct the General Synod Council to explore the development of an annual multi-day denominational conference on racism and anti-racism that would serve as a time for conversation, learning, networking, and strategizing, and report to General Synod 2007.

The coordinator for multiracial ministries and social justice is exploring this initiative.

To instruct the General Synod Council to provide an annual report of GSC staff, General Synod officers, and GSC members who have participated in anti-racism workshops, indicating the organization presenting the workshops.

General Synod Council staff employed through 2003 participated in anti-racism training provided by Lutheran Human Relations Association. GSC executive staff, members of the General Synod commissions, and the GSC will participate in anti-racism training in October 2008.

To instruct the General Synod Council to specifically identify the persons or roles/positions that should participate in anti-racism workshops; to encourage minimally 80 percent participation of the identified list by 2010; and report to the General Synod in 2011.

See the response to R-40 above.

To instruct the General Synod Council to ensure that a minimum of four individuals are trained to conduct anti-racism workshops for the denomination by fall 2007.

The coordinator for multiracial ministries and social justice is currently negotiating with an anti-racism training organization regarding this initiative.

To instruct the General Synod Council to make available ongoing anti-racism workshops for each regional synod beginning fall 2007.

Three programs are being developed to meet this instruction: 1) Breakfast Club, a twelve-month, one-on-one discussion based program where pairs explore race, faith, and personal life journey; 2) a close review of history to examine the formation of and resistance to race-based governmental actions, power analysis, and racialization of self- and Christian-images; and 3) an intense four-day bus trip through the deep South to explore past and present places of racial injustice, speak with people, and examine
To immediately begin an honest and intentional denomination-wide dialogue on homosexuality; and further, to instruct the General Synod Council (GSC) to hire a facilitator to begin work no later than January 2006 and to continue for up to three and a half years in order to give direction to the dialogue; and further, to direct the GSC to provide an annual report to the General Synod, with a final report not later than General Synod 2009.

The GSC’s dialogue team is conducting events throughout the United States and Canada. An update report titled “RCA Dialogue on Homosexuality” is included in this GSC Executive Committee report.

RESOLUTIONS

During 2008 the General Synod Council recognized the departure from staff of a group of dedicated and effective staff persons in the area of finance.

Susan Converse served the RCA as treasurer and chief financial officer for nearly ten years, beginning in 1998. During that time, several major accomplishments have increased the strength and service of our financial systems and our benefit programs. Our retirement program was been entirely redesigned, with pension funds now handled efficiently by Fidelity Investments. Important changes in the RCA health insurance program have increased its effectiveness and financial stability. Further, a comprehensive set of financial policies have been put into place to guide all of our operations. Susan leaves the General Synod Council of the Reformed Church in America, as well as the Board of Benefit Services and the RCA Church Growth Fund, all in a sound financial position.

Several other members of the finance staff chose not to relocate to the Michigan Regional Center following the 2007 decision by the General Synod Council to move most financial operations to that location. Norma Violante, contribution accountant, served the RCA for over thirty-one years in various capacities. Michelle Boyd, accounting coordinator, served the RCA for over two years. And Ruth Blankschen, assistant controller, served the RCA for six years.

At its spring 2008 meeting, the General Synod Council adopted the following resolution for these dedicated servants of the church:

Be it resolved that the General Synod Council of the Reformed Church in America, in the year of our Lord 2008, offers thanks to God for the years of competent and faithful service to the ministries of the Reformed Church in America by Susan Converse, Ruth Blankschen, Norma Violante, and Michelle Boyd. Each contributed from the unique gifts that God had given to them, with diligence and care of all. Each, out of their careful stewardship of the church’s resources, contributed to the sound financial position of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America. And each did their work with the good spirit and commitment that made them valued colleagues and friends.

More recently, the General Synod Council (GSC) has taken note of the forthcoming departure of Jeff Japinga. For more than two decades Jeff has served on the staff of the Reformed Church in America, utilizing his gifts in constantly dependable, committed, and faithful ways to strengthen our life and mission. His wisdom dealing with education, resources, and communication has benefited the GSC’s work enormously. For many years he served the Church Herald, including as its editor from 1991 to 1995. From there, he transitioned to the staff of the GSC, and led its work in Christian education and discipleship. His service helped transform how we nurture and support the capacity of congregations to deepen discipleship. More recently Jeff has served as executive coordinator in the Office of the...
General Secretary. He has performed that role with extraordinary skill, wisdom, and grace.

Moreover, Jeff has provided leadership for the RCA’s staff development efforts, and has facilitated the Belhar Implementation Group. He also works with General Synod director of operations and support Ken Bradsell as a key person in the process for discussion and decision-making at General Synod. Jeff is leaving the GSC staff in July in order to become dean of the doctor of ministry program at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago. He’ll be working with pastors who desire to deepen their understanding of and capacity for congregational service and mission, using his strong commitment as an educator and teacher to do so. The GSC gratefully commends this servant of the church to his new role of teaching and ministry.

Therefore,

be it further resolved that the General Synod encourages the delegates and guests of the 202nd regular session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America to join it in expressing to Susan, to Ruth, to Norma, to Michelle, and to Jeff its gratitude, admiration, and affection and prayers for years of health and joy in continuing service to Christ
and his church.

PRELIMINARY SUMMARY OF THE STATISTICAL REPORT
OF THE REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA
FOR THE YEAR ENDING 12/31/2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>Increase or Decrease</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Churches</td>
<td>934</td>
<td>931</td>
<td>931</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Church Households</td>
<td>112,747</td>
<td>105,166</td>
<td>105,445</td>
<td>279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Confessing Members</td>
<td>168,450</td>
<td>166,921</td>
<td>165,953</td>
<td>(968)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Inactive Members</td>
<td>39,121</td>
<td>39,061</td>
<td>39,387</td>
<td>326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Baptized Members</td>
<td>67,886</td>
<td>64,876</td>
<td>65,238</td>
<td>362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Total Membership</td>
<td>275,457</td>
<td>270,858</td>
<td>270,518</td>
<td>(340)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Adherents</td>
<td>46,311</td>
<td>51,068</td>
<td>50,498</td>
<td>(570)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Average Worship Attendance</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Received on Confession</td>
<td>7,295</td>
<td>6,863</td>
<td>7,040</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Received on Certificate</td>
<td>3,538</td>
<td>3,409</td>
<td>2,989</td>
<td>(420)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Transferred</td>
<td>3,400</td>
<td>3,068</td>
<td>3,060</td>
<td>(8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Deceased</td>
<td>2,692</td>
<td>2,545</td>
<td>2,580</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Other Removals from Roll</td>
<td>8,071</td>
<td>5,656</td>
<td>5,034</td>
<td>(622)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Infants Baptized</td>
<td>3,568</td>
<td>3,468</td>
<td>3,351</td>
<td>(117)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Adults Baptized</td>
<td>1,414</td>
<td>1,488</td>
<td>1,404</td>
<td>(84)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Sunday Church School</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 New Membership Classes</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 Other Educational Programs</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19a RCA Assessments</td>
<td>12,152,631</td>
<td>12,517,429</td>
<td>12,646,733</td>
<td>129,304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19b RCA Contributions</td>
<td>14,393,041</td>
<td>13,660,425</td>
<td>14,294,301</td>
<td>633,876</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19c Other Contributions</td>
<td>18,488,940</td>
<td>18,042,115</td>
<td>18,920,354</td>
<td>878,239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 Congregation Purposes</td>
<td>271,991,931</td>
<td>293,101,846</td>
<td>326,507,755</td>
<td>33,405,909</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>317,026,543</td>
<td>337,321,815</td>
<td>372,369,143</td>
<td>35,047,328</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Church Plants with a Denominational Plan
70 church plants have an average worship attendance of 102

Organized/Received/Adopted
Korean Choong Hyun Church, Orlando, Florida (1/07) Classis of Florida
New Covenant Korean Reformed Church, Oradell, New Jersey (2/07) Classis of Greater Palisades
Hanaim Church, Paramus, New Jersey (6/07) Classis of Passaic Valley
The Journey, San Jose, California (9/07) Classis of California
The River, Kalamazoo, Michigan (11/07) Classis of Southwest Michigan
The Journey, Surprise, Arizona (12/07) Classis of the Southwest

Disbanded/Released
Mont Pleasant Reformed Church, Schenectady, New York (3/07) Classis of Schenectady
Community of Joy, Traverse City, Michigan (6/07) Classis of Northern Michigan
Fourth Corner Community Church, Bellingham, Washington (8/07) Classis of Cascades
Reformed Protestant Dutch Church of Coeymans, Coeymans, New York (11/07) Classis of Albany


**ELECTING A GENERAL SECRETARY**

1. The Reverend Classis of Albany respectfully overtures the General Synod to amend the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 5, Section 3, to read in its first sentence: “The General Synod shall have elect a general secretary whose duty shall be to...”; and further, to instruct the Commission on Church Order to prepare such changes to the Bylaws of the General Synod to effect the constitutional change.

**Reasons:**

1. The general secretary is an officer of the General Synod. It is reasonable that the synod should select its own officers.
2. The general secretary is charged with “articulating a vision for the church.” In a Reformed church order this can only take place as the assembly elects the person charged with such responsibility.
3. Election by the General Synod will strengthen the relation between the synod and its general secretary.

In response to Overture 1, the advisory committee recommended:

**R-17**

To deny Overture 1. (ADOPTED)

**Reason:**

Provision for the election of the general secretary is already included in the General Synod Council bylaws proposed to the General Synod at this meeting (Article 8.1).

2. The Classis of Columbia-Greene overtures the General Synod to amend the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 5, Section 3, to read in its first sentence: “The General Synod shall have elect a general secretary for a term of four years, renewable, whose duty shall be to...”; and further, to instruct the Commission on Church Order to prepare such changes to the Bylaws of the General Synod to effect the constitutional change.

**Reasons:**

1. The general secretary is an officer of the General Synod. It is reasonable that the synod should elect its own officers.
2. The general secretary is charged with “articulating a vision for the church” (Section 3). In a Reformed church order this can only take place as the assembly selects the person charged with such a responsibility.
3. Election by the General Synod will strengthen the relation between the synod and its general secretary.

In response to Overture 2, the advisory committee recommended:

**R-18**

To deny Overture 2. (ADOPTED)

**Reasons:**

1. The present system places primary responsibility for oversight of the general secretary with the General Synod Council, which is best situated to assess the effectiveness of the general secretary’s performance.
2. The General Synod is not in the best position to assess the effectiveness of the general secretary in the ongoing exercise of the office because most attendees participate very infrequently and are unaware of much of the everyday work of the general secretary.

3. The general secretary is more effectively held accountable when the position is defined as that of an “at will employee.”

3. The Classis of Greater Palisades overtures the General Synod to amend the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 5, Section 3, to read in its first sentence: “The General Synod shall have elect a general secretary whose duty shall be to...”; and further, to instruct the Commission on Church Order to prepare such changes to the Bylaws of the General Synod to effect the constitutional change.

**Reasons:**

1. The general secretary is an officer of the General Synod. It is reasonable that the synod should select its own officers.
2. The general secretary is charged with “articulating a vision for the church.” In a Reformed church order this can only take place as the assembly elects the person charged with such responsibility.
3. Election by the General Synod will strengthen the relation between the synod and its general secretary.

In response to Overture 3, the advisory committee recommended:

   **R-19**
   To deny Overture 3. (ADOPTED)

**Reason:**

   Provision for the election of the general secretary is already included in the General Synod Council bylaws proposed to the General Synod at this meeting (Article 8.1).

### Moving Denominational Offices

4. The Reverend Classis of Albany respectfully overtures the General Synod to instruct its executive committee to report to the General Synod the rationale for the movement of national offices from New York City to Grand Rapids, including specifically the Office of the General Secretary, and further to offer a financial accounting of the costs involved in the move and the financial saving therefrom.

**Reasons:**

1. The placement of the national office is an important action taken by a denomination. Since the “General Synod alone shall determine denominational policy” (*BCO* Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 2, Section 4), it is reasonable that the synod be full partners in the conversation.
2. While there may be good reasons for the move, other options were not placed before the church.
3. An accounting of financial advantages (or disadvantages) of any major initiative makes for transparency to the body that is finally responsible for the “general superintendence over the interests and concerns of the whole church.” (*BCO* Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 2, Section 1).

In response to Overture 4, the advisory committee recommended:

   **R-20**
   To deny Overture 4. (ADOPTED)
Reason:
The overture asks for an explanation and accounting, which has already been addressed in the report of the General Synod Council serving as the executive committee of the General Synod on pages 44-45.

5. The Classis of Columbia-Greene overtures the General Synod to instruct the General Synod Council to report to the 2009 General Synod the rationale for the movement of General Synod offices from New York City to Grand Rapids, including specifically the Office of the General Secretary; and further, to offer a financial accounting of the costs involved in the move, as well as any financial savings therefrom.

Reasons:
1. The placement of the offices of the General Synod is an important action. Since the “General Synod alone shall determine denominational policy” (BCO Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 2, Section 4), it is reasonable that the synod be a full partner in the conversation.
2. The decision to move the “headquarters” from one part of the church to another should engage the entire church. The New York City site has been geographically near three regional synods, almost one-half of our denomination’s churches; Grand Rapids is within one synod. While there may be good reasons for the move, other options were not placed before the church.
3. An accounting of financial advantages (or disadvantages) of any major initiative makes for transparency to the body that is finally responsible for the “general superintendence over the interests and concerns of the whole church” (BCO Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 2, Section 1).

In response to Overtures 5, the advisory committee recommended:

R-21
To deny Overture 5. (ADOPTED)

Reason:
The overture asks for an explanation and accounting, which has already been addressed in the report of the General Synod Council serving as the executive committee of the General Synod on pages 44-45.

6. The Classis of Greater Palisades overtures General Synod to instruct its executive committee to report to the General Synod the rationale for the movement of national offices from New York City to Grand Rapids, including specifically the Office of the General Secretary; and further, to offer a financial accounting of the costs involved in the move and the financial saving therefrom.

Reasons:
1. The placement of the national office is an important action taken by a denomination. Since the “General Synod alone shall determine denominational policy” (BCO Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 2, Section 4), it is reasonable that the synod be full partners in the conversation.
2. The General Synod reviewed the placement of denominational offices in an extensive report in 1987 (Minutes, pp. 245ff.). The General Synod subsequently denied an overture in 1994 requesting that the “headquarters” be moved out of New York City. The General Synod itself has taken no further action.
3. The movement of the “headquarters” from one part of the church to another should engage the entire church. Geographically “475” is near three regional synods. Grand
Rapids is in one synod. While there may be good reasons for the move, other options were not placed before the church.

4. An accounting of financial advantages (or disadvantages) of any major initiative makes for transparency to the body that is finally responsible for the “general superintendence over the interests and concerns of the whole church” (BCO Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 2, Section 1).

In response to Overture 6, the advisory committee recommended:

R-22
To deny Overture 6. (ADOPTED)

Reason:
The overture asks for an explanation and accounting, which has already been addressed in the report of the General Synod Council serving as the executive committee of the General Synod on pages 44-45.

Assessments to Cover Insurance Costs for Ministers of Word and Sacrament

7. The Reverend Classis of Albany respectfully overtures the General Synod to fund health, dental, life, accidental death and dismemberment, long-term care, and long-term disability insurance for all ordained RCA ministers of Word and sacrament under call or contract working twenty hours per week or more whose insurance is not covered by a body outside of the RCA by per-member assessment, rather than billing the churches directly for the actual cost of benefits beginning 1 January 2009.

Reasons:
1. The issue of health care remains a major crisis in the United States, and there are no signs of any immediate solution. Whether we wish the RCA to be in the insurance business or not, we will continue to have this responsibility for the foreseeable future.
2. Under our covenantal theology, it is the responsibility of the whole church to support those in ministry among us. In this case, our Canadian brothers and sisters would be called on to assist U.S. congregations through this crisis.
3. Such a shift would free up resources at our theological seminaries, which could then be used to explore other modes of theological education and/or reduce the cost to students of such education, and allow for more people to be trained for various kinds of ministry in the church, thus helping the RCA to fulfill “Our Call.”
4. Many of these people—GSC, regional synod, classical, and agency employees—already have their insurance costs paid by assessment dollars.
5. Such a change would increase the stable pool of participants in the plan, making it easier to explore merger with an even larger plan or other ways to deliver such insurance more economically.
6. While, in response to an overture from this classis and a referral from the 2006 General Synod, the Board of Benefits Services gave an insightful report on the impact of such a change (MGS 2007, pp. 184-185), the board indicated that it cannot “determine for the synod” whether such a plan should be implemented. Without a recommendation or an overture, however, the 2006 synod had no means of acting on or even discussing the report.
7. Albany Classis believes that this overture simplifies certain problems anticipated by the BOBS 2007 report, since we are invoking the principal that the cost of a responsibility of the whole church should be borne by the entire church, without exception.
8. The great increase in costs of insurance since this issue was last considered by the General Synod (MGS 1990, pp. 370-377) has made it increasingly difficult for con-
In response to Overture 7, the advisory committee recommended:

**R-23**
To deny Overture 7. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. Funding current insurance liabilities for all active pastors covered in this overture would cost at least $85 per communicant member.
2. This would benefit churches with under approximately 220 members. Larger churches would carry more of the financial burden and might eventually refuse to participate. Large churches are pressed in their budgets, too.
3. Canadian churches would be forced to subsidize American churches in their insurance costs. This burden would fall on small churches as well as larger churches.
4. Churches would be assessed, even if they do not have an installed pastor.
5. This approach would weaken the clear bond between a pastor and the congregation he or she serves, in which the congregation agrees to take responsibility for the full support of the pastor.

**Merging RCA Health Insurance with Another Plan**

8. The Reverend Classis of Albany respectfully overtures the General Synod to instruct the Board of Benefits Services to prepare a plan by which our health insurance program might be merged with a larger one, with specific recommendations and rationale for implementation, for report to the 2009 General Synod.

Reasons:
1. The issue of health care remains a major crisis in the United States, and there are no signs of any immediate solution.
2. The possibility of merging our program with a larger one, thus reducing our insurance costs by including those covered by our program in a larger insurance pool, was one of the arguments for requiring participation by all installed ministers, in order to insure the stability of the program, when the RCA adopted this system in 2004. Since then, insurance costs have continued to rise substantially, but no recommendations for merger of our program with another have been forwarded to the General Synod.
3. Such a change could free up resources in congregations, assemblies, seminaries, and agencies across the church by reducing costs.

In response to Overture 8, the advisory committee recommended:

**R-24**
To deny Overture 8. (ADOPTED)

Reason:
The Board of Benefits Services is already exploring all possible means to reduce insurance costs. It has already considered such strategies, and will continue to explore them.
Advocating to Change the U.S. Health Care System

9. The Reverend Classis of Albany respectfully overtures the General Synod to instruct the general secretary to write letters to whomever is serving as President of the United States, Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, and U.S. Senate Majority Leader as of January 20, 2009, expressing concern over the current inequities and injustices in this country’s health care system, and to send copies of this correspondence to all U.S. denominations with whom the RCA is in fellowship, communion, or dialogue, urging those denominations to speak up in similar ways; and further,

to instruct the Commission on Christian Action to prepare suggested means by which confessing members, consistories, classes, and regional synods might most effectively communicate such concerns and advocate for change with their elected representatives, for report to the 2009 General Synod and posting on the RCA website as soon as possible.

Reasons:
1. The issue of health care remains a major crisis in the United States, and there are no signs of any immediate solution. The fact that the costs related to health care are now imperiling the ministries of RCA congregations means that such perils and injustices are much greater for others across the country.
2. While the general secretary has rightly pointed out that letters which he sends to our elected officials have limited impact, we still have a responsibility as Christians to bear witness for what is right and call our governmental officials to account (Deuteronomy 10:18-19; Proverbs 21:3; Isaiah 1:17, 42:6, 49:6, 60:3; Belhar Confession, Articles 4 and 5).
3. As all of us share in that responsibility, we should all share in this ministry, rather than leaving the task to the general secretary alone.
4. By inviting other denominational bodies to take action with us, we can potentially increase the impact of our witness. Where one small plea may have no effect, repeated pleas can move those who govern to do justice (Luke 18:1-5).

In response to Overture 9, the advisory committee recommended:

R-25
To direct the Commission on Christian Action to prepare a study on the U.S. health care system, and how the church can be salt and light to bring greater justice and effectiveness to that system, for report back no later than the 2010 General Synod. (ADOPTED)

Reason:
The issue of health care remains a major crisis in the United States, and there are no signs of any immediate solution. The fact that the costs related to health care are now imperiling the ministries of RCA congregations means that such perils and injustices are much greater for others across the U.S.

Procedures to Supersede a Consistory

10. The Reverend Classis of Albany respectfully overtures the General Synod to instruct its Commission on Church Order to review BCO Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Sections 12-15 (regarding the supersession of consistories by classes) and BCO Chapter 1, Part II, Article 12, Section 8 (regarding the dissolution of pastoral relationships), specifically looking to clarify the meaning and implication of these sections and recommending, as it sees fit, possible amendments to the Book of Church Order, for report to the 2009 General Synod.
Reasons:
1. The procedures for superseding a consistory (BCO Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 13) seem to presume a “hostile takeover” of sorts, where the consistory would give reasons why it should not be superseded. Procedures are less clear for situations where a consistory requests supersession or where, by resignations, a consistory no longer exists, because it does not include elders, deacons, and a minister of Word and sacrament, and therefore immediate action must be taken.

2. In cases such as those mentioned above, where the consistory is not going to show cause why it should not be dissolved and, therefore, Section 13 will not necessarily be invoked, it is unclear whether the vote for supersession requires a two-thirds supermajority of the classis (the instruction regarding such supermajorities appears only under Sections 13 and 14).

3. Further, it would appear that, while a supermajority may or may not be required to declare a consistory superseded (see reason 2, above), it is not required to reconstitute the consistory (BCO 1.II.7, sec. 15).

4. BCO 1.II.7, sec. 14.b creates an ambiguity, in that the trustees appointed by the classis for care and maintenance of the property are agents of the classis, and entirely subject to its instruction. Yet these same individuals may also be appointed as the functional consistory of the congregation, which gives them some autonomy from the classis and some accountability to the congregation. The administrative functions of a consistory could be in conflict with the charge of the trustees, and this ambiguity should be clarified.

5. The process for dissolving a pastoral relationship seems to presume—as would be true in most cases—the presence of an installed consistory, where the presence of another minister of classis represents the classis’ interests both as originator of the pastoral relationship and as arbitrator of the dissolution between pastor and consistory. How does this function in a case where the consistory has been superseded? Again, assuming that the trustees have been appointed to also serve as a consistory, should one of the ministers appointed as a trustee by the classis—part of the functional consistory—superintend the proceeding? If the pastor does not concur with the request for dissolution, are the trustees functioning as an agent of the classis, in which case the classis cannot be the arbitrator—or as the consistory? If the trustees are functioning as an agent of the classis, does that mean the minister must concur in the dissolution as someone who is amenable to the classis?

In response to Overture 10, the advisory committee recommended:

R-26
To instruct the Commission on Church Order to review the Book of Church Order (BCO), Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Sections 12-15 (regarding the supersession of consistories by classes) and BCO Chapter 1, Part II, Article 12, Section 8 (regarding the dissolution of pastoral relationships), specifically looking to clarify the meaning and implication of these sections and recommending, as it sees fit, possible amendments to the Book of Church Order, for report to the 2009 General Synod. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. The moderator of the Commission on Church Order believes that these concerns are worth exploring.

2. The procedures for superseding a consistory (BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 13) seem to presume a “hostile takeover” of sorts, where the consistory would give reasons why it should not be superseded. Procedures are less clear for situations where a consistory requests supersession or where, by resignations, a consistory no longer exists because it does not include elders, deacons, and a minister of Word and sacrament, and therefore immediate action must be taken.
3. Where the consistory is not going to show cause why it should not be dissolved—and, therefore, Section 13 will not necessarily be invoked—it is unclear whether the vote for supersession requires a two-thirds supermajority of the classis (the instruction regarding such supermajorities appears only under Sections 13 and 14).

4. Further, it would appear that, while a supermajority may or may not be required to declare a consistory superseded (see reason 2, above), it is not required to reconstitute the consistory (BCO 1.1.II.7, Section 15).

5. BCO 1.II.7, Section 14b creates an ambiguity, in that the trustees appointed by the classis for care and maintenance of the property are agents of the classis, and entirely subject to its instruction. Yet these same individuals may also be appointed as the functional consistory of the congregation, which gives them some autonomy from the classis and some accountability to the congregation. The administrative functions of a consistory could be in conflict with the charge of the trustees, and this ambiguity should be clarified.

6. The process for dissolving a pastoral relationship seems to presume—as would be true in most cases—the presence of an installed consistory, where the presence of another minister of classis represents the classis’s interests both as originator of the pastoral relationship and as arbitrator of the dissolution between pastor and consistory. How does this function in a case where the consistory has been superseded? Again, assuming that the trustees have been appointed to also serve as a consistory, should one of the ministers appointed as a trustee by the classis—part of the functional consistory—superintend the proceeding? If the pastor does not concur with the request for dissolution, are the trustees functioning as agent of the classis, in which case the classis cannot be the arbitrator—or as the consistory? If the trustees are functioning as an agent of the classis, does that mean the minister must concur in the dissolution as someone who is amenable to the classis?

Returning Assessment Monies to Classes

11. The Reverend Classis of Mid-Hudson respectfully overtures the General Synod to direct the General Synod Council to return a more significant amount of the monies allocated to send the Church Herald to every household to the classes in 2009 to help reduce the General Synod assessment per member.

Reasons:

1. It is irresponsible to propose a budget on an “assumption” that the General Synod would approve the reallocation of the General Synod Council assessments from the Church Herald to General Synod programs that support Our Call. Such a proposal could be intimidating to delegates of General Synod.

2. Less than 25 percent of the $917,525 was proposed to return to classes, only $200,000. This appears to be slightly more than a token reimbursement.

3. The way in which the proposal was presented to General Synod for the reallocation of Church Herald assessments seemed to be underhanded and thereby has the effect of causing more distrust on the part of churches struggling financially to support their own ministries.

In response to Overture 11, the advisory committee recommended:

R-27
To deny Overture 11. (ADOPTED)

Reason:

Although the process for making the decision regarding the allocation of Church Herald assessments last year could have been more transparent, the decision has now been made, and at present the assessment cut proposed by this overture would severely damage the work of the church.
Changing the Annual Constitutional Inquiry Questions

12. The Reverend Classis of Mid-Hudson respectfully overtures the General Synod to direct the Commission on Church Order to revise the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 1, in order to define, update, and simplify the language of the questions for the annual constitutional inquiries collected by the classes from their member churches.

Reasons:
1. The questions should reflect the core concerns regarding the life of RCA congregations.
2. Some of the current language results in inconsistent applications by the member churches.
3. Some questions are expressed too narrowly. For example:
   - Inquiring into instruction on one confession alone is too restrictive and should be generalized to reflect teaching on all three confessions.
   - Inquiries into the identification of gifts should include all ages and all gifts, including the ministry of Word and sacrament.
4. Some questions are redundant. For example:
   - Inquiring into the performance of the consistory, Board of Elders, Board of Deacons, and installed ministers includes, by definition, meeting all requirements in the Book of Church Order. Therefore, it becomes unnecessary to single out the particular requirements of Chapter 1, Part 1, Article 5, Sections 3 and 4 in a separate question (which leads some member churches to be concerned that the RCA emphasizes these responsibilities more than other responsibilities).
5. Redefining the questions to align with the most significant activities of discipleship and leadership according to Reformed theology, while also simplifying the questions to allow for consistent application, will lead to more meaningful and consistent self-examination by the churches, and improved classis guidance and supervision.

In response to Overture 12, the advisory committee recommended:

R-28
To direct the president of the General Synod to appoint a task force to review the constitutional inquiry questions (BCO 1.II.7, Section 1) for their contemporary theological and ecclesiological relevance, practical usefulness, and missional focus, for report to the General Synod of 2010. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. A review of these questions might be helpful, but it should involve more than church order.
2. These questions can be a tool to assess our faithfulness to the Constitution, but even more to assess church health.

Biennial General Synod

13. The Reverend Classis of Northern Michigan respectfully overtures the General Synod to amend the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 4, Section 1, as follows (additions are underlined, deletions are stricken out):

The General Synod shall meet annually biennially at such time and place as shall have been determined at its previous session. The General Synod Council shall host a leadership conference on
The purpose of the leadership conference shall be to equip congregations for ministry and mission, aligned with the Mission and Vision Statement of the Reformed Church in America. All meetings of the General Synod and leadership conference shall begin and end with prayer.

Reasons:
1. In January 2008, the RCA hosted its first denominational leadership conference, called “One Thing,” in San Antonio, Texas. The “One Thing” event successfully demonstrated the importance of gathering for denominational fellowship focusing on elements of our unity as expressed in our Mission and Vision Statement.
2. The “One Thing” leadership conference demonstrated that we are better stewards of denominational resources and finances if we offer a leadership conference on the alternate years of a biennial General Synod meeting. Leadership conferences are less expensive than General Synod meetings and can be funded through grants, such as the RCA’s grant through the Lilly Endowment.

In response to Overture 13, the advisory committee recommended:

R-29
To deny Overture 13. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. The General Synod is growing and evolving in positive ways and already includes a broad consideration of leadership issues.
2. Annual meetings hold the General Synod Council more accountable for its implementation of the program of the church.
3. In a period of rapid change and church multiplication, church governance needs to stay engaged annually.
4. Annual General Synods provide a way to assure that representatives of the whole church will participate. The same thing cannot be said of events like “One Thing.”
5. Events like “One Thing” are valuable and should be encouraged, but they can still be held within the present structure, since they are revenue neutral.

Filing Complaints against Classes

14. The Classis of Illiana overtures the General Synod to amend the Book of Church Order as follows (additions underlined):

Chapter 2, Part II, Article 1. Nature of Complaints

Sec. 3. A complaint may be filed only with the judicatory that has immediate superintendence of the assembly unless the complaint is filed by two or more classes against another classis and one or more of the complainants is from a regional synod other than that of the accused classis. In such cases, the complaint shall be filed with the clerk of General Synod and General Synod shall assume original jurisdiction.

Sec. 4. A complaint may be filed only by:

d. Two or more classes against another classis.

Reasons:
1. Classes are the most central and critical assembly of the RCA.
2. A formal means for the encouragement and accountability of classes among peers is absent in the BCO.
3. The current political separation of classes from one another fosters more of a congregational than covenantal spirit within the denomination.
4. The absence of class peer accountability can lead to and foster a spirit of disunity in the RCA.
5. Requiring multiple classes to file will minimize frivolous complaints between classes.

In response to Overture 14, the advisory committee recommended:

R-30
To deny Overture 14. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. The practical effect of such a change would be to increase church conflicts and distract the church from its mission.
2. Other classes may and often will lack a sufficient understanding of contextual factors in other classes, rendering them less competent to judge the actions of other classes.
3. Any individual within a class is can lodge a complaint. Current judicial procedures are adequate to protect classes from errors.
4. Higher assemblies provide a more effective and healthier venue for classes to discuss and negotiate their differences.

The New Denominational Magazine/Publication

15. The Regional Synod of Albany overtures the General Synod to instruct the general secretary and the General Synod Council to explain to the synod and subsequently to the denomination why a new denominational magazine/publication has been established that will be distributed by mail beginning three times annually.

Reasons:
1. The reason argued before the General Synod to no longer fund the Church Herald through classical assessments promised to significantly lower those assessments, and did not speak otherwise of establishing a new publication of the General Synod Council.
2. At the time that classical assessments were established for the purpose of an every-household distribution of the Church Herald, consistories and church members had been promised on the floor of General Synod that the every-household subscription mailing list would only be used for the distribution of the Church Herald. The distribution of this new publication seemingly represents a breaking of that covenant.

In response to Overture 15, the advisory committee recommended:

R-31
To direct the General Synod Council to report its overall communication policy and strategy, together with the rationale and funding assumptions undergirding that policy and strategy, to the 2009 General Synod. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. There is confusion in the church about the role and purpose of RCA Today, especially in relationship to the Church Herald.
2. The General Synod needs a clearer understanding of other communication strategies being developed by the General Synod Council.
16. The Regional Synod of New York overtures the General Synod to instruct the
general secretary and the General Synod Council to explain to the church why a
new denominational magazine/publication has been established that will be
distributed by mail beginning three times annually to the detriment of our long-
standing and award-winning *Church Herald*.

**Reasons:**
1. The reason argued before the General Synod to no longer fund the *Church Herald*
through classical assessments promised to significantly lower those assessments, and
did not speak otherwise of establishing a new publication of the General Synod
Council.
2. At the time that classical assessments were established for the purpose of an every-
household distribution of the *Church Herald*, consistories and church members had
been promised on the floor of General Synod that the every-household subscription
mailing list would only be used for the distribution of the *Church Herald*.

In response to Overture 16, the advisory committee recommended:

**R-32**

To direct the General Synod Council to report its overall
communication policy and strategy, together with the rationale
and funding assumptions undergirding that policy and strategy, to
the 2009 General Synod. (ADOPTED)

**Reasons:**
3. There is confusion in the church about the role and purpose of *RCA Today*, especial-
ly in relationship to the *Church Herald*.
4. The General Synod needs a clearer understanding of other communication strategies
being developed by the General Synod Council.

**Annual Financial Support to the Church Herald**

17. The Regional Synod of New York overtures the General Synod to provide annual
financial support to the *Church Herald*, beginning with $120,000 in 2009.

**Reasons:**
1. The *Church Herald* provides a unique mechanism connecting our North American
denomination, meeting the expectations put forth by former General Synod president
Louis Lotz in his 1992 report (*MGS 1992*, p. 30) enumerating how the *Church Herald*
serves the church.
2. The *Church Herald* provides the most complete record of denominational identity,
ministry, mission, and vision.
3. The *Church Herald* provides an important forum for the free expression of opinions
on important denominational and kingdom issues, fulfilling our need to have such a
forum “to debate and discuss, to listen to each other’s stories, and share our own”
4. The *Church Herald* provides resources for spiritual formation otherwise unavailable.
5. The action of General Synod 2007 that ended distribution of the *Church Herald* to
every household in the Reformed Church in America, and removed funding of
$920,000, has compromised the viability of the publication.
6. The *Church Herald* enjoyed little time to effect a successful transition to a
subscription-based system.
7. The *Church Herald* thus far has procured half the subscriptions necessary to func-
tion; *Church Herald* deficit spending is projected to be $120,000 in 2008.
8. If the intent of the action of General Synod was to discontinue every-household
distribution of the *Church Herald*, the unforeseen result has become the imminent destruction of the publication to the detriment of the ministry and mission of the RCA.

9. Restoration of the $120,000 would impact the per-member assessment by approximately $.72, a small price to pay to preserve the *Church Herald*, our “one vehicle for discussion and debate” (*MGS* 1992, p. 30).

In response to Overture 17, the advisory committee recommended:

**R-33**
To request the Editorial Council of the *Church Herald* to submit a proposal and rationale for ongoing assessment subsidies, to be considered by the 2009 General Synod. (ADOPTED)

**Reason:**
The General Synod needs to consider the viability and quality of the *Church Herald* as part of its consideration of the overall communication strategy of the RCA.

A motion was made to amend the motion as follows:

To request the Editorial Council of the *Church Herald* to submit a proposal and rationale for ongoing assessment subsidies, to be considered by the 2009 General Synod and allocate $125,000 of the 2009 budget communications line item to the operating budget of the *Church Herald*.

VOTED: To not adopt the amendment.

**Classis Authority to Suspend or Remove an Installed Deacon or Elder**

18. The Synod of New York respectfully overtures the General Synod to amend the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, to add as Section 23 as follows:

Sec. 23. The Classis shall have authority to remove or suspend any elder or deacon who is ordained and/or installed after an election where there has been an unresolved election objection filed, until such objection is resolved according to the guidelines of the *Book of Church Order*.

**Reasons:**
1. Consistory, as the primary assembly of officeholders, must at all times follow the *Book of Church Order*.
2. The *BCO* does not need per se to provide for every possibility of irregular process. However, the establishment of any office is so fundamental to the proper structure and functioning of any RCA body that issues of irregularities in nomination and election to such an office needs unambiguous recourse.

In response to Overture 18, the advisory committee recommended:

**R-34**
To deny Overture 18. (ADOPTED)

**Reason:**
The *Book of Church Order* procedure for complaints already makes provision for suspending actions which are being complained against (*BCO* 2.II.1.5).
Response to the Report of the President

In response to P-1 from the report of the president (p. 24) the advisory committee recommended:

R-35
To instruct the General Synod Council to appoint a study committee to work with the Houses of Prayer Equipping (HOPE) team to develop a proposal to be presented to General Synod 2009 that will ensure the continuation and funding for the team itself; and further,

to explore the need for, and if appropriate propose a job description and funding for, a denominational minister for prayer.

(ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. The Houses of Prayer Equipping team, a vision that God gave former General Synod president Steve Brooks, has a significant legacy of fruitful work in the life of the Reformed Church.
2. The president reminded us that prayer is arguably the single most important activity in the life of any believer or church, but it has no permanent home or status in the structure of the denomination.

In response to P-2 from the report of the president (p. 25) the advisory committee recommended:

R-36
To affirm the usefulness of vigorous debate, and to thank the president for his concern for the unity and peace of the church.

(ADOPTED)

In response to P-3 from the report of the president (p. 25) the advisory committee recommended:

R-37
To encourage the General Synod Council to continue to find ways to explore alternative strategies for funding the church’s work.

(ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. Giving, funding, and assessments are important issues for the RCA’s life together and deserve careful attention.
2. The issue of assessments seems to be studied on a recurring basis in denominational life and the General Synod Council is in the best position to recognize whether this is a fruitful time to revisit this issue and in what way and context it could best be addressed.
Report of the General Synod Council on Church Multiplication

But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that the sower and reaper may rejoice together (John 4:35-36).

Appreciating the effectiveness of church planting and its biblical precedent in the book of Acts, the Reformed Church in America has committed itself to church multiplication. And the heart of church multiplication is a passion for changed lives.

God’s people across the RCA are imagining new ways to show and tell the good news of life in Christ. In renewing their commitment to the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) many congregations and church leaders are discovering new life and energy—and plenty of challenges—as they plant new churches in their neighborhoods and communities.

New churches reach new people. In fact, the most effective way to reach spiritually lost people is by starting a new church. The ministry of a new church looks and feels different from that of an established church. A new church more easily attracts people across cultural boundaries and in rural, urban, and suburban settings.

The vision of the RCA as it relates to multiplication is to begin four hundred new congregations by 2014, with one-third of these churches to be multicultural plants or congregations of people of racial and ethnic groups that are different than the Anglo majority culture. This represents a ten-fold increase of church planting from 2003, when approximately ten new congregations were birthed each year in the RCA, as witnessed by our “98 by ‘98” decade challenge. In 2013, we seek to start 98 new congregations in one year, creating a sustainable movement of church multiplication that will reach lost people and expand the kingdom of God.

New Church Ministers Where Others Don’t

“We’re called to the dirty, grungy places, the impoverished places. We are called to go where others don’t,” says Rob Link, pastor of The River in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

Grants from the RCA Church Growth Fund, the Classis of Southwest Michigan, and the Synod of the Great Lakes made possible a strong start to The River’s ministry. The church began meeting in September 2004.

“With the grants we were able to hit the ground running hard,” says Link. “We started with sixty-one people and by week three we had hit two hundred and went to a second service.

“Hundreds of non-Jesus people have become Jesus people. A hundred-plus homeless folks or folks living at the mission call The River their home. Everybody’s got issues—it’s just middle class people that pretend they don’t. We’ve had all kinds of crazy things happen at worship, with drunk folks busting out in a dance during a worship song and jumping on stage, or other guys who are bipolar yelling during the sermon, ‘I disagree, that’s not right!’ There’s a lot of the messy side of it, but we’re very okay with it. We roll with it and we deal with it. It’s not about behavior, it’s about belonging. They’ll believe in Jesus and become who he calls them to be.” The River has also seen more than 75 adult baptisms since June 2007.

The River meets in three locations around downtown Kalamazoo and draws up to six hundred people to weekly worship.
GSC MULTIPLICATION ENDS MONITORING REPORT

Each spring the general secretary is required to report to the GSC on progress on the various ends policies established by the GSC. The monitoring report for multiplication follows.

Ends E-2 Church Multiplication
The RCA will foster a sustainable movement of church multiplication through starting new congregations.

General Secretary’s Interpretation

Intermediate goals:
In addition to the three intermediate goals listed in the fall report, two other “multipliers” will be shared here.

OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES IN CHURCH MULTIPLICATION

Intermediate Goals

To accomplish a shift in church planting momentum, the RCA Church Multiplication Team (CMT) is employing a number of “multipliers”:

Double the number of “parenting” churches (primary initiating and directive partners) in the RCA every two years.

Strategies: Up from twenty in 2004, the RCA currently lists seventy-five churches with the mindset and the behavior of a parent church, a church that births and blesses the next generation of churches until these churches are able to reproduce as well. Sixty-five potential parent churches were invited to the January 2008 One Thing event in San Antonio, Texas, for inspiration and training with the Parent Church Network. Most of these churches will be coached and in networks for the twenty-four months following One Thing in order to become part of the one hundred fifty reproducing churches the RCA intends to have by the end of 2009. The goal is to have six hundred such churches by 2014.

Ensure that every church plant is born with a plan to reproduce itself and is held accountable to fulfill that plan.

Strategies: Church plants are not viewed as the end users of the resources committed to start them, but instead become aqueducts for living water. The RCA church-planting goal anticipates that three hundred of its four hundred new congregations will themselves produce new churches. (It also assumes a survivability rate of 80 percent.) This branching out of the family tree becomes a significant multiplier over time toward the goal of four hundred new congregations. Some churches that are four years old or younger have already birthed new congregations in multi-site settings.

Triple the number of emerging planting leaders in the pipeline (named and nurtured over a number of years) in relation to the number of churches planted each year.

Strategies: The CMT has enlisted more than 105 church-planter candidates ranging from high school, college, and seminary students to people on the commissioned pastor track, RCA ministers, ministers from other denominations, and international leaders. The Emerging Leaders Team of the CMT oversees and directs the planters assessment and training process with a dedicated budget and effective teamwork. Two years ago, the CMT had the idea to enlist planters but no actual system. The strategy the team now has in place has helped the RCA make considerable progress in church multiplication.
Exponential funding.

To realistically support a vision that increases by ten-fold (from ten a year to one hundred) the number of new congregations to be started by the end of Our Call, financial resources for church multiplication have to grow significantly as well. The CMT estimates $60 million will be needed over the next six years for church planting. This figure is based on three hundred new congregations receiving an average of $200,000 in outside support over their first three years. While some new congregations start for less than $50,000 or become self-supporting from day one (house church networks, multi-site congregations, etc.), costs for other high-impact church plants that are designed to plant a series of new churches in an area in a few years and which require dual planters, are often closer to $500,000, not including the cost of land and building. The CMT has plans underway to obtain the $60 million that will be needed. The team has applied for a Lilly grant for church multiplication and helped develop new Global Mission/Church Multiplication Partnership-in-Mission (PIM) shares that give RCA congregations the opportunity to invest in planting new churches. In addition, 10 percent of offerings in new plants will be given to the plants’ sponsoring churches so that they can plant more new churches, and approximately $20 million already earmarked for planting in classis bank accounts across all forty-five classes will be put to better use. The sale of existing property is not really in view to achieve this financial goal, although it may happen, and classis decisions may align with church multiplication needs at times.

R-38
To urge every RCA church to consider becoming a church partner for North American church planting with a Partnership in Mission share for the next six years to help plant churches across North America. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. RCA church planting is expanding even more rapidly than anticipated and partnerships are needed from at least three hundred RCA congregations cross-regionally to fuel this movement in the next six critical years.
2. These gifts, to be administered for Church Multiplication through the RCA’s successful Global Mission PIM share system, will multiply many times over in coming years: helping to start self-supporting churches that will in turn plant others, as well as provide funding for all kinds of ministry and mission in local and global communities, as well as take on specific mission shares globally when these new congregations organize as RCA churches.
3. This is a practical way for more churches to actively engage in church multiplication. With a mission share for planting, churches will receive frequent reports and receive speakers from new congregations. This will seed further vision and commitment to church multiplication as one united church under Our Call.

Exponential leadership.

For the next three hundred new congregations to have talented and approved RCA church planters at the helm, a dynamic reproduction of new leadership must occur. The CMT has run estimates on the number of church planters likely to be produced through our two seminaries and Ministerial Formation Certification Agency over the next six years. The number of master of divinity graduates was estimated at sixty per year, of which perhaps sixteen would be candidates for planting. Combine this with the reality that potentially fifty or more current RCA pastors of the fifteen hundred or so ordained ministers of Word and sacrament could retire annually in coming years, and it becomes obvious that the RCA needs leaders for planting from new sources. The commissioned pastor track outlined in the Book of Church Order is taking hold in a number of parenting churches, classes, and
regions. International leaders have been attracted to the RCA recently, as well as pastors from other denominations. Both women and men will need to be raised up, trained, and deployed for planting, in line with the vision of Joel expressed in Acts 2. Strategies are underway to help leaders reproduce leaders in church-based training environments, much like Jesus’ apprenticing model in the New Testament. Fortunately the RCA has hundreds of potential qualified leaders to help meet this multiplying need for new equipping leaders for Christ’s church.

Data Summary

The RCA ended 2007 with eighty-nine New Congregation Plans approved, which is beyond the sixty-six projected for the first five years of Our Call. In fact, 91 approved New Congregation Plans was the goal by the end of 2008, and 124 by the end of 2009. Regional synods currently report worship attendance numbers for more than 140 new congregations in the U.S. and Canada.

The Parenting Church Network included seventy-five parent churches by the end of 2007, and this is expected to double every two years through 2013, the last year of Our Call. The One Thing equipping event in San Antonio in January 2008 included training for sixty-five potential parent churches that are becoming part of ten new coached multiplying networks across the RCA.

Currently more than 105 emerging leaders are in the “planter’s pipeline,” and new assessments of potential planters take place regularly.

More than one-third of new congregations continue to be multiracial or ethnically and racially different than the RCA’s Anglo majority.

One newly organized RCA church, Revolution in urban Long Beach/Los Angeles, baptized 100 adults in 2006 and 250 in 2007 with three worship sites. Seven of the RCA’s eight regional synods have historically recorded fewer than 250 adult baptisms per year. Through new RCA churches, God is adding to his church daily those who are being saved (Acts 2:47).

House Fire Strengthens Foundation for New Church Start

On October 24, a house fire destroyed much of Steve and Joanne McNary’s new home in San Antonio, Texas. They had moved in only three months before when they relocated to the area to start a new church called Rock Hills.

“God has done amazing things even out of the ashes of a burnt home,” Steve says. “The families in our neighborhood now have a ‘closeness’ to them that would have taken years to develop, and the Rock Hills team is right in the middle of it all.”

Two weeks before the fire, the McNarys had invited the neighborhood over to watch a Dallas Cowboys game. That was the first time they met Melissa, a widow with two small children.

“The night of the fire, she came over crying and wanted to help us in any way possible,” Steve recalls. “Since then, as we’ve opened up to her, she’s opened up to [fellow church planter Dave Lantz] and me and has shared how hard life has been for her.

“A great relationship is being formed there, and that’s what we want Rock Hills to be—a great community built on great relationships.”
Another neighbor, Kim, visited local people and businesses to ask for their support for the McNarys. “As she handed us a stack of checks and gift certificates one night, she hugged Joanne and me and said, ‘You know, we’ve only known you two months, but we love you guys.’”

The fire has also helped establish connections with a county fire inspector, a realtor, a hair stylist, and other neighbors.

“As Dave and I were talking, we realized that what happened to our house has jumped Rock Hill way ahead of where we were as far as networking and relationship building go,” Steve says.

“Did I want this to happen? No—do you think I’m crazy? Would I recommend this as an effective way to plant a church? Not really. Can God change the polarity of something? Absolutely.”

### New Congregation Plans Approved in 2007

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Church Plant</th>
<th>Planter</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<td>Juan Jose Fontes</td>
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<td>Pete Watts</td>
<td>Carson, CA</td>
<td>California</td>
<td>RSFW</td>
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Congregations Organized

Hanaim Church, Paramaus, New Jersey; Hak Kwon Lee, pastor; organized June 2007
The Journey, San Jose, California; Jeff Wenke, pastor; organized September 2007
The River, Kalamazoo, Michigan; Rob Link, pastor; organized November 2007
The Journey, Surprise, Arizona; Dan Beyer, pastor; organized December 2007
Wayfarer Community Church, Caledonia, Michigan; Joshua Blunt, pastor; organized January 2008
North Ridge Community Church, Eldridge, Iowa; Douglas Evenhouse, pastor; organized February 2008
CenterPoint Church, Lewis Center, Ohio; David Jansen, pastor; organized April 2008
Within Reach Ministries, Kalamazoo, Michigan; Rick Patterson and Lon Bouma, pastors; organized April 2008
North Point Church, Plainwell, Michigan; Jason Zimmer, pastor; organized June 2008

Parenting Churches, New Church Plants, and Their Relationship to Classis

In February 2008 significant discussion occurred among members of the Commission on Church Order and approximately twenty other RCA leaders regarding the relationship among parenting churches, church plants, and classes. After enriching discussion regarding the role of regional synods and classes in determining the classis of membership of a church as prescribed by the Book of Church Order, the CMT felt the following statement more clearly aligns with RCA polity regarding the role of the regional synods than their earlier statement, which had been approved by the CMT and accepted by the GSC as not being against GSC policy.

Church Multiplication Team Conviction
(Revised February 2008)

The classis of the parenting church (directive partner) determines the classis of accountability and support for a new church start the first ten years. This founding relationship will be reevaluated for continued viability and best fit in the tenth anniversary year of when the New Congregation Plan was approved. It is strongly recommended that a member of the Management Team (or Steering Committee) of the New Congregation be a member of the local classis, when possible, in order to encourage the development of relationships and partnerships in the geographical area and to bring added value and wisdom to the new congregation.

This accountable and supportive relationship will remain with the classis of the parent church for the initial ten years, or longer, based on the discernment at that time of the:

  a) church plant itself (now organized as an RCA church)
  b) the parent church’s consistory
  c) the parent church’s affiliated classis
  d) the potential new classis relationship by transfer
  e) the regional synod(s) involved
The Book of Church Order places the responsibility with the regional synod(s) to transfer an RCA congregation or church from one classis to another classis.

Exceptions to this policy or timeframe should be agreed upon as well by the same parties, in writing.

Reasons:
1. The directive partner relationship with a parent church is so crucial for the success of a church multiplication movement that reasonable time to establish the new work must be honored through empowering relationships more than geographical proximity. Since all new congregations are birthed with an expectation to reproduce other congregations, the ten-year time frame provides sufficient support through this “third generation” of reproduction.
2. Parent churches and classes have a wide diversity of ability in the birthing and blessing of new congregations until they are able to be self-supporting, self-governing, and self-reproducing. Maximizing the relationship networks and opportunities of all our diverse churches across any geographic boundaries for planting will accelerate bringing Christ’s salvation to the lost people groups in North America.
3. Clear lines of accountability and expectations benefit each classis and church. This protects the new plant from having to depend materially and spiritually on a classis of churches not eager or able to provide that leadership and sending role. It protects a classis from having to assume responsibility for a plant they know little about or have limited capacity to support.

Examples:
- A Korean church in Atlanta may affiliate with similar Korean churches of the Classis of Nassau-Suffolk if they will be the active parenting church connection.
- A Hispanic plant in Los Angeles with leaders sent out and supported by another parenting church in Central California Classis will affiliate for its first ten years of life directly with Central California Classis.
- Center city urban planting churches who start new congregations in similar cosmopolitan cities will remain the sending and supporting agency, with affiliation to the parent church’s classis for accountability, until reviewed at the end of the first decade.
- A strong reproducing church in western Michigan can send and support a new church start team into Detroit or Cincinnati or Chicago, and the accountability relationally and spiritually for that plant will remain with Zeeland or Holland or North/South Grand Rapids Classis for the founding years until the official review ten years in.

New Church Creates Community in Inner City

“Ninety percent of our people grew up and live in the inner city of East Oakland; they are not used to hearing purpose, hope, and community in the name of our Lord,” says Ron Nunez, pastor at Living Grace Church, a new church start in East Oakland, California.

“I see God taking them from drug addiction to freedom in Christ Jesus, equipping them not only to meet their Savior or to work for the kingdom, but to live socially productive lives. It’s creating community. They’re starting to look out for each other—in the inner city, you don’t really see that.”

Living Grace Church began meeting in spring 2006. The church is predominately African American, but it has a growing number of Latinos and a multiracial staff.

For the past three months, the church has planned various community events. They’ve
shared hot meals on a Saturday afternoon, they’ve given away a truckload of bread, and they’ve started offering an English as a Second Language (ESL) class on Sunday mornings.

Six to ten Latino families have been attending the class since it started several months ago. After each session, the families are invited to stay for worship. Some Spanish songs have been incorporated into the service, and the sermon is translated and broadcast into earphones worn by Spanish-speaking attendees. Nunez says it took months to get the technology, but it’s being used every Sunday.

Predominantly Black Churches Underway in Georgia and New York

New predominantly black churches are beginning to make an impact in the RCA. Imani Christian Center in Atlanta, Georgia, is a new RCA church start that is supported by Zeeland Classis. This unique new congregation meets in a theater and attracts approximately one hundred people to worship each Sunday. This dynamic ministry is being led by Lewis and Lisa Tait, who help guide the church with a contemporary worship flavor and casual dress code in this mostly traditional African American worship setting.

RCA African American/Black Ministries has guided the formation and revitalization of the former Ghanaian Mission Church, now renamed Emmanuel Presbyterian/Reformed Church, a unique congregation with two worshiping sites in the Bronx, New York. African American/Black Ministries has also given support and encouragement to Angel Community Church in Muskegon, Michigan, and City Hope Ministries in Grand Rapids, Michigan (both joint RCA/CRC churches); and New Life Community Church (RCA) in Tulare, California.

Report of the Reformed Church in America Church Growth Fund, Inc.

The Reformed Church in America Church Growth Fund, Inc. (CGF) supports the work and witness of the RCA by making loans to RCA churches, classes, and other agencies and affiliates so they can purchase, construct, or improve church property or facilities. The CGF (formerly known as The Reformed Church in America Building and Extension Fund) also provides funds for New Congregation Matching Grants. Loans of up to $25,000 are made on an unsecured basis. Larger loans (up to the current loan limit of $2,000,000) are secured.

Detailed information regarding the CGF (such as the amounts that can be borrowed, the purposes for which funds may be borrowed, the requirements that must be satisfied in order to borrow funds, and how one may invest in the CGF) is available through the RCA’s website (www.rca.org/cgf). Following this report is a list of all churches that are borrowers from the CGF (or for whom loans have been approved) as of the end of fiscal year 2007.

Funds in the CGF come from gifts and bequests from members and friends of the RCA, the sale of investment notes, and earnings on CGF assets. Investment notes are offered in fixed maturities of one, 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 under the heading “Church Growth Fund” and subheading “How to invest in RCACGF investment notes.” Presently the CGF offers investment notes for sale in nine-
teen states—Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, South Dakota, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin. The rates of interest paid on investment notes are established periodically by a subcommittee of the CGF board and are posted on the RCA's website.

At the end of fiscal year 2007 (September 30, 2007) the CGF had assets of over $43 million and liabilities of over $9.47 million (nearly all of which were investment notes). Of the more than $43 million in assets, over $39 million were in the form of loans outstanding to RCA churches (or classes, for the benefit of RCA congregations).

One hundred thirty-five loans were outstanding (or committed but not yet funded) to local RCA congregations at the end of fiscal year 2007 (compared to 145 at the end of fiscal year 2006).

Four commitments for new loans were issued to RCA congregations in fiscal year 2007 (compared to ten in fiscal year 2006 and fifteen in fiscal year 2005), and the total dollar amount committed was $1 million (compared to $5.178 million in fiscal year 2006 and $9.828 million in fiscal year 2005). Of the four loan commitments issued in fiscal year 2007, two were for short-term unsecured loans, and the others were for larger, secured loans. The CGF prays that the facilities that are purchased, built, or remodeled will enable the congregations to fulfill their call to ministry in their communities.

Loan demand has increased over the past few years, at least in part because of the RCA's increasing emphasis on church revitalization and church multiplication. As a result, funds available for loans has decreased and the CGF has been unable to approve certain loan applications that would have been approved but for the lack of available funds. This is the primary reason for the lower number of loan commitments issued in fiscal year 2007. Consequently, the CGF has increased its efforts to attract more capital. Ads are running in the *Church Herald*. Letters have been sent to existing CGF investors, as well as depositors in the RCA Fund, encouraging new investments. Borrowers are encouraged to prepay their loans. Stated clerks and treasurers of classes and regional synods are contacted quarterly informing them of interest rates for investment notes. Presentations by the RCA’s development office include the CGF. Nevertheless, the need for additional funds persists. The CGF covets your prayers as it seeks to maintain an adequate level of funds for loans to RCA churches that are renewing and expanding their ministries, and encourages each of you to consider how you and your church, classis, and regional synod may support the CGF financially through gifts or investments.

As noted above, the CGF continues to provide resources to fund matching grants for new ministries. Since the inception of this program in 1999 and continuing through the end of fiscal year 2007, seventy-six commitments for such grants (totaling $1,962,000) have been issued. The CGF 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.

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 CGF continues its work, the board of directors and staff ask for your continued support and prayers.
The following is a list of all churches that are borrowers from the CGF (or for whom loans have been approved) as of the end of fiscal year 2007.

**CANADA**

**Alberta**  
Christ Community Church, St. Albert, Alberta

**British Columbia**  
Powell River Reformed Church, Powell River, British Columbia

**Manitoba**  
Elmwood Community Reformed Church, Winnipeg, Manitoba

**Ontario**  
Drayton Reformed Church, Drayton, Ontario  
Forestview Community Church, Grimsby, Ontario  
First Reformed Church, St. Catharines, Ontario  
Classis of Ontario (New Life Reformed Church), Toronto, Ontario  
Classis of Ontario and Christ Community Church, Welland, Ontario

**UNITED STATES**

**Arizona**  
New Hope Community Church, Gilbert, Arizona  
Christ’s Community Church, Glendale, Arizona  
Desert Haven Community Church, Mesa, Arizona  
Hope Community Church, Scottsdale, Arizona

**California**  
Canyon Lake Community Church, Canyon Lake, California  
Cornerstone Community Church, Chowchilla, California  
New Hope Community Church, Fremont, California  
CrossWinds Community Church, Hesperia, California  
Park Hills Community Church, Los Angeles, California  
Living Faith Community Church, Modesto, California  
Palm Canyon Community Church, Moreno Valley, California  
Lincoln Avenue Community Church, Pomona, California  
East Hills Community Church, Riverside, California  
Sunrise Community Church, Tulare, California

**Colorado**  
New Hope Community Church, Aurora, Colorado  
Springs Community Church, Colorado Springs, Colorado  
Christ Community Church, Denver, Colorado  
Faith Community Church, Littleton, Colorado

**Florida**  
West Broward Community Church, Fort Lauderdale, Florida  
Classis of Florida (Korean Choong Hyun Church), Orlando, Florida  
Christ Community Church, Palm Springs, Florida  
First Reformed Church, Tampa, Florida

**Georgia**  
North Atlanta Community Church, Roswell, Georgia

**Idaho**  
Valley Life Community Church, Meridian, Idaho

**Illinois**  
Christ Community Church, Lemont, Illinois  
Bethel Reformed Church, Sterling, Illinois

**Indiana**  
Christ’s Community Church, Fishers, Indiana  
Christ’s Community Church, Fort Wayne, Indiana  
Community Reformed Church, Lafayette, Indiana
Iowa
Classis of Central Iowa (Bridgeway Church), Ames, Iowa
Crossroads Community Church, Estherville, Iowa, and East Sioux Classis
Hope Reformed Church, George, Iowa
Newkirk Reformed Church, Hospers, Iowa
Classis of West Sioux and Rejoice! Community Church, LeMars, Iowa
Crossroads Church, Norwalk, Iowa, and Classis of Central Iowa
Good News Community Church, Okoboji, Iowa
First Reformed Church, Prairie City, Iowa
Classis of West Sioux (New Hope Community Church), Sioux City, Iowa
Hope Reformed Church, Spencer, Iowa
Westview Church, Waukee, Iowa

Kansas
Crossroads Church, Overland Park, Kansas
Harvest Community Church, Wichita, Kansas

Maryland
Monocacy Valley Church, Ijamsville, Maryland

Michigan
River Tree Community Church, Byron Center, Michigan
CrossWinds Community Church, Canton, Michigan
Open Door Reformed Church, Dorr, Michigan
First Reformed Church, Grand Haven, Michigan
Classis of North Grand Rapids and Clancy Street Ministries, Grand Rapids, Michigan
Grace Reformed Church, Holland, Michigan
Second Reformed Church, Kalamazoo, Michigan
Twin Lakes Reformed Church, Kalamazoo, Michigan
Within Reach Ministries, Kalamazoo, Michigan
Martin Reformed Church, Martin, Michigan
Calvary Reformed Church, Mattawan, Michigan
Laketon Bethel Reformed Church, Muskegon, Michigan
Covenant Community Church, Muskegon Heights, Michigan
Rockford Reformed Church, Rockford, Michigan
Classis of Northern Michigan (for New Hope Community Church), Shelby, Michigan
Community of Joy, Traverse City, Michigan

Minnesota
Peace Reformed Church, Eagan, Minnesota
Classis of Minnesota (successor to Minnesota Valley Community Church, Prior Lake, Minnesota)
American Reformed Church, Worthington, Minnesota

Missouri
Christ’s Church, St. Peter’s, Missouri

New Jersey
Blawenburg Reformed Church, Blawenburg, New Jersey
Han Sung Church, Cresskill, New Jersey
Clover Hill Reformed Church, Hillsborough, New Jersey
Old Bergen Church, Jersey City, New Jersey
The Reformed Church in Kinnelon, Kinnelon, New Jersey
First Reformed Church, Lincoln Park, New Jersey
Ocean Community Church, Manahawkin, New Jersey
First Reformed Church, Rocky Hill, New Jersey

New York
Taiwanese American Reformed Church in Queens, Bayside, New York
Fordham Manor Reformed Church, Bronx, New York
Old First Reformed Church, Brooklyn, New York
Clarksville Community Church, Clarksville, New York
Community Reformed Church of Colonie, Colonie, New York
Greenbush Reformed Church, East Greenbush, New York
Siloam Church, Flushing, New York
Fonda Reformed Church, Fonda, New York
Helderberg Reformed Church, Guilderland Center, New York
Fair Street Reformed Church, Kingston, New York
Levittown Community Church, Levittown, New York
Korean Philippo Presbyterian Church, Long Island, New York
Pitcher Hill Community Church, North Syracuse, New York
Arlington Reformed Church, Poughkeepsie, New York
The Reformed Church, Poughkeepsie, New York
Pultneyville Reformed Church, Pultneyville, New York
Queens Reformed Church, Queens Village, New York
The New Church of Greater New York, Roslyn Heights, New York
Niskayuna Reformed Church, Schenectady, New York
First Reformed Church, Scotia, New York
First Reformed Church of Bethlehem, Selkirk, New York
Grace Christian Church, Staten Island, New York
New Hackensack Reformed Church, Wappingers Falls, New York
First Reformed Church, Wynantskill, New York
New Hope Reformed Church, Yonkers, New York

**North Dakota**
Red River Reformed Church, West Fargo, North Dakota

**Ohio**
New Hope Reformed Church, Powell, Ohio

**Pennsylvania**
Newtown Reformed Church, Newtown, Pennsylvania
The Reformed Church, Willow Grove, Pennsylvania

**South Dakota**
Bethany Reformed Church, Canton, South Dakota
Valley Springs Reformed Church, Valley Springs, South Dakota

**Tennessee**
Franklin Fellowship Church, Franklin, Tennessee

**U.S. Virgin Islands**
St. Thomas Reformed Church, St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands

**Washington**
Fourth Corner Community Church, Bellingham, Washington
Trinity Reformed Church, Kent, Washington
Church of the Good Shepherd, Lynnwood, Washington
East Valley Reformed Church, Yakima, Washington

**Wisconsin**
Bethany Reformed Church, Sheboygan, Wisconsin
Hope Community Reformed Church, West Bend, Wisconsin
Report of the General Synod Council on Revitalization and RCA Congregations

[Jesus said] “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).

That command of our risen Lord calls the Reformed Church in America to renewed obedience in a new day. It recalls us to our deep, historical commitment to constantly reform according to the Word of God, which is also the foundation for our deep, historic commitment to church revitalization. The Great Commission calls every congregation to re-form its ministry and mission by God’s grace and with God’s direction.

What is a revitalizing congregation?

A revitalizing congregation is a body of believers, responsive to God’s call, developing a faithful and fruitful life through new mission, new ministries, and new members.

Each congregation brings this call to renewal to life in its unique setting as it:

- Nurtures a missional mindset resulting in externally focused ministry.
- Multiplies new disciples, new leaders, new teams, new mission, new ministries, new worship services, new sites, and new congregations.
- Intentionally develops a growing community of servant leaders who are equipped and empowered for ministry.
- Grows deeper in its love of God and wider in its love of the people among whom God has called it to serve—living by grace; practicing radically inclusive love; showing Christ-like hospitality; embracing the gifts of every person, race, and culture; seeking to become increasingly diverse as a reflection of the kingdom of God; intentionally developing a growing community of servant leaders who are equipped and empowered for ministry.

The result? Lives are transformed by the love of Jesus Christ, the hungry are fed, the broken are made whole, hurts are healed, and hope overcomes despair. Neighborhoods, villages, towns, and cities become healthier, more just, and more gracious for all people as they experience God’s expanding realm of grace, mercy, love, and justice.

Youth Outreach Changes Lives in New Jersey

Five years ago, when Bill Iverson was seventy-four years old, he followed God’s call to Newark, New Jersey, to start rebuilding Trinity Reformed Church, which had waned to four members who met in a decaying building. His grandson, Danny Iverson, thought he was nuts.

“I came up to tell him he was crazy,” Danny says, “and the Lord really hit me with the kids. There’s close to twenty-five hundred at-risk youth within a fifteen-block radius of the church. The Lord really put it on my heart to come here and work with [my grandfather] and work with the youth.”

Danny and his wife, Kimberly, started Safe Haven Urban Redemption, the church’s outreach to youth in the Newark area, which is plagued with drug problems, gang violence, and teen pregnancy.
“We’re trying to be a light in that darkness and let the Lord use us to reverse that generational curse—to see these kids put on a different path and follow the Lord, not just while they’re kids, but for the rest of their lives,” he says. “You provide something with substance, even with discipline, and we’ve found that a lot of kids are hungry for that—hungry for someone to care enough to correct them, and pour into them and ask them questions and love them for who they are.”

Trinity’s basement was excavated by volunteer work groups to create space for a youth center, which includes a computer lab and recording studio. It houses an after-school program that focuses on long-term mentoring. Soon a rental center will let kids borrow sports equipment. “It’s a safe place where they can really be kids, a place to come and know they’re not going to be bullied, or cursed at, or beat up, or molested,” Iverson says. “There are times where we’re like, ‘We should be out of money in our church checking account,’ and God just provides somehow. It’s really, really cool how he keeps doing that—it reinforces that he wants this church to be here. He wants the gospel to go forth into the streets of Newark, and he wants this place changed.”

Sustaining Pastoral Excellence Grant from the Lilly Endowment Supports Revitalization Efforts

In November 2003 the RCA was notified that it was the recipient of a grant through the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence Initiative of the Lilly Endowment, Inc. in Indianapolis, Indiana. In January 2004 the denomination received the $2 million grant.

The major components of the grant are:

- Formation of coached revitalizing networks for pastoral renewal, congregational revitalization, and increased ministry and mission effectiveness.
- Intentional interaction between pastors in networks and the leaders of the congregations with whom these pastors serve.
- Network pastors are eligible to receive one-time $1,000 clergy renewal grants that are used for personal and congregational renewal.
- Training of coaches throughout the RCA is funded through this grant.
- An RCA staff position, coordinator of leader renewal and networks, and partial funding for a coordinator of church health and coaching, along with all the administrative support for this office, and all other attendant costs are covered through this grant.

Working Together to Revitalize Existing Congregations

Initiatives designed to encourage, resource, equip, and empower congregational revitalization have begun in a number of key areas.

Natural Church Development

The Natural Church Development (NCD) process is like an annual physical that results in a change in eating habits, exercise commitments, or sleep patterns. It isn’t like a diet to achieve a short-term goal but rather it’s an ongoing, long-term process.

Pastor and researcher Christian Schwarz has identified eight “quality characteristics” that affect the life, effectiveness, and growth of congregations. Each characteristic reflects an important dimension of how the Bible describes a fruitful church.
• Empowering leadership
• Gift-oriented ministry
• Passionate spirituality
• Functional structures
• Inspiring worship
• Holistic small groups
• Need-oriented evangelism
• Loving relationships

After a congregation takes the NCD survey, it forms a church health team and works with an NCD coach to address the characteristic in which it scored lowest in an organic and systemic way, using its strengths to do so. The goal is to use the NCD process or another health assessment tool to release the potential God has implanted in the congregation.

An Elder General Synod Delegate Sparks Congregational and Classis Revitalization

“In June of 2007 I had the privilege of attending the RCA General Synod in Pella, Iowa, as a corresponding delegate representing the women of Mid-America Synod. I had no idea why I was chosen to do this, but I was very happy to go. I always enjoy seeing our denomination in action, meeting many old friends, and making new acquaintances. During the course of synod, I was impressed by presentations relating to the church revitalization program that is part of Our Call, and I made it a point to attend the review forum on revitalization. I began to feel that this would be just what is needed by my own church, that we fit perfectly the model of a settled church, doing OK and satisfied with the status quo, with little desire to reach out to the world around us.

“When I came home, I spoke to our pastor, sharing my excitement about what I had learned about the revitalization program, NCD, and coaching. A number of years ago he and those who were on our consistory at that time had a rather discouraging encounter with some parts of the program as it then existed, but he did not squelch my enthusiasm and allowed me to present some of the information to our consistory. I shared some of the things that I had seen and heard, and showed them parts of the General Synod DVD on revitalization. Subsequently, the consistory moved to look into the program, and the pastor contacted Ken Eriksto set up an introductory meeting. I began to wonder if indeed there had been a purpose (besides my enjoyment) for me to attend General Synod!

“A little later, in July, I attended another great gathering, the RCA Women’s Conference in Chicago. There, I just happened to be sitting near Ken Erikstina seminar, and during a break we chatted briefly about the introductory meeting on revitalization that was to be held at our church. By then, the meeting had been expanded to include our entire classis, and through our pastor’s invitation, a number of churches were represented there. Our own congregation is now in the beginning stages of organizing the program. Oh, we’re not completely revitalized yet, but the process is underway, and I, for one, am glad that I was able to bring home some inspiration from General Synod.”

Chris Barthel
German Valley, Illinois

Coached Revitalizing Networks

A Coached Revitalizing Network is a way to involve four to seven pastors in developing deep, sustaining friendships that will help them live on the front lines of ministry. A network offers a safe community in which pastors receive encouragement, coaching, and accountability to help them:
• Grow deeper in Christlike character.
• Gain increasing clarity and focus in their calling.
• Develop new leadership and ministry competencies.
• Lead their congregations with courage.

Coached Revitalizing Networks are a place where pastors clarify their personal mission and are equipped with knowledge and skills to serve their congregations as transformational leaders.

Three elements are essential to Coached Revitalizing Networks that help sustain pastoral excellence:

1. **Transformational learning** in relationship with peers under the guidance of a network facilitator provides an essential foundation for the lifelong learning required of pastoral leaders today.

2. **Covenantal accountability** helps pastors translate good intentions into concrete action, apply new learning in their own lives and the lives of congregations, and integrate their sense of calling into their calendars.

3. **Collegial support** by a pastor’s peers builds trust and creates a safe space for pastors to pray for one another, care for and encourage one another, raise questions, express doubts, celebrate God-given successes and learn from failures.

It’s called a “coached” network because coaching supports and enhances Coached Revitalizing Networks and is central to them. An ongoing coaching relationship built around regular coaching sessions helps pastors address their specific opportunities, challenges and issues with the assistance of a trained coach. Through coaching, pastors and congregational leaders are empowered in their ministry, helped to discern how God is calling them to serve their community and world, and equipped to multiply new disciples, leaders, ministries, mission, and congregations.

**Network Helps Pastor Reach Goals**

“You come out feeling refreshed and renewed. There’s so much purpose and so much accountability,” Drew Poppleton says about his pastoral network. Poppleton co-pastors First Reformed Church in Lafayette, Indiana, with his wife, Andrea.

The network, which includes Poppleton and two other RCA pastors in the area, meets once a month for three hours. Poppleton looks forward to the meetings as times of worship, brotherhood, and accountability.

“The goal is to see each of us reach our own God-given potential in our own situation. It’s really good to be together. There’s no competition.”

Poppleton’s network has been meeting each month for a year. To kick off their network, they dedicated a weekend to a Purposeful Living retreat. The retreat challenged each pastor to identify core values, goals, and roles in life and ministry, and to incorporate those things into a personal calling statement.

“It provides the foundation for the success of your group,” Poppleton says. The calling statements identify roles, list goals, and help inspire accomplishments. For instance, one of Poppleton’s primary ministry roles is listed as “Preacher.” The related goals are to preach thirty-five times this year, try three new approaches, and read three books on the subject.

“I am reminded by [my personal calling statement] that my primary gifts are in the areas of preaching, teaching, and discipling,” he says. “I should focus on those things. If I don’t
find ways to delegate pastoral care and administration, I am doing an injustice to both myself and the church, and obviously to God.”

Coaching

Coaching is central to Our Call. Trained coaches support and enhance coached revitalizing networks by empowering congregational leaders for ministry and helping them discern how God is calling them.

Across the RCA people are being identified who have the passion and the aptitude to coach. They receive training in foundational coaching skills. Then they are trained to serve as Natural Church Development coaches and work with a local congregation’s church health team or to serve as a network coach/facilitator. You can learn more about coaching in the “Leadership” section of the RCA website (www.rca.org).

Accepting the Challenges of Deep Change for the Sake of the World God Loves

At the heart of congregational revitalization is the reality that missional engagement with the world God loves requires challenging choices and deep change. This is why pastors and congregational leaders are encouraged to come together for learning, accountability, and support in networks and to enter into the deeper reflection and more intentional action that comes through a coaching relationship.

Revitalization in the RCA’s Historic Black Churches

In recent years, a number of young, able pastors have been called to serve the RCA’s historic black churches. Many of those black churches have been without pastoral leadership for quite some time and have been led by the consistories. One of the challenges of revitalization, therefore, is to help forge positive, productive partnerships between these new pastors and the lay leadership. The director of the African American/Black Council helps these black congregations focus on building up the kingdom of God through the local and wider church while addressing the tremendous needs of their communities.

The revitalization journey is challenging. The stories that emerge through that journey are exciting.

GSC REVITALIZATION ENDS MONITORING REPORT

Each spring the general secretary is required to report to the General Synod Council (GSC) on progress on the various ends policies established by the GSC. The monitoring report for revitalization follows:

E-3 Revitalization Ends Policy

The RCA will be a fellowship of externally focused congregations where lives are being transformed and communities are being renewed.

General Secretary’s Interpretation

This ends policy calls the GSC staff to make a difference among three distinct recipients:

- Help congregations become healthier and more externally focused.
- Empower healthy, externally focused congregations to be a means by which lives are transformed.
• Support healthy, externally focused congregations as they work with a wide variety of partners to renew their communities.

This ends policy is focused on a long-term time horizon—2013 and beyond. The general secretary is responsible for ensuring that measurable outcomes for 2013 are established and yearly benchmarks between the years 2008 and 2013 are developed and monitored. To that end the general secretary has established the following goals, outcomes, and strategies.

Church Revitalization Objectives and Strategies

Goal for Pastoral Networks: By 2013, at least five hundred ordained or commissioned pastoral leaders of congregations will participate in a coached revitalizing network for at least five years as a way to equip them to lead revitalizing, missionally engaged congregations.

Outcomes

• Five hundred pastoral leaders have developed a personal calling statement that informs and guides their ministry.
• Five hundred pastoral leaders have a coach helping them live out the mission, vision, and values God revealed to them in their personal calling statement.
• Five hundred pastoral leaders are in clear and explicit covenantal partnership with congregational leaders for missional engagement.
• Five hundred pastoral leaders, in covenant partnership with their congregational leaders, are committed to do what is needed to place participation in God’s mission at the center of their personal and congregational life and ministry.

Strategies

• Seven hundred pastoral leaders will participate in networks for at least one year in order to retain five hundred who participate in a coached revitalizing network for five years.
• One hundred twenty-five high quality network coach/facilitators will be trained, supported, and held accountable for their work.
• One hundred twenty-five additional pastors will be trained to share the coaching in networks.

Data

• One hundred eighty-five people have been trained to serve as coached revitalizing network coaches/facilitators.
• Fifty-eight coached revitalizing networks are currently in operation.
• These networks include 380 pastors representing 372 congregations.
• A recent survey of network participation indicates that currently fewer than 50 percent of the network participants have a clear covenant for revitalization with their consistories.
• Three hundred eighty people have received an orientation to coaching through foundational coach training and approximately 150 others have been exposed to coach training in earlier versions of network facilitator training and NCD coach training.
• Data is needed but not yet available on how many pastors throughout the RCA receive regular coaching, whether through NCD, their network, or some other means.

Goal for Church Health: By 2013 at least 90 percent of RCA congregations will have participated in the Natural Church Development (NCD) process and at least 75 percent will repeat it regularly.
Outcomes

- By 2013, at least 90 percent of all RCA congregations will engage in a coached NCD process.
- By 2013, at least 75 percent of congregations repeating the NCD cycle will show improvement in order to become healthy enough to engage deeper missional questions about mission, vision, and values—meaning average scores above 35.
- By 2013, at least four hundred of the RCA congregations that were in existence in 2005 have become healthy enough to be a parent congregation and at least three hundred have multiplied or have begun the process to plant a congregation.

Strategies

- Continue to train (and retrain) NCD coaches so all congregations engaging in NCD for the first time have a well-trained NCD coach and all second-time congregations that desire a coach can have one assigned to them.
- Partner intentionally with the regions in recruiting high quality coaches and share in the costs of training and supporting those coaches.
- Tell NCD stories of greater health resulting in increased missional faithfulness and God-blessed fruitfulness.
- Compare and contrast the data from the annual consistorial reports between congregations improving in NCD scores and those not participating or not showing improvement.

Data

- Since 2004, 342 RCA congregations have completed the NCD survey at least one time, 69 congregations have completed one NCD cycle and taken the survey a second time, and 7 congregations have completed two or more cycles and taken the NCD survey three or more times.
- Between January and July of 2007, seventeen congregations engaged in a coached NCD process.
- Between January and July of 2007, ten congregations engaged in their second NCD cycles and five engaged in their third cycles.
- The NCD training material has been rewritten to make it more accessible to coaches and congregations. Training occurs in a workshop format which allows for more relevant and timely interaction with other participants and trainers and is very “hands on.”
- Intentional conversations with regional staff regarding the use of NCD and the development of quality coaches, as well as sharing the cost of training, has begun.
- NCD stories are being told through the Church Herald, the new RCA Today magazine, the RCA website, and video clips at General Synod.
- Information technology staff and revitalization staff are developing a plan for accessing data that will correlate NCD scores with responses to certain questions in Part I and Part II of the Annual Consistorial Report.

Goal for Congregational Faithfulness: By 2013, at least five hundred RCA congregations already existing in 2005 have clear and compelling statements of mission, vision, and values and are prayerfully orienting their congregational lives and imaginations toward faithful and collaborative participation in the mission of God.

Outcomes

- By 2013, at least five hundred RCA congregations will be engaged in ministry partnerships aimed at community impact with other RCA congregations, other Christian
congregations and faith groups, or other community partners God provides.

- By 2013, congregational members in at least five hundred RCA congregations will be equipped to engage in incarnational ministries through which they serve people who aren’t yet disciples of Christ and will be trained to engage in spiritual conversations with them.
- By 2013, at least one hundred previously declining RCA congregations will have become “turn-around congregations.”
- By 2013, at least five hundred RCA congregations are active, vital houses of prayer.

### Church Stays Open for Prayer 24/7

The guest book at the Reformed Church of Prince Bay on Staten Island, New York, has been signed 1,275 times since July 1. That’s not bad for a church that averaged twelve people at worship only a few months before.

The increased interest is a result of the church’s new prayer ministry. The dwindling congregation took a leap of faith and committed to keeping the church open around the clock for anyone who wanted to pray.

Hundreds of requests are posted on a “prayer tower” in the sanctuary, including many notes of answered prayer. “There’s one prayer after another that’s been answered,” says Adolf Pagliarulo, a local RCA pastor who volunteers with the prayer ministry. “We tell people this isn’t magic at all. Someone just took the time to say, ‘Jesus, I know that nothing is impossible.’”

Pagliarulo says people stop by at all times of the day or night, and that the ministry is building bridges in the community. The people who come to pray represented “a full cross-section of society—people who are affluent, people who are poor, people who are seen as respectable, people who are coming off drugs,” he says. “We get every nationality represented. We get people from many different churches on Staten Island, from Roman Catholic to AME Zion. Even Muslims have stopped by. Everyone just comes in and finds the peace of being in that sanctuary.

“What was happening in the early church is beginning to happen on Staten Island in the little church that never closes—people’s faith is being built up, and they’re sharing in the community, and lives are being changed.”

### Strategies

- Collaborate with the coordinator for discipleship to develop a variety of ways to help deepen discipleship among congregational leaders and members.
- Collaborate with the Houses of Prayer Equipping (HOPE) team to develop and support more RCA congregations becoming houses of prayer.
- Develop processes, including prayer walks and other means, that will equip congregations to see their communities through God’s eyes, to creatively join Jesus in ministry in their communities, and to remain open to new opportunities the Holy Spirit will reveal to them.
- Develop and deploy coached processes that will equip and empower congregational and pastoral leaders to discern their congregation’s mission, vision, and values and to develop the missional imaginations and faithfulness needed to become vital outposts of the reign of God.
- Initiate an online assessment to identify pastors with the gifts, passion, and drive for “turn-around” ministry with a goal of identifying one hundred such current and emerging pastoral leaders (both ministers of Word and sacrament and commissioned pastors).
• Develop a training process for turn-around pastors and congregational leadership teams similar to “Thrive!” in partnership with the congregational multiplication team.

• Encourage classes to evaluate their lives together in light of our shared mission in order to discern how God is calling them to work together to renew lives and transform their communities.

Data

• More than three hundred RCA congregations have an identified prayer coordinator.

• The HOPE team is working with congregations across the RCA to form networks of congregations that desire to become houses of prayer.

• The revitalization staff has initiated conversations about how to help congregations learn to do prayer walks as a way to become more open to God’s work around them.

• Work continues with a group of ecumenical partners and the Gallup organization to develop an online assessment for people with the gifts to be “turn-around pastors.” The target for completion is the end of 2008.

• Stories are being collected of classes that are examining their lives and ministries through the eyes of mission and various models are being shared as requested.

Goal for Congregational Fruitfulness: By 2013, at least five hundred RCA congregations already existing in 2005 will:

a) Exhibit missional fruitfulness through stories of transformed lives.

b) Show clear evidence of impact on their communities.

c) Employ statistical criteria that confirm that they are making more and better disciples.

Further, among these five hundred congregations:

• At least 40 percent will celebrate a cultural and racial mix of congregational members that closely resembles their communities.

• At least three hundred of those congregations will have made a commitment to congregational multiplication.

Outcomes

• Between 2008 and 2013 the number of adult confessions of faith and adult baptisms per one hundred confirmed RCA members will increase by 25 percent in at least five hundred congregations and by 10 percent in the RCA as a whole.

• Between 2008 and 2013 new ministry and new mission activities as reported in the annual consistorial report will increase by 30 percent between 2008 and 2013 in at least five hundred RCA congregations and by 10 percent in the RCA as a whole.

• By 2013, at least 20 percent of RCA congregations (existing and new) will meet the generally accepted criteria of “multiracial.”

• By 2013, at least 75 percent of all RCA pastoral leaders will be multiculturally competent.

• By 2013, at least three hundred RCA congregations that existed in 2005 will have either already planted a church or are actively involved in the multiplication movement and are ready to be a parent church.

Strategies

• The strategies that will lead to these fruitful outcomes are all those that have come before in the three leader development and renewal goals, the congregational health goal, and the congregational faithfulness goal.
• In partnership with the racial/ethnic and multicultural ministry staff a variety of means will be developed to help RCA pastoral leaders gain a deep biblical grounding in the multiracial, multicultural future God is bringing to the RCA and to equip them to be multiculturally competent.
• To work with the coordinator for multiracial initiatives and social justice and the Multiracial Congregational Team to develop training processes in cultural competence.
• In partnership with Global Mission draw on the experience and expertise of RCA mission partners in cross-cultural ministry.
• The other key strategy will be to continually ask appreciative questions about what is happening when RCA congregations are at their best and to develop ways to measure outcomes so the GSC staff learns and adapts its activity as the RCA moves forward.

Data

• Conversations are underway with the RCA information technology staff to begin calculating and tracking the data and the percentages identified in the first two above.
• A number of initiatives have begun in pursuit of God’s vision of a multiracial future for the RCA:
  ♦ Earl James has been hired as coordinator of multiracial initiatives and social justice. His vision to assist the RCA in tipping into its multiracial future is guided by his core values: biblically grounded, collaboratively strong, and racially and ethically equitable.
  ♦ A multiracial vision statement has been adopted by the Multiracial Congregation Team: Everyone who wants to experience the RCA as home, may experience the RCA as home.
  ♦ A Continuum for Multiracial Congregational Living in the RCA has been developed, presented, and posted on the RCA website.
  ♦ A definition of “multicultural competency” is emerging.
  ♦ Networks on shared work among Congregations Organizing for Racial Reconciliation (CORR), Multiracial Congregation Team (MRCT), racial/ethnic staff, and the GSC staff for racial/ethnic councils are being strengthened.
  ♦ Networks within the RCA are emerging to deliver the Breakfast Club, a year-long relationship-based racial justice training program. Two churches have committed to starting clubs by fall 2008 and this information has been shared widely.
  ♦ A relationship with CORR is being formed to provide 1) day-long and two-and-a-half day trainings for RCA people on racial justice, and 2) training for several RCA people to facilitate CORR’s programs within the RCA.
  ♦ Work is underway with the MRCT to promote multiracial congregations and support their pastors.
  ♦ An overview on progress on the Decade Freed from Racism was conducted and reported to CORR, MRCT, councils’ executive committee members, and racial/ethnic staff to contribute to a growing sense of joint work and to focus on critical next steps.
Report of the General Synod Council on Discipleship

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Colossians 3:16-17).

Discipleship changes people, communities, and institutions as disciples commit to making disciples and more people become more like Jesus, embodying his teachings in their daily lives.

GSC DISCIPLESHIP ENDS MONITORING REPORT

Each spring the general secretary is required to report to the General Synod Council (GSC) on progress on the various ends policies established by the GSC. The monitoring report for discipleship follows.

Ends E-4 Discipleship Policy

The RCA will be a fellowship of congregations filled with disciples, nurtured inwardly, focused outwardly, becoming like Jesus in all they think, say, and do in order to show the love of God in all circumstances to all people.

General Secretary’s Interpretation

Disciples making disciples is the clearest and most precise way to state the vision and values of the discipleship office. Each disciple of Christ is committed to internalizing the gospel in his or her individual life, which results in a compelling desire to disciple another person. Leaders, teachers, pastors, youth, and children will be discipled and will disciple others through empowering, connecting, encouraging, and sustaining, and this will result in transformed lives.

This ends policy is also reflected in the mission statement of the discipleship team: “Christian discipleship is the practice of following Jesus Christ, becoming like him in all we think, say, and do, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to be the very presence of Christ in a lost and broken world so loved by God.” The youth team, the Commission on Christian Education and Discipleship, the HOPE prayer team, and the discipleship team are collaboratively strategizing methods to live into the definition that we have stated.

Disciples making disciples embodies the inward nature of growing in Christ as an individual and it incorporates the outward focus of discipling others. It is relational in its approach, missional in its nature, educational in its practice, incarnational in its witness, and transformational in its outcome. It is integral to all we do as the body of Christ. Discipleship is one of the foundations of the ten-year goal, and with that comes the urgency and necessity of working with revitalization and multiplication to equip and empower disciples for faithful and fruitful ministry.

To that end, the appropriate GSC staff and the general secretary have identified the following goals:

Objectives and Strategies in Discipleship

Goal: To implement and provide training for a relational model of discipleship, using reproducing triads and small groups.
Discipleship is relational and done best in community. What are the relational techniques and models that help form disciples who emulate Jesus Christ in all they think, say, and do?

**Strategies**

- Design, through the discipleship team and Gregg Ogden, a training process by which local leaders will be equipped to lead a triad approach to disciple-making.
- Train regional leaders, who can in turn work with and train congregational leaders, in a relational model for discipleship.
- After year two, gather the discipleship team and regional trainers for evaluation, follow-up training, and revision of the process.
- Offer venues and training for small-group leadership.
- Continue to use the language and practice of people development versus program development.

**Outcomes**

- By 2013, at least one hundred people will be trained in the triad approach and in turn will provide training in at least three congregations annually.
- By 2013, at least three hundred congregations will have received training in relational discipleship.
- By 2013, at least one thousand congregational leaders will be involved in triads that provide accountability, trust, and biblical engagement as a means by which to strengthen their discipleship ministry.

**Goal:** To see our consistories, leadership, and congregations transformed as they are challenged to participate in an intentional form of discipleship that results in life change.

The RCA is focusing on transformation. What does life change look like as a disciple and how is that measured?

**Strategies**

- Develop a spiritual assessment tool for leaders to use as a way to examine their lives as disciples of Jesus Christ.
- Work with revitalization staff to develop coaching techniques and strategies for leader based discipleship.
- Collaborate with the HOPE prayer team to develop and support more RCA congregations as houses of prayer.
- Encourage leaders in RCA churches to invest in the lives of youth, children, and new believers as they walk with them in a discipling relationship and as they encourage leaders and teachers in the church who are teaching Sunday school, Children and Worship, vacation Bible school, or Wednesday night programs or mentoring.
- Continue to raise up new leaders who experience transformation and are being called to use their gifts in fruitful and faithful ways.
- Work with the coordinator for multiracial initiatives and social justice to devise methods and ways to live out discipleship by seeking justice in our churches and communities.

**Outcomes**

- By 2013, at least five hundred RCA congregations will be active houses of prayer.
- By 2013, at least five hundred teens will have professed their faith because of being
mented and raised up through consistory leadership.

- By 2013, the number of RCA congregations and the number of non-RCA congregations that provide Children and Worship centers for the nurturing and transformation of young children will each increase by at least 10 percent.
- By 2013, the number of young people exposed to missional leadership opportunities through programs and institutions will increase by 20 percent.
- By 2013, foundational coach training will have been provided for one hundred discipleship leaders.
- By 2013, three hundred leaders will be in networks.
- By 2013, forty congregations will be worked with directly, in collaboration with both multiplication and revitalization.

Project Timothy Offers Mission Experience for Teens

“I was able to connect with God on a whole other level—I was finally able to take the faith that I had been raised with and make it my own,” says Anna Palsma, who spent a week in Taize, France, through Project Timothy 2006. “I would do Project Timothy again in a heartbeat.”

Project Timothy enables young people to experience hands-on ministry in North America and around the world. Projects include anything from vacation Bible school or day camp to service projects at missions, food pantries, and homeless shelters, to construction and painting. Most sites work directly with churches or RCA missionaries.

Project Timothy 2008 runs from July 3 to 16. This year’s sites include Taize, France; North Bergen, New Jersey; Guayaquil, Ecuador; Ocho Rios, Jamaica; and City Church, California. The program also includes orientation and debriefing at Providence Christian College in Ontario, California.

“Anyone can do something for God. I don’t need to have a degree to spread his Word,” says Lindsay Dunn, who has participated in Project Timothy for the past four years. “Each year has given me a deeper understanding of what faith really is—of what God really wants of us.”

Goal: To continue to offer Reformed and missional resources for empowering and equipping local congregations.

The RCA is working toward a form of missional discipleship and engaging the question, “How are we preparing disciples to make other disciples?”

Strategies

- Work with Faith Alive and other ecumenical partners on the creation of resources for congregational use that support our commitment to be Reformed and missional.
- Continue to highlight opportunities in the denomination that lead people into mission in a Reformed context.
- Collaborate with the Mission Volunteer Program and Project Timothy staff and Leaders on the Horizon in order to call youth into mission, service, and leadership.
- Work with revitalization, equipping congregational members to engage in incarnational ministries through which they serve people who are not yet disciples of Christ and are trained to engage in spiritual conversations with them.
- Work with RCA seminaries to provide lifelong learning opportunities that are both Reformed and missional.
Outcomes

• By 2009, to have a fully functioning, three-year, online training course (Opening Doors to Discipleship) available to all RCA congregational leaders in discipleship.
• By the following year to have one hundred churches participating in Opening Doors to Discipleship.
• Annually, to provide complete and updated resource lists of curriculum for children, youth, and adults that support our commitment to be Reformed and missional.
• By 2013, to have youth from every region participating in Project Timothy.
• To participate in at least two collaborative lifelong learning events with both New Brunswick and Western Theological Seminaries in order to train and empower fifty local leaders who will be models of lifelong learning and a voice of discipleship in their regions.
• By 2013, resource networks will be using discussion forums/blogs so that Reformed disciples may share Reformed and missional resources and best practices with one another in order to grow disciples, nurture them inwardly, and focus them outwardly.

How God Brought One Woman and the RCA Youth Team Together

“During the fall 2007 General Synod Council meeting excitement filled the air as plans were being broadcast about the upcoming One Thing event in San Antonio, Texas, in 2008. My heart began to sink as I noticed the workshop sessions for this momentous event excluded our youth and young adults. My heart was pained that day because I felt like no one even realized that our children were being excluded. As an African American woman I have often experienced the sting of being discounted, forgotten, and overlooked. Something began to rise up in me and before I could even filter the words coming from my mouth I asked, ‘Where is the programming for our youth?’ At first my comments were misunderstood and I was informed that this conference really didn’t incorporate sessions for young people. My indignation was only fueled and I clarified my point. ‘No, I mean where are the workshops that help our churches reach this current generation? Our churches are dying, and we must do something about welcoming our youth into our worship!’ A few people responded, but honestly, I felt as if my voice had gone unheard again.

“After the meeting ended a lively, articulate, energy-filled young lady came over to me and said, ‘Hi, my name is Kirsty DePree and I serve as coordinator of discipleship for the RCA. I would love for you to serve on the Youth Discipleship Team.’ She went on to explain how she shared my concerns and that she was determined to address this very serious issue facing the church. Well, to make a long story short, in less than two weeks I was on my way to Minneapolis, Minnesota, for my first team meeting. To my surprise the RCA was already doing some wonderful things for our youth, such as Leaders on the Horizon, Project Timothy, TASC (Taking a Stand for Christ), and the RCA camps.

“I wondered how many youth in the RCA even knew about these wonderful opportunities and were taking advantage of them. Well, my mother always taught me if you’re not part of the solution, you’re part of the problem. So when persons were asked to work along with Phil Tanis to develop a youth ministry webpage I jumped at the opportunity to take a lead role. Less than six months later, with the assistance and input of a remarkable team of concerned youth leaders, that youth ministry page can be found on the RCA website. It’s an exciting place for pastors and youth ministers to visit to learn about opportunities for youth, resources, leadership development, and churches with exemplary youth ministries. Our church in Stone Mountain, Georgia, plans to begin implementing the Leaders on the Horizon curriculum. I was also invited by Kirsty to serve as a workshop leader for the youth conference held at Western Theological Seminary in May 2008. My workshop focused on providing youth leaders and pastors with the necessary resources and tools to reach even the most marginalized youth in our communities for Christ.
Goal: To educate and empower our children, youth, and leaders as they seek to grow as disciples of Christ.

What new, creative resources and methods will help the RCA educate disciples, and which present methods are still effective?

Strategies

• Gather data about what methods and curriculum are being used to educate our children, youth, and adults.
• Offer a scope and sequence of what adults, children, and youth should be learning.
• Educate leaders, teachers, and pastors on teaching technique, methodology, discipleship training, and spiritual disciplines.
• Develop Christ-centered followers, teachers, and leaders that are connected and sustained in community and who live out their faith in all they think, say, and do.

Outcomes

• By 2010, there will be a training session offered in every region for children’s ministries and adult discipleship.
• By 2010, training events for I Wonder and Following Jesus will be developed and implemented so that local Children and Worship leaders will be further equipped and empowered for faithful and fruitful ministry.
• By 2011, an online Children and Worship introduction workshop will be provided.
• By 2013, the number of Children and Worship basic training, introduction, enrichment, and specialized events will increase by 20 percent in order to strengthen local Children and Worship ministry.
• By 2013, Children and Worship networks via discussion forums/blogs will be created for trainers and local leaders to provide a means for communication and for sharing questions and best practices.
• By 2013, a network for educators in each region will keep them connected, revitalized, and sustained.

Spanish Young Children and Worship Opens Doors for Ministry

Jaime and Martha Amaro, RCA missionaries to Mexico, introduce the Children and Worship program (“Culto Infantil” in Spanish) to churches across the country and offer program training for educators and church leaders.

The basic manual for the program, Young Children and Worship, by Sonja M. Stewart and Jerome Berryman, is now available in Spanish. The book was translated into Spanish by the Amaros and published as Los Niños Pequeños y La Adoración.

In February the Amaros taught a class about Children and Worship at the National Presbyterian Church Seminary in Mexico City. “The best part was having the opportunity to present the Spanish version of the basic manual there,” Martha says. “We have been traveling around Mexico sharing the program, but this is what we have been waiting for, and now the course will be offered as a part of the normal curriculum at the seminary.

“Finally, children will no longer be the last link of the chain.”

Hector Silva, a dean at the seminary, says, “What a blessing to have access to this class. This is going to be a perfect tool to recover our Reformed tradition.”
Report of the General Synod Council on Leadership throughout the RCA

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I; send me!” (Isaiah 6:8).

God is still calling people into relationship and sending them to participate in and witness to the reign of God. By God’s grace, the Reformed Church in America is joining in that work by identifying, forming, deploying, nurturing, and renewing people with gifts for leadership. Throughout the denomination, this occurs by:

- Forming a new generation of pastoral leaders
- Training elders and deacons in their ministry
- Assisting leaders to discern God’s direction
- Connecting ministers of Word and sacrament and congregations
- Creating pastoral networks for support and learning
- Coaching and mentoring pastors in their work
- Nurturing the unique gifts and ministry of women

The General Synod Council (GSC) nurtures congregational leadership—deacons, elders, ministers, emerging leaders, and long-time leaders—through programs and ministries around four themes:

- Calling people to ministry
- Forming people for ministry
- Nurturing people in ministry
- Renewing people for changing ministry

Calling People to Ministry

The major initiative in this area of focus is Call Waiting. Call Waiting includes a cooperative program with RCA camps and conference centers.

Call Waiting has led to the initiation of the Fund for Ministerial Leadership, which actively seeks contributions for scholarships to assist RCA members who are called to attend seminary. Call Waiting resulted in the creation of a program of care and nurture for college students who attend the General Synod as corresponding delegates, to assist them in their vocational development. It is clear that God’s call in the lives of RCA members is at the heart of raising up a new generation of leaders to serve a world in need and a denomination eager to serve.

Call Waiting led to the development of an initiative called “Gracious Welcome.” Through this initiative the RCA intends to learn how to warmly and most effectively reach out to and welcome ordained ministers from other denominations as they come to assist the RCA in the revitalization and multiplication of RCA congregations. “Gracious Welcome” will also seek to extend Christ-like hospitality to congregations that choose to join the Reformed Church in America.

Forming People for Ministry

Our congregational leaders are hungry for tools that can move their congregations toward health and growth. In response to this challenge, the coordinator for consistory training and ministry services provides support and training to equip and develop the gifts of pastors, elders, and deacons as they move toward a fuller understanding of being faithful consistories.
Specific training is provided for the effective use of the RCA resource *Companions on the Way*, which supports the ministry of elders as they tend to the spiritual needs of people who are exploring or rediscovering the Christian faith. This resource is adaptable for use by elders and pastors in any congregation, and has the potential to enliven the whole faith community.

In some regions of the RCA, clusters of consistories come together for learning, shared ministry, and support. These consistory clusters provide a way for consistories to share with one another about how they shape ministries in their respective congregations and to support each other’s ministry goals.

**Nurturing People in Ministry**

A primary way the RCA nurtures people in ministry is through a growing emphasis on coaching. Within the RCA coaching is understood as the process of coming alongside a person to help her or him discover God’s agenda for her or his life and ministry, while seeking the Holy Spirit’s guidance to see that agenda become reality. Coaching helps a person listen to God about where change is needed and then equips and empowers a person to make the necessary changes.

The increased awareness and accountability that comes along with coaching will help the person being coached be more faithful as she or he participates in and witnesses to the realm of God. By God’s grace, and through the Holy Spirit’s power, the outcome will be more fruitful ministry. This is true for at least three reasons:

1. **Coaching is focused on the present.** Coaches help others understand their present situation in order to discover and implement meaningful actions to address that situation.
2. **Coaching helps people discover their own answers.** Coaches assume that the person closest to the issue typically has the best answers, and that she or he will discover those answers with the help of someone skilled in asking the right questions.
3. **Coaching leads to intentional action.** Coaches help people take inventory of their values and desires by listening to them, asking questions, and speaking the truth, and then helping them develop and take intentional steps toward more faithful action in the future.

Coach training has been offered to pastoral leaders in all the regional synods of the RCA and to some congregational leaders as well. A current goal is to develop the means to train more elders, deacons, and other congregational leaders in coaching skills as we look for ways to nurture existing leadership and develop new leadership in congregations throughout the RCA.

**Commissioned Pastors in the RCA**

“The vision of the Reformed Church in America in the twenty-first century is to see a new reformation of lay people equipped and inspired to serve Christ and his church” (“Report on the Summit to Study Lay Pastoral Ministry in the RCA,” *MGS 2002*, p. 293).

A commissioned pastor is an elder commissioned by a classis to serve in a specific role within a congregation, the classis, or a specialized ministry. Commissioned pastors serve as church planters, Christian educators, youth leaders, and executive pastors and in many other significant ministry roles. They are valuable ministry partners as the RCA identifies, equips, and empowers the leadership necessary to live into “Our Call.”
The commissioned pastors program works with leaders for whom a seminary education is not practical or possible. A personalized training program is designed around each person’s gifts and calling and usually includes mentoring, coaching, college or university classes, distance learning classes through a seminary, and hands-on ministry experiences. The program equips each participant to serve in his or her specific classis. Training programs vary by region and are coordinated and contextualized by classis.

The General Synod Council has created a Commissioned Pastor Advisory Team to facilitate the sharing of learning and best practices, oversight of standards, and coordination of efforts. This team meets one day annually and stays in touch between meetings via email and conference calls.

By the end of 2007, 56 elders had been commissioned to serve in ministry by a classis and 117 more people were being trained as commissioned pastors.

**Commissioned Pastors Program in the Great Lakes Equips Leaders**

A former nuclear engineer is pursuing theological training for ministry through the RCA’s commissioned pastors program.

“He really has a heart for the poor and those who have physical needs,” says Ron Geschwendt, coordinator for commissioned pastors in the Synod of the Great Lakes. “With the support of thirteen area churches, he started a ministry called Help, a diaconal-type ministry. He leads that, he supervises that, he raises funds for that, and we are going to commission him to that ministry.”

Geschwendt says many commissioned pastor candidates are already on staff at local churches and want to receive education to broaden their ministry or help them do their jobs better. Other candidates are training for ministry as a second career after an early retirement. Some enter the program with the goal of working bi-vocationally—mixing ministry with another job.

A candidate from Columbus, Ohio, is building on his work experience in counseling. “It is the vision of the church where he’s an elder that he’s going to develop a two-prong ministry, one for mentally disadvantaged adults and their families, and one to develop a counseling ministry in that church,” Geschwendt says.

“He has so many credentials already—we’re just going to give him the theology and pastoral side of things to bring him up to speed relative to his skills and knowledge.”

**The Pastoral Search Process within the RCA**

The office of ministry services has shifted focus in the last year in efforts to improve the entire call process. Major work continues through conversations and meetings with pastoral candidates and search committees. Every Church Profile and Ministerial Profile is personally handled by the coordinator of ministry services, who works with candidates and search committees until a call is extended and accepted. “Kaizen” is probably the best word to describe the philosophy driving this office. It is Japanese for “continual improvement” and speaks directly to staff members’ openness in learning and understanding the needs of pastors and churches and in building levels of excellence into every aspect of the call process.

**Congregational Leadership Development**

In the RCA deacons, elders, and pastors govern and guide a congregation together. New
resources have been produced this year that help deacons and elders understand their work and do it more faithfully. *Deacons and Elders: Called to Serve* helps deacons and elders become better prepared to serve as leaders in their congregations. It features a combined leader and participant booklet, a pamphlet entitled “A Three-Minute Tour of the Reformed Church in America,” and a DVD that complements material in the booklet.

Regional leadership training events as well as consistory workshops and retreats have provided opportunity for the coordinator of consistory training to nurture and encourage existing leaders throughout the RCA.

Congregational leadership isn’t limited to the officeholders. The ministries of RCA congregations rely on the creativity and commitment of every member. It is always exciting to see people grow into new leadership roles within congregations.

### A Congregational Leader Comes Alive through Service

“There’s the ladies’ room?” and “Where’s the ladies’ room?” I kept looking for ways to use my gifts. The following year at Day Extraordinaire I chaired the auction for our missions fundraiser. At these events I met other women in the church and found out how they got involved.

The New Hope Crisis Counseling Center sounded interesting so I signed up for the training class and subsequently volunteered there the following year as a phone counselor. In the meantime my husband and I attended a Sunday fellowship class called New Community and eventually were invited to join the leadership team. Again I kept looking for the best way to use my gifts, and when the bulletin announced a need for a volunteer for the secretary to the executive pastor, I applied. The ladies I met in women’s ministries were definitely a big part of my Christian growth.

**Ellen Koops**

The Crystal Cathedral, Garden Grove, California

### Chaplains

A large number of RCA ministers do not serve congregations. Their ministry takes place in hospitals, mental health institutions, nursing homes, prisons, and the armed forces. They are endorsed by the RCA to the specialized ministry of chaplain. Every year all who have been endorsed and certified by the office of ministry services to exercise the ministry of chaplain are invited to attend an annual conference. This gathering, which takes place prior to General Synod, provides a nurturing place of mutual support and accountability as well as renewal and networking possibilities for participants. The conference provides a place to experience a variety of learning models through theological reflection, and participants identify the experiences as transformative and challenging. They return to their workplaces not only refreshed but better equipped for their various ministries.

### Specialized Interim Ministers

Interim ministry continues to be a useful specialty within the RCA. The ministry office maintains a roster of qualified interims, monitors their current availability, and provides their names on request. The specialized interim ministers are invited to an annual gathering which provides time for strengthening ties and sharing stories and resources, as well as for rest and renewing an awareness of God’s calling.
Renewing People for Changing Ministry

A major opportunity before the revitalization and leadership staff of the RCA is to listen to God and discern how the powerful and transformative movement of coached revitalizing networks can be extended to more pastors throughout the denomination and how the benefits of networks can be made available to congregational leaders as well.

Already, throughout the Reformed Church in America, elders, deacons and other congregational leaders are experiencing the benefits of participating in the Purposeful Living process. Purposeful Living is the primary tool being used by pastoral leaders as they develop personal calling statements in their coached revitalizing networks. As an extension of their work in networks, pastors and network coaches/facilitators are guiding congregational leaders through the same process. The result is a growing group of leaders who have a clearer sense of who God created them to be, what God is shaping them to do, and where God is challenging them to go. In this way, renewed leadership contributes to revitalizing existing congregations and multiplying new ministries and congregations.

The Reformed Church in America offers ordained leadership throughout the denomination a comprehensive program that calls, forms, nurtures, and renews ministers, elders, deacons, and other congregational leaders, encouraging them to focus outward in mission toward a world eager to hear and embrace good news.

RCA Women’s Ministries Help Develop Leaders

“I began attending Garden Grove Community Church in 1963 at the age of four. When I was 32 years old I joined the staff in the Christian education department, where I served for seven years. I then was called to be director of women’s ministry, where I have served for over eight years. About four years ago I was invited to serve on the women’s ministry advisory group for our denomination, where I have had the great privilege of serving with leaders from across our denomination from many different backgrounds, culturally as well as economically. This opportunity has taken me to places I would never have had the opportunity to go. I have visited students at Northwestern College in Iowa. We spent time with young women, some from our denomination and some from other denominations, and were amazed at their deep faith and enthusiasm for women’s ministries. We were impressed by their passion for God and their hearts for missions! I had the opportunity to attend the “One Thing” conference in San Antonio, Texas, and have had several other opportunities to meet with the advisory team in other parts of the country.

All of these experiences have caused me to learn so much about our denomination and all it has to offer the local church and the world. I have been empowered to think and dream bigger than ever before and have been given the opportunity to voice my opinion, all the while appreciating and valuing our Reformed theology and beliefs. These opportunities and the relationships I have formed have given me a great sense of confidence to do what God has called and empowered me and others to do. We are getting ready to launch a new and awesome mission opportunity called Sister Share to the denomination and the world, and it only happened because of the faithful prayers of our team, the support of the denominational staff, and the vision and graciousness of our leader, Mary Clark, who is truly the embodiment of servant leadership. I have great faith in our denomination as I get to know more and more about it and the leaders God has entrusted it to.

Michelle Cavinder
Anaheim, California

GSC LEADERSHIP ENDS MONITORING REPORT

Each spring the general secretary is required to report to the General Synod Council (GSC)
on progress on the various ends policies established by the GSC. The monitoring report for Leadership follows.

**Ends E-5 Leadership Policy**

The RCA will be a fellowship of congregations filled with disciples, nurtured inwardly, focused outwardly, becoming like Jesus in all they think, say, and do in order to show the love of God in all circumstances to all people.

**General Secretary’s Interpretation**

This ends policy calls the GSC staff to make a difference in the experience of three distinct recipients in order that:

- Congregations are resourced for their work of leadership development.
- Existing leadership experiences ongoing renewal.
- Emerging leadership (congregational and pastoral) is identified, called forth, and trained to exercise leadership in the life of the congregation in the world God loves.

This ends policy has a long-term time horizon—2013 and beyond—and therefore requires intermediate benchmarks for the years between 2008 and 2013. Those benchmarks must delineate:

- Specific leadership development processes and tools the GSC offers congregations and a means to account for the use of those processes by leaders.
- The number of congregational leaders intentionally seeking renewal and the impact of those efforts on their lives and leadership.
- The number of emerging pastoral leaders identified, the type of leadership that is needed, and the equipping processes employed to develop, nurture, and support these leaders.

To that end, the appropriate GSC staff and the general secretary have identified the following goals.

**Objectives and Strategies in Leadership**

**Goal for Congregational Leader Renewal:** By 2013, congregational leaders (whether in an ordained office or not) in at least 400 RCA congregations have developed and are guided by a personal calling statement and are drawing on training that helps them lead congregations more faithfully and fruitfully.

**Outcomes**

- At least ten to fifteen congregational leaders in each of at least four hundred RCA congregations have developed their own personal calling statement.
- At least 250 RCA congregations will have a clear plan for nurturing existing leaders and for identifying, calling, equipping, and supporting new leaders.
- Congregational leaders in 250 congregations, in partnership with their pastoral leaders, will have collaboratively led a process through which they discerned their congregation’s mission, vision, and values and will have taken specific steps to place God’s mission at the center of their life and ministry.
- Consistories in at least 250 RCA congregations will have adopted a governance model that is:
  - consistent with their discernment concerning God’s mission for their congregation.
  - a model through which they lead their congregations in missional engagement.
  - a model that draws on an RCA understanding of the parity of the offices.
- In a denomination-wide survey of elders and deacons, at least 50 percent of them will indicate that they are equipped for their specific role.
Strategies

• Develop a facilitator’s guide for the Purposeful Living process and use it to:
  ♦ Equip and empower all coached revitalizing network coaches/facilitators to launch the Purposeful Living process in the congregations of all network members accompanied by a plan to multiply its use in those congregations.
  ♦ Train people in every regional synod to lead Purposeful Living retreats for clusters of congregational leaders and/or to coach individual congregations through the process.
• Equip “coach trainers” who are trained and provided the resources to train coaches to serve within various types of congregational ministries.
• Develop a coached congregational revitalization process that will:
  ♦ Help members of congregations prayerfully discern God’s mission, vision, values, and future story for their congregation.
  ♦ Include specific steps that a congregation can take to move toward its full redemptive potential.
  ♦ Be supported by coaches trained to support this process.
• Develop a resource or process that will help congregations identify, develop, and elect strong spiritual leaders who will place God’s mission at the heart of their work as leaders—especially in consistories.
• Develop consistory training materials that equip and empower consistories for their role of collaborative leadership with their pastoral leader(s) and that focus on their shared role as representatives of Christ and Christ’s mission in and through their congregations.
• Continue to refine, distribute, and employ existing RCA materials that help deacons and elders claim their distinctive roles.

Data

• With the completion of the Purposeful Living Facilitator’s Guide, the Cluster Leadership Team, through Ellen Ratmeyer and Rodger Price, is ready to invite, train, and encourage pastors who have completed the Purposeful Living process and developed their own personal calling statement to begin using this resource within their congregations.
• During the last year, regional leadership training events as well as consistory workshops and retreats have provided opportunities for the coordinator of consistory training to nurture and encourage existing leaders throughout the RCA.
• A new training resource especially for Reformed Church in America consistories has been produced. This new resource, Deacons and Elders: Called to Serve, helps deacons and elders become better prepared to serve as leaders in their congregations. It features a combined leader and participant booklet, a pamphlet entitled “A Three-Minute Tour of the Reformed Church in America,” and a DVD that complements material in the booklet. The resource is available through Faith Alive Christian Resources. This resource complements the newsletter Called to Serve: Deacons and Elders Together, which is mailed to the homes of all elders, deacons, and pastors.
• The Christian Reformed Church has partnered with the RCA to produce a consistory training DVD which will be completed in 2009.
• An initiative to develop regional trainers for consistories is also underway.
• Through prayer workshops, discipleship training, and the initiatives of the HOPE prayer team, intentional processes for discernment will be introduced to consistories and other church leaders. The coordinator of consistory training will make this a priority in the next year, collaborating with other GSC and regional staff.
• We will design and begin to conduct surveys of elders, deacons, and consistories concerning their current levels of training and what they still require.
Goal for Development of New Pastoral Leadership: By 2013:

- At least 100 new ordained or commissioned pastoral leaders will be entering the RCA annually.
- Every new leader who desires it will be supported during at least the first five years of ministry with a coach and within a coached revitalizing network.
- Pastoral leaders with a clear sense of calling to turn-around ministry or church planting will receive specialized training for those roles.
- Thirty-five percent of the individuals in the RCA’s pool of new pastoral leaders will be people of racial and ethnic minority groups.

Outcomes

- By 2013, we will actively nurture openness to God’s call into pastoral ministry in the lives of at least 500 RCA young people from high school through college, and at least 150 of these young people will be from racial and ethnic minority groups.
- By 2013, of the 150 racial and ethnic minority young people discerning or answering a call to ministry with whom we are in relationship, at least 50 will come from within the RCA.
- By 2013, every new pastoral leader entering the RCA ministry each year who desires it will have been assessed as a potential church planter and at least 25 of these emerging leaders will have received specialized training, coaching, and experience in church planting as part of their preparation for ministry.
- By 2013, every new pastoral leader entering RCA ministry each year who desires it will have been assessed as a potential “turn-around” pastor, and by 2013, at least fifty new leaders, in partnership with their congregational leadership, will have received specialized training and coaching for leading a congregational “turn-around.”
- By 2013, at least 25 percent of the new pastoral leaders entering RCA ministry will have specialized training in multicultural ministry—either as a planter or as a revitalizing leader.
- By 2013, the percentage of RCA pastoral leaders leaving the ministry in their first five years in the ministry will be 10 percent or less than the percentage in 2007.
- By 2013, seventy-five percent of pastors who accept a second call after four to ten years will be equipped to discern their potential new call through the lens of a personal calling statement, and with the increased self-awareness that comes through coaching and participation in a network.

Unusual Programs Help Church Connect with Community

“In Brooklyn, the churches that have survived and done well are those that have been forever on their location and have accepted whatever population is there,” says Daniel Meeter, pastor at Old First Reformed Church.

Old First, the oldest church in Brooklyn, was founded 354 years ago. Meeter says the congregation has always followed and reflected the changing community. Before World War I, he says, the area was WASP—white, Anglo Saxon, and Protestant. “After World War I it switched to Irish and Italian Catholic, after World War II it shifted to poverty and persons of color, and in the ‘70s it started gentrifying.

“Now we call it post-racial—you’ll see everything here,” he says. He characterizes the community as vibrant, up and coming, highly urban, and very liberal.

The church stays relevant and connected to the community with a number of creative and unorthodox programs. As a result, Meeter says, “The neighborhood now feels that Old First is for the community.”
On Martin Luther King Day, for instance, the church hosted an interfaith event focused on peace. Old First is also part of a coalition to fight homelessness in Brooklyn.

The church runs programs for children and youth, including Club Loco, a hangout place for teens; The Seed Is the Word, a non-traditional VBS program; and the Chocolate Chip Chamber Music series, featuring classical music and storytelling aimed at toddlers and preschoolers.

For all its innovative, almost secular outreach programs, the church is rooted in worship. “We balance that wide-open secular side with a very Christ-centered Sunday morning,” Meeter says. “I think it’s that mix that’s key.”

**Strategies**

- Evaluate our Call Waiting program and through it improve our ability to communicate with and pray for people with leadership potential whom God may be calling into ministry and connect this program with initiatives such as Still Small Voice, Leaders on the Horizon, the Youth Ministry Team, and others which may emerge.
- Assist consistory in ways to use the fourth question in the annual Constitutional Inquiry, which concerns nurturing call in the lives of young people in more faithful, intentional, and fruitful ways.
- Evaluate the Seminarian Seminar held at General Synod in order to clarify its unique contributions and, in the years following each seminar, build on the relationships begun there.
- Nurture a healthier and more consistent climate for candidate care throughout the forty-five classes of the RCA.
- Discipleship, leadership, and the GSC racial ethnic staff will collaborate to develop African American/black, Hispanic, and Pacific-Asian youth as current and future leaders in order to develop more pastoral leaders from within RCA racial and ethnic congregations.
- Deepen relationships with Western Theological Seminary (WTS) and develop fruitful relationships with New Brunswick Theological Seminary (NBTS) and the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency (MFCA) through which attempts are made to continuously improve leadership development during the M.Div. years and proactively support development of new leaders during the first five years of ministry through coaching, networks, and other means still to be developed.
- Work with WTS to develop specialized training for church planters and turn-around leaders and embed the skills of leading a revitalizing congregation deeply into the curriculum for all candidates.
- Work with NBTS to more fully develop ministry development tracks in multiracial and multicultural ministry and missional urban ministry.
- Work with MFCA to include new pastoral leaders in networks and coaching relationships as these leaders enter ministry.
- Share best practices for training and developing commissioned pastors throughout the RCA and include them in networks and coaching relationships.
- Work with various partners in the translation and/or program development of commissioned pastor training materials, resources, courses, and processes for people for whom English is not the first or primary language.
- Practice continuous improvement in congregational transitions, pastoral placement, and congregational search services so the percentage of pastoral dissolutions that occur under stress or duress is less than 5 percent.
Data

- Call Waiting, Still Small Voice, and the Seminarian Seminar are being brought together under the leadership of one staff person and a much more complete database is being constructed.
- Our racial and ethnic staff and the multiracial ministries staff will work together to nurture call and support seminary education among young people of racial and ethnic minority groups.
- The director of congregational mission and coordinator for church health and coaching are active team members in the Cooper Missional Leadership program and the Rüdler Leadership Initiative at Western Theological Seminary.
- The director of congregational mission and the coordinator for leader renewal and networks are participants in conversations in the New Brunswick Theological Seminary strategic planning process.
- The director of congregational mission convenes the Commissioned Pastor Advisory Team and has initiated conversations about more complete ways to include commissioned pastors in RCA life and ministry.
- The director of communications has assumed responsibility for the translation of significant RCA materials into the primary RCA constituencies for which English is not the primary language.

RETIRED MINISTERS OF WORD AND SACRAMENT

During 2007 twenty-three RCA ministers of Word and Sacrament retired from active service. Those who retired are being recognized by a display of their photographs and service records as well as by General Synod’s endorsement of appreciation for their years of faithful and dedicated ministry in the church.

R-39
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. (ADOPTED)

Roy Ackerman
Parchment, Michigan

E. Wayne Antworth
Sherman, Connecticut

Eltje Brunemeyer
Bayville, New Jersey

Theodore Chandler
Whiting, New Jersey
Robert Engel
Westbury, New York

Forrest Harms
Plymouth, Minnesota

Harvey Heneveld
Zeeland, Michigan

James Heneveld
Zeeland, Michigan

Donald Jansen
Augusta, Michigan

Willis Jones
Beechwood, Scotland

Judith Marvel
Tucson, Arizona

Peter Paulsen
Decatur, Georgia

Samuel Priestley
Markham, Ontario

Richard Rockwood
Kentwood, Michigan

Janet Rogacki
Belmont, Michigan

Leon Roggen
Niles, Michigan

Arvin Schoep
Earlton, New York

Robert Schwander
Holland, Michigan

Edward Seely
Loveland, Colorado

Stephen Struikmans
Temecula, California

Larry Ten Haken
Hazelhurst, Wisconsin

Lawrence Wilkes
Anaheim, California

John Zavacky
Bradenton, Florida
GENERA L SY NO D COUNCIL REPORTS

NECROLOGY

Necrology Report 2007

Harold J. Lenters was born on September 20, 1924, at Grandville, Michigan. He studied at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1950. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1953.

Mr. Lenters was licensed by the Classis of Holland in 1953 and ordained by the Classis of Minnesota the same year. He pastored the following congregations: American, Woodstock, Minnesota, from 1953 to 1956; Beaverdam, Zeeland, Michigan, from 1956 to 1959; Bethany, Sheboygan, Wisconsin, from 1959 to 1964; Community, Clearwater, Florida, from 1964 to 1968; First, Ireton, Iowa, from 1968 to 1974; and First, Byron Center, Michigan, from 1974 to 1984. He also served as the minister of calling at First, Sioux Center, Iowa, from 1985 to 1991.

Mr. Lenters died on January 19, 2007. He was eighty-two years old.
Fred Tanis Jr.

Fred Tanis Jr. was born on October 22, 1956, at Paterson, New Jersey. He studied at Luther College from which he graduated in 1976, and completed his undergraduate education at Nyack College from which he graduated in 1978. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1984.

Mr. Tanis was licensed by the Classis of Paramus in 1983 and ordained by the same classis in 1984. He served an internship at the Reformed Church in Metuchen, New Jersey, from 1982 to 1984 and then pastored the following congregations: Queens, Queens Village, New York, from 1984 to 1989; First, Catskill, New York, from 1989 to 1995; and United, Clifton, New Jersey, from 1995 until his death.

Mr. Tanis died on February 15, 2007. He was fifty years old.

Gordon Linton Robinson

Gordon Linton Robinson was born on November 14, 1924, at Brooklyn, New York. He studied at Central College, from which he graduated in 1954. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1958.

Mr. Robinson was licensed by the Classis of North Long Island in 1958 and ordained by the Classis of Philadelphia the same year. He served as a student pastor at Johnsville, Warminster, Pennsylvania, from 1955 to 1958. He then pastored the following congregations: Fordham Manor, Bronx, New York, from 1962 to 1964; Pequannock, Wayne, New Jersey, from 1964 to 1981; National Evangelical Church, Kuwait, from 1981 to 1985; and Second, Tarrytown, New York, from 1986 to 1987. He also served as an interim pastor at First, Cambridge, Ontario, from 1985 to 1986; Community, Whiting, New Jersey, from 1987 to 1989; Ocean, Manahawkin, New Jersey, from 1990 to 1991; and Vienna Community, Vienna, Austria (an interdenominational church for English-speakers), in 1995.

Mr. Robinson died on February 16, 2007. He was eighty-two years old.

James William Benes

James William Benes was born on April 4, 1915, at Waupun, Wisconsin. He studied at Central College, from which he graduated in 1936. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1939.

Mr. Benes was licensed by the Classis of Chicago in 1939 and ordained by the Classis of Montgomery the same year. He pastored the following congregations: West Leyden, New York, from 1939 to 1943; Calvary, Hagaman, New York, from 1943 to 1949; Mohawk, New York, from 1949 to 1972; and Stony Brook, New York, from 1972 to 1980. He also served as the pastor of visitation at Community, Glendale, Arizona, from 1982 to 1994 and as interim at Longview Community in Phoenix, Arizona, from 1987 to 1988. He was a pastor to pastors for the Classis of the Southwest from 1988 to 1994 and president of the Particular Synod of Albany from 1951 to 1952.

Mr. Benes died on February 20, 2007. He was ninety-one years old.

Anne Ruth De Young

Anne Ruth De Young was born on May 19, 1916, at Clymer Hill, New York. She received her registered nurse degree from Berea College of Nursing in 1938. Her undergraduate education was completed at Hope College, from which she graduated in 1942. She also
studied at the Kennedy School of Missions in 1951 and became a certified midwife by the Maternity Association of New York City in 1952.

Ms. De Young began her mission career as a nurse in Jackson County, Kentucky, from 1943 to 1944. She then entered the foreign mission field, serving in India from 1945 to 1946; China from 1946 to 1951; and Arabia in 1952.

Ms. De Young died on February 20, 2007. She was ninety years old.

Daniel Kring Poling

Daniel Kring Poling was born on August 21, 1908, at Columbus, Ohio. He studied at Wooster College, from which he graduated in 1931. His theological education was received at Princeton Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1934. He was awarded a doctor of divinity degree by Salem College in West Virginia in 1954.

Mr. Poling was licensed by the Presbytery of New Brunswick in 1934 and ordained by the Presbytery of Westchester the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Presbyterian, Bedford, New York, from 1934 to 1940; Presbyterian, Wheeling, West Virginia, from 1940 to 1943; Temple Baptist, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, from 1943 to 1947; and Fort Washington Collegiate, New York City, from 1947 to 1978. He served as interim minister at Westminster Presbyterian, Manchester, New Hampshire; South Weare Union, Weare, New Hampshire; and Bennington Congregational, Bennington, New Hampshire.

Mr. Poling died on March 5, 2007. He was ninety-eight years old.

James Bleeker Parsons

James Bleeker Parsons was born on August 21, 1925, at New York City. He studied at Brown University, from which he graduated in 1947. His theological education was received at Union Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1950. He also received a doctor of ministry degree from Drew University in 1977.

Mr. Parsons was licensed and ordained by the Classis of New York in 1950. He began his ministry in YMCA work in Indiana from 1950 to 1952 and served as associate pastor at Fort Washington Collegiate in New York City from 1952 to 1957. He then pastored the following congregations: Lincoln Park Community, Yonkers, New York, from 1957 to 1970; Mile Square, Yonkers, New York, from 1964 to 1970; and First, Nyack, New York, from 1970 to 1989. He served a mission church in New Fairfield, Connecticut, from 1989 to 1991 and as stated supply in Clarkstown, New York, in 1997. He also served as an adjunct professor of religion at St. Thomas Aquinas College in Sparkill, New York.

Mr. Parsons died on March 13, 2007. He was eighty-one years old.

Steven Ronald Everett

Steven Ronald Everett was born on May 7, 1969, at Pequannock, New Jersey. He studied at Muhlenberg College, from which he graduated in 1991. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1997.

Mr. Everett was licensed by the Classis of Passaic Valley in 1992 and ordained by that classis in 1997. He pastored Glenmont, New York, from 1997 to 2003 and Community, Douglaston, New York, from 2003 until his death.

Mr. Everett died on March 18, 2007. He was thirty-seven years old.
Jeffrey Smith Stephen Garden


Mr. Garden died on April 5, 2007. He was sixty-eight years old.

Martin Cheng-chang Wang

Martin Cheng-chang Wang was born on March 1, 1935, at In-Ian, Taiwan. He studied at Taiwan Theological College, from which he graduated in 1960. His theological education was received at Union Theological Seminary in Virginia from which he graduated in 1963. He was awarded a master of theology degree from Union in 1964 and a doctoral degree from the University of Manchester (United Kingdom) in 1970.

Mr. Wang was licensed by the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan in 1965 and ordained by the Seven Stars Presbytery in 1967. He served as an evangelist in His-chi, Taiwan, from 1960 to 1961 and was pastor at Tyng-min Presbyterian in Keelung, Taiwan, from 1964 to 1965. Mr. Wang was an associate professor at Taiwan Theological College in Taipei, Taiwan, from 1964 to 1972 and professor at Trinity College in Singapore from 1972 to 1974. He came to the RCA and served as pastor at Winfield, Woodside, New York, from 1981 to 1988. He was then a world mission associate for the RCA and professor at Taipei Theological Seminary in Taiwan, from 1989 to 1999.

Mr. Wang died on April 16, 2007. He was seventy-two years old.

Walter N. Van Popering

Walter N. Van Popering was born on July 3, 1928, at Bay Shore, Long Island, New York. He studied at Hamilton College, from which he graduated in 1949. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1953.


Mr. Van Popering died on April 26, 2007. He was seventy-eight years old.

Lynn T. Joosten

Lynn T. Joosten was born on September 5, 1930, at Lakeview, South Dakota. He studied at Central College, from which he graduated in 1952. His theological education began at Western Theological Seminary in 1952 and was completed at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1955.

Mr. Joosten was licensed by the Classis of Pella in 1955 and ordained by the Classis of Schenectady the same year. He pastored the following congregations: associate pastor, Bellevue, Schenectady, New York, from 1955 to 1957; pastor, Brielle, New Jersey, from 1957 to 1961; associate pastor, First, Albany, New York, from 1961 to 1967; pastor, Christ

Mr. Joosten died on May 1, 2007. He was seventy-six years old.

**Ruth Ten Brink**

Ruth Eileen Loring Ten Brink was born on September 26, 1920, at Presque Isle, Maine. She studied at the University of Maine, from which she graduated in 1942. She also studied at the Merrill Palmer School, the Kennedy School of Missions, and Cornell University. Ms. Ten Brink began her career as a teacher in 1942 and served on the mission field in India from 1946 to 1967.

Ms. Ten Brink died on May 17, 2007. She was eighty-six years old.

**William W. Sacher**

William W. Sacher was born on March 4, 1936, at Buffalo, New York. He studied at the University of Buffalo, from which he graduated in 1956. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1977.

Mr. Sacher was licensed and ordained by the Classis of Mid-Hudson in 1977. He served as student pastor at Gravesend, Brooklyn, New York, from 1975 to 1977 and as missionary pastor at Toms River, New Jersey, from 1977 to 1980. He pastored the following congregations: Herkimer, New York, from 1980 to 1983 and Blue Mountain and Katsbaan, Saugerties, New York, from 1983 to 2003. Mr. Sacher also served as vice president of the Regional Synod of New York in 1999.

Mr. Sacher died on May 28, 2007. He was seventy-one years old.

**Harry John Almond**

Harry John Almond was born on November 25, 1918, at Newark, New Jersey. He studied at Rutgers University, from which he graduated in 1941. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1947.

Mr. Almond was licensed and ordained by the Classis of Paramus in 1947. He served on the mission field at the Basra Boys School in Arabia from 1943 to 1951. He served as a representative for Moral Re-Armament from 1951 to 1976, as its executive director from 1976 to 1980, and as its director from 1980 to 1997. He was a representative on the Committee for Christian and Muslim Relations of the National Council of Churches in 1985.

Mr. Almond died on June 3, 2007. He was eighty-eight years old.

**Paul M. Van de Hoef**

Paul M. Van de Hoef was born on November 25, 1929, at Boyden, Iowa. He studied at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1962. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1965.
Mr. Van de Hoef was licensed by the Classis of West Sioux in 1965 and ordained by the Classis of North Grand Rapids the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Aberdeen, Grand Rapids, Michigan, from 1965 to 1969; Rose Park, Holland, Michigan, from 1969 to 1979; and Heritage, Hudsonville, Michigan, from 1979 to 1981. He served as the president of the Particular Synod of Michigan from 1976 to 1977.

Mr. Van de Hoef died on June 5, 2007. He was seventy-seven years old.

Fred Herwaldt Jr.

Fred Herwaldt Jr. was born on December 16, 1946, at Flint, Michigan. He studied at Michigan State University, from which he graduated in 1969. His theological education was received at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, from which he graduated in 1973.

Mr. Herwaldt was licensed and ordained by the Classis of South Grand Rapids in 1973. He served as assistant pastor at University, East Lansing, Michigan, from 1973 to 1977 and as director of the Tri-County Aging Nutrition Program in Lansing, Michigan, from 1977 to 1980. He then pastored Onesquethaw, Feura's Bush, New York, from 1980 to 1984 and Lincoln Park, New Jersey, from 1984 until his death.

Mr. Herwaldt died on June 9, 2007. He was sixty years old.

Berend T. Vander Woude Jr.

Berend T. Vander Woude Jr. was born on September 16, 1919, at Portage, Michigan. He studied at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1941. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1944.

Mr. Vander Woude was licensed and ordained by the Classis of Pleasant Prairie in 1944. He pastored the following congregations: Normandale, Pekin, Illinois, from 1944 to 1948; Alexander, Iowa, from 1948 to 1955; Greenleafton, Preston, Minnesota, from 1955 to 1966; Brooklyn Park, Minneapolis, Minnesota, from 1966 to 1967; Our Savior’s, Brooklyn Park, Minnesota, from 1967 to 1974; Woodway Community, Edmonds, Washington, from 1974 to 1978; and Laotian Community, Eagan, Minnesota, from 1980 to 1989.

Mr. Vander Woude died on June 12, 2007. He was eighty-seven years old.

James Woolley Dunham

James Woolley Dunham was born on March 22, 1921, at New Brunswick, New Jersey. He studied at Central College, from which he graduated in 1950. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1953. He was awarded a master of theology degree from Princeton Theological Seminary in 1960.

Mr. Dunham was licensed and ordained by the Classis of New Brunswick in 1953. He served in the mission field in Arabia from 1953 to 1987.

Mr. Dunham died on June 26, 2007. He was eighty-six years old.

Rudolf Kuyten

Rudolf Kuyten was born on May 4, 1932, at Haarlem, the Netherlands. He studied at Calvin College, from which he graduated in 1957. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1959.
Mr. Kuyten was licensed and ordained by the Classis of Holland in 1959. He served on the
mission field in Japan from 1960 to 1995.

Mr. Kuyten died on July 10, 2007. He was seventy-five years old.

**Barclay Belding Fishburn**

Barclay Belding Fishburn was born on February 22, 1922, at Albany, New York. He studied at Union College, from which he graduated in 1944. His theological education began at Western Theological Seminary and was completed at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1950.

Mr. Fishburn was licensed by the Classis of Schenectady in 1950 and ordained by the Classis of Montgomery the same year. He pastored the following congregations: First, Amsterdam, New York, from 1950 to 1959; Clymer Hill, Clymer, New York, from 1959 to 1962; Fruitport, Michigan, from 1963 to 1968; Bosworth Road Presbyterian, Cleveland, Ohio, from 1969 to 1970; and First, Marion, New York, from 1971 to 1973. He served as pastor of visitation at East Williamson, New York, from 1973 to 1986 and was interim at Ontario, New York, from 1974 to 1978. He was also in specialized ministry at Xerox Corporation in Webster, New York, from 1973 to 1988.

Mr. Fishburn died on July 17, 2007. He was eighty-five years old.

**F. Scott Petersen**

F. Scott Petersen was born on March 2, 1963, at Staten Island, New York. He studied at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1986. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1991.

Mr. Petersen was licensed by the Classis of Holland in 1992 and ordained by the Classis of Schoharie the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Lawyersville, New York, 1991 to 1994; Sharon, New York, from 1991 to 1994; Griggstown, Princeton, New Jersey, from 1994 to 2000; and Fairfield, New Jersey, from 2000 until his death.

Mr. Petersen died on August 4, 2007. He was forty-four years old.

**Samuel Williams**

Samuel Williams was born at Brewton, Alabama. He studied at Central College, from which he graduated in 1948. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1951.

Mr. Williams was licensed and ordained by the Classis of Holland in 1951. He served as a teacher at Southern Normal School in Brewton, Alabama, from 1951 to 1960. He was the assistant chaplain and director of Upward Bound at Hope College from 1968 to 1971. He pastored Pembroke, St. Anne, Illinois, from 1960 to 1968 and Community, Oakland, California, from 1971 to 1990.

Mr. Williams died on August 31, 2007. He was eighty-five years old.

**Kenneth Leestma**

Kenneth Leestma was born on August 5, 1926, at Holland, Michigan. He studied at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1952. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1954. He received his doctor of ministry degree from the California Graduate School of Theology in 1976.
Mr. Leestma was licensed by the Classis of Grand Rapids in 1954 and ordained by the Classis of California the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Lincoln Avenue, Pomona, California, from 1954 to 1960; Bethel, Sheldon, Iowa, from 1960 to 1966; Bayshore Gardens, Bradenton, Florida, from 1966 to 1971; Eldorado Park Community, Long Beach, California, from 1971 to 1976; New Life Community, Artesia, California, from 1976 to 1991; Christ Community, Carmichael, California, in 1992; and Glendale, Arizona, in 1993. He also served as the interim pastor for the English-speaking congregation of the National Evangelical Church in Bahrain in 1991. He was an RCA pastor to pastors from 1991 to 1992 and minister for congregational life at the Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, California, from 1993 to 1999.

Mr. Leestma died on September 20, 2007. He was eighty-one years old.

Ralph H. Van Rheenen was born on July 18, 1921, near Pella, Iowa. He studied at Central College, from which he graduated in 1948. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1951.

Mr. Van Rheenen was licensed by the Classis of Pella in 1951 and ordained by the Classis of Germania the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Chancellor, South Dakota, from 1951 to 1957; Faith, Kalamazoo, Michigan, from 1957 to 1967; Spring Valley, Fulton, Illinois, from 1967 to 1977; Community, Hawarden, Iowa, from 1977 to 1984; and Raritan, Illinois, from 1985 to 1989.

Mr. Van Rheenen died on November 6, 2007. He was eighty-six years old.

Wilhelm Kruger Haysom was born on December 31, 1912, at San Francisco, California. He studied at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1936. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1939.


Mr. Haysom died on November 14, 2007. He was ninety-four years old.

Fred J. Baumgardner was born on October 18, 1918, at Milton, Pennsylvania. He studied at New York University, from which he graduated in 1946. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1948.

Mr. Baumgardner was ordained in the Baptist Church in 1941. He pastored the following congregations: Community, Elmhurst, New York, from 1940 to 1946; Second, Jersey City, New Jersey, from 1946 to 1950; Trinity, West New York, New Jersey, from 1950 to 1961; Bellevue, Schenectady, New York, from 1961 to 1985.
Mr. Baumgardner died on November 14, 2007. He was eighty-nine years old.

**Andy Kamphuis**

Andy Kamphuis was born on April 16, 1920, at Waupun, Wisconsin. He studied at the Moody Bible Institute.

Mr. Kamphuis received a dispensation and was licensed and ordained by the Classis of West Central in 1970. He served as a missionary in Winnebago, Nebraska, from 1956 to 1962. He was the lay pastor at Apache, Oklahoma, from 1962 to 1970 and pastor from 1970 to 1986. He also served as a representative of Portable Recording Ministries International.

Mr. Kamphuis died on November 25, 2007. He was eighty-seven years old.

**Glenn Bruggers**

Glenn Bruggers was born on August 21, 1923, at Holland, Michigan. He studied at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1948. He received his theological education at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1951. He also studied at Yale University and McCormick Theological Seminary.

Mr. Bruggers was licensed and ordained by the Classis of Illiana in 1951. He entered mission service and served in Japan from 1951 to 1974; following that he served as secretary for Asian and African mission for the RCA from 1974 to 1989.

Mr. Bruggers died on November 28, 2007. He was eighty-four years old.

**Frederic Cornelius Dolfin**

Frederic Cornelius Dolfin was born on March 9, 1920, at Hudsonville, Michigan. He studied at Lakeland College, from which he graduated in 1941. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1944. He was awarded a master of theology degree from Clarksville Seminary in 1955.

Mr. Dolfin was licensed by the Classis of Wisconsin in 1944 and ordained by the Classis of Illiana the same year. He pastored the following congregations: First, De Motte, Indiana, from 1944 to 1949; Second, Grand Haven, Michigan, from 1949 to 1958; Eighth, Grand Rapids, Michigan, from 1959 to 1965; First, Waupun, Wisconsin, from 1965 to 1971; Calvary, South Holland, Illinois, from 1971 to 1973; North Park, Kalamazoo, Michigan, from 1973 to 1980; and Bethel, Grand Rapids, Michigan, from 1980 to 1985. He served as interim minister at Bethany, Grand Rapids, Michigan, from 1985 to 1987 and Calvin, Grand Rapids, Michigan, from 1987 to 1989. Mr. Dolfin was pastor of congregational care at Woodhaven Reformed in Byron Center, Michigan, and engaged in specialized ministry with Portable Recording Ministries in Holland, Michigan. He also served as president of the Particular Synod of Chicago in 1970.

Mr. Dolfin died on November 29, 2007. He was eighty-seven years old.

**James Zwemer Nettinga**

James Zwemer Nettinga was born on July 16, 1912, at Chicago, Illinois. He studied at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1934. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1937. He was awarded a master of theology degree by Princeton Theological Seminary in 1938 and a doctoral degree by Union Theological Seminary in 1946.
Mr. Nettinga was licensed by the Classis of Holland in 1937 and ordained by the Classis of New York in 1938. He pastored Harlem Collegiate, New York City, New York, from 1938 to 1942 and then served as secretary for Young People’s Work (RCA) from 1942 to 1947, acting secretary of the Board of Domestic Missions (RCA) from 1947 to 1949, and secretary of the American Bible Society from 1949 to 1977.

Mr. Nettinga died on December 2, 2007. He was ninety-five years old.

William C. Hillegonds

William C. Hillegonds was born on February 11, 1922, at Chicago, Illinois. He studied at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1949. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1951.

Mr. Hillegonds was licensed by the Classis of Chicago in 1951 and ordained by the Classis of Rensselaer the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Chatham, New York, from 1951 to 1955; Brighton, Rochester, New York, from 1955 to 1960; Hope, Holland, Michigan, from 1960 to 1965; and Second, Pella, Iowa, from 1978 to 1980. He served as chaplain at Hope College from 1965 to 1978 and was dismissed to the Presbytery of Detroit in 1980.

Mr. Hillegonds died on December 23, 2007. He was eighty-five years old.


*Just as it is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world, so it has been bearing fruit among yourselves from the day you heard it and truly comprehended the grace of God (Colossians 1:6).*

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. The church, led by the Holy Spirit, is called to bear witness through God’s unconditional love to those who are among the poor, who are strangers, and who have become outcasts.

The vision of the Global Mission staff of the RCA is to support congregations and members as they personally, prayerfully, and financially support mission personnel, mission partners, and mission teams to do the following:

- Bring the good news of God’s grace in Jesus Christ to those who have never heard the joyful message.
- Increase the leadership, education, and technology capacities of mission partners.
- Transform the local mission engagement of congregations and members through intentional global connections.
- Respond to disasters and injustice with actions of relief, development, and advocacy.

**A Tradition of Mission**

RCA Global Mission has been engaged in cross-cultural mission for more than 150 years and has a record of excellence that is well known both within our church and the ecu-
menical mission world. Long-term assignments have been the backbone of RCA global missions. These career missionaries make a lasting and sustainable difference in lives of people, communities, and indigenous churches. Emerging global churches are born, discipled, trained, sustained, and sent in mission through long-term missionaries. The RCA remains committed to long-term mission assignments as the most effective approach to the sustainable development of indigenous churches around the globe.

Volunteers and Mission Teams

RCA Global Mission is also committed to short-term volunteers and mission teams. In the last thirty years, the sending of short-term mission teams both locally and globally has escalated rapidly. RCA Global Mission is committed to facilitating mission trips that accomplish meaningful and sustainable work, but more importantly transform the lives of the participants, the people “on the ground,” and the sending church.

RCA Global Mission is committed to long-term missionaries and short-term volunteers and mission teams. In today’s world of mission, the two approaches are not in conflict. Rather each contributes a distinctive role in God’s mission to reconcile the world to himself in Jesus Christ.

Growing Global Mission Opportunities

As Christians we are called to bring the whole gospel to the whole world. We also believe that focus is critical to effective mission work. All new RCA global mission projects must clearly address one or more of the following critical priorities:

- Evangelizing unreached peoples
- Empowering global partners
- Equipping RCA churches for mission
- Embracing compassion and justice

Evangelizing Unreached Peoples

RCA missionaries and funding enable the spread of the gospel to unreached peoples around the globe:

- In Chile with the Christian Presbyterian Church.
- In Honduras with the Moravians.
- In Alaska with the services of Mission Aviation Repair Center.
- In Italy with the Waldensians.
- In Niger with the Evangelical Church of the Republic of Niger.
- In Kenya with the Africa Inland Church.
- In China with the China Christian Council and the Yanbian and Rajin Foundation.
- In Myanmar with the Reformed Evangelical Church in Myanmar.
- Through Scripture translation and dissemination by RCA mission personnel assigned to Wycliffe, United Bible Societies, and Audio Scripture Ministries.

Empowering Global Partners

RCA Global Mission most often works in partnership with indigenous churches. The number one priority of our global partners is leadership development. RCA missionaries and mission grants equip leaders:

- In a doctoral program based in Latin America.
- At Bible Schools in Honduras, Chiapas, Mexico, and Niger.
- Through worship services for and the discipling of believers of international congregations in Oman and Bahrain.
- At Al Amana Centre in Oman.
- At St. Paul’s United Theological College in Kenya.
- At the Evangelical Theological Seminary and Reformed Christian Church in Croatia.
• With the Ukrainian Center for Christian Cooperation.
• In Albania with the Albanian Evangelical Alliance.
• At Tokyo Union Theological Seminary in Japan.
• In Estonia with Union of Evangelical Christian and Baptist Churches.
• At the Evangelical Seminary of Caracas in Venezuela.
• Through the Quiche Evangelical Church in Guatemala.
• At Mekane Yesus Theological Seminary in Ethiopia.
• At seminaries of the China Christian Council in Heifei and Shenyang.
• At Tainan Theological Seminary and Yu-Shan Theological College in Taiwan.
• Through the diaconal program of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa and the Dutch Reformed Church.
• Through the Church Planting Center of the Reformed Evangelical Church in Myanmar.

Equipping RCA Churches for Mission
The term “mutual mission” describes a two-way relationship between mission partners, each of them both sending and receiving. The gifts of the global church are precious treasures for the church in the West as it seeks to understand local mission in a racially diverse and religiously pluralistic world. RCA Global Mission facilitates mutual mission in several ways.

For the past several years RCA Global Mission has partnered (first with Western Theological Seminary and later expanding to include the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency and New Brunswick Theological Seminary) in providing seminary students with cross-cultural immersion experiences that develop within students the skills to communicate the gospel effectively across cultural lines. Global Mission also sponsors experiential journeys for RCA pastors to key mission sites.

RCA Global Mission is in a very good position to partner in these learning experiences, since that is what we have been doing effectively for over 150 years: crossing cultural lines with the good news of the gospel in ways that are sensitive to the culture and true to the gospel. Through partnerships with RCA pastors and seminaries, Global Mission hopes to contribute to the competencies of future church leaders, while building with them a partnership in ministry and mission that will last a lifetime.

Embracing Compassion and Justice
Through Global Mission missionaries and grants to mission partners, the Reformed Church in America participates in the compassion and justice proclaimed by Jesus in Luke 4:21, when he said, “Today this scripture [Isaiah 61] has been fulfilled in your hearing.”
• The sick are healed in Nicaragua, Honduras, Chiapas, South India, Niger, Mozambique, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Bahrain.
• The broken and oppressed find wholeness and peace in Hungary, Italy, Egypt, South Korea, the United States, South India, Sudan, Palestine, and Malawi.
• Sustainable development supports brothers and sisters in Christ in Niger, Mozambique, South India, Ethiopia, Malawi, Kenya, and South Africa.
• Children are lovingly cared for and educated in Japan; Nicaragua; Malawi; Argentina; Ecuador; Hawaiian Gardens, California; Sioux Falls, South Dakota; Grand Rapids, Michigan; Staten Island, New York; Mescalero and Dulce, New Mexico; and Jackson County, Kentucky.
• Through Reformed Church World Service, RCA members continue a ministry of compassion and hope throughout our lost and broken world. Gifts to One Great Hour of Sharing and in response to crisis appeals provide emergency relief to disaster survivors, grants for rehabilitation, the development of long-term solutions, and advocacy for justice for people who are poor and hungry.
OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES IN GLOBAL MISSION

Statistics on RCA Church and Member Giving

“Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matthew 6:21).

First a story, and then a few statistics.

The photo of children on the first page of the letter caught 12-year-old Francesca Bevevino’s eye. She read the letter, which was from the RCA; it asked for donations to supply Roma (gypsy) children in Europe with Bibles. It told about how the Roma kids need to learn to read, and how they need to learn about God’s love for them. The letter explained that the Bible in their own language could help the children do both. Not long before, Francesca had heard her parents, Laura and Frank, talk about which appeals for funds they could support and which they couldn’t. They get a lot of requests for donations in the mail every month. Francesca also knew that her parents had set aside money to buy her new clothes. “You know, Mom, I don’t need everything,” said the seventh-grader. With her parents’ consent, Francesca decided to send $40 of her school clothes money to buy Bibles for Roma children. “She’s a good kid with a big heart,” says her mom.

Francesca gave a little more than the average amount per RCA member given to Global Mission through churches in 2007, which was $37.60.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Churches</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2002</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RCA church pledges to Global Mission</td>
<td>$6,276,909</td>
<td>$6,373,893</td>
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<tr>
<td>Churches with no pledges</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average amount of church pledges</td>
<td>$10,621</td>
<td>$9,716</td>
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<tr>
<td>Per-member average giving through churches</td>
<td>$37.60</td>
<td>$35.95</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Individuals</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2002</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual pledges to Global Mission</td>
<td>$256,550</td>
<td>$105,800</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of individuals holding pledges</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average pledge per person</td>
<td>$1,316</td>
<td>$1,411</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reformed Church World Service</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2002</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Donations* by individuals</td>
<td>$38,438</td>
<td>$24,482</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total donors</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>134</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average gift per person</td>
<td>$452</td>
<td>$183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donations* by churches</td>
<td>$222,487</td>
<td>$204,809</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total churches</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>170</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average gift per church</td>
<td>$1,318</td>
<td>$1,204</td>
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</table>

*Donations do not include contributions for disaster appeals.

Global Mission Funding Challenges

Global Mission is grateful for the faithful support of missionaries and mission projects by RCA congregations and members. With their generosity, along with transfers from a legacy and development fundraising accounts, Global Mission ended the 2007 fiscal year balancing revenue with expenditures. Already well into the 2008 fiscal year, Global Mission faces significant challenges due to the weakening of the U.S. dollar resulting in mid-year cost of living salary increases for missionaries in many countries, and the possible impact of the weakened economy on giving patterns. In addition to these dynamics carrying over into 2009, medical insurance premiums for missionaries will rise 12 percent. With great
appreciation for the faithfulness of churches and individuals supporting RCA missionaries, and with every intention to be faithful stewards of the gifts of God’s people, the following recommendation is offered:

**R-40**

To set the Partnership-in-Mission share for 2009 at $6,000, an increase of $200; and further,

to encourage all RCA churches to commit to at least one full share. (ADOPTED)

**CATEGORIES AND NUMBERS OF MISSION PERSONNEL**

**RCA mission personnel** are appointed by RCA Global Mission for specific ministry. Global Mission establishes their salaries and benefits and supervises these missionaries. **Mission partner personnel** (MPP) are employed by partners’ organizations. They are under the supervision of the partner, who also establishes and regulates salaries and benefits. **Volunteers** are appointed by the RCA Mission Volunteer Program to specific job responsibilities; they generally receive housing and a stipend.

**Number of Mission Personnel by Category, 1996-2008**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>MISSYS</th>
<th>MPP</th>
<th>VOLUNTEERS</th>
<th>TOTALS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>83</td>
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<td>74</td>
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<td>2008</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>147</td>
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**Mission Personnel Changes**

Lew and Nancy Scudder have retired from active missionary service. See the recommendation below for information regarding the mission service of the Scudders. Lew and Nancy will continue to live in Cyprus.

Ruth Estell has been appointed as an RCA missionary to serve at Yanbian University of Science and Technology in China. Ruth will be serving as a lecturer in the English department of the university. Ruth is the daughter of Judy Estell, RCA missionary to Taiwan.

Linn Gann, long-time RCA volunteer, has accepted an assignment as a RCA missionary in partnership with Mission Partners International and the Church of South India. Linn will work in South India as an employment consultant.

**Mission Partner Personnel**

Paul Pierce and Kathy Kamphoefner have been appointed to the refugee ministry at St.
Andrew’s Church in Cairo, Egypt. Paul and Kathy will be working with the Sudanese refugees living in Cairo, continuing the work of Dick and Lynn Allhusen.

Gail MacLaurin replaced Sharende Waard as executive director of Elisha House Pregnancy and Family Support Centre in Welland, Ontario. Sharen remains on the staff of Elisha House in a part-time capacity.

Frederick Carmelo has replaced Pastor Jones Galang in the ministry of outreach to migrant workers in South Korea in partnership with the Presbyterian Church of Korea.

**Completion of Assignment**

Earl and Sarah Smith have left their position at Omaha Reformed Church in Macy, Nebraska, to accept a call to a church in Wisconsin.

Lance and Elizabeth Edwards have completed their assignment with the Reformed Church in Mozambique.

**Volunteer Services Assignments**

**Bahrain:**
- Jena Helmus
- Jacob and Sally Hockinson
- Amy Leigh Lightfoot
- Alison Murphy
- Kristin Nikkel
- Alicia Pashby
- Jennifer Yeske

**Japan:**
- Nathan Blakeslee
- Nicholas Boyes
- Myra Cubos
- Anna Herzog
- Josephine Kimura
- Elizabeth King
- Tonya Nelson
- Kevin Oosting
- Chris Rensink
- Kimberly Shepherd
- Maribeth Voss

**United Kingdom:**
- Braden Beukelman
- Ashley Pavlat

**Deaths**

Esther De Weerd served the RCA in India from 1926 to 1967.

Glenn Bruggers served the RCA in Japan as a missionary and on staff as secretary for Asian and African Ministries.

**The Retirement of Lewis and Nancy Scudder**

The Reformed Church in America does not have a global mission program. In reality, the RCA has people in global mission. We do not send programs. We send people who give their lives on behalf of the RCA in service to the world and the global church. We support
them in their ministries, and celebrate with them in retirement.

Lewis Rousseau Scudder III was born in 1941 to RCA missionary parents in Kuwait. He was educated in a missionary boarding school in South India from the age of seven through high school, then attended Hope College and Western Theological Seminary, after which he was ordained by the Classis of Holland. Lew and his wife, Nancy (child of Presbyterian missionaries in India), were commissioned in 1966 as missionaries to the Middle East. They served in Beirut, Lebanon (1973-1976), Kuwait (1976-1980), Bahrain (1986-1990), Istanbul, Turkey (1990-1994), with the Middle East Council of Churches in Cyprus (1994-2006), and as Middle East consultants to RCA Global Mission. Nancy has also served on the board of directors of Al Amana Center in Oman.

The retirement of Lew and Nancy brings to an end 188 years of unbroken mission service by members of the Scudder family that began in 1819 when John and Harriet Scudder set sail for India. Since that time their descendents have served as missionaries in India and throughout the Middle East.

In their recent letter to supporting churches, the Scudders wrote:

*With great thanksgiving (and just a touch of pride) we have served in the RCA’s mission program for forty-one years. It has given us a marvelous opportunity to live and learn and love and grow, and through it all we’ve felt the guiding hand of God as we’ve ministered, borne our witness, and been witnessed to in this most beautiful of lands. Since we have chosen Cyprus for our retirement home, we will remain here for as long as God gives us life and breath and health. But we are also being asked by Global Mission to continue to aid and abet its work in the Middle East [as consultants]. We will do that with good heart.*

_The Arabian Mission’s Story: In Search of Abraham’s Other Son_ (number 30 in the RCA Historical Series), by Lew Scudder, was published in 1998.

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**WHEREAS**, as missionary kids, Lewis and Nancy Scudder heard their own call from God to follow Christ in mission, and responded with heart, mind, and soul; and

**WHEREAS** Lewis and Nancy Scudder served with distinction in the Gulf for forty-one years, mastering language and culture, history and current reality, relationships and networks; and

**WHEREAS** on home assignment, delegation to General Synod, and through written publications, Lewis regaled us with eloquent rhetoric and profound insight; and

**WHEREAS** Lewis and Nancy, standing on the shoulders of four preceding generations of Scudder missionaries and living out its unbroken line of mission commitment to the poor and rulers of nations, the illiterate and the educated, ancient branches of Christianity and leaders of the world’s religions, missionary colleagues and mission societies; and

**WHEREAS** through Lewis and Nancy—and generations of Scudders before them—the RCA rubbed shoulders with brothers and sisters in the Middle East and learned what it means to follow Christ in mission around the world and around the corner;
THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the two hundred and second session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting June 5-10, 2008, at Hope College in Holland, Michigan, with gratitude to God for their lives and witness, honors Lewis and Nancy Scudder with a prayer of thanksgiving and a token of our esteem. (ADOPTED)

STORIES ILLUSTRATE THE STATISTICS

A more complete report of the work of Global Mission needs to include not only statistics but also narratives. Literally thousands of stories are lived out every day by RCA mission personnel and partners. The following stories relate to Global Mission’s four priorities and provide a “snapshot” of the results of the RCA’s historic commitment to global mission.

Evangelizing Unreached Peoples

**Ethiopia.** RCA missionaries Dick and Donna Swart recently shared ways the Lord is blessing their ten-year ministry among the Daasanech people along the Omo River in southern Ethiopia. A church has been established among the Daasanech, largely because of the faithful witness of Berhanu and Hanna, an evangelist couple sent by the Swarts’ partner church, Kale Hiwot. “Every Sunday, fifty to one hundred fifty gather together in our village for worship, singing, teaching, and fellowship,” say the Swarts. “About thirty Daasanech have accepted Christ publicly and meet regularly for discipleship and prayer.” Because of the health work that Donna is a part of, Daasanech women and children are able to get immunizations and prenatal care. This has markedly reduced the incidence of many diseases. And, thanks to the Swarts’ windmill irrigation project, the Omo River is now fringed with garden plots that yield tomatoes, peppers, onions, bananas, papaya, and greens. This has vastly improved the Daasanech diet. (Based on a missionary letter from Dick and Donna Swart)

**Sicily.** David and Joy Zomer serve a Waldensian church in Sicily that just celebrated its one-hundred-tenth anniversary—and the members didn’t think they would have ever made it that far! A year and a half ago, there were only fifteen worshiping members accompanied by a very gray mood. Today regular attendance is between forty-five and sixty and the children’s program has blossomed to eighteen. More impressively, the church has recaptured the vision of being active in the world. Today Sicily is flooded with economic migrants from Eastern Europe, a new type of poor, mainly women who come for six months to care for the elderly in their homes. Five of these care-givers are now part of the church family and are being equipped to minister to their “sisters.” As a result, the congregation has discerned a call from God to build a center for female immigrants. Landlocked and restricted by building codes, the members of the church will have to demolish their historic building on the inside, dig down a meter, and thus create space for two floors, one for the church and one for the mission center. The congregation is willing to give up its historical building with its beautiful wooden roof to follow Christ’s call to mission. (Based on a missionary letter from Dave and Joy Zomer)

**Hungary.** “A small, Roma (gypsy) village in the middle of nowhere in the Hungarian-speaking part of rural Ukraine. A collection of hovels. One well in the village, two outhouses. Filthy children playing outside in the mud. The only food we saw was potatoes and candy. Yet we could see a window with a pretty lace curtain and a flower pot blooming on the windowsill. We entered a home. Inside was a group of Christians singing powerfully with heart and soul. In the midst of poverty and squalor, their prayers were filled with praise and thanksgiving for all that God had done for them. They taught us songs so we could sing with them. They asked us how they could pray for us, the Americans. Since that first visit two years ago, we have moved to Hungary to share Christian fellowship and serv-
ice with the Roma. We have much to learn from them. And now, that small Roma village has a new church built from handmade bricks of muddy clay. They are still singing their songs and praying their prayers, giving thanks to God for all things.” (Dick and Carolyn Otterness, RCA missionaries to the Roma)

China. “We were on a tour of new and renovated churches in the Province of Xiamen in South China. Late in the afternoon we arrived at the city of one of the host pastors. After a light lunch, she and the elders of the church led us up several flights of stairs to a tower that looks out over the entire city. The tower houses a bell, which the pastor calls the ‘gospel bell.’ The office of the local communist government is to the east, and to the west is the city’s Buddhist temple. The revitalization of the church and the construction of its new building are amazing. But even more so is the story of the pastor. Six years ago, she was a member of a very strong Buddhist family when she converted to Christianity. Three years ago, she became the pastor of the church and preached to a worshiping congregation of ten on the first Sunday. One year ago, a revitalized congregation began a total reconstruction of its building, capped with the gospel bell pealing out the good news of God’s grace and inviting all to worship the resurrected and living Christ.” (Bruce Menning, director of RCA Global Mission)

Empowering Global Partners

Ecuador. Carlos Velasco, a former resident of the Prince of Peace Foundation in Guayaquil, Ecuador, a home for orphans and street children, received his bachelor’s degree from Fresno Pacific University in December 2007. Carlos credits the counsel of many, especially Ana Pino Garcia, the former director of the children’s home. The encouragement and prayers on his behalf motivated him to pursue his education. He came to the U.S. on a soccer scholarship and thanks the RCA for their support of Prince of Peace Foundation. Carlos is one of the many success stories that the home has produced. (From a trip report submitted by Jhonny Alicea-Báez, supervisor of RCA mission in the Americas)

Latin America. Chuck Van Engen, executive director of the the Latin American Doctoral Program (PRODOLA is its acronym in Spanish), reports that what started out as a dream is now a bona-fide academic/doctoral program fully accredited by the ministry of education of the Republic of Costa Rica. The program has sixty-eight students, including those in the new 2008 class. The student body represents the evangelical/Protestant spectrum of the church in Latin America. Students from the U.S. and Canada are adding a new dimension to the program, engaging the theology and concerns of the growing Latino community in the U.S. and Canada. (From a trip report submitted by Jhonny Alicea-Báez, supervisor of RCA mission in the Americas)

Urban ministry in the United States. The Way Out Ministries in Hawaiian Gardens, California, continues to celebrate the fruits of its ministry. Approximately eight graduates of the Way Out Academy have gone on to community colleges or trade schools to further their education. This is an amazing accomplishment, given the fact that before coming to the academy they were all failing due to poor study habits, negative environments, or detrimental behavior. Some of these young people began attending the youth program and later entered the academy, some stayed to become active in the life of the church, and many are now leaders within the academy and the church. (From a trip report submitted by Jhonny Alicea-Báez, supervisor of RCA mission in the Americas)

The Dominican Republic. Two leaders in Hispanic ministry in the RCA, Andres Serrano and Brigido Cabrera, have laid a solid foundation of teaching, inspiration, and relational networks among pastors and leaders of independent churches in the Dominican Republic who intend to become the Dominican Reformed Church (IRD). An RCA Dominican Republic coaching team has been formed to work with the officers of the new IRD. The
team includes Serrano, Cabrera, Jon Norton (Synod of New York), Luis Pérez (Synod of the Mid-Atlantics), Jhonny Alicea-Báez (Global Mission), and Bruce Menning (Global Mission). The IRD has a legal name and a well-discerned vision, and it is forming and filing its bylaws. On February 9, 2008, the vision and mission of the IRD was presented to over one hundred pastors. Many more are waiting expectantly to see the new denomination emerge. On April 11-12, 2008, twenty-four leaders of the IRD and the RCA coaching team engaged in a strategic planning process to outline and prioritize goals for the next three years. The IRD will have a close sister relationship with the RCA. The Dominican Republic model may be duplicated in other regions where local leaders embrace Reformed faith and polity.

**Equipping RCA Churches**

**Israel/Palestine.** “I was a pretty good baseball player, maybe a bit above average, but just a bit. The reason I was only just a bit above average was because my goal as a hitter was ‘not to strike out.’ In fact, I hardly ever remember striking out. But I also hardly remember hitting any home runs. I hit a lot of ‘warning track’ fly balls, but only two home runs. If I had my ball-playing life to live over again, I’d strike out more often. And I’d hit more home runs!

“As the November 27, 2007, Annapolis summit approaches, my hope and prayer is that Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, United States President George W. Bush, along with United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice will not step up to the plate with the pint-sized goal of “not striking out.” Please, please, please, you big hitters—swing for the fences. Maybe you will strike out, but right now striking out means nothing to anyone because striking out is what everyone expects you will do. But if you swing for the fences, if you just take your very best swings, if you will risk looking foolish, then maybe you’ll surprise even yourselves and maybe, just maybe, you’ll hit one clean out of the park. Then what? Then peace, and with peace a bunch of new problems—but peace with new problems is a home run for so many people.

“I don’t have my ball playing life to live over again. I must live with some regrets about talent wasted. But I’m not going to dwell on that for longer than it takes me to finish this piece of writing. I’m moving on! In fact, I moved on some time ago, on a day when I decided that I wasn’t going to live my life simply trying not to strike out—not to fail. But rather, I was going to swing for the fences more, and hit a few home runs along the way. I have. I am. And I’m going to continue to take some big swings from time to time. You too?”

(From the blog of RCA missionary Marlin Vis)

**Niger.** Thanks to the work of an RCA volunteer work group, members of a church in Niger, Africa, were astonished to see a playground emerge from an unused section of their property in exactly one week. RCA missionary Tom Johnson hosted four men and two women from Hopewell Reformed Church in Hopewell Junction, New York, who went to Niamey, Niger, in March 2007 to build a children’s playground. “Boukoki Church is planning on hosting a preschool or kindergarten in the near future,” says Johnson. “God blessed us by sending an engineer who enthusiastically started designing a swing set, a slide, and a platform that would hold three sets of hand rings.” The volunteers also built two rocking horses using old truck springs, a balance bar, and a tree swing. Except for the swing sets and the hand rings, which the volunteers had brought with them, the crew built all items on site with the help of two local men, a handyman and a welder. In appreciation, members of the church prepared a meal for the volunteers that featured some of Niger’s best dishes. (Based on a missionary letter from Tom Johnson)

**Ethiopia.** The Reformed Church in America has been working with the outreach department of its partner, the Ethiopian Evangelical Church of Mekane Yesus (EECMY) to share
the gospel with the Gumuz, an unreached people group in northwestern Ethiopia. Their population is estimated at over 120,000 (80,000 in Ethiopia, 40,000 in Eastern Sudan). The Gumuz have been marginalized by the Amhara and other larger people groups for centuries.

EECMY evangelist and church planter Berhanu, who is Amhara, said God gave him a vision to go share the gospel with the Gumuz. This defies communal and tribal dynamics, because the Amhara and Gumuz are still considered enemies and have very little to do with one another.

Berhanu had acted on this vision for a year and a half when, in February 2006, RCA mission supervisor Derrick Jones visited him and the Gumuz people, along with EECMY outreach coordinator Beredo Bekalo. Approximately one hundred and forty people in three villages had gathered under trees to hear the gospel. Several people were coming to faith in Christ. Wonde, a village leader, in expressing his thanks to EECMY and the RCA, said, “All of us want to believe in Jesus; we need change, change of life. We were in darkness. With the teaching of Jesus, now we are in the light. We will not be in darkness again. God bless you.”

Berhanu and EECMY have identified two young Gumuz men who have been faithful in following Christ and who possess the qualities and desire to lead the church and minister to their people. In September 2007, these two young men, Lemi Wondu and Mogus Andi, began studies to complete a two-year certificate program in Bible at the EECMY’s Tilku Akaki Bible School in Addis Ababa. (Based on a trip report submitted by Derrick Jones, supervisor of RCA mission in Africa)

Venezuela. “The new church started by RCA missionaries straddled a hill in Caracas. On one side was a middle class neighborhood. On the other, cascading down the steep slope of the hill, was a favela, a jumble of tiny houses with common walls occupied by the city’s poor. One Sunday, a family from the favela entered the church on top of the hill wondering if they would be welcomed. The following evening, as it was the custom of the church to call on all visitors in their homes, the pastor and an elder wound their way to the humble abode in the favela. During their time with the family, friends and relatives crowded into the main room of the house or stood in the doorway for lively conversation. When the family was asked what they appreciated about the new church, they noted three things. ‘We live in the favela and were still welcomed, even though this doesn’t happen in Caracas. The church took up an offering for the poor. And the pastor preached a gospel of God’s grace in Jesus.’ One could not ask anything more of any Christian church around the globe.” (Bruce Menning, director of RCA Global Mission)

Embracing Compassion and Justice

Sudan. Recently Deb Braaksma helped lead a two-week trauma healing workshop that was attended by thirty people. “Their lives had been severely impacted by the Bor Massacre, in which over 2,000 civilians lost their lives,” she says. “One-third of the participants were former Lost Boys and 42 percent gave evidence of suffering from post traumatic stress disorder.”

The stories they shared illustrated the symptoms they were facing:
• “ Tanks crushed civilians and shot down many people. I have many nightmares about tanks crushing people.”
• “Dinkas make traps for animals by making holes in the ground…I felt like that animal in the pit. I felt sure I would die. We don’t mourn death. We expected it.”
• “Losing one’s loved ones one after another makes a person unable to mourn. We stopped feeling. The sorrow was overwhelming.”
Braaksma says it was clear that the workshop’s message of reconciliation was getting across when one of the participants said, “Some say we must remove [an ethnic group] for all they have done to us. But we cannot do that. The Bible says we cannot do that. It’s like removing our eye. We need them. We must forgive them and unite with them.”

“My heart sang!” says Braaksma. (Based on a missionary letter from Deb and Del Braaksma)

Mozambique. “Among those whose lives are being touched by the work of RCA in Africa are Fulayi and Melania Laisonne of northwestern Mozambique, participants in the Farming God’s Way program of the Reformed Church in Mozambique (Igreja Reformada em Mozambique or IRM). This program encourages and facilitates a holistic program of sustainable agriculture, recognizing the stewardship we’ve been given over God’s good earth.

“Melania and Fulayi are learning to make better use of their small garden plot by placing seeds closer together with more even spacing, using compost manure in conjunction with just a little bit of fertilizer, and keeping the soil protected from the drying wind and sun with a blanket of plant residue. They are being enabled not only to produce more, but to protect all their hard work with better storage and marketing methods.

“But this isn’t just about having a more secure supply of food. It’s also about dignity and community and justice. These folks are learning through the IRM field workers that they are valued image bearers of God Almighty. They are experiencing the strength of encouraging each other in farming clubs. And they are beginning to enjoy freedom from debt and poverty as they see real and sustainable improvement in their situation. All of this helps them to grow in their experience of God’s good grace.” (Larry McAuley, RCA missionary in Mozambique and Malawi)

Israel/Palestine. “‘Mister, Mister.’ A small boy is calling out to me. I try to ignore him because I know he wants money. The boy keeps asking as I keep walking. The door of my escape is just ahead. Still he calls, ‘Mister, Mister.’ It’s the wrong door. We’re on the Bethlehem side of the Separation Wall, and the turnstile will not turn. I can’t get out. I turn to look at this persistent child. He says, ‘Not this way, Mister. Over here is where you get out.’ Out of the place of Jesus’ birth. Out of despair which has become the definition for Bethlehem. He walks me down the hill and along the hideous wall. I look down at him and he says, ‘I tried to tell you, but you wouldn’t listen.’ Often we say, ‘We are doing this for the sake of our children and grandchildren.’ And who are these children and grandchildren? Who is my neighbor’s child? Is my neighbor’s child my child? What will it take for the children of the world to get our attention?” (From the blog of RCA missionary Marlin Vis)

Report of Words of Hope

The mission of Words of Hope is to help build the church worldwide through the powerful medium of broadcasting. Words of Hope exists for the sake of the world church, committed to its growth and health. Words of Hope is grateful to partner with RCA congregations throughout North America in this exciting and life-changing venture.

Broadcasting

Albania: Albert Dosti first heard the gospel in the 1980s via Words of Hope’s Albanian radio broadcasts. Back then, Albania’s Marxist regime had decreed that atheism would be
mandatory throughout the land. Listening to gospel broadcasting was explicitly forbidden. As a member of Albania’s military, Albert was responsible for monitoring externally transmitted Albanian language broadcasts and reporting their content to his superiors. Yet Albert found himself so attracted to the gospel broadcasts that he jeopardized his freedom to continue listening instead of reporting the broadcasting frequencies. Today that hardline government is no longer in power and Albanians can now freely listen to three Christian FM radio stations which feature daily broadcasts of Words of Hope’s Albanian programs. Albert now pastors the Way of Peace Church in Lushnje; he also serves as the radio pastor for Words of Hope’s daily Albanian Bible teaching program and the daily devotional broadcast.

**Arab world:** There are an estimated 340 million Arabic-speaking people, and Arabic is the native tongue of more than one-third of the world’s Muslims. The vast majority live in the twenty-two nations of the Arab League. According to the Middle East Reformed Fellowship (MERF), radio is the most accessed source of information and entertainment for more than 95 percent of Arab people. Words of Hope’s partnership with MERF and the Back to God Hour in Arabic language ministry continues to expand. Each of the nightly programs is regularly evaluated in order to make it a more effective means of communicating the gospel message to Arab Muslims. The goal is to attract a wider, steady listening audience. While all the programs have clear gospel content, they differ greatly in format. Offering the listeners the opportunity to send SMS (text) messages to a mobile/cell phone number has resulted in more than four thousand new contacts in 2007. This has provided much quicker and more reliable contact with listeners.

**Iran:** Since the 1990s, outreach in the Persian (Farsi) language to Iran has ranked among the top priorities for Words of Hope. Currently there is a widespread disenchantment with Islam in Iran, and growing numbers are open to the gospel alternative. Programs on the air and now on the Internet enable inquirers to hear the Word of God and new believers to be discipled. In addition to the radio broadcasts, biblical training conferences have played a key role in the steadily expanding Persian ministry. Because opportunities for fellowship and biblical training are quite limited inside Iran, the participants, mostly Muslim converts, are eager to receive as much Bible-based teaching as possible. The testimonies of how Iranians have committed their lives to Jesus Christ are thrilling and also an indication of growing openness to the gospel inside Iran. Because restrictions and persecution are common, commitment to Christ is often risky for Iranian converts.

**Niger:** Words of Hope’s Niger collaboration with RCA Global Mission’s partner the Evangelical Church of the Republic of Niger (EERN) continues to expand. Hausa and French broadcasts have been airing since September 2006. The network has steadily added a number of local and regional radio stations across Niger’s principal population centers along its southern border with Nigeria. Listener response to the programs is increasing throughout Niger as well as in northern Nigeria. Stories of conversions have been reported; testimonies have been received from missionaries and pastors who greatly rejoice that these programs are broadcast in their areas of outreach.

**South Asia:** One of the expanding language ministries in South Asia is the Kashmiri broadcast to the disputed region between India and Pakistan. A summer 2007 visit to the target area revealed evidence that the Kashmiri outreach has begun to bear tangible fruit. Listener response has gradually increased, aided by a new transmission site and enhanced promotional efforts. The initial programs were low-key, based on the theme “Children of War.” Feedback indicated that the series was well accepted and timely. Now programming has gradually begun talking about the life of Jesus, citing examples of parables and testimonies of people who have experienced real life in Jesus.

Outreach to the isolated Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan has been aided by a new two-room digital recording studio installed at the Dzongkha ministry’s field operations facility. Its
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activation enabled a newly trained indigenous program producer to begin recording new gospel radio programs. He is a Buddhist convert who is qualified, committed, and concurrently pastoring a Bhutanese congregation in the target area.

In 2006, Words of Hope officially registered as the primary trustee of the indigenous Good Books Educational Trust based in Ranchi, Jharkhand, India. In addition to providing Bible correspondence courses to thousands each year, Good Books, under the leadership of director for South Asia Stephen Paul, serves as the legal employer for Words of Hope’s staff working in the Dogri, Garhwali, Bhojpuri, Dzongkha, Kashmiri, and Hindi languages.

**Specialized English:** Spotlight programs in specialized English are produced in three centers: in the United States at Words of Hope and the Back to God Hour, and in the United Kingdom at FEBA Radio. In Spotlight programs, the presenters speak in a slower, clearer way that English learners find easier to understand. Listeners use the programs to practice listening comprehension and hear stories from all over the world with a Christian perspective. One trend is the increasing proportion of feedback the team gets from people who find Spotlight on the Internet, as opposed to radio, even though Spotlight is on at least seventy radio stations. It is a great encouragement and blessing to receive reports of people accepting Christ through this outreach ministry.

**Sudan:** During the past two decades, the church has grown faster among southern Sudanese than anywhere else in the world. The thirty-minute nightly Dinka and Nuer broadcasts have played a significant role in facilitating this explosive growth. The 2005 Sudan peace agreement triggered a massive repatriation of Sudanese refugees. Government officials attest that the growth of the church is helped by these broadcasts, as they play a crucial role in establishing trust, which is essential to nation-building in South Sudan. The Lokichoggio Ministry Center at the Kenya-Sudan border is not only the production site for Dinka and Nuer programing, but is also strategically located for frequent visitors en route to and from the Kakuma refugee camp, Nairobi, and various other towns across Sudan.

**Turkey:** Much of the New Testament, from Acts onwards, took place in present-day Turkey. It continued to be one of the leading centers of Christianity for 500 years; all the ecumenical councils of the early church were held in cities located within Turkey. Today the situation is different. After 1,500 years of massive historical change, twenty-first-century Turkey is one of the least evangelized countries on earth. Words of Hope Bible-teaching radio programs produced by Haluk Bilgen are broadcast on local FM radio stations. Since January 2008 he has added a weekly television program available by satellite transmission. Words of Hope’s Turkish ministry also includes a husband and wife team who are the only trained Christian counselors in the Turkish evangelical church. They make a weekly program that addresses family issues.

**Uganda:** Since 2006, Words of Hope Uganda has been producing gospel broadcasts in the languages of Luganda, Bari, and English. Based in Mukono, the ministry is a partnership with the Church of Uganda’s Mukono Diocese. Titus Baraka, a graduate of Western Theological Seminary (WTS), produces the Bari radio programs and chairs the management committee, while fellow WTS alumnus Stephen Kaziimba produces the Luganda broadcasts. Several positive signs point to the growing impact of the broadcasts. One diocese in northern Uganda used the radio programs to promote its annual January conference, and as a result, the number of participants increased from 35,000 in previous years to over 70,000 in early 2008.

**Media Research Institute**

The Media Research Institute (MRI) was founded in 2007 by Words of Hope’s director of
research and training Robert Fortner for the purpose of helping mission agencies, international non-profit organizations, NGOs (non-governmental organizations) working in developing countries, and other groups seeking to serve the disenfranchised and to improve the quality and impact of their work. MRI undertakes field work on media issues, using focus groups, survey research, and extended interviews to advise organizations on strategies, evaluate programs, and improve effectiveness of ongoing work. MRI’s first large scale survey research project covered portions of four countries (Kenya, Sudan, Congo, and Uganda), was conducted in twelve languages, and resulted in usable data based on 3,600 interviews. MRI operates under the auspices of Words of Hope and Far East Broadcasting Company.

Internet Outreach

A notable addition to the Words of Hope website (woh.org) this year has been the inclusion of a new videos page at http://www.woh.org/resources/videos/. One can view any of the videos streamed or downloaded (to facilitate church usage, etc.). Ongoing features on the website include Daily Reflections devotional meditations, Read the Bible in a Year with daily installments from Genesis through Revelation, and the English-language radio program, available in three formats: web text, portable document format (PDF), and audio (mp3). The weekly Words of Hope radio programs (from 1988 to the present), can also be indexed by Scripture reference, topic, date, or keyword. Both the Daily Reflections and the weekly Words of Hope scripts are distributed to email subscribers, and can also be received monthly in audio CD format or downloaded via podcast.

Resources Available

Each quarter Words of Hope publishes 90,000 copies of the Daily Reflections meditations for worldwide distribution. Copies, including a large print edition or a recorded version on CD, are available for individuals and churches. Words of Hope’s devotional meditations can be imported by any website interested in daily updated content. The devotional text is automatically updated at the start of each new day. For more information about this free service, send a brief email to woh@woh.org.

The newly redesigned Update newsletter is produced by Words of Hope for use in church bulletins or mailboxes, with over 600 RCA congregations receiving this resource. The purpose of this publication is to share news and stories from the various ministries in which Words of Hope is engaged throughout the world, as well as the information about the world Christian movement that is received from partners in other countries.

This year’s video presentation, available on DVD to congregations and individuals, is a collection of ministry reports with updates on the languages of Buginese and Makassar to Indonesia, Dinka and Nuer to Sudan, and Hausa and French to Niger. Words of Hope also continues to produce a quarterly two-minute video update which is provided to interested congregations, especially those equipped to project video during their Sunday services.

Grateful Thanks

Words of Hope is thankful for the involvement and support of so many individuals and congregations, friends of Jesus Christ drawn together around the great purpose of sharing the gospel with the world by radio. During 2007 RCA congregations contributed to Words of Hope a total of $746,125. Congregations are encouraged to support the ministry of Words of Hope through one or more mission project shares, which can be designated for a particular language outreach.
In addition to the faithful financial support, Words of Hope covets the ongoing prayer support of congregations. Each month prayer concerns from listeners and ministry partners are gathered and distributed to over a thousand individuals and numerous prayer groups. Prayer partners in Michigan faithfully gather each month in Grand Rapids, Holland, and Traverse City for breakfast, fellowship, and an extended time of prayer. Words of Hope seeks to see more such groups established in other locations and asks that the ministry be prayed for regularly in RCA congregations and worship services. Churches or individuals wishing to receive the monthly prayer concerns should contact Words of Hope.

The Bible often draws upon the imagery of planting and harvest to make a spiritual point. Usually it has to do with the need for patience and perseverance. “Let us not grow weary of doing good,” urged Paul, “for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up” (Galatians 6:9, ESV). The work that Words of Hope does in broadcasting the gospel throughout the world calls for patient endurance, for stick-to-itiveness, year in and year out. We believe there will be a rich harvest of redeemed lives and growing churches, provided we don’t give up and quit. After more than sixty-two years of faithfully sowing the seed throughout the world, it seems evident that Words of Hope is in missionary broadcasting for the long haul. Thank you for partnering with us.

I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind (1 Corinthians 1:4-5).

Throughout the year and through every aspect of Our Call, the RCA has been blessed. It has been blessed with incredible stories of the goodness and faithfulness of God. In response we give thanks to God from whom all blessings flow, and we share these stories with each other.

GSC STAFF COMMUNICATION DIRECTIVES

RCA Today Print Piece Created for Members and Congregations

At the direction of the 2007 General Synod, a print communication piece, called RCA Today, was developed in order to communicate more fully with RCA members. The first issue of this magazine was distributed in April 2008. RCA Today focuses on stories, resources, praise and prayer, and small-group study opportunities specifically around the five elements of Our Call (church multiplication, revitalization, discipleship, leadership, and mission). Each section of the magazine also promotes two-way dialogue by offering a direct email link for those who want to offer feedback and/or request more information.

Each of the eight regional synods receives four pages in the publication in which to support the work of their synods. The magazine is customized to ensure that RCA members receive copies of RCA Today that have their regional synod’s pages. For those who wish to read the pages of the other regional synods, those pages are available on the RCA website. This cooperative effort between General Synod Council (GSC) staff and regional synods allows RCA Today to effectively communicate at a denominational and local level.

RCA Today will be distributed three times a year to member homes and congregations. The magazine is also available on the RCA website for those who prefer an electronic copy.

RCA Website Changes to Meet the Needs of Leaders, Members, and Seekers

Two new websites will complement the main RCA website, www.rca.org, which itself will see significant changes in order to meet the growing online needs of church leaders, members, and seekers.

The main RCA website will continue to be focused more and more on the needs of church leaders and members. Stories from throughout the denomination continue to be featured on the homepage, with new stories being posted at least weekly. Practical resources, resource suggestions, newsletters, and other documents and forms are being posted almost daily. (The website has nearly four thousand pages currently.) Areas of the website that are being significantly reworked this year include Discipleship, Church Multiplication, Social Witness and Justice, Caring for Creation, Children and Worship, and Resources. A new Belhar Center is being developed within the site to support churches in their provisional use of the Belhar Confession. Private areas (intranets) for chaplains, specialized interim ministers, the Church Growth Fund board, and GSC staff are also under development. More than a dozen missionary videos have been added, and video will play an increasingly important role on the site.

The two new sites, under development when this report was written, serve complementary purposes to the main site. RCA Community (www.rcacommunity.org) is designed to be a virtual gathering place for RCA leaders and members. Devoted to encouraging discussions and the exchange of ideas, it will both host and provide links to RCA-related blogs.
Discussion forums (i.e., bulletin boards) on numerous topics will be available. It will also have a subscriber center, allowing members to subscribe to a number of regularly created e-newsletters. If it succeeds as planned and hoped, it will create a virtual community of RCA members, gathering our transcontinental denomination in a place where we can interact with each other, supporting ministries, exchanging ideas, and discussing topics.

The second site, as yet untitled, is being directed at seekers. It will give an overview of what the RCA believes and stands for and then assist seekers in finding a local church through various search engines.

In addition to these projects, an expanded website team has created the new *RCA Today* website, bringing the entire magazine online at www.rcatoday.org.

The RCA website continues to be an expanding opportunity to communicate with the church and also a valuable tool for communicating, discussing, and interacting with each other via the “information super-sidewalk” of the RCA.

**Translation Efforts Increase**

With the encouragement of past General Synods, the support and involvement of regional synods, and the ongoing cooperation of the racial and ethnic councils of the RCA, the number of communication pieces that were translated increased dramatically in 2007. Particular focus has been placed on translating constitutional documents as well as Reformed creeds and confessions. The translations of creeds and confessions has increased rapidly through coordinated translation efforts with other denominations (e.g., Christian Reformed Church, Korean Presbyterian, Taiwanese Presbyterian, etc.). Additional translation work was done in relation to resources for commissioned pastors and other church leaders. In order to make these resources available to the largest audience, the majority of the translated material is posted on the web in lieu of printing. This is both cost effective and allows translated material to be made available more quickly. This momentum will continue as we look to bring RCA communications into the languages in which our members worship the Lord.

**REFORMED CHURCH PRESS**

Reformed Church Press (RCP) is organized as a separate corporate entity (New York not-for-profit) of the General Synod. However, for more than a decade, it has functioned with the oversight of the General Synod Council. It provides the means for the RCA to continue to produce selected resources to support specific RCA mission and ministry in fulfillment of both the Statement of Mission and Vision and Our Call. It is the imprint used on all RCA produced materials including books, General Synod documents, DVDs, CDs, promotional and communication vehicles, and *Perspectives* (a theological journal).

In 2007 and 2008 RCP produced and updated more than fifty resource products for the RCA, including a growing number of DVDs, resources translated into Spanish, Chinese, and Korean, and a number of resources that support congregations around the five elements of Our Call.

RCP also supports the efforts of the Commission on History and its publication of historical resources. New resources published recently by the Commission on History include *A Goodly Heritage: Essays in Honor of the Reverend Dr. Elton J. Bruins at Eighty*, edited by Jacob E. Nyenhuis, and *Liturgy among the Thorns*, edited by James Hart Brumm.
Restated Certificate of Incorporation

Like several other corporations operating at the denominational level, the current board of directors of RCP has reviewed its certificate of incorporation and bylaws in light of its current roles and responsibilities in the RCA and applicable law. It has identified a number of revisions to both documents that would have the effect of 1) describing with greater clarity its place in the overall organization of the RCA, 2) describing more accurately its current roles and responsibilities, 3) enabling it to operate more effectively, and 4) taking fuller advantage of various provisions of applicable law (e.g., provisions that describe permissible ways to conduct meetings, provisions that authorize indemnification of officers and directors under certain circumstances, and provisions that are typically used to reinforce the non-profit nature of the corporation).

Amendments to the bylaws of RCP were presented to and approved by the 2007 General Synod. The board of directors now proposes the following amendments to the certificate of incorporation of RCP, and recommends that General Synod approve them as well. The proposed amendments are consistent with the bylaws (as amended) approved by the 2007 General Synod. If approved by the General Synod, the board will adopt them at its fall 2008 meeting and then take all steps necessary to have them filed with the New York Department of State.

R-42
To adopt the following restated Certificate of Incorporation of Reformed Church Press. (ADOPTED)

RESTATED
CERTIFICATE OF INCORPORATION
OF
REFORMED CHURCH PRESS
UNDER SECTION 805 OF THE NOT-FOR-PROFIT CORPORATION LAW

***

We the undersigned, being the President and Secretary of Reformed Church Press, do hereby certify:

First: The name of the corporation is

REFORMED CHURCH PRESS

(hereinafter called the “Corporation”).

Second: (a) The Corporation is a corporation as defined in subparagraph (a)(5) of Section 102 of the Not-for-Profit Corporation Law of the State of New York, and shall be a Type B corporation under Section 201 of the Not-for-Profit Corporation Law of the State of New York. As such, the Corporation shall have no members.

(b) The purpose of the Corporation shall be to make available communications that embrace the Reformed faith, that engage issues that Reformed Christians meet in person-
al, ecclesiastical and societal life, and that shape the identity and mission of the Reformed Church in America.

(c) The Corporation shall accomplish the foregoing purpose primarily through the production of publications, but also shall have the power and authority to engage in any and all other activities and pursuits that are lawful, that are reasonably related to the purposes set forth in Paragraph (b) of this Part Second, and that are not inconsistent with any other provisions of this certificate.

(d) The purposes of the Corporation shall be fulfilled on a non-profit basis. No part of the Corporation’s earnings shall inure to the benefit of any individual or organization, but such earnings may include reasonable charges designated for administrative services.

Third: The Corporation shall have at least four and not more than ten voting directors, at least four of whom shall be voting members or staff of the General Synod Council of the Reformed Church in America ("GSC") and all of whom shall be of at least the minimum age prescribed by the New York not-for-profit corporation law. The number of GSC staff serving as voting directors shall not exceed the lesser of (a) one half of all voting directors, or (b) three. The General Secretary of the Reformed Church in America shall be an ex officio member of the Board of Directors, without vote but with the right to attend all meetings and to speak on any matter before the corporation.

Fourth: No part of the net earnings of the Corporation shall inure to the benefit of, or be distributable to, its directors, officers, or other private persons, except that the Corporation shall be authorized and empowered to pay reasonable compensation for services rendered and to make payments and distributions in furtherance of the purposes set forth in Article Second hereof. No substantial part of the activities of the Corporation shall be the carrying on of propaganda, or otherwise attempting to influence legislation, and the Corporation shall not participate in, or intervene in (including the publishing or distribution of statements) any political campaign on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate for public office. Notwithstanding any other provision of these articles, the Corporation shall not exercise any power or carry on any other activities not permitted to be carried on (a) by a corporation exempt from federal income tax under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, or the corresponding section of any future federal tax code, or (b) by a corporation, contributions to which are deductible under Section 170(c)(2) of the Internal Revenue Code, or the corresponding section of any future federal tax code.

Fifth: A. To the fullest extent permitted by applicable law, this Corporation may indemnify any person made, or threatened to be made, a party to an action or proceeding other than one by or in the right of the Corporation to procure a judgment in its favor, whether civil or criminal, including an action by or in the right of any other corporation of any type or kind, domestic or foreign, or any partnership, joint venture, trust, employee benefit plan or other enterprise, which any director or officer of this Corporation served in any capacity at the request of this Corporation, by reason of the fact that he or she, or his or her testator or intestate, was a director or officer of the corporation, or served such other corporation, partnership, joint venture, trust, employee benefit plan or other enterprise in any capacity, against judgments, fines, amounts paid in settlement and reasonable expenses, including attorneys’ fees actually and necessarily incurred as a result of such action or proceeding, or any appeal therein, if such director or officer acted in good faith, for a purpose which he or she reasonably believed to be in, or, in the case of service for any other corporation or any partnership, joint venture, trust, employee benefit plan or other enterprise, not opposed to, the best interests of this Corporation and, in criminal actions or proceedings,
in addition, had no reasonable cause to believe that his or her conduct was unlawful.

B. To the fullest extent permitted by applicable law, this Corporation may indemnify any person made, or threatened to be made, a party to an action by or in the right of this Corporation to procure a judgment in its favor by reason of the fact that he or she, or his or her testator or intestate, is or was a director or officer of the Corporation, or is or was serving at the request of this Corporation as a director or officer of any other corporation of any type or kind, domestic or foreign, of any partnership, joint venture, trust, employee benefit plan or other enterprise, against amounts paid in settlement and reasonable expenses, including attorneys’ fees, actually and necessarily incurred by him or her in connection with the defense or settlement of such action, or in connection with an appeal therein, if such director or officer acted in good faith, for a purpose which he or she reasonably believed to be in, or, in the case of service for any other corporation or any partnership, joint venture, trust, employee benefit plan or other enterprise, not opposed to, the best interests of this Corporation, except that no indemnification under this paragraph shall be made in respect of (a) a threatened action, or a pending action which is settled or otherwise disposed of, or (b) any claim, issue or matter as to which such person shall have been adjudged to be liable to the Corporation, unless and only to the extent that the court in which the action was brought, or, if no action was brought, any court of competent jurisdiction determines upon application that, in view of all the circumstances of the case, the person is fairly and reasonably entitled to indemnity for such portion of the settlement amount and expenses as the court deems proper.

Sixth: Subject to an order of a Justice of the Supreme Court of the State of New York, in the event of a liquidation, dissolution, termination or winding up of the Corporation (whether voluntary, involuntary or by operation of law), the property and assets of the corporation shall be distributed to the General Synod Council of The Reformed Church in America or its successors so long as it or they qualify as exempt from income tax under Section 501(a) as organizations described in Section 501(c)(3) in the Internal Revenue Code of 1954 as the same may be amended from time to time. In the event that said corporation(s) is not then in existence and has not been succeeded by a qualifying corporation, then none of the property or assets of the Corporation shall be made available in any way to any individual, corporation or other organization except to corporations or other organizations located within the United States that qualify as exempt from income tax under Section 501(a) as organizations described in Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1954 as the same may be amended from time to time, subject to an order of the Justice of the Supreme Court of the State of New York. The board of directors shall specify any such qualifying organization in the plan for the dissolution of the Corporation and distribution of its assets; if the board of directors is unable to select such qualifying organization the selection shall be made by a court of competent jurisdiction in the State of New York.

Seventh: The board of directors shall at all times operate pursuant to a substantial conflicts of interest policy to protect the Corporation’s interest when the Corporation is contemplating entering into a transaction or arrangement that might benefit the private interest of any private party, including a director or officer of the Corporation, or any member of any committee of the Corporation exercising delegated powers of the board of directors. This conflicts of interest policy shall supplement but not replace any applicable state laws governing conflicts of interest and/or transactions with financially interested parties that is applicable to nonprofit corporations in the State of New York.
Eighth: The principal office of the Corporation is to be located in the County of New York and State of New York.

Ninth: The existence of the Corporation is perpetual.

Tenth: The Secretary of State of the State of New York is hereby designated as agent of the Corporation upon whom process against it may be served. The post office address within the State of New York to which the Secretary of State shall mail a copy of any papers served upon him or her with respect to this Corporation is as follows:

Reformed Church Press
c/o Reformed Church in America
475 Riverside Drive, 18th Floor
New York, N.Y. 10115
Attn: Secretary

Eleventh: Subject to any additional requirements set forth in the New York Not-for-Profit Corporations Law, this certificate of incorporation may be amended by a majority vote of the voting directors after such proposed amendments have been approved by a majority vote of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America. Proposed amendments shall be submitted to the board members in writing prior to any regular meetings, with final approval given at a subsequent meeting.

The RCP Certificate of Incorporation in strike-out and underline found below is for reference purposes only. The preceding unmarked version found above is being voted upon by the synod.

RESTATED
CERTIFICATE OF INCORPORATION
OF
REFORMED CHURCH PRESS

(UNDER SECTION 402805 OF THE NOT-FOR-PROFIT CORPORATION LAW)

The undersigned incorporator, a natural person over the age of twenty one years, in order to form a corporation under the Not-for-Profit Corporation Law of the State of New York, certifies as follows:

* * * * *
We the undersigned, being the President and Secretary of Reformed Church Press, do hereby certify:

**FIRST**: The name of the corporation is

**REFORMED CHURCH PRESS**

(hereinafter called the “Corporation”).

**SECOND**: (a) The Corporation is a corporation as defined in subparagraph (a)(5) of Section 102 of the Not-for-Profit Corporation Law of the State of New York. (b) The Corporation shall be a Type B corporation under Section 201 of the Not-for-Profit Corporation Law of the State of New York. As such, the Corporation shall have no members.

(c) The objects purpose of the Corporation shall be exclusively charitable and educational within the meaning of Section 501(c)(3) of the United States Internal Revenue Code of 1954 as the same may be amended from time to time (hereinafter referred to as the “Code”), and shall include:

1. to make available to the membership of the Reformed Church in America communications that embrace the Reformed faith, that engage issues that Reformed Christians meet in personal, ecclesiastical and societal life, and that shape the identity and mission of the Reformed Church in America.

2. to accomplish said ends through the production of publications which would provide clarity regarding the identity of the Reformed Church, supply the need for thoughtful educational analysis of contemporary moral and social issues and provide a Reformed contribution to the broad range of ecumenical concerns in the world church.

(c) The Corporation shall accomplish the foregoing purpose primarily through the production of publications, but also shall have the power and authority to engage in any and all other activities and pursuits that are lawful, that are reasonably related to the purposes set forth in Paragraph (b) of this Part Second, and that are not inconsistent with any other provisions of this certificate.

(d) In furtherance of its purposes as set out above, but not for any other object or purpose, of the Corporation shall have the following powers, to the extent permitted by law, in addition to those powers granted by Section 202 of the Not for Profit Corporation Law of the State of New York:

1. to engage in and conduct a publishing business; to originate, compose, purchase, acquire, edit, print, reproduce, publish, sell, assign, mortgage, pledge, dispose of, and otherwise deal in and with books, periodicals, advertising material, pictures, sound reproductions, films, publications and printed material of all kinds.

2. to employ and act as agent for writers, composers, artists, designers, photographers, artisans and other persons; to gather, purchase, receive, acquire, own, use, report, sell, distribute and deal in, information pertaining to the philosophical concepts of the Reformed Church in America.

3. to build, purchase, lease, acquire, own, hold, occupy, maintain, improve, use and operate printing plants, binderies, shops, studios, factories, laboratories, offices, buildings, structures, and works of all kinds.
(4) to invest and reinvest the Corporation’s funds exclusively for the objects and purposes set forth above, without regard to whether such investments would be regarded as desirable or prudent by an investor interested solely in profit and not interested in promoting such objects and purposes, and to receive funds (by grant or otherwise) for the purpose of investment and reinvestment from other organizations exempt from income tax under Section 501(c)(3) of the Code be fulfilled on a non-profit basis. No part of the Corporation’s earnings shall inure to the benefit of any individual or organization, but such earnings may include reasonable charges designated for administrative services.

(5) To solicit, accept, hold, donate and administer funds exclusively for the Corporation’s purposes set forth above and to take and receive, by bequest, devise, gift or benefit of trust, and to purchase, construct upon, or lease any property, or any interest therein, real, personal or mixed, tangible or intangible, wheresoever located and without limitation as to value.

(6) To hold, sell, lease, loan, convey or otherwise dispose of any property so received, purchased, constructed or otherwise acquired, and to invest or reinvest the principal thereof, and receive the income therefrom; to add any such income to principal and to deal with, use, expend, loan, convey, donate, design or otherwise transfer the property of the Corporation, whether principal or income, exclusively for the purposes set out above.

(7) To transfer or distribute funds to organizations which are exempt from income tax under Section 501(c)(3) of the Code or contributions to which are deductible under Section 170(c)(1) and Section 170(c)(2) of the Code.

(8) To exercise its rights, powers and privileges by holding meetings of its Board of Directors, by keeping its books, by employing personnel, and by establishing one or more offices, branches, subdivisions and agencies, in any part of the United States of America or elsewhere.

(9) To do everything and anything reasonable and lawfully necessary, proper, suitable or convenient to achieve the objects and purposes set forth above.

(e) Notwithstanding any other provision of this Article SECOND, the Corporation may not exercise any power either expressed or implied, in such a manner as to disqualify the Corporation from exemption from income tax under Section 501(a), as an organization described in Section 501(c)(3) of the Code:

(1) No substantial part of the activities of the Corporation shall consist of carrying on propaganda, or otherwise attempting to influence legislation. The Corporation shall not participate in or intervene (whether by publishing or distributing statements or otherwise) in any political campaign on behalf of any candidate for public office.

(2) The Corporation shall not be conducted or operated for profit, and no part of the net income of the Corporation shall inure to the benefit of any private member or individual, nor shall any of such net income nor any of the property or assets of the Corporation be used other than for the objects and purposes of the Corporation as set forth in Paragraph (e) of Article SECOND hereof; and

(3) In Third: The Corporation shall have at least four and not more than ten voting directors, at least four of whom shall be voting members or staff of the General Synod Council of the Reformed Church in America (“GSC”) and all of whom shall be of at least the minimum age prescribed by the New York not-for-profit corporation law. The number of GSC staff serving as voting directors shall not exceed the lesser of (a) one half of all voting
directors, or (b) three. The General Secretary of the Reformed Church in America shall be an *ex officio* member of the Board of Directors, without vote but with the right to attend all meetings and to speak on any matter before the corporation.

**Fourth:** No part of the net earnings of the Corporation shall inure to the benefit of, or be distributable to, its directors, officers, or other private persons, except that the Corporation shall be authorized and empowered to pay reasonable compensation for services rendered and to make payments and distributions in furtherance of the purposes set forth in Article Second hereof. No substantial part of the activities of the Corporation shall be the carrying on of propaganda, or otherwise attempting to influence legislation, and the Corporation shall not participate in, or intervene in (including the publishing or distribution of statements) any political campaign on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate for public office. Notwithstanding any other provision of these articles, the Corporation shall not exercise any power or carry on any other activities not permitted to be carried on (a) by a corporation exempt from federal income tax under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, or the corresponding section of any future federal tax code, or (b) by a corporation, contributions to which are deductible under Section 170(c)(2) of the Internal Revenue Code, or the corresponding section of any future federal tax code.

**Fifth:** A. To the fullest extent permitted by applicable law, this Corporation may indemnify any person made, or threatened to be made, a party to an action or proceeding other than one by or in the right of the Corporation to procure a judgment in its favor, whether civil or criminal, including an action by or in the right of any other corporation of any type or kind, domestic or foreign, or any partnership, joint venture, trust, employee benefit plan or other enterprise, which any director or officer of this Corporation served in any capacity at the request of this Corporation, by reason of the fact that he or she, or his or her testator or intestate, was a director or officer of the corporation, or served such other corporation, partnership, joint venture, trust, employee benefit plan or other enterprise in any capacity, against judgments, fines, amounts paid in settlement and reasonable expenses, including attorneys’ fees actually and necessarily incurred as a result of such action or proceeding, or any appeal therein, if such director or officer acted in good faith, for a purpose which he or she reasonably believed to be in, or in the case of service for any other corporation or any partnership, joint venture, trust, employee benefit plan or other enterprise, not opposed to, the best interests of this Corporation and, in criminal actions or proceedings, in addition, had no reasonable cause to believe that his or her conduct was unlawful.

B. To the fullest extent permitted by applicable law, this Corporation may indemnify any person made, or threatened to be made, a party to an action by or in the right of this Corporation to procure a judgment in its favor by reason of the fact that he or she, or his or her testator or intestate, is or was a director or officer of the Corporation, or is or was serving at the request of this Corporation as a director or officer of any other corporation of any type or kind, domestic or foreign, or any partnership, joint venture, trust, employee benefit plan or other enterprise, against amounts paid in settlement and reasonable expenses, including attorneys’ fees, actually and necessarily incurred by him or her in connection with the defense or settlement of such action, or in connection with an appeal therein, if such director or officer acted in good faith, for a purpose which he or she reasonably believed to be in, or, in the case of service for any other corporation or any partnership, joint venture, trust, employee benefit plan or other enterprise, not opposed to, the best interests of this Corporation, except that no indemnification under this paragraph shall be made in respect of (a) a threatened action, or a pending action which is settled or otherwise disposed of, or (b) any claim, issue or matter as to which such person shall have been adjudged to be liable to the Corporation, unless and only to the extent that the court in which the action was brought, or, if no action was brought, any court of competent juris-
diction determines upon application that, in view of all the circumstances of the case, the person is fairly and reasonably entitled to indemnity for such portion of the settlement amount and expenses as the court deems proper.

**Sixth:** Subject to an order of a Justice of the Supreme Court of the State of New York, in the event of a liquidation, dissolution, termination or winding up of the Corporation (whether voluntary, involuntary or by operation of law), the property and assets of the Corporation shall be distributed to the General Synod, Council of The Reformed Church in America, a New York Not-for-Profit Corporation, or its successors, so long as it or they qualify as exempt from income tax under Section 501(a) of as organizations described in Section 501(c)(3) in the Internal Revenue Code of 1954 as the same may be amended from time to time. In the event that none of said organizations is said corporation(s) is not then in existence and has not been succeeded by a qualifying corporation, then none of the property or assets of the Corporation shall be made available in any way to any individual or corporation or other organization except to corporations or other organizations located within the United States which qualify as exempt from income tax under Section 501(a) as organizations described in Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1954 as the same may be amended from time to time, subject to an order of the Justice of the Supreme Court of the State of New York. The board of directors shall specify any such qualifying organization in the plan for the dissolution of the Corporation and distribution of its assets; if the board of directors is unable to select such qualifying organization the selection shall be made by a court of competent jurisdiction in the State of New York.

(f) In the event that the corporation shall at any time be a private foundation within the meaning of Section 509 of the Code, the Corporation, so long as it shall be such a private foundation, shall distribute its income, for each taxable year, at such time and in such manner as not to subject it to tax under Section 4942 of the Code, and shall be absolutely prohibited from and shall refrain from engaging in the following acts:

1. Self-dealing as defined in Section 4941 of the Code;
2. Retaining any excess business holdings as defined in Section 4943(c) of the Code;
3. Making any investments in such manner as to subject it to tax under Section 4944 of the Code; and
4. Making any taxable expenditures as defined in Section 4945 (d) of the Code.

The foregoing provisions of this Article shall be construed as purposes, objects and powers, and each as an independent purpose, object and power, in furtherance and not in limitation, of the purposes, objects and powers granted to the Corporation by the laws of the State of New York; and except as otherwise specifically provided in any such provision, no purpose, object or power herein set forth shall be in any way limited to or restricted by reference to, or inference from, any other provision of this Certificate, provided, however, that the Corporation may not exercise any power, either express or implied, in such a manner as to disqualify the Corporation from exemption from United States income tax under Section 501(a) as an organization described in Section 501(c)(3) of the Code.

Nothing herein shall authorize the Corporation directly or indirectly, to engage in or include among its purposes, any of the activities mentioned in Section 404(b) (v) of the Not for Profit Corporation Law.
Seventh: The board of directors shall at all times operate pursuant to a substantial conflicts of interest policy to protect the Corporation’s interest when the Corporation is contemplating entering into a transaction or arrangement that might benefit the private interest of any private party, including a director or officer of the Corporation, or any member of any committee of the Corporation exercising delegated powers of the board of directors. This conflicts of interest policy shall supplement but not replace any applicable state laws governing conflicts of interest and/or transactions with financially interested parties that is applicable to nonprofit corporations in the State of New York.

THIRDEighth: The principal office of the Corporation is to be located in the County of New York and State of New York.

FOURTH: The Corporation shall be managed by its Board of Directors and the Directors shall have all powers, rights, privileges, duties and obligations of directors.

(b) The number of Directors of the Corporation shall be fixed by, or determined in accordance with, the by-laws, and in any case shall not be fewer than three (3). The names and addresses of the initial Directors are set forth below:

Rev. Edwin G. Mulder  
475 Riverside Drive  
New York, NY 10115

Jeannette Doyle  
475 Riverside Drive  
New York, NY 10115

Everett K. Hicks  
475 Riverside Drive  
New York, NY 10115

FIFTHNinth: The existence of the Corporation is perpetual.

SIXTHTenth: The Secretary of State of the State of New York is hereby designated as agent of the Corporation upon whom process against it may be served. The post office address within the State of New York to which the Secretary of State shall mail a copy of any process against the corporation papers served upon him or her with respect to this Corporation is as follows:

Office of the General Secretary  
Reformed Church Press  
c/o Reformed Church in America  
475 Riverside Drive, 18th Floor  
New York, N.Y., 10115  
Attn: Secretary

SEVENTH: By-laws of the Corporation may be adopted or amended by an affirmative vote of a majority of the Directors then in office at any regular meeting or at any special meeting called for the purpose, so long as they are not inconsistent with the provisions of this Certificate or the laws of the State of New York.
IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have made, subscribed and acknowledged this Certificate this 29 day of August 1985 at New York, New York.

_______________________________
William J. O’Shea
Burns, Kennedy, Schilling & O’Shea
508 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10022

Eleventh: Subject to any additional requirements set forth in the New York Not-for-Profit Corporations Law, this certificate of incorporation may be amended by a majority vote of the voting directors after such proposed amendments have been approved by a majority vote of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America. Proposed amendments shall be submitted to the board members in writing prior to any regular meetings, with final approval given at a subsequent meeting.

Report on the Faith Alive Christian Resources Partnership

A recent review of reports indicates strong sales of resource material in all regions of the RCA. RCA staff meet regularly with Faith Alive Christian Resources leadership to ensure the partnership is working well and supporting the resource needs of both the RCA and Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC). Staff cooperation between Faith Alive and the RCA is strong. The RCA receives revenue from the Reformed Church Press materials sold through Faith Alive and this continues to provide revenue that, in turn, is used to produce additional resources to support the RCA and other Reformed congregations throughout the United States and Canada.

THE OFFICE OF HISTORICAL SERVICES REPORT

The RCA Archives exists to serve as the memory of the church. The corporate memory of what we have done and who we have been constitutes our heritage—a journey of 379 years seeking to serve faithfully our Lord in mission throughout the world. The RCA Archives preserves records from congregations, classes, regional synods, the General Synod, and staff offices in order to document how we have followed the call to mission, since a strong future is built upon a solid understanding of the past. The primary goal of the Archives in this process is to offer stability and relevance to the long-term mission of the church.

The archivist has to make decisions about what should be kept and what may be disposed without serious consequence so a faithful record exists of who we are and what we have been about. In order to see where we can go, we must first understand where we have been. Researchers, synod committees and agencies, denominational staff offices, and others who seek to understand the rich heritage of the RCA as it grows into the future actively make use of this record. This past year, the archivist assisted about three hundred individuals with records management, research, and information requests.
Report of the Editorial Council of the *Church Herald*

The year 2007 marked a significant change for the *Church Herald* when General Synod voted to discontinue the funding that supplied the magazine to every household in the denomination since 1993. The magazine has returned to being a subscription-based publication, a transition that has impacted fiscal and distribution numbers as well as the communication avenues available denomination wide.

The change in the distribution plan has provided the magazine with both challenges and opportunities. In this time of transition, subscription numbers continue to grow but have not yet reached a number to assure the magazine’s long-term solvency. Although it is our goal to have 25,000 subscribers by the end of 2008, we anticipate a deficit year in 2008 (as much as $119,000). To meet even this budget, the *Church Herald* will be seeking donations from readers and from congregations, a new endeavor for the organization. Looking forward, we may reduce the number of pages produced in order to avoid continued deficits, but the quality of the published product will continue to be high.

To convert to subscriptions, the *Herald* initially contacted congregations, encouraging them to subscribe on behalf of their member households; 150 congregations, most of them smaller, enrolled in this way (a total of 13,080 subscriptions). For RCA members not enrolled through their congregations, renewal notices were sent to individuals. By the beginning of 2008, subscriptions were near 20,000 and have slowly increased. According to recent surveys, this translates into approximately 28,200 readers. Staff and council members continue to work to build these numbers.

The Future

Since synod’s action, a frequently asked question has been, Can the *Church Herald* survive on subscriptions alone? As with any organism, life expectancy is difficult to predict, even under ideal conditions. Given current reserves and levels of subscribership, the magazine can continue for at least two years. If additional churches subscribe on behalf of their members and support the magazine in other ways, the publication’s future will be more secure.

In a world of rapidly declining denominational affiliation, some question the need for denominational communication, especially in print. Nevertheless, the ending of the every-household distribution was a loss to the denomination. Without the connection to each other, it becomes far easier to deny our diversity and to focus on maintaining individual congregations rather than working together on kingdom building.

Through the years the *Church Herald* and its predecessors have strengthened the RCA in myriad measurable and immeasurable ways. The demise of the *Herald* would be costly to the RCA. The *Herald* provides:

- A sense of history: the *Herald* is the most complete and accurate record of the work of the RCA.
- A sense of our future: the *Church Herald* provides space for exploration of cutting-edge possibilities and ministries to come.
- A table at which all are welcome: no other place in the denomination is open to all, regardless of age, race, education, gender, geography, income level, or calling.
- A ministry that serves everyone: nothing else is as comprehensive as the *Church Herald* as a place to educate, support, and inspire church members.
- A place of influence: opinions can be expressed through the *Herald* that cannot be aired elsewhere.
- A resource that allows the deepening of our spiritual selves: the magazine is a discipleship resource.
• The pulse of the denomination: the Herald reports on the work of the people and congregations of the RCA, as well as the work being done by the denominational staff.

The Herald in 2007

Throughout the year, the magazine continued to serve its audience of 93,000 denominational households. As part of a redesign launched in January, the Herald began a regular feature titled “The Church in Conversation.” For this feature, an article is distributed to a number of readers for their comments, which are then consolidated and published alongside the article. Topics for this feature have included forgiveness, films, prayer, General Synod, and Bible translations. Feedback on this feature continues to be positive.

Other topics covered in the magazine’s eleven issues included the Belhar Confession, pastoral support and pastoral exits, stories of the RCA’s mission presence worldwide, and coverage of local church events and denominational meetings. A survey conducted in the spring indicated that readers favored columnists Louis Lotz and Phyllis Palsma, and most appreciated articles that encourage their own spiritual growth.

The survey also indicated that in 93 percent of households, at least one person read the magazine, and that 72 percent read 50 percent or more of the magazine. Of those surveyed, 46 percent indicated that it was very or extremely important to them to receive the magazine.

The composition of the staff of the Church Herald remained stable in 2007. Kathy Dykhuis left her position as administrative assistant in June; Shelly Davis began in that position in July and jumped in quickly to assist with the transition. The remaining staff—managing editor Terry DeYoung, news editor Terry DeBoer, bookkeeper Brenda Addie, subscription manager Sue Stevens, data entry assistant Nancy Graham, and proofreader Linda Vanderhyde—have continued to lend their considerable talent to the production of the magazine. With the transition to subscriptions, much of the staff’s energy shifted to the business of list management and renewals, a new and challenging area that required all staff to work extra hours.

The Herald in 2008

The Editorial Council encourages congregations to subscribe on behalf of their members. The Church Herald is a cost-effective means of educating, inspiring, and connecting the members of the RCA. In addition to connecting members to God and to each other, the Herald provides support for members confronting life’s challenges, encourages them in their spiritual walks, helps them to understand the complexities of the local congregation and the denomination, and offers a place for discussion and mutual understanding.

Every church and every member can benefit from receiving this resource, and with every subscription our ministry grows stronger. We move forward in hope, anticipating a long and vibrant life, serving God and the membership of the Reformed Church.
Report of the Board of Editors of Perspectives

The board of editors and the contributing editors of Perspectives: A Journal of Reformed Thought would like to thank the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America for its ongoing support of our endeavors.

Perspectives is published ten times each year. For the last several years, the entire magazine has been made available online. Our website was completely overhauled this past year in conjunction with other web-based changes in the RCA. The board believes that the “new and improved” website is now more attractive than ever and is also more user-friendly. Articles are archived and reviewed as well, and these can be easily searched by author, subject, and keyword.

Perhaps partly owing to the growing popularity of e-journals and the online availability of so many periodicals—including Perspectives—we have witnessed a decline in subscribers in recent years. However, the board remains grateful for the support—both monetarily as well as in terms of readership and distribution—of a number of supporting academic institutions from around the United States. These include Calvin College, Central College, Dordt College, Hope College, New Brunswick Theological Seminary, and Northwestern College.

The board of editors of Perspectives believes that our little journal contributes to a thoughtful, Reformed engagement with a variety of issues that are vital to the church and to the culture in which we find ourselves. We would like to invite ever-more readers into that conversation. To that end—and in the light of the decline in subscribers—the board decided to launch a targeted mailing campaign to encourage new subscriptions in the winter and spring of 2008. Working with a Chicago-based public relations and marketing firm that counts The Christian Century and Sojourners among its clients, the editors and editorial board of Perspectives are hopeful that by the end of this calendar year, we will be able to distribute the magazine to a significantly higher number of people.

Currently Perspectives is being edited by James Bratt of Calvin College’s history department and Scott Hoezee, director of the Center for Excellence in Preaching at Calvin Theological Seminary. Although Joan Zwagerman Curbow assisted in the editing process in 2007 and remains our managing editor, she no longer serves as a regular editor. The board will soon be seeking a third person to become an editor along with Bratt and Hoezee. Looking to the future, it is anticipated that James Bratt and then eventually Scott Hoezee as well will rotate out of their editorship positions, and so long-range plans are being made for their replacements.

The board of editors currently includes nine individuals in addition to the two main editors, the review editor, the poetry editor, and the managing editor. This group of fourteen people meets twice each year, in the spring and fall, to review recent issues, do strategic planning for upcoming editions of the magazine, and tend to the variety of other financial and logistical details inherent in putting out a periodical.

Together the board of editors and the contributing editors of Perspectives thank the RCA General Synod for its ongoing enthusiasm for and support of our efforts, and we look forward to continuing our service into the future.
Report of the Board of Benefits Services

The Board of Benefits Services (BOBS) met in regular session on October 16-17, 2007, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and March 10-12, 2008, in Chicago, Illinois. The board, through its finance, insurance, and policy committees, discussed and made decisions on several important issues that impact the financial and medical health of participants that are enrolled in the programs provided by the RCA through the Board of Benefits Services.

The objective of the Board of Benefits Services is to support those in ministry to the RCA by providing benefits during times of transition and financial need. In order to provide this support BOBS must utilize insurance principles that require levels of participation that can sustain the programs over time and in a cost efficient manner. BOBS is committed to carry out the policy of the denomination as identified in the Book of Church Order.

Covenant of Care and Full Participation

The Board of Benefits Services revised the definition of full participation under the Covenant of Care in order to address the concern of requiring all full-time pastors to be in the medical insurance program and to respond to the request of several classes at the 2005 General Synod. As of January 1, 2006, an RCA church with a full-time minister of Word and sacrament under call or contract can meet the full participation requirement by paying a contribution of one-half the single annual medical premium. This contribution helps maintain the viability of the RCA medical program and also allows the minister of Word and sacrament to enter into the RCA medical program should circumstances change and health coverage become needed through the RCA medical program.

As of January 1, 2007, in order to comply with the requirement of Formulary 5 as outlined in the Book of Church Order, BOBS has included all full-time ministers of Word and sacrament in the medical program or Covenant of Care contribution, basic life insurance, and long-term disability. The board recognizes that local practices may differ with regard to providing these coverages, but in order to meet our fiduciary responsibility as an agency of the General Synod and to meet requirements of our insurance contracts, BOBS is required to provide these benefits to identified pastors.

Compliance with requirements established in the Book of Church Order is a major issue that confronts BOBS. As identified in Formulary 5 of the Book of Church Order, consistories that hire a full-time minister of Word and sacrament under call or contract are required to pay “stipulated contributions to the Reformed Church retirement plan and the premiums for group life insurance, long-tem disability insurance, and medical insurance [or Covenant of Care contribution] for the minister as offered by the Board of Benefits Services.” BOBS is called by the denomination to provide benefits to all full-time RCA ordained pastors. BOBS must establish benefits, policies, and rates based on this directive. However, BOBS does not have authority with regard to the actions of churches and consistories and therefore cannot force the collection of contributions to support the benefits promised. Non-compliance with Formulary 5 at the local level creates 1) the potential loss of benefits to the entire denomination, and 2) the inability to fully fund benefits due to non-payment at the local level.

BOBS is working on solutions to this problem with the creation of a task force that will bring together board members, participants, and classis representatives to review current policy and recommend future action.

Enhancements to the RCA Insurance Program

The major objectives of BOBS are to provide benefits that meet the needs of participants
and their families and to provide benefits that are financially sound and affordable for the denomination. Fortunately, due to the efforts of many throughout the denomination, the insurance programs (medical, drug, dental, disability, long-term care and life) are on solid financial footing. As of January 1, 2008, the medical program is fully reserved and able to pay all incurred but not reported claims. The entire insurance program has a total working reserve of just over $7 million. As a result, BOBS was able to 1) maintain an average premium increase of 3 percent over the last three years, and 2) develop programs that enhance the entire plan and better serve the participants.

On January 1, 2007, the Board of Benefits Services introduced the new Benefits for Life program. The Benefits for Life program brought major enhancements to the medical, drug, and life programs offered to the denomination.

Specifically, the Benefits for Life program provided participants with the following:

- Greater access to physician, hospital, and prescription drug networks through United Healthcare and Medco.
- Health and well-being assessment surveys and the opportunity to engage in lifestyle-change programs to increase health and productivity.
- Heart Math, a program designed to help participants deal with the negative impact of stress and to improve cognitive performance.
- Increased basic and supplemental life benefits for participants over age 51.
- Increased retiree medical coverage to a 90 percent/10 percent coinsurance from the previous coinsurance amount of 80 percent/20 percent.
- Online enrollment.
- Online access to their benefits and the ability to update data immediately.
- Web-based health resources related to wellness, health management, medical providers, and prescription drugs.
- Medical plan design simplification: overlaps among deductible, co-pay, and coinsurance features were eliminated. There is 100 percent coverage for most prevention and diagnostic procedures.
- A foreign missionary insurance program through Aetna that provides greater benefits to missionaries in the mission field and that costs less than the U.S.-based benefit program.

**Insurance Premium Rate Changes**

Effective January 1, 2008, the Board of Benefits Services was able to offer all programs under Benefits for Life at an increase of 4 percent. This increase is well under the national average of 10 percent. For the last three years rates have averaged less than 3 percent per year.

**Transition to RCA 403(b) Retirement Program**

At the 2005 General Synod the denomination delegated to the Board of Benefits Services full responsibility for developing and implementing the RCA’s retirement plan, in accordance with the Covenant of Care, to provide participants with a program that provides competitive and varied investment opportunities, exceptional customer care and service, and distribution options that will provide income when needed while protecting income as one moves through the retirement years.

With this responsibility the Board of Benefits Services moved forward with the transition to the RCA 403(b) Retirement Program. Contributions made since January 1, 2005, have been credited to the amended and reinstated RCA 403(b) Retirement Program. The non-qualified RCA Retirement Plan was “frozen” from further contributions effective
December 31, 2004. The Board of Benefits Services took this action for several reasons. In October 2004 Congress passed legislation that significantly changed the rules on how the prior RCA retirement plan could operate. These legislative changes made it virtually impossible for the Board of Benefits Services to continue to operate the plan as it was designed. The law did not apply to the 403(b) program. The board used the opportunity to enhance the 403(b) program by providing participants with greater management tools, loan flexibility, and additional investment options. The RCA 403(b) Retirement Program plan document, Summary Plan Description, and forms are available on the RCA website, as are the details concerning this transition.

Currently, the RCA 403(b) Retirement Program consists of participant money already deferred and invested in the 403(b) employee plan and contributions that have been made by churches, or other eligible employers, as of January 1, 2005. BOBS has determined that until the IRS provides for a private letter ruling on the possibility of the Non-Qualified program being deemed a 403(b) program, no further attempt will be made to merge the two retirement plans.

**Fidelity Retirement Planning**

The Board of Benefits Services is committed to providing educational resources to plan participants and to assist them in planning for retirement. To this end BOBS has worked with Fidelity to provide various opportunities for participants to prepare for retirement. Fidelity works with participants who are three to five years away from retirement to evaluate current readiness for retirement and offer strategies to maintain or build toward greater retirement fund growth. Participants are matched with one retirement specialist through a one-on-one teleconference session or a face-to-face meeting at a local Fidelity branch to review budgeting and retirement income stream. Fidelity provides this service free of charge to retirement plan participants. Younger participants also have access to Fidelity retirement counselors, who can help them begin retirement planning strategies such as deferring part of their salaries in order to save for retirement. At this meeting of the General Synod, as it does each year, Fidelity representatives will be available to counsel plan participants on planning for retirement.

In collaboration with Fidelity, the board is also communicating with participants who, based on age, may not be investing in a portfolio mix that could best maximize their retirement savings. A Fidelity advisor will work with these participants to align their funds to target retirement income needs based on their current age.

**Transition of Member from the Board of Benefits Services**

With deep appreciation and sincere gratitude, the board thanks the following Board of Benefits Services member who has completed his term of service:

**The Rev. Thomas Bos**

The board is very grateful for Rev. Bos’s willingness to serve the Reformed Church in America and for the gifts of expertise and wisdom he has generously shared in helping the board carry out its work. We commend him for his work and trust that God will continue to bless him as he serves the church in other ways.

**Revisions of the Constitution and Rules of the Board of Benefits Services**

The Board of Benefits Services completed a one-year review and revision of its Constitution and Rules in the fall of 2007 in consultation with the RCA’s general counsel. The proposed revisions were considered and discussed at the spring 2007 meeting as
required by the Constitution and Rules (Article VII). The revised document was adopted by the board at its October 2007 meeting for consideration and approval by the 2008 General Synod (Article VII). The proposed changes reflect a general “clean-up” of the document to more accurately reflect its purpose, to clarify its relationship to the General Synod and to the staff assigned to carry out its directives, and to more clearly define the board’s roles and responsibilities. Many of the changes bring the Constitution and Rules into conformity with New York State statutes governing not-for-profit corporations and implement more effectively certain provisions of New York State law regarding the operations of not-for-profit corporations. Other changes bring the Constitution and Rules into greater conformity with the organizational documents of other RCA entities.

R-43
To adopt the following revisions of the Constitution and Rules of the Board of Benefits Services of the Reformed Church in America (additions are underlined, deletions stricken). (ADOPTED)

THE CONSTITUTION AND RULES
OF THE BOARD OF BENEFITS SERVICES
OF THE REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA

FOREWORD

The Board of Pensions of the Reformed Church in America was established by the General Synod of the Reformed Church and incorporated by Act of the Assembly of the State of New York, approved April 16, 1923, under the original name of “The Ministers’ Fund of the Reformed Church in America, Inc.” In June 1923, the General Synod designated the Ministers’ Fund as one of the regular boards of the Reformed Church.

The original charter was amended by Act of the Assembly, approved March 23, 1938, so that a retirement fund could be established for the benefit of lay workers of the Reformed Church. Under date of March 19, 1954, the name of the board was changed to “The Board of Pensions of the Reformed Church in America” in order to conform to the names of the other boards of the Reformed Church and pursuant to Section 40 of the General Corporation Law of the State of New York.

In order to reflect more accurately the duties and responsibilities of The Board of Pensions, it will be known as “The Board of Benefits Services of the Reformed Church in America” as of the effective date of this amendment to the Constitution.

The purpose of The Board of Benefits Services is to provide, manage, and administer retirement income, supplemental pensions, assistance grants, and insurance benefits, and personnel support services for all ordained ministers and their families, and for other employees of agencies, assemblies, and institutions of the Reformed Church in America in accordance with the rules prescribed herein.

The Constitution of The Board of Benefits Services given herein, and the rules prescribed in each department of the two divisions are the official constitution and rules adopted by The Board of Benefits Services and approved by the General Synod and supersede the constitutions and rules of the following funds and departments which heretofore comprised the Ministers’ Fund of the Reformed Church in America, Inc.:
The Widows’ Fund, organized 1837
The Disabled Ministers’ Fund, organized 1855
The Ministerial Pension Fund, established 1928
The Widows’ Department of the Ministerial Pension Fund, established 1932
The Contributory Annuity Fund, organized 1936
The Retirement Fund for Lay Workers, organized 1937
The Children’s Christmas Fund (Orphans’ Fund)

This Constitution as amended and restated is effective July 1, 2004.

PART I
THE BOARD

I. THE CORPORATION

1.1 The Board of Benefits Services of the Reformed Church in America (hereinafter “The Board of Benefits Services” or the “Corporation”) is a corporation as defined in subparagraph (a)(5) of Section 102 of the New York not for profit corporation law, and is a Type B corporation under Section 201 of the New York not for profit corporation law. As such, the Corporation shall have no members. The Corporation is not a “private foundation” as that term is defined in Section 509 of the United States Internal Revenue Code of 1954 (as amended).

1.2 The Board of Benefits Services is an agency of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, and as such is subject to all provisions of the Reformed Church in America Book of Church Order (as the same may be amended from time to time) applicable to such agencies.

1.3 Without limiting or modifying any other provision of this document or the Corporation’s act of incorporation (or any amendments thereto), the purpose of The Board of Benefits Services is to provide, manage, and administer retirement income, supplemental pensions, assistance grants, and insurance benefits for all ordained ministers and their families, and for other employees of agencies, assemblies, and institutions of the Reformed Church in America.

1.4 The principal office of the Board of Benefits Services shall be located in the City, County, and State of New York.

II. MANAGEMENT

2.1 The supervision of the retirement and benefit plans of the Reformed Church in America shall be vested in a Board which shall consist of sixteen directors members, all of whom are members of the Reformed Church in America. The composition of the board of directors of the Board of Benefits Services shall be as follows: the president and vice president of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, a New York not for profit corporation (“General Synod”), the moderator of the General Synod Council of the Reformed Church in America, a New York not for profit corporation (“General Synod Council”), and thirteen directors members at-large who shall be nominated by the General Synod Commission on Nominations and elected by the General Synod to terms of three years and may be re-elected for a second three year term. The Commission on Nominations will strive to assure that no more than 1/3 of the at-large member terms expire annually. Members shall be ineligible for two years after they have served two consecutive terms. The at-large directors members shall be profes-
sionals qualified as follows: three in the field of finance; two in the field of employee retirement benefits; two in the field of health care services; one in the field of law. Also, three at-large positions shall be filled by ordained ministers who are actively serving an RCA congregation at the time of nomination. The general secretary and the treasurer of the General Synod Reformed Church in America shall be an ex-officio director members without vote. The general secretary shall use every opportunity to bring the work of The Board of Benefits Services before the Reformed Church in America.

2.2 The Board of Benefits Services shall have power to fill vacancies on The Board of Benefits Services occurring by reason of death, resignation, or otherwise.

2.3 The Board of Benefits Services shall have and, except as provided in 1.1 hereof, shall exercise all the power necessary to receive, accumulate, manage, invest, and dispose of the funds and property entrusted to it, consistent with the laws under which it has been incorporated or with any action of the General Synod of the Reformed Church.

2.4 The Board of Benefits Services is empowered to make rules for the administration of its work in accord with plans approved by the General Synod and consistent with this Constitution.

2.5 (a) To the fullest extent permitted by applicable law, the Corporation may indemnify any person made, or threatened to be made, a party to an action or proceeding other than one by or in the right of the Corporation to procure a judgment in its favor, whether civil or criminal, including an action by or in the right of any other corporation of any type or kind, domestic or foreign, or any partnership, joint venture, trust, employee benefit plan or other enterprise, which any director or officer of this Corporation served in any capacity at the request of this Corporation, by reason of the fact that he or she, or his or her testator or intestate, was a director or officer of the Corporation, or served such other corporation, partnership, joint venture, trust, employee benefit plan or other enterprise in any capacity, against judgments, fines, amounts paid in settlement and reasonable expenses, including attorneys’ fees actually and necessarily incurred as a result of such action or proceeding, or any appeal therein, if such director or officer acted in good faith, for a purpose which he or she reasonably believed to be in, or, in the case of service for any other corporation or any partnership, joint venture, trust, employee benefit plan or other enterprise, not opposed to, the best interests of this Corporation and, in criminal actions or proceedings, in addition, had no reasonable cause to believe that his or her conduct was unlawful.

(b) To the fullest extent permitted by applicable law, this Corporation may indemnify any person made, or threatened to be made, a party to an action by or in the right of this Corporation to procure a judgment in its favor by reason of the fact that he or she, or his or her testator or intestate, is or was a director or officer of this Corporation, or is or was serving at the request of this Corporation as a director or officer of any other corporation of any type or kind, domestic or foreign, of any partnership, joint venture, trust, employee benefit plan or other enterprise, against amounts paid in settlement and reasonable expenses, including attorneys’ fees, actually and necessarily incurred by him or her in connection with the defense or settlement of such action, or in connection with an appeal therein, if such director or officer acted in good faith, for a purpose which he or she reasonably believed to be in, or, in the case of service for any other corporation or any partnership, joint venture, trust, employee benefit plan or other enterprise, not opposed to, the best interests of this Corporation, except that no indemnification under this paragraph shall be made in respect of (a) a threatened action, or a pending action which is settled or otherwise disposed of, or (b) any claim, issue or matter as to which
such person shall have been adjudged to be liable to this Corporation, unless and only
to the extent that the court in which the action was brought, or, if no action was brought,
any court of competent jurisdiction determines upon application that, in view of all the
circumstances of the case, the person is fairly and reasonably entitled to indemnity for
such portion of the settlement amount and expenses as the court deems proper.

III. OFFICERS AND COMMITTEES

3.1 All officers of The Board of Benefits Services shall be either a member of the
board of directors or staff employed by the General Synod Council. The Board of
Benefits Services shall elect annually a president, vice-president, and a secretary, and
such other officers as the board of directors may from time to time deem appropriate,
the terms of which shall commence on July 1 of each year and terminate on June 30 of
the following year. The treasurer of the General Synod and the General Synod Council
shall be the treasurer of The Board of Benefits Services and shall serve the board as an
ex-officio member without vote. The secretary need not be a member of the board of
directors. The president and vice president shall be elected from the membership of the
board of directors.

3.2 The Board of Benefits Services may engage such additional assistance as may
be necessary for the performance of its work.

3.3 The Board of Benefits Services shall appoint a Finance Committee and such
other committees as may be necessary to carry out its work.

3.4 The Board of Benefits Services shall appoint a delegate to serve as an ex-officio
member, without vote, of the Board of Trustees of the Registered Pension Plan for the
Employees of the Regional Synod of Canada, Inc. Said delegate shall attend the annual
meeting of the Plan Trustees and report to The Board of Benefits Services on the sta-
tus of the plan, the adequacy of retirement benefits provided by the plan, and the annual
audit of said the plan.

IV. DUTIES OF OFFICERS

4.1 The president shall preside at all meetings of the board of directors of The Board of
Benefits Services and shall perform such other duties as are usually required of that
officer, or as may be requested by The Board of Benefits Services. The president shall
be a member, ex-officio with full privileges, of all committees of The Board of Benefits
Services.

4.2 The vice-president shall, in absence of the president, perform the duties of the presi-
dent.

4.3 The secretary shall attend the meetings of the board of directors of The Board of
Benefits Services and of the regular committees, and such other meetings as may be
prescribed by The Board of Benefits Services; shall have custody of the minutes and
other records and papers of The Board of Benefits Services and the corporate seal, and
shall also perform the duties ordinarily required of a recording and corresponding sec-
retary; and shall be responsible for the preparation of an annual report for The Board of
Benefits Services to act upon and present to the General Synod.
V. MEETINGS

5.1 The Board of Benefits Services shall hold at least two regular meetings of the board of directors each year or as called by the president of The Board of Benefits Services. Nine members present at a meeting shall constitute a quorum. An affirmative vote of a majority of the voting members of the board of directors shall be necessary to take any action, but a lesser number present may adjourn the meeting to a later date.

5.2 A written notice of each regular and special meeting, together with an agenda, background information, and proposed actions shall be mailed to each director at least ten days before each regular meeting or five days before a special meeting of the board of directors. The location of each regular or special meeting of the board of directors shall be specified by the president of the Corporation in the notice of the meeting.

5.3 At the meeting of The Board of Benefits Services preceding the annual meeting of the General Synod, the reports prepared by the secretary and the report of the auditors shall be considered and adopted for presentation to the General Synod.

5.4 The annual meeting of The Board of Benefits Services shall be the meeting immediately preceding the annual meeting of the General Synod held in the fall, at which time the members and officers shall be elected and any of the committees appointed.

5.5 Any written or electronically transmitted (including email or facsimile transmission) consent by any director of the Corporation to any action taken at a meeting of the board of directors of the Corporation shall for all purposes (including determining the effectiveness of the action and determining the presence of a quorum for such meeting) be treated in the same manner as if the director providing the written or electronically transmitted consent had in fact attended the meeting and cast a vote in favor of the action consented to.

5.6 Any one or more members of the board of directors of this Corporation or of any committee of this Corporation may participate in a meeting of such board or committee by means of a conference telephone or similar communications equipment allowing all persons participating in the meeting to hear each other at the same time. Participation by such means shall constitute presence in person at a meeting.

5.7 Any action required or permitted to be taken by the board of directors of this Corporation or of any committee of this Corporation may be taken without a meeting if all directors or committee members consent in writing or by electronic transmission (including email and electronic transmission) to the adoption of a resolution authorizing the action. The resolution and the written or electronically transmitted consents thereto by the directors or committee members shall be filed with the minutes of the proceedings of such board or committee.

DUTIES OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

1.11(a) The finance committee shall have general oversight of the financial operations of The Board of Benefits Services and shall be responsible for the review of investment performance of all assets in the Retirement Plan. The finance committee shall annually review and recommend to The Board of Benefits Services any changes in investment options, management and custody of Retirement Plan funds. The finance committee, subject to the approval of The Board of Benefits Services, may appoint from time to time, a separate investment advisory committee, to review and advise on investment options, performance and management of all assets in the Retirement Plan,
whether held by The Board of Benefits Services or a custodian as described herein, as well as the selection of any investment adviser to which responsibility for investments may be delegated. The investment advisory committee shall submit periodic reports of such activities to the finance committee and/or Board according to the procedures that may be established by the Board.

The investment advisory committee shall consist of up to seven members, all of whom are members of the Reformed Church in America. The composition of the investment advisory committee shall be as follows: the moderator of the GSC Finance Services Committee, the moderator of The Board of Benefits Services Finance Committee, and up to five at-large members. The at-large members shall be professionals qualified as follows: up to four investment management professionals and one lawyer. The treasurer of the Reformed Church in America shall be an ex-officio member without vote. The investment advisory committee shall nominate candidates for the at-large positions, and such candidates shall be subject to the approval of The Board of Benefits Services Finance Committee and the GSC Finance Services Committee. At-large members will be invited to serve a one-year term and may be re-elected for renewable one-year terms. Each year, the investment advisory committee shall elect a chairperson who will preside over all meetings.

1.11(b) The finance committee, subject to the approval of The Board of Benefits Services, may delegate and grant to a custodian which is a bank, trust company or financial institution, any or all of the authority of The Board of Benefits Services with respect to retention, investment and reinvestment of the assets of the Retirement Plan, or any part thereof. Such custodian shall report its activities with regard to the investments held to the Finance Committee and/or investment advisory committee, and shall hold such property in safekeeping, collect the income thereof, and pay over the same to the Board at such times and in such manner as the finance committee shall specify. The finance committee, in its discretion, may also delegate and grant to a custodian or investment advisor so designated, all or any portion of the authority possessed by The Board of Benefits Services with respect to the retention, investment, and reinvestment of assets of the Board, or any part thereof, on condition:

(1) That such custodians’ purchase, sale, and exchange of Board assets be conducted in accordance with such investment standards and policies and such other terms and conditions as may from time to time be established by the finance committee or by the investment advisory committee;

(2) That such custodians’ designation and authority and such investment standards and policies and terms and conditions shall be subject to modification or revocation at any time at the discretion of The Board of Benefits Services;

(3) That notification of all purchases, sales, and other transactions including periodic performance reports of all investments held, effected by such custodians pursuant to such authority shall be given promptly to the investment advisory committee and the finance committee by the custodians or investment advisor. The finance committee shall provide annually for the auditing of the books of the Board.

VI. DISSOLUTION/LIQUIDATION

6.1 Subject to an order of a Justice of the Supreme Court of the State of New York, in the event of a liquidation, dissolution, termination or winding up of the corporation (whether voluntary, involuntary or by operation of law), the property and assets of this Corporation shall be distributed to the General Synod Council or its successors or
designee so long as it or they qualify as exempt from income tax under Section 501(a) as organizations described in Section 501(c)(3) in the Internal Revenue Code of 1954 as the same may be amended from time to time. In the event that said corporation(s) is not then in existence and has not been succeeded by a qualifying corporation, then none of the property or assets of this Corporation shall be made available in any way to any individual, corporation or other organization except to corporations or other organizations located within the United States, that are specifically designated by the General Synod, and that qualify as exempt from income tax under Section 501(a) as organizations described in Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1954 as the same may be amended from time to time, all subject to an order of the Justice of the Supreme Court of the State of New York. The board of directors shall designate any such qualifying organization in the plan for the dissolution of this Corporation and distribution of its assets. If the board of directors is unable to designate such qualifying organization then its designation shall be made by a court of competent jurisdiction in the State of New York.

VII. AMENDMENTS

7.1 The Constitution and Rules of the Board may be amended by a two-thirds vote of the members present at any regularly constituted meeting of The Board of Benefits Services, provided that the proposed amendment has been presented in writing at a previous regularly constituted meeting. The amendment shall become effective only after approval by the General Synod, by a majority vote of those present and voting at any regularly constituted meeting.

7.2 The Constitution and Rules of the Board may be amended by the General Synod by a majority vote of those present and voting at any regularly constituted meeting; provided that the proposed amendment has been submitted in writing to The Board of Benefits Services for its consideration at least three calendar months before the meeting of the General Synod in order that the Board may be able to present its views of the matter.
Report of the Commission on Christian Action

“The Reformed Church in America has, throughout its history, known the God of justice and peace, clearly aware of the reality-altering gospel message, a message that announces good news to the poor and release to the captive.” This is a line quoted directly from this 2008 report of the Commission on Christian Action that speaks succinctly of the identity and call of this commission and our Reformed Church. The Book of Church Order defines the task of the commission as to “inform and advise the church concerning current social issues and the scriptural and Christian principles by which critical evaluation may be exercised on those issues and proper action taken” (BCO 3.1.5.2b).

The Commission on Christian Action therefore met October 11-13, 2007, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and January 24-26, 2008, in San Antonio, Texas, at the One Thing event to work on materials in an effort to help “inform and advise the church.” As in the past, the commission’s work is expansive and ranges the gamut; and while it can be challenging, it is ever the commission’s desire to live into and live out, more fully, both our Reformed and missional identity in the church.

The commission wishes to thank with sincere gratitude Robert Van Dyken and Seth Kaper-Dale, both serving the last six consecutive years on the commission. They each exemplify the “strong desire and demonstrated ability to make the gospel and the Christian way of life applicable to contemporary social issues” within our society and culture (BCO 3.1.5.2a). The Commission on Christian Action also wishes to thank Dwayne Jackson, former coordinator of social witness and denominational staff person to the commission, for all he contributed to the work of justice in the denomination. Finally, it is with much appreciation that we welcome Earl James as coordinator of multiracial initiatives and social justice. The commission celebrates what he has already contributed to the work of the RCA and looks forward with much hope to the future.

Immigration

General Synod 2007 approved the distribution of the paper “Immigration and the Reformed Church in America,” which was to be made available on the RCA website, together with resources informing congregants about current legislation about immigration issues (MGS 2007, R-65, p. 253). Synod also instructed the General Synod Council “to commission a brief study guide to be available by General Synod 2008 that will educate and inform congregations about the plethora of issues that drive the immigration debate; and further, to encourage congregations to assist immigrants to become citizens of the United States or Canada and to welcome them into the Reformed Church in America” (MGS 2007, R-66, p. 253). After extensive research, the Commission on Christian Action has found the study guide “For You Were Once a Stranger: Immigration in the U.S. through the Lens of Faith,” which is produced by Interfaith Worker Justice, to be the most comprehensive and up-to-date resource available. (This resource can be downloaded at http://www.iwj.org/actnow/imm/IWJhndbk_4May07LORES.pdf.)

R-44
To commend the study guide “For You Were Once a Stranger: Immigration in the U.S. through the Lens of Faith,” produced by Interfaith Worker Justice; and further, to instruct the General Synod Council to make it available on the RCA website. (ADOPTED)
Women and Men in Partnership

The members of the Commission on Christian Action join with our sisters and brothers on the Commission for Women and the Commission on Race and Ethnicity in the following observation:

[C]urrent denominational staff, especially at classifications I and II (upper-level executives), do not reflect the diversity of the denomination, especially the female majority of the RCA’s membership (63 percent). This overwhelming preponderance of male (and Caucasian) leadership defies a vision of equality, much less a practice of justice. The RCA has an opportunity to demonstrate its commitment to justice and equality by paying special attention to the manner in which future denominational staff positions are filled, especially key upper-level staff positions.

—From the 2008 report of the Commission for Women

Especially in light of the Belhar Confession, which reminds us to live into Christ’s call for justice, the Commission on Christian Action fully supports the following recommendation of the Commission for Women:

...that throughout the remaining years of Our Call (2008-2013), the General Synod Council develop and implement a process to recruit and train leaders who represent the array of ethnicities and races that make up God’s world, with particular attention to gender inclusion, so that in the future the pool of candidates for denominational staff positions, particularly at classifications I and II, better reflects the denomination’s commitment to a multicultural and multiracial future; and further,

that the General Synod Council create a task force (to include representatives from the Commission for Women, the Commission on Race and Ethnicity, and the RCA Women’s Ministries Advisory Team) to develop a plan for greater inclusion of women and people of color at all levels of staffing within the RCA, and to develop leadership training opportunities consistent with this goal.

Starting Church-Based Non-Profits in Local Congregations:
A Method to Make Local Congregations More Missional

In his 2007 report to General Synod, general secretary Wesley Granberg-Michaelson encouraged the Reformed Church in America to move from being a “settled” denomination to being a “missional” church. The general secretary explained that this begins with a theological shift in our thinking: “a missional church places its commitment to participate in God’s mission in the world at the center of its life and identity.” Further, he said, “our focus is placed on God’s work, transforming lives through the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ, transforming communities through the justice and love that break into the world through God’s kingdom, and seeking the transformation of the world, so that God’s will might be done on earth” (MGS 2007, p. 33).

While some of the “settled” nature of RCA churches is clearly a result of historical developments (as noted by Granberg-Michaelson) it can also be argued that when RCA churches, and other churches, fail to be heavily “missional” it is sometimes more the result of practical factors than theological ones. The Reformed Church in America has, throughout its history, known the God of justice and peace, clearly aware of the reality-altering gospel message, a message that announces good news to the poor and release to the captive. However, the missional message of the church, as central as it is to the reality of the church, often is prioritized only after worship, education, pastoral care, and administrative tasks are attended to. Churches are more likely to put resources into a minister of music
and a minister for youth and families, ministries that first serve those inside the congregation, than they are to hire a minister for justice and mercy. Volunteers are asked to get involved with the Sunday school program and the choir before they are asked to head mission initiatives. In most small churches the reality of a tight budget, a staff of one or two, and a limited number of volunteers mean that choices have to be made, and teaching the Bible and having quality worship services, understandably, are the first priorities.

However, churches that find a way to implement ministries of mission and justice find it to be an absolutely critical part of the vitality of the church. The Christian education program, the choir, pastoral care teams, and the consistory call on the gifts of some, but there are many in the church whose gifts for ministry are aligned with social justice concerns in the community and the world. For the sake of the congregation, as well as the world “out there” mission and justice need to become part of the essence of church.

One way that churches in the Reformed Church in America are strengthening their justice and mercy ministries is through the creation of church-based non-profit organizations for justice and mercy.

Q. What is a church-based non-profit?
A. A church-based non-profit is an affiliated agency that your church organizes with the expressed purpose of helping your congregation serve others.

Q. Why would a church create a church-based non-profit?
A. A church with congregants who are part of God’s mission, spreading God’s love in a community, quickly becomes a congregation with eyes that see great need. A church-based non-profit can be the agency that carries out programs that bring solutions to the needs identified, programs with a scope that would have been too much for the church structure.

Q. Who is “in charge” of the church-based non-profit?
A. The non-profit’s board of directors is “in charge,” but the board of directors can be designed in many different ways. There can be bylaws that state that a percentage (up to 100 percent) of the board must be members of the congregation. There can be bylaws that state that a percentage of the board members must also be on consistory. The benefit of ensuring that the church-based non-profit has church people at the helm is that it helps tighten the relationship between the two and ensures that the mission is consistent.

Q. Who staffs a church-based non-profit?
A. A non-profit hires staff and volunteers that together carry out programs and projects that meet identified needs.

Q. Where do the staff and the volunteer base come from?
A. A church-based non-profit can hire from within or from beyond the church community, and the volunteer base can come from either within or beyond the church too.

Q. How does the non-profit pay for this staff?
A. The beauty of a church-based non-profit is that its board can raise funds from beyond the church. A church-based agency that provides, for example, a drop-in center for youth, can look to county and state funding and corporate grants. It is frequently easier to raise money for a church-based non-profit than it is to raise money to meet the church budget. Many churches with a church-based non-profit keep a lean church budget and raise funds for social change through the church-based non-profit.

Q. What sort of non-profits are out there?
A. Affordable housing corporations, counseling agencies, home health agencies, commu-
nity development agencies, day care programs, drop-in centers, thrift shops, environmental ministries—the list is endless.

Q. Can a non-profit take on various ministries, or is it project specific?
A. A non-profit can have many projects under the umbrella of the organization.

Q. How does a church maintain “monitoring ability” (i.e., “control”) of a non-profit it creates?
A. A church maintains a level of control by maintaining a large presence on the board of directors, but many churches find that non-profits do find their own identity and direction. Giving away power and control may be one of the most important functions of forming church-based non-profits. The non-profit helps push the ministry of the church beyond its walls.

Q. What does it cost for a church to initiate a non-profit?
A. Most states have an incorporation fee of around $150 in order to become a state entity and to receive an employee identification number. Then there is a rigorous federal form called the 1023 that agencies must fill out in order to become tax exempt. This process costs around $500.

Q. What does it cost to maintain a church-based non-profit?
A. There is no continual fee that one must pay the federal government to maintain status as a non-profit. The cost of maintenance comes mainly in the form of bookkeeping and auditing costs and filing federal papers that keep the non-profit financially accountable.

Q. What sort of legal services are needed, and where do you get those services?
A. Most churches find that a church-based non-profit brings out the talents of the congregation. Lawyers, bookkeepers, accountants, and skilled administrative assistants who have sat in the pew for years without a place to serve now ask to get involved. For those services that cannot be provided by someone in the congregation, there are many support agencies in most cities and towns across America, with names like Pro Bono Partnership and Center for Nonprofits.

Q. How large are the budgets of church-based non-profits?
A. This varies dramatically, depending on the nature of the work of the church-based non-profit.

Q. Does a church based non-profit have an easier time receiving grants than do churches?
A. Yes, the grant possibilities, at the national, state, county, and local level, are endless.

Q. How do you ensure fiscal separation between a non-profit and a church?
A. Having completely separate books, a separate bookkeeper, and budgets that don’t mingle is essential to the integrity of both the church and the non-profit.

R-45
To direct the General Synod Council to collect data about RCA congregations that have church-based non-profit organizations, and to distribute that data through the RCA website. (ADOPTED)

R-46
To request that a focus of the revitalization efforts of Our Call be to encourage churches to start non-profit organizations whose express purpose is to help congregations serve others. (ADOPTED)
R-47
To request that the General Synod Council assist congregations to form affinity groups across the RCA to talk together about starting non-profit organizations that will serve others.
(ADOPTED)

PORNOGRAFY AND THE INTERNET

Pornography is not new. Sit down at your computer and you have at your fingertips over 1.3 million porn websites. As of 2003, the number of pornographic web pages topped 260 million and was steadily growing: 32 million individuals (71 percent male, and 29 percent female) have visited Internet porn websites; 25 million Americans spend between one and ten hours per week visiting Internet porn websites, and an additional 4.7 million Americans spend over eleven hours per week visiting Internet porn sites. Ninety percent of kids between the ages of eight and sixteen have viewed pornography on the Internet. Seventy percent of online teens have accessed pornography on the Internet accidentally.

The word “pornography” comes from two Greek words, porne (a harlot) and graphein (to write). When these words are combined, pornography in the Greek means “the writing of the harlot.” It is interesting to note that in Greek, the word for fornication and pornography is the same word. The only difference between the words is the context in which they are used; with fornication it refers to an act and with pornography it is something that is written. The venue in which it occurs—be it an act, or deed, in writing, or in thought—is not important; they are really all the same.


It has been twenty years since a report on pornography has been adopted by General Synod. The Internet has revolutionized how people can access pornography and this new availability has heightened ethical concerns.

It is very sad but true that something that has so much potential for good can and is being used in such sinful and destructive ways. However, this is a frightening reality with the Internet and pornography.

In 1995, Time magazine broke one of the first big stories on “cyberspace.” In that piece, Philip Elmer Dewitt described “the new allure of online porn.” He wrote, “Pornography is different on the computer network. You can obtain it in the privacy of your home—without having to walk into a seedy bookstore or movie house. You can explore different aspects of your sexuality without exposing yourself to communicable disease or public ridicule.”

Pornography was once thought to be a problem only of men. However, more recent studies show millions of women and children are now involved, especially since the Internet has become so available. “Dirty Little Secret,” an article in the September/October 2007 issue of Today’s Christian Woman, reported: “[O]ne out of every six women including
Christians struggle with an addiction to pornography. That is 17 percent of the population. More than 80 percent of women with this addiction take it offline. The article goes on to say that “women, far more than men, are likely to act out their behaviors in real life, such as having multiple partners, casual sex, or affairs.

*Christi anity Today* Leadership Survey in December 2001 revealed that 51 percent of pastors say cyber-porn is a possible temptation, 37 percent say it is a current struggle, and four in ten pastors have visited a porn site. Other sources, including *AFA (American Family Association) Journal*, Promise Keepers, and Focus on the Family, report similar statistics regarding pastors and others in church leadership.

In an interview with Dr. James Dobson, serial killer Ted Bundy stated: “I’ve lived in prison for a long time now, and I’ve met a lot of men who were motivated to commit violence. Without exception, every one of them was deeply involved in pornography—deeply consumed by the addiction.” This is most true in criminal acts involving children. The Internet has proven a useful tool for pedophiles and sexual predators as they distribute child pornography, engage in sexually explicit conversations with children, and seek victims in chat rooms. “How Pornography Harms Children,” an article posted on protectkids.com, states: “[I]n a study of convicted child molesters, 77 percent of those who molested boys and 87 percent of those who molested girls admitted to the habitual use of pornography in the commission of their crimes.”

Experts in the field say that Internet affordability, accessibility, and anonymity are feeding a new psychological disorder called “cybersex addiction.” Pornography is the major component of this addiction. Dr. Mark Schwartz of the Masters and Johnson Institute says, “For some people, the route to compulsive use of the Internet for sexual satisfaction is fast and short.” He goes on to say, “Sex on the Net is like heroin, it grabs them and takes over their lives. And it’s very difficult to treat because the people affected don’t want to give it up.” Dr. Jennifer Schneider states: “Even when cybersex addicts and their partners sought treatment, they often concealed their real problem and therapists often failed to ask questions that would disclose it. As a result, the diagnosis of cybersex addiction is often missed.” Some research of behavioral addiction such as cybersex and pornography suggests that they cause changes in the brain that result in the release of “endogenous opioids,” similar to the release of endorphins, which results in perpetuating the behavior. Dr. Al Cooper, a staff psychologist at Stanford University and the author of *Sex and the Internet: A Guidebook for Clinicians*, has conducted one of the largest and most detailed surveys of online sex. He calls the Net “[I]n a study of convicted child molesters, 77 percent of those who molested boys and 87 percent of those who molested girls admitted to the habitual use of pornography in the commission of their crimes.”

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Pornography is an industry (some prefer the term “criminal enterprise”) that is growing rapidly. Whatever it is called, it is becoming more and more pervasive in all of society. It now has its own lobbyists who work aggressively with politicians and judges to liberalize laws and rulings relating to pornography. It is also very profitable. According to Jan LaRue of Concerned Women for America, pornography production worldwide takes in about $56 billion per year. In the U.S. alone it garners $10 to $14 billion annually.

Despair is not the appropriate Christian response. “[F]or the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world” (1 John 4:4). We need to see the kingdom victorious and not fall into the tragic abyss described by John Piper in *Christianity Today*:

> What seemed so tragic to George Verwer—as it does to me—is that so many (young) people are being lost to the cause of Christ’s mission because they are not taught how to deal with the guilt of sexual failure. The problem is not just how not to fail. The prob-
lem is how to deal with failure so that it doesn’t sweep away your whole life into wasted mediocrity with no impact for Christ... The great tragedy is that Satan uses guilt from these failures (pornography and sexual sin) to strip you of every radical dream you ever had or might have. In their place, he gives you a happy, safe, secure, American life of superficial pleasures, until you die in your lakeside rocking chair... I have a passion that you do not waste your life. My aim is not mainly to cure you of sexual misconduct. I would like that to happen. But mostly I want to take out of the Devil’s hand the weapon that exploits your sin and makes your life a wasted, worldly success. Satan wants that for you.

The Internet is here to stay and it has a growing role in the lives of our families. It will be a challenge to protect the entire family, parents and children, from the dangers that the Internet makes so easily available. Jim Burns, Ph.D., gives the following tips:

1. Educate yourself and your kids about the Internet.
2. Select an Internet Service Provider (ISP) that offers server-board filtering.
3. Purchase and install porn blocking software.
4. Set family standards on Internet usage and post them near the computer.
5. Report suggestive messages or pornographic email to your ISP.

Burns has a more detailed description of these tips under the heading “How to Keep the Internet Safe, Educational, and Fun” on the Home Word website: www.homeword.com.

In the 1978 report on pornography to General Synod, there is an excellent discussion of how sex is a gift from God. Other past reports on pornography contain a lot of the information that was available at the time they were written. They also made many excellent recommendations. However, there is no way they could anticipate the tremendous effects that the Internet would have on society as a whole and especially on the spread of the evil of pornography. At this time, we must question how aggressive the church has been in implementing the past recommendations. Some information regarding pornography is available, but most in the church are not aware that it exists and prefer to ignore the problems pornography is responsible for both in the church and in society. With all the information that is available, the church remains silent. It must, at a minimum, inform and educate its members. “Anyone, then, who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin” (James 4:17).

Endnotes

R-48
To direct the General Synod Council 1) to make the paper “Pornography and the Internet” and the 1972, 1978, and 1987 reports on pornography readily available on the RCA website, and 2) to create a summary position statement; and further, to have a denominational pornography awareness day to alert RCA members about how pervasive this evil is in society and churches and how rapidly addiction can occur. (ADOPTED)
To direct the General Synod Council to advise RCA consistories on how to monitor online activities on computers within their churches. (ADOPTED)

Human Trafficking

The Reformed Church in America condemns human abuse. Psalm 82:4 instructs: “Give justice to the weak and the orphan; maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.” Recently the estimate of the total number of people living under slave-like conditions was over 27 million worldwide, which is more than the total number of slaves prior to the Civil War. This number continues to grow. Each year over 17,500 people are smuggled into North America, into forced servitude. Human trafficking is an abuse of human life and as such is offensive to the dignity of an individual, who is the bearer of the image of God.

A widely accepted definition of trafficking is provided by the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime:

a. The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.

b. Exploitation includes, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude, or the removal of organs.

c. The consent of a victim of trafficking in persons to the intended exploitation is irrelevant where any of the means described above have been used.

d. The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered “trafficking in persons.”

The local church would benefit from resources being made available to help people understand and actively oppose this injustice and care for the victims of this crime.

Hands That Heal, a community-based international curriculum, is a resource and tool available to inform and inspire churches and individuals to engage in the battle against the injustice of human trafficking and to help equip them to provide transformational care to survivors. The community-based edition, which utilizes a participatory approach, is produced by the Faith Alliance Against Slavery and Trafficking (FAAST) and can be ordered from www.faastinternational.org.

Other human trafficking informational resources/websites include:

- www.salvationarmyusa.org/trafficking
- www.iast.net
- www.prostitutionresearch.com
- www.acf.hhs.gov/trafficking/
- www.usdoj.gov/whatwedo/whatwedo_ctip.html
- www.fbi.gov/hq/cid/civilrights/slavery.htm
- www.cmda.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Human_Trafficking&Template=/TaggedPage/TaggedPageDisplay.cfm&TPLID=33&ContentID=9267 (includes PowerPoint presentations)
- www.ijm.org
Books and audio resources on human trafficking:


Movies related to human trafficking:

- *Blood Diamond* (2006), illustrates how child soldiers are used in West African conflicts.
- *Soldier Child* (2005), a documentary about child soldiers in Uganda.
- *Human Trafficking* (2005), a four-hour Lifetime miniseries on European women trafficked into the United States for prostitution.
- *Modern-Day Slavery: Sierra Leone and Liberia* (2006), a 10-minute video by FAAST partners World Hope and World Relief on trafficking and their programs in these countries.
- *Sex Trafficking in Cambodia* (2003), a 23-minute World Hope video documenting the lives of victims in Cambodia.

R-50
To direct the General Synod Council to make the resource reference-sites on human trafficking available on the RCA Social Witness website as well as to disseminate the information via the monthly mailing; and further,

to encourage congregations to use the Hands That Heal curriculum to inform and inspire churches and individuals to engage in the battle against the injustice of human trafficking and to help equip them to provide transformational care to survivors. (ADOPTED)
The Shrinking Christian Communities of the Middle East

The Middle East has always been a crossroads for the interests of political empire and economic intrigue. Yet it is also a place where people have for millennia lived their lives in faithfulness to God and the message of God’s prophets. Among these lands God raised up followers of God’s son, Jesus Christ, who embodied God’s reign in Jesus’ own communities and people. Christians have given physical presence to the gospel for two millennia, but that physical presence and witness today is in danger of extinction because of pressures that are pushing indigenous Christians out of the biblical lands. According to the BBC, emigration, low birth rates, and persecution are resulting in shrinking numbers of Christians in Middle Eastern countries. 

Hostilities in Iraq have had a devastating effect on Iraqi Christians, causing many of those who were able to do so to leave. Likewise Israeli-Palestinian tensions have caused hardships for Arab Christians. Since 1946 the Christian population of east Jerusalem has dropped from 30,000 to less than 10,000 people, while Palestinian Christians find themselves caught between Israeli and Islamic militancy. In Bethlehem, Christians, who used to account for 85 percent of the population, are now less than 20 percent in the city of Jesus’ birth. In the last decade the number of Christians in the Middle East has plummeted from 12 million to only about 2 million, according to World Council of Churches figures. As minority communities in their respective countries, Christians face pressures and challenges that now threaten the viability of Christian presence in the lands of the birth of monotheism and Christianity.

The situation of Middle Eastern Christians is cause for alarm. Through the RCA’s membership in the World Council of Churches and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, and its historic ties with Arabian missions and partners in the Middle East Council of Churches, it shares an interest in the survival, witness, and spiritual and physical health of Middle Eastern Christians. As members together of Christ’s body, we share a deep heartfelt concern for the Christians of the Middle East.

Several observations are in order. The prospect of the near extinction of Christianity in the Middle East is both a real possibility and a danger both theologically for the church, and practically for the Middle East. The doctrine of the incarnation speaks to God’s concern for the embodied presence of Christ among us, and a church without concrete embedded roots anchored in the land of its birth runs the risk of being a church docetic, disembodied, and historically adrift. The existence of the church universal apart from a sense of historical continuity over time in the land of its birth is theologically abhorrent.

Furthermore, practically speaking, the health and well-being of Christian communities is important for the prospects for peace and tolerance within Middle Eastern societies. Throughout the Middle East, Christians have served in all levels of society and governments. In the Israeli-Palestinian struggle, Christian Palestinians have been prominent workers for easing tensions and promoting peace among Jews, Muslims, and Christians.

Finally, indigenous historic Christian communities remind their Muslim neighbors that Christianity is not an import from the West. In short, Christianity, the Middle East itself, and indeed the world need the churches and Christian communities.

R-51
To encourage the congregations of the RCA to uphold indigenous historic Christian churches of the Middle East in their prayers, specifically asking members to join the prayers of efforts such as the Covenant of Prayer by the Iraq Network and the Presbyterian Week of Prayer and Witness, and of the blog by RCA mission associates Marlin and Sally Vis. (ADOPTED)
COMMISSIONS

R-52
To direct the General Synod Council to gather, share, develop, and distribute materials on the situations faced by Middle Eastern Christians to RCA agencies and congregations. (ADOPTED)

R-53
To encourage congregations and individuals to support Reformed Church in America, Christian Reformed Church, and Formula of Agreement partner denomination programs to support Middle Eastern Christians in their struggles, specifically such projects as the Mount of Olives Housing Project, which provides Christian Palestinians living in Jerusalem with housing. (ADOPTED)

Endnotes
5 Newsweek, loc.cit.

Torture

Following Christ in mission in a lost and broken world so loved by God is the mission of the Reformed Church in America. And in living out that mission, the RCA has committed itself to particular values that guide us, values such as following Christ passionately, values such as being formed by God’s love, values such as living by grace and humbling ourselves to the power of God, as well as the value of reaching out and embracing the gifts of every person, race, and culture. This is our mission and these are our values.

Jesus taught, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:43-48).

Torture, however, is anathema to the mission and values of the church and the teachings of Christ. As disciples of Christ we would hope this would be absurdly obvious. Yet as the 2005 General Synod commended paper “Following Christ in an Age of Terror” notes, in a culture increasingly infused with fear “[e]ncroachment on civil liberties has extended even to the point of making torture an acceptable option for interrogation, something that in recent decades has been deplored by the U.S.” (MGS 2005, p. 209).
The Classis of Albany respectfully overtured the 2007 General Synod to join their voices with other Christian sisters and brothers to speak a word against the use of torture. They rightfully reasoned that

[t]orture is offensive in the eyes of Christ and cannot be condoned by the church. The failure of the United States government to accord humane treatment to all prisoners and detainees has already elicited the disapproval of the General Synod (MGS 2005, R-67, p. 219). We all are God’s children, made in his image. Torture is a desecration of his beloved creation (Genesis 1:26-28). Christ commands us to love and treat our enemies as we wish to be treated (Matthew 5:43-49; Luke 6:31; Luke 6:35). Compassion for prisoners and their suffering is mandated by Scripture (Hebrews 13:3). Christ himself is among the prisoners (Matthew 25:34-45) (MGS 2007, p. 111).

The National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT) is a coalition of churches and other organizations of faith that are lifting their voices against torture. Their Statement of Conscience states:

Torture Is a Moral Issue

Torture violates the basic dignity of the human person that all religions, in their highest ideals, hold dear. It degrades everyone involved—policy-makers, perpetrators, and victims. It contradicts our nation’s most cherished ideals. Any policies that permit torture and inhumane treatment are shocking and morally intolerable.

Nothing less is at stake in the torture abuse crisis than the soul of our nation. What does it signify if torture is condemned in word but allowed in deed? Let America abolish torture now—without exceptions.

Members of the NRCAT endorse this statement, agree to consider using and promoting NRCAT programs, name a representative to the Participating Members’ Council, and contribute a modest annual financial contribution to NRCAT.

Participating members of the NRCAT represent the broadest range of Christian denominations including evangelical, mainline, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox churches. The other three Formula of Agreement churches are participating members of the NRCAT.

R-54
To instruct the General Synod Council to make the Reformed Church in America a member denomination in the National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT) and to employ within the RCA the resources and materials that NRCAT provides. (ADOPTED)
Report of the Commission on Christian Education and Discipleship

The chief concern of the Commission on Christian Education and Discipleship is to encourage and exhort the churches in the practice of Christian discipleship. While the term “discipleship” is never used in Scripture, it is, of course, taught and practiced in the life of Jesus and the leaders of the early church movement. Jesus gathered disciples whom he trained to follow, obey, serve, and learn from him. Therefore, Christian discipleship is about 1) education: teaching and learning the faith together; 2) “followership”: becoming loving, obedient followers of the Lord Jesus Christ together; and 3) leadership: a more mature person teaching another to be a follower of Jesus.

The Discipleship Team has defined discipleship as “the practice of following Jesus Christ, becoming more like him in all we think, say, and do, empowered by the Holy Spirit to be the very presence of Christ in a lost and broken world so loved by God.” As such, discipleship is mandatory, not optional, in the church of Jesus Christ.

Members of the Commission on Christian Education and Discipleship spent time at their fall meeting describing the characteristics of discipleship that is “deep” and “rich.”

A VISION OF A REFORMED CHURCH WHERE DISCIPLESHIP IS DEEP AND RICH

A Reformed church where discipleship is deep and rich is a church that involves everyone—adults, youth, children. No one is left out; all people belong because all have a place to serve in ways that best suit their gifts and abilities and limitations. Children and youth are integrated into the life and ministry of the church beginning with their baptism in ways that are appropriate and that train children and youth to own their faith and their role as participants in the church they attend. Adults, children, and youth are equally valued and given place to exercise their abilities in service to Christ in his church. “Every-member ministry” is the norm, not the exception. Thus the church is a place where people are discovering their gifts and passions, growing in their excitement to serve God and the wider church, and being encouraged to minister.

A Reformed church where discipleship is deep and rich doesn’t avoid difficult issues, but confronts them and teaches a way of freedom and grace. It exudes the joy of Jesus Christ, who promised to give his joy, that our joy may be complete (John 15:11). It is a place where love for Jesus is evident in the willingness of members to serve and love each other; where love for Jesus, not promise of reward or punishment, is the only motivator to live a clean and holy life devoted to God alone. It is a place where real life issues such as addictions (drugs, alcohol, pornography, work, etc.), abuse (sexual, verbal, psychological, etc.), betrayal, selfishness, and greed are openly discussed in ways that give space for the transforming work of the Spirit to bring about genuine lifestyle changes. In other words, it is a place that doesn’t avoid difficult issues, but confronts them and teaches a way of freedom and grace. A Reformed church that practices a discipleship that looks like this does so because it is a place where God’s Word is central to all its members as they seek to “let the word of Christ dwell in [them] richly” (Colossians 3:16).

A Reformed church where discipleship is deep and rich is engaged in meaningful prayer at all times. This church educates its people both to prayer, by teaching them how to pray, and by prayer, by praying at all times and places. They pray for their community, and they also regularly and specifically pray for the church worldwide. They pray for the needs of the whole world, not just their own country. In this way, Reformed people are informed about the urgent needs of their world and are softened to act in ways that bring about change.
A church that is a place of deep and rich discipleship is a teaching and learning community. The basics of the Reformed faith are continually being taught and understood more deeply. Mission, prayer, and doctrines are taught from a Reformed perspective so that members understand how all of life comes under the grace and sovereignty of God. All members, not only pastors and congregational leaders, take seriously their obligation to engage in lifelong learning in the faith. The adults model lifelong learning to the children and youth by remaining engaged in teaching and learning opportunities that deepen their knowledge of and faith in God. One of the goals in teaching is that those who are being taught will become teachers of others (2 Timothy 2:2). As a result, those who teach and who train others to teach are highly valued in the church, given voice in decision making, remunerated financially when appropriate, and given space and means for continuing education.

A Reformed church that is practicing a discipleship that is rich and deep is concerned for those outside the church. Its people are actively involved in the ministry of Jesus— bring ing good news to the poor, proclaiming release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and freedom for the oppressed (Luke 4:18). Those who are not followers of Christ but attend the church are already actively involved in the work of Christ.

In summary, discipleship is deep and rich when it is:

- Transformational personally, communally, and institutionally.
- Incarnational: the gospel is not simply known intellectually but embodied and lived out in daily life.
- Educational and missional: the movement is both inward and outward.
- Relational: involving all generations in teaching each other and learning from each other.

The commission desires for congregations throughout the RCA to experience a time of deep and rich discipleship together, a time of celebrating and learning and teaching, for all ages, in a variety of ways, and in many places. The length of time or season for this time of discipleship could be for three months or a year. A design team could consider the time frame and the shape of such an experience. The hope is that such a season together would enable all of our congregations to “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 I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20).

The commission also believes that articulating a strong vision for education and discipleship and celebrating a season of discipleship will give direction for the best possibilities for supporting, encouraging, and training those involved in leading such ministries.

Therefore the commission makes the following recommendation:

R-55
To instruct the General Synod Council to work in collaboration with the Commission on Christian Education and Discipleship to design a denomination-wide Season of Discipleship for review by the Commission on Christian Education and Discipleship by its fall meeting in 2009. (ADOPTED)

Certification

The commission continues to study the certification process and resources for supporting and empowering those who serve in the teaching ministry. Resources such as Opening Doors to Discipleship, a web-based three-year cycle of training for teachers and leaders in the church, and conversations with members of CERCA (Christian Educators of the Reformed Church in America) are part of that exploration. The commission will report its findings to the General Synod in 2009.
Report of the Commission on Christian Unity

Introduction

The General Synod is responsible for the RCA’s ecumenical relations (*Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part V, Article 2, Section 5). In response to Christ’s prayer that we may all be one and to fulfill its constitutional responsibility, General Synod has constituted the Commission on Christian Unity to oversee ecumenical commitments, to present an ecumenical agenda to the church, and to carry out ecumenical directives given by the General Synod. Since its creation in 1974 (MGS 1974, R-6, pp. 201-202) and adoption by General Synod in 1975 (MGS 1975, R-4, pp. 101-102) the Commission on Christian Unity has served General Synod by coordinating a range of ecumenical involvements reaching all levels of mission in the RCA. The commission advises General Synod on ecumenical matters and communicates with other denominations, ecumenical councils, and interdenominational agencies. It educates the RCA on ecumenical matters and advocates for actions and positions consistent with RCA confessions and ecumenical practices as outlined in “An Ecumenical Mandate for the Reformed Church in America,” adopted by General Synod in 1996 (MGS 1996, R-1, p. 197). General Synod refers ecumenical matters to the Commission on Christian Unity for study and implementation.

Though the RCA’s ecumenical life can be generally summarized under the rubrics “programmatic ecumenism,” “conciliar ecumenism,” and “conversational/dialogue ecumenism,” these categories remain inadequate to express the full spectrum of our church’s ecumenical life.

**Programmatic ecumenism** refers to cooperative work with other churches creating joint programs of mission. This may be done formally or informally, from denominational to local levels. It emerges from a mutual desire to carry out a specific mission. Examples are cooperative education, curriculum development, disaster relief, vacation church schools, shelters for the homeless, food banks, youth events, and services of worship. The RCA’s global mission program is an excellent example of programmatic ecumenism through partnerships and cooperative work.

**Conciliar ecumenism** represents the world, national, regional, state, and local councils where churches come together for mission. Councils facilitate collaboration of denominations and churches in a host of programs of service and witness, while recognizing and accepting the distinctive history, polity, and ecclesial expression of the church catholic.

The RCA is a member of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada and the Canadian Council of Churches, and a charter member of the World Council of Churches, the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. Most recently the RCA has become an originating member of Christian Churches Together in the U.S.A. Several regional synods, classes, and local congregations hold memberships in the National Association of Evangelicals.

**Dialogues and conversational ecumenism** are expressions of ecumenical practices that occur between churches at the denominational level. They may be either bilateral (one-to-one) or multilateral (among more than two). Through dialogue, faithful expression is given to what churches believe. Areas of common belief are identified alongside those that need further reflection. The process of dialogue requires respectful listening to one another, letting each church speak for itself, and then together recognizing any emergent consensus offering substantial fellowship and common mission. The RCA is currently involved in both bilateral and multilateral dialogues including the Reformed–Roman Catholic Dialogue, the Moravian Dialogue, and a dialogue with the Christian Reformed Church in North America.
Inter-religious dialogue is an emerging area of discussion within the Commission on Christian Unity. As the world continues to become ever more global, so do the communities in which RCA congregations serve. Congregations are increasingly searching for understanding of differing faith communities as well as for tools and models for inter-religious dialogue. The Commission on Christian Unity has begun to research and study this issue of inter-religious dialogue and will continue to explore ways in which it might promote resources for inter-religious communication and understanding.

Classes Ecumenical Network

The commission has invited and encouraged each classis to appoint an individual to serve as ecumenical liaison with the commission. A significant number of classes accepted the invitation; others vested this role in their clerks. For all classes the network provides a communication link with the local churches. The commission shares information and updates of its work and receives information about local ecumenical initiatives. The Commission on Christian Unity is currently working to revise and update this important communication resource and encourages each classis to be sure to maintain active participation in this network.

RCA Ecumenical Appointees

The RCA is represented at ecumenical tables and events by persons elected or appointed who willingly give of their ecumenical gifts and time to promote a greater witness to the unity we have in Christ. Following participation in events or meetings, these appointees provide brief reports to the Office of the General Secretary and to the Commission on Christian Unity.

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

This year marks the centenary of prayer for Christian unity. It was in January 1908 that the “Church Unity Octave” was first observed in the chapel of the small Atonement Franciscan Convent of the Protestant Episcopal Church, which is located on a remote hillside fifty miles from New York City. “This new prayer movement caught the imagination of others beyond the Franciscan Friars...to become an energetic movement that gradually blossomed into a world-wide observance involving many nations and millions of people” (from “A Brief History of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity,” Graymoor Ecumenical and Interreligious Institute, 2008).

While there were some important precedents to this determination to pray for unity, it was in the nineteenth century that Christians gathered to pray together prompted by the alarming divisions which weakened the power of the Christian witness. As years passed, it was union among Christian individuals of different churches for renewal in the Spirit (differentiated from reunion of the churches) that became the thread that brought several streams of prayer movements into this one ongoing initiative of prayer.

With sponsorship by the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches and the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity, the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity today belongs to all Christians who are sincerely interested in the fulfillment of Christ’s prayer “that all may be one.” The Commission on Christian Unity celebrates the progress that has been made over the first one hundred years of setting aside this January week (the 18th through the 25th) for prayers for unity. Thanks be to God for the work of God’s Spirit in drawing more and more people into this worldwide prayer movement.

It is with an awareness that there continue to be obstacles to the fulfillment of Christ’s will for the church that the Commission on Christian Unity encourages all churches to pray
without ceasing for this singularly important initiative. Further, this commission requests that the Commission on Christian Worship make a variety of resources available for use in congregations. Currently, annual resources are available through Graymoor Ecumenical and Interreligious Institute, P.O. Box 300, Garrison, NY 10524-0300; (845) 424-2109; www.geii.org.

World Communion Sunday

Celebrated on the first Sunday in October, and formerly called World Wide Communion Sunday, this ecumenical program observed locally by many Reformed churches had its origins in the Presbyterian Church in 1936. By 1940, the Federal Council of Churches (later to become the National Council of Churches) paved the way for the extension of this observance to churches throughout the world.

The Commission on Christian Unity agrees with the point made on the National Council of Churches website that such a Sunday observed worldwide takes on “new relevancy and depth of meaning in a world where globalization often has undermined peace and justice—in a time when fear divides the peoples of God’s earth.” So, in the midst of the world in which we are called to serve, following Christ in mission and working with all the partners God provides, this commission urges all churches to set aside this October Sunday to celebrate our oneness in Christ as we consciously join our Christian brothers and sisters around the world at the very same table of the Prince of Peace. Useable and suggested resources already known and used throughout the RCA should be gathered by the Commission on Christian Worship for availability to all RCA congregations. Visit www.nccusa.org for resources and further information on World Communion Sunday.

The World Alliance of Reformed Churches

The World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) is composed of four area councils. The Reformed Church in America is a member of the Caribbean and North American Area Council (CANAAC). Reformed churches in the Caribbean, the United States, and Canada belong to CANAAC. The WARC Executive Committee met from October 18-28, 2007 in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. The theme of the meeting was “Called to Be Communion: From Elmina to Port of Spain.” The focus was on unity in the church and on justice in the world. WARC’s executive committee agreed to a historic merger with the Reformed Ecumenical Council. It affirmed the focus on justice in the world, journeying to Nelson Island where many of the enslaved from Elmina disembarked. WARC’s executive committee agreed to keep sacred WARC’s continuing journey toward justice in the world. The guide for the Accra Confession was shared with the executive committee, and was greatly praised. From December 10-14, 2007, in Runaway Bay, Jamaica, delegates from the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, the World Council of Churches, and the Council for World Mission attended the International Ecumenical Conference in Commemoration of the 200th Anniversary of the Abolition of the British Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. The paper prepared by the delegates was titled “Abolished, but Not Destroyed: Remembering the Slave Trade in the 21st Century.” The paper is a serious attempt to reflect on slavery and the modern forms of slavery. Its discussion of reparations is within an action-reflection model that compels confession, contrition, restoration, and reconciliation. It concludes with a list of recommendations and affirmations. The conference was a result of the extensive planning done at the gathering in Chiang Mai, Thailand, February 11-15, 2007.

The Commission on Faith and Order of the National Council of Churches of Christ U.S.A.

Commission on Faith and Order of the National Council of Churches of Christ U.S.A. continues its work on the church’s exercise of authority in the world, justification/sanctification, and full communion.
The World Conference on Faith and Order

In the course of the next several months, the Commission on Christian Unity will seek to listen to and educate the RCA through guided reflection on and response to a National Council of Churches of Christ U.S.A. Commission on Faith and Order study document titled “The Nature and Mission of the Church.” The document represents what the churches have been able to say together about the church as well as about those areas in which the churches continue to differ. These areas are seen by some as a legitimate expression of diversity, and by others as obstacles “to the goal of visible unity in one faith and one Eucharistic fellowship.” The RCA and other churches worldwide have been invited to read and reflect on the document and to prepare a response guided by ten particular questions. The commission’s hope is that this process will aid in developing the RCA’s understanding of the church, as well as contribute to the resolution of issues that continue to divide the worldwide body of Christ.

Christian Churches Together

Christian Churches Together in the U.S.A. (CCT) grew out of a deeply felt need to broaden and expand fellowship, unity, and witness among the diverse expressions of Christian faith today. It is composed of thirty-six churches and national organizations from virtually all U.S. Christian Evangelical, Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Pentecostal, historic Protestant, and racial and ethnic churches. It provides a context marked by prayer, theological dialogue, and fellowship in which churches can develop relationships with other churches with whom they presently have little contact. Committing itself to the mission of overcoming domestic poverty, CCT invites all Christians, all people, and especially all leaders in public life to embrace and implement four objectives: 1) to strengthen families and communities (because they are essential bulwarks against poverty), 2) to reduce child poverty (by 50 percent in the next ten years), 3) to make work (by combating racism and guaranteeing that full-time work offers a realistic escape from poverty and access to good health care), and 4) to strengthen the educational system with particular attention to the public schools (because access to quality education offers perhaps the best way out of poverty).

THE BELHAR CONFESION

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’s 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). CCU has made the Belhar Confession and the church-wide study its highest priority for the last seven years. A full report of how the General Synod has studied the Belhar Confession is available in last year’s Report of the Commission on Christian Unity (MGS 2007, pp. 271-274).

Background: The Belhar Confession is rooted in the struggle against apartheid in southern Africa. It is an “outcry of faith” and a “call for faithfulness and repentance.” It was first drafted in 1982 by the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC, colored) under the leadership of the Rev. Dr. Allan Boesak. That church took the lead in declaring that apartheid constituted a “status confessionis” in which the very truth of the gospel was at stake.

The Belhar Confession was adopted in 1986 by the DRMC after years of conversation with its “mother church,” the Dutch Reformed Church in Southern Africa (DRC, white). This adoption, which was not repeated in the DRC, set the DRMC apart from the DRC. In April of 1994 the Belhar Confession was adopted as the theological foundation of the new Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa, comprised of the former bodies of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC), and the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA, black). Though some regional synods of the DRC have adopted the Belhar Confession, the
DRC as a whole has not yet done so. Even so, the DRC no longer offers theological justification to apartheid.

**What the Belhar Confession addresses:** The Belhar Confession addresses the issues of church unity, reconciliation, and God’s justice. *Unity* is seen as a gift and an obligation for the church. It is to be pursued and sought and built, becoming visible wherever and whenever possible as a witness to the working of God’s Spirit for the unity manifest in the unity of the Trinity and so that the world might believe.

*Reconciliation* is a message entrusted to the church by God. The church is called to be a peacemaker, giving witness in word and in deed. The church is to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Peace is the salt and the light. *Justice* and true peace are revealed as the nature of God, who is God to the destitute, the poor, and the wronged. The church is called and must stand where God stands, with people in any form of suffering.

**The Belhar Confession is a gift:** The Belhar Confession is a gift to the whole church. Born in the struggle in southern Africa, it has wide implications beyond its original context. It is a confession for the whole church seeking to be faithful to God, who stands in the midst of suffering of any and all expression.

**Our historic confessions:** The confessions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that comprise the Reformed Standards of Unity are the Heidelberg Catechism (1563; adopted by the Reformed Church in America in 1792); the Belgic Confession (1561; revised 1619; adopted at the Synod of Dort 1618-1619, with foreign delegates exhorted to preserve it), and the Canons of the Synod of Dort (1618-1619).

Timely in their context and of great value and significance for the faith of the church, these “standards of unity” say little about the centrality of unity to the life, witness, and mission of the church as an expression of the fullness of the Reformed faith. Unity is the prayer of Christ in the Gospel of John, chapter 17.

The themes of reconciliation and justice are repeatedly expressed in and through the ministry and suffering of our Lord Jesus Christ. They are intrinsic in the call to the church to stand where God stands in the world. Their absence from the sixteenth century confessions diminishes the fullness of the Reformed faith in today’s world. The twentieth century Belhar Confession rounds out the RCA’s sixteenth and seventeenth century standards of unity.

In compliance with the General Synod directive of 2000 the Commission on Christian Unity has prayerfully and intentionally presented the Belhar Confession to each General Synod since 2002. These presentations have been coupled with the desire of bringing to confessional completeness the fullness of the Reformed faith—its biblical witness, its loyalty to Christ, and its mission of, and witness to, the gospel of unity, justice, and reconciliation “of a broken world so loved by God.”

**General Synod 2007**

The General Synod of 2007 was addressed by the Rev. Dr. Piet J. Naude of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa and the Rev. Dr. Russel Botman, rector of Stellenbosch University and a member of the URCSA. They addressed the themes of unity, reconciliation, and justice found in the Belhar Confession as these relate to their own and other Reformed church bodies, bearing testimony concerning the power of the Belhar to serve as a confessional basis to a biblical commitment to racial reconciliation, justice, and unity (*MGS 2007*, pp. 279-289).
What Is a Confession?

A confession is a written formal statement that acknowledges, declares, and gives evidence of religious beliefs.

A confession speaks internally to the church that makes the declaration and as such is informing for the vision and mission of the church. A confession gives material form to the vision and mission...it states the characteristic quality of the vision and mission...it communicates the vision and mission of the church...to the church...about the church...thus inwardly forming the church, calling to, and reminding the church of, its vision and mission.

A confession speaks externally—to the oikoumene, the “whole inhabited world,” the world so loved by God...as known in other churches, faiths, cultures, and societies both religious and secular, in other words, the “total community” in its various lifestyles and structures.

A confession puts forth a declarative statement to the oikoumene so that the church’s beliefs regarding the call of God to a vision and mission can be known, made evident by, in, and through the church.

“A confession does not only say something about God and his heaven, about the believer and his church, but also something about the world. It says something about God as he comes to meet the world in Jesus Christ the Lord; and about the Church as it lives in the world; and about the world as it exists before God” (A Moment of Truth: The Confession of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church 1982, edited by Cloete and Smit, William B. Eerdmans, p. 113).

How Does a Confession Come About?

A confession begins its formation at a time when an extremely serious situation and a very important issue or issues arise that seem to go “right to the heart of the gospel,” those occasions when the gospel is threatened, when the integrity of the gospel is at stake (status confessionis), such as in the sixteenth century when classical Reformed confessions were formed, written, and embraced and in the twentieth century when the Confessing Church in Germany came into existence over against those Christians loyal to Hitler and produced the Barmen Declaration of 1934.

In the later part of the twentieth century the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in southern Africa challenged the biblical and theological legitimacy of the doctrine and law of apartheid as being a situation that “struck a moment of truth” in which “the gospel was at stake.”

What Purpose Does a Confession Serve?

“Christian faith is the decision in which men have the freedom to be publicly responsible for their trust in God’s Word and for their knowledge of the truth in Jesus Christ, in the language of the Church, but also in worldly attitudes and above all in their corresponding actions and conduct” (Dogmatics in Outline, Karl Barth; SCM Press, p. 28).

A confession declares that God is historical. The nature and action of God are imbedded in creation, i.e., the world. The world is the theater of God’s action, God’s glory. The world is the purpose of God’s action. God’s calling of the church into existence is to be a community that arises out of the world and lives in the world for the world.
A confession declares that the church is gathered not on its own behalf or for its own purposes, but to be the manifestation of God’s healing, redeeming, repairing, renewing of the world. Or as we say in the language of our day...a thousand churches/congregations in a million ways doing one thing—“following Christ in mission, in a lost and broken world so loved by God.”

A confession professes to the world in word and deed that the church’s business is God’s business and that God’s business is the world. It is a declaration to the world and a reminder to itself that the church is called to be radically attentive to the world, even as God is radically attentive to the world as creator, sustainer, and redeemer.

A confession gives expression of faith, by and through the church, giving rise to action/mission that becomes a historical witness to the truth that God is a living, active, expressive, moving God in events and time.

**What Does the Belhar Confession Mean for the RCA?**

The Commission on Christian Unity continues to lead the church-wide study of the Belhar Confession to seek an answer to this question.

**What Will the RCA Do with the Belhar Confession?**

After six years of presentations to successive General Synods and provisional adoption of the Belhar Confession at the General Synod of 2007 (MGS 2007, R-82, p. 276) and two years of study by congregations throughout the RCA, the Commission on Christian Unity looks forward to presenting the Belhar Confession for full adoption at the General Synod of 2009.

To assist congregations in the study of the Belhar Confession in the two-year period established by the General Synod of 2007 a Belhar Implementation Team has been established. It is working to provide resources for testing the Belhar Confession as an educational/formative work in the nurture of faith for RCA witness and mission, through discernment, as a theological foundation for the RCA call “to follow Christ in mission in a lost and broken world,” confessing the great privilege of “participating in God’s [ongoing] transformation of our lives, our congregations and the world” through the unity given in Christ, the reconciliation of the cross-resurrection event, and the justice of God, for report to the General Synod of 2009 through the Commission on Christian Unity (MGS 2007, R-82, p. 276).

Members of the Belhar Implementation Team include:

- Rev. Jeanne Boland (Commission on Theology)
- Rev. James Daniels (Commission on Christian Education and Discipleship)
- Rev. Harold Delhagen, chairperson (Commission on Christian Unity)
- Rev. Pamela Pater Ennis (Commission on Christian Action)
- Rev. Douglas Fromm, RCA staff (Commission on Christian Unity)
- Rev. Paul Janssen (Commission on Worship)
- Rev. Mark Kellar (Commission on Race and Ethnicity)
- Dr. Oliver Patterson (Commission on Christian Unity)
- Rev. Jeffrey Japinga, RCA staff (Office of the General Secretary)
Report of the Commission on Christian Worship


The commission’s agenda has included discussion of several ongoing items within the worship purview of the denomination:

- The RCA’s worship website
- Cooperation with the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) on new musical resources for congregational use
- Nurturing ecumenical relationships
- Baptism and reaffirmation of baptism
- Worship for General Synod
- Consideration of Today’s New International Version Bible (TNIV) for possible commendation to our churches

This last topic generated considerable discussion. With attention given to translation committees, translation methods, and the various versions in use by RCA churches, the commission, per its Book of Church Order responsibilities, reached consensus that, although we affirm the NRSV’s position as the officially recommended translation for use in the RCA, we commend the TNIV for use in worship, liturgy, and study.

*Singing the New Testament*, a resource anthology of New Testament songs, will be available to the churches in June 2008, through Faith Alive Christian Resources. This work is the product of a collaborative endeavor between the CRC and the RCA and is designed as a resource for musicians and worship leaders.

The commission is also exploring ways in which its members can, as servants of the church, participate in and contribute to ongoing conversations regarding church multiplication and congregational revitalization in the RCA.

Liturgies for the Lord’s Supper

The bulk of the commission’s agenda and energies continued to be devoted to fulfilling a charge given to the commission regarding additional liturgies for the Lord’s Supper.

*History*

In 2005 the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America adopted the following recommendation in response to an overture from the Reverend Classis of Central Iowa:

To affirm the Commission on Christian Worship’s work to create additional liturgies of the Lord’s Supper, and to ensure that these liturgies are briefer than those currently available; and further, to request that the commission define the essential components and expectations of the liturgy, for report to the General Synod of 2007 (*MGS 2005*, R-95, p. 373).

*Interpretation*

The commission interpreted R-95 to reflect three basic desires:

1. Brevity (shorter options)
2. Diversity (options suited for a variety of settings, with additional variety within each setting)
3. Clarity (what is “essential” for a genuine celebration of communion)
Complexity
Three issues exacerbate the complexity of the General Synod’s recommendation:

1. The Liturgy for Lord’s Day Worship is a constitutional liturgy. There are two aspects to this constitutional status: 1) the Book of Church Order requires that it “shall be read” (1.1.2.11.c) when the sacrament is celebrated (thereby not allowing the use of non-approved liturgies for sacramental celebrations), and 2) it can only be changed, revised, or superseded by a complex process (thereby mitigating against the likelihood of approval for new liturgies).
2. As the commission attempted to fulfill R-95 and examined the development of previous liturgies, it found that the creation and development of new constitutional liturgies is a slow and theologically intense process that it could not adequately complete in the time given.
3. The current constitutional liturgy is ecumenically recognized and changes would almost certainly have ecumenical impact.
4. After immense consultation with liturgists, theologians, and worship leaders throughout the RCA and other denominations with similar theology, the commission finds little consensus as to what the “essential” liturgical components are for celebration of the Lord’s Supper.

Pathway to a Solution
The Commission on Christian Worship engaged the above problems in four ways:

1. It sought shorter sacramental liturgies in an effort to find theologically sound and practically usable orders that could be included and/or recommended for use. Unfortunately, as they were tried in real congregations the commission received almost universal response that what was gained (brevity) was not worth what was lost or threatened (theological and ecumenical integrity).
2. The commission considered commissioning a new sacramental liturgy for the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. Unfortunately, this encountered the same complexities mentioned above.
3. The commission examined the liturgies of our Formula of Agreement partners and other denominations with similar theology to the RCA. This attempt also did nothing to assuage the complexities mentioned above.
4. The commission partnered with the Calvin Institute for Christian Worship and convened a two-day Consultation on Eucharistic Rites (February 15-16, 2007) with a wide variety of Reformed theologians, worship leaders, and ecumenical partners. Consensus throughout the consultation included:
   a. Variety and the ability to contextualize are important but difficult to provide in sacramental liturgies.
   b. The basic shape of our current liturgy provides both denominational and ecumenical unity.
   c. Other denominations report hasty attempts to provide solutions to the same concerns and encourage us to proceed carefully and without haste.
   d. Participants encouraged us to maintain the constitutionality of our liturgy despite the difficulties it presents.
   e. Opportunities for variety in sacramental celebration should be directly connected to frequency of celebration (i.e., the more frequently congregations celebrate the sacrament, the more appropriate it would be to use shorter and more diverse forms).

Solution
In an effort to faithfully integrate R-95 with the wisdom discerned over the past three years, the commission recommends amending the Book of Church Order to allow the use of “liturgies approved for occasional use.” These liturgies would not be “constitutional,”
nor would they represent the fullness of Reformed or ecumenical sacramental theology nor be appropriate for use in all settings, but they would be vetted by the commission and approved for occasional use by the General Synod. We currently have several sacramental liturgies that already fulfill this status “unofficially” (the Consultation on Church Union Liturgy, the Formula of Agreement Liturgy, the Lima Liturgy), as well as other rites with similar standing (the Order for Profession of Faith, the order for Worship at the Closing of a Church, etc.).

“Occasional use” liturgies would be regularly solicited and continually collected by the Commission on Christian Worship (some may be existing liturgies from other denominations, others would certainly be newly crafted). The commission would:

- Evaluate them for theological faithfulness (Do they reflect the theology of our constitutional liturgy and the Directory for Worship?), diversity (Do they provide something new or meet a visible need?), and usefulness (Are they usable in real congregations?).
- Obtain approval from the General Synod for “occasional use” liturgies.
- Make them available to the denomination.
- Present new “occasional use” liturgies for General Synod approval every seven years.

Recommendation
The Commission on Christian Worship respectfully submits the following recommendation:

R-56
To adopt the following amendment to the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 11c, for recommendation to the classes for approval (addition is underlined):

c. The sacrament of the Lord’s Supper shall be administered, if possible, at least once every three months in every church. “The Office for the Administration of the Lord’s Supper” or a liturgy approved by General Synod for occasional use shall be read. All baptized Christians present who are admitted to the Lord’s Supper are to be invited to participate.
(ADOPTED)

Gratitude

The commission gratefully acknowledges the participation of the Rev. Kathryn Roberts on the commission and regretfully received her resignation. Dr. Martin Tel, whose six years of service on the commission are concluding, is also acknowledged with gratitude. His thorough knowledge of music and hymnody, his breadth of ecumenical relationships within the music community, and his warm and engaging presence will be sorely missed.
Report of the Commission on Church Order

The Commission on Church Order met October 12-14, 2007, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and February 7-9, 2008, at the Michigan Regional Center of the Reformed Church in America in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Additionally the commission communicated by email between the in-person meetings.

Judicial Procedures

The 2007 General Synod approved amendments to the Book of Church Order of the Reformed Church in America (RCA) as proposed by the Commission on Church Order that provided for a new method of handling judicial business in the church. The amendments provided for a new judicial body within each classis, regional synod, and the General Synod called the Commission on Judicial Business. The amendments included changes to facilitate the handling of judicial procedures using the new Commission on Judicial Business.

These amendments did not receive the necessary two-thirds approval of the classes for the 2008 General Synod to declare them to be approved and incorporated into the Book of Church Order (BCO). Believing that the changes were important improvements to the judicial process that would benefit the church, the commission invested a great amount of time and effort in developing the “Judicial Bodies” amendments. Therefore the commission seeks and welcomes input from the church about the defeated amendments in order for it to better understand the concerns that led to classes not approving the changes.

Included within the “Judicial Bodies” amendments were changes to allow a judicatory to dismiss a complaint or appeal if it “is judged to be frivolous, dilatory, or clearly without merit.” The commission believes that these provisions could stand apart from the other changes that were initially proposed. It is important not to have the judicial process be a burden to a judicatory when matters are brought to it that are clearly without merit.

Therefore, because the necessary number of classes did not approve the “Judicial Bodies” amendments to the BCO, the commission recommends adoption of the following amendments dealing with dismissing frivolous matters:

R-57

To adopt the following amendment to the Book of Church Order, Chapter 2, Part II, Article 2, Section 5 and Chapter 2, Part III, Article 2, Section 5 for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined, deletions stricken out):

Chapter 2, Part II, Article 2, Section 5

Sec. 5. If the case is in proper order, the committee shall then consider its merits. If the complaint is judged to be frivolous, dilatory, or clearly without merit, the committee may dismiss the complaint without a hearing. If the complaint goes forward, the committee shall consider the record of the case and such additional arguments as may have been submitted and shall also hear the parties together with such counsel as may be requested by the parties. Counsel shall meet the qualifications set forth in Chapter 2, Part I, Article 5, Section 10. This hearing shall be conducted in a fair and impartial manner with all parties present. If the complainant in person or by counsel fails to appear, the committee may declare the case to be defaulted.
Chapter 2, Part III, Article 2, Section 5

Sec. 5. If the case is in proper order, the committee shall then consider its merits. It shall consider the record of the case and such additional arguments as may have been submitted. If the appeal is judged to be frivolous, dilatory, or clearly without merit, the committee may dismiss the appeal without a hearing. If the appeal goes forward, the committee shall also hear the original parties, together with such counsel as may be requested by the parties. Counsel shall meet the qualifications set forth in Chapter 2, Part I, Article 5, Section 10. This hearing shall be conducted in a fair and impartial manner. Either party may elect not to appear in person or by counsel at the hearing.

The Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance offered an amendment to the proposed changes (in italics), and the synod made further editorial changes so that the final proposed amendment to R-57 read:

Sec. 5. If the case is in proper order, the committee shall then consider its merits. If the complaint is deemed to be frivolous, dilatory, or clearly without merit, the committee may dismiss the complaint without a hearing. (This dismissal may be subject to complaint to the higher judicatory, but not appeal.) If the complaint goes forward, the committee shall also hear the record of the case and such additional arguments as may have been submitted and shall also hear the parties together with such counsel as may be requested by the parties. Counsel shall meet the qualifications set forth in Chapter 2, Part I, Article 5, Section 10. This hearing shall be conducted in a fair and impartial manner with all parties present. If the complainant in person or by counsel fails to appear, the committee may declare the case to be defaulted.

Chapter 2, Part III, Article 2, Section 5

Sec. 5. If the case is in proper order, the committee shall then consider its merits. It shall consider the record of the case and such additional arguments as may have been submitted. If the appeal is deemed to be frivolous, dilatory, or clearly without merit, the committee may dismiss the appeal without a hearing. (This dismissal may be subject to complaint to the higher judicatory, but not appeal.) If the appeal goes forward, the committee shall also hear the original parties, together with such counsel as may be requested by the parties. Counsel shall meet the qualifications set forth in Chapter 2, Part I, Article 5, Section 10. This hearing shall be conducted in a fair and impartial manner. Either party may elect not to appear in person or by counsel at the hearing.

Reasons:
1. The intention of the recommendation by the Commission on Church Order remains intact. The amendments are offered to clarify the language and the redress that is available.
2. An appeal is in order only when a judgment has been reached. In the case of the dismissal by a committee, a judgment has not been reached; rather, the matter has been dismissed.
3. An appeal is not appropriate after a committee has dismissed a charge, since no record of the case is available for review, as it would be after a judgment by the judicatory.

VOTED: To adopt the amendment.

The final version of the proposed changes to the Book of Church Order is as follows:
To adopt the following amendment to the Book of Church Order, Chapter 2, Part II, Article 2, Section 5 and Chapter 2, Part III, Article 2, Section 5 for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined, deletions stricken out):

Chapter 2, Part II, Article 2, Section 5

Sec. 5. If the case is in proper order, the committee shall then consider its merits. If the complaint is deemed to be frivolous, dilatory, or clearly without merit, the committee may dismiss the complaint without a hearing. (This dismissal may be subject to complaint to the higher judicatory, but not appeal.) If the complaint goes forward, the committee shall consider the record of the case and such additional arguments as may have been submitted and shall also hear the parties together with such counsel as may be requested by the parties. Counsel shall meet the qualifications set forth in Chapter 2, Part I, Article 5, Section 10. This hearing shall be conducted in a fair and impartial manner with all parties present. If the complainant in person or by counsel fails to appear, the committee may declare the case to be defaulted.

Chapter 2, Part III, Article 2, Section 5

Sec. 5. If the case is in proper order, the committee shall then consider its merits. It shall consider the record of the case and such additional arguments as may have been submitted. If the appeal is deemed to be frivolous, dilatory, or clearly without merit, the committee may dismiss the appeal without a hearing. (This dismissal may be subject to complaint to the higher judicatory, but not appeal.) If the appeal goes forward, the committee shall also hear the original parties, together with such counsel as may be requested by the parties. Counsel shall meet the qualifications set forth in Chapter 2, Part I, Article 5, Section 10. This hearing shall be conducted in a fair and impartial manner. Either party may elect not to appear in person or by counsel at the hearing.

(ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

General Synod Council Bylaws

The following General Synod recommendation was referred to the commission:

To instruct the Commission on Church Order in consultation with the Commission on Theology to review the proposed General Synod Council bylaws as to their conformity with the Constitution of the RCA and report to the 2008 General Synod (MGS 2007, R-7, p. 51).

The commission met with the Commission on Theology and asked that it respond to any theological issues it might have regarding the General Synod Council (GSC) bylaws. The Commission on Church Order paid particular attention to the responsibilities of the GSC as outlined in the BCO, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 6. It did not find anything in the proposed bylaws that did not conform to the Constitution of the RCA. Nor did the report that was received from the Commission on Theology indicate any nonconformity. However, both commissions noted that improvements could be made in the proposed
bylaws. Both commissions communicated with the GSC issues (albeit non-constitutional issues) that they had with the proposed bylaws.

At the commission’s February meeting it reviewed an amended version of the proposed GSC bylaws which incorporated the suggestions of the commissions. It appeared that all of the issues raised were addressed and that much improvement has been made in the proposed bylaws. It is the understanding of the commission that the GSC will propose these revised bylaws to this General Synod. While the commission reports that they find nothing in the 2007 version of the proposed bylaws that does not conform to the Constitution of the RCA, it believes that these revisions will better reflect the intent and spirit of the RCA Constitution.

Documentation in Receiving a Minister

The 2007 General Synod voted:

To instruct the Commission on Church Order to review Chapter 1, Part II, Article 11, Section 4a (3-4) of the Book of Church Order and to consider amendments to that section that would allow a classis to waive the receipt of an academic degree and a seminary transcript in limited instances when an ordained minister of a church in communion with the General Synod is unable to furnish such documents (MGS 2007, R-28, pp. 108-109).

The commission was charged to review only one subsection of the BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 11, Reception of Ministers and Licensed Candidates from Other Denominations—Section 4a numbers 3 and 4. This article outlines the rules for the classis to follow as it considers receiving into the RCA and into the classis those ministers coming from other denominations. The Section 4a numbers 3 and 4 cannot be considered without looking at the whole article.

The first three sections of this article outline the rules for reception of a minister while the fourth section, with its many parts, is more like a process guide for implementation of the first three sections. (The fifth and last section of this article deals with licensed candidates and does not enter into this particular discussion.)

The commission expressed some concerns about the BCO being a procedural manual; soon the details of such a manual can become troublesome. For example, the aforementioned Section 4 of Article 11 only refers to a process for receiving ministers under “call,” which becomes confusing when ministers are being considered under other circumstances. Discussion surrounded allowing the wisdom of the classis to determine the best process to fulfill the rules clearly outlined in the first three sections of Article 11. While a classis can become bogged down with procedures when not allowed to determine its own process to fulfill requirements, the commission recognized that it is helpful to classes to have steps to follow so that nothing is missed in these important matters.

It was determined that further input is needed before a decision and recommendation can be made by the commission. There appear to be broader issues than just providing copies of academic degrees and seminary transcripts as outlined in the recommendation. The commission will continue to study this issue and bring further report to the 2009 General Synod.

Deleting BCO Reference to Associates in Ministry

In its report to the 2007 General Synod, the Commission on Christian Education and Discipleship stated that the certification process for associates in ministry was not effective and therefore it made recommendation to end the associate in ministry certification process while still recognizing those who are associates in ministry (MGS 2007, pp. 263-264). The associate in ministry position was established in the mid-1990s as a certification process for
professional educators who were not also ordained ministers of Word and sacrament. The Commission on Christian Education and Discipleship report included a recommendation to end certification of associates in ministry including the BCO reference to same, as well as a recommendation formulating a new way of training, mentoring, and providing support for persons in education, discipleship, and youth ministries in RCA congregations.

Since it involved a BCO change, the recommendation to end associates in ministry certification was referred to the Commission on Church Order.

On the surface it seemed that this was a routine BCO matter to ensure that there were no conflicts so that the commission could then proceed to offer the recommendation to delete the appropriate sections as requested by the Commission on Christian Education and Discipleship. The Commission on Church Order noted that the BCO sections in question defined associates in ministry and gave them the privilege of the floor. It was also noted that while a process will begin to formulate a new way to recognize professionals in Christian education, that new way is not yet in place. Deleting the BCO sections at this time will take away the definition and voice of existing associates in ministry without replacing it with anything.

The commission communicated with the Commission on Christian Education and Discipleship about these issues and received word that the commission would like to have no changes made at this time. Therefore the Commission on Church Order will not bring a recommendation to this synod.

Disbanding/Dissolving Churches

In the course of the life of a denomination it becomes necessary to disband and dissolve churches. This is a classic responsibility with specific instructions given in the BCO under the rules for “Superintendence of the Churches” (BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7). In recent years several questions have been voiced about this process including:

- Does the church property need to be sold to disband a church?
- What if the classis wishes to retain the property?
- Does the church corporation need to be dissolved? When?
- What if a classis wishes to restart a congregation?
- What is the difference between disbanding a church and dissolving a church?

The answers to these questions and others are not always clear in the reading of the BCO. In order to clarify and give flexibility to classes in the process to disband a congregation and dissolve a church corporation, the commission offers the following recommendation:

R-58

To adopt the following amendment to the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7 for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined, deletions stricken out):

Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7

Sec. 16 17. Whenever a church is disbanded or and the corporation or other legal entity through which its consistory functions is dissolved, all real and personal property shall thereupon become vested in the classis of which the church is a member, upon the assumption by the classis of all that church’s outstanding obligations, provided the laws of the state in which the church is located do not prohibit this procedure. If the classis is not legally capable of owning real property, all such real and personal property shall become vested in the next higher assembly legally capable of owning real property, upon the
assumption by that assembly of all outstanding obligations of the church. The assumption of obligations shall be limited to the value of such property.

Sec. 17.6. If the corporation or other legal entity through which a consistory functions is dissolved, as a part of such dissolution process, the classis, in formally dissolving a church, shall be satisfied that each and all of the following conditions have been fulfilled:

a. The sale, and transfer, or other disposition of all physical properties of the church.

b. The transfer of all financial assets to the classis, and the assumption by the classis of all financial liabilities of the church and of all organizations within it to the extent of the value of such assets.

c. The presentation to the classis of all formal church records, and all other records and documents in its possession.

d. The dissolution of the corporate entity of the church.

(ADOPTED)

Notes to the changes:
1. When a church is disbanded by classis it is no longer functioning as a congregation. It is a step that will usually end in the final dissolution of the corporation.

2. Until the corporation is dissolved it may still own the property and/or other assets, but note that within this process the classis controls that corporation and thus the assets until a final determination is made (see BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 14).

3. These changes allow the corporation to continue without a functioning congregation. While not recommended, if circumstances make it necessary, the classis could use the same corporation in a restart of the church.

4. These changes allow for some additional flexibility on the part of the classis in the process of disbanding and dissolving a church.

General Synod Relationship with the Colleges

The commission was asked to look at the BCO section that outlines the relationship between the RCA colleges and the General Synod. Specifically the question arose regarding governing board members who are designated by the General Synod. The presidents of the three colleges—Hope, Northwestern, and Central—were contacted to determine their comfort level with the current relationship and rules. The commission received a reply that indicated the colleges were pleased with the present practice and they would like it to continue. The colleges all believed the relationship with the RCA was beneficial for the colleges as well as for the RCA.

The colleges were subsequently contacted and asked to confirm that their organizational documents (articles or bylaws) are in conformity with the BCO section that specifies the General Synod appointed members to their governing boards (BCO, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 7, Section 5). The commission has offered to help resolve any inconsistencies that are discovered.
General Synod Professors Task Force

The 2007 General Synod voted to approve a recommendation from the commission to reconstitute the task force originally established in 2005 with its specific tasks to consider the office of General Synod professors of theology as it relates to the Constitution of the RCA. The task force is to bring a report to the General Synod of 2009. The Commission on Church Order representative reported that the task force will begin to meet in the spring of 2008. There is no interim report at this time.

Supervisors in Churches without a Minister

Per BCO rules supervisors are appointed by the classes for congregations who do not have a minister. An example of a common traditional situation is an installed RCA pastor in a church who receives and accepts a call to another church; until such time as a new minister is called and installed in that church, the church has a supervisor who is an RCA minister of Word and sacrament who is a member of and is appointed by the classis of said church.

In untypical situations questions have arisen about what is required by the BCO. Situations with contract ministers, including those who are ministers from other denominations, can complicate the issue when a classis tries to determine in which cases it needs to appoint a supervisor and who that supervisor can be.

The commission believes that the BCO intends that:

- A church must always have a supervisor when there is no installed minister. Additionally, a church must always have a supervisor when there is no installed senior minister; an associate minister, though installed, does not qualify the church to bypass the requirement that the classis appoints a supervisor. A minister under contract is not an installed minister.
- A classis may appoint a church’s contract minister as supervisor if that minister is a member of the classis.
- A classis may appoint a church’s associate minister as supervisor if that minister is a member of the classis.
- A temporary member of the classis, as defined in the BCO, may be appointed as supervisor.
- In all cases the classis uses its judgment to decide what is in the best interest of the church.

To add clarity to the BCO, the commission makes the following recommendation:

R-59
To adopt the following amendment to the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 3 for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined, deletions stricken out):

Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 3
Sec. 3. The classis shall appoint one of its ministers as supervisor of all proceedings of the consistory of a church without an installed minister; The classis shall also appoint one of its ministers as supervisor of all proceedings of the consistory of a church without an installed senior minister. The supervisor shall attend all formal meetings of the consistory, due notice having been given. (ADOPTED)

Communion Liturgy for Occasional Use

Upon the request of the Commission on Christian Worship, the commission prepared BCO
changes to allow for the occasional use of alternate liturgies for the celebration of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. The proposed BCO changes do not change the constitutional liturgies. The Commission on Christian Worship proposal calls for a process for “occasional use” liturgies to be approved by General Synod and the proposed BCO language change reflects this process.

The specific recommendation, including the BCO proposed change, is part of the report of the Commission on Christian Worship and appears in their report.

Church Multiplication Team Conviction Document

A document called “Church Multiplication Team (CMT) Conviction,” developed by the Church Multiplication Team, was brought to the attention of the commission. This document outlined a process by which a new church plant that had a parenting church could be affiliated with, and upon organization be a member of, the same classis as that of the parenting church whether physically located in that classis or not. The commission looked at the document in relation to it being in compliance with the BCO regarding the principle of bounds of a classis as stated there.

The issues that came under discussion became somewhat linked to another item before the commission, that being the case of a regional synod forming an affinity classis versus a classis that has traditional contiguous geographical bounds. The discussion of the affinity classis will be addressed in the next section of this report. Because of the common elements, the commission participated in a joint meeting hosted by the General Synod president that brought together the commission and representatives of the Church Multiplication Team and the Synod of the Far West—the regional synod that is forming the affinity classis.

The commission communicated with the Church Multiplication Team at the joint meeting; both parties were better able to understand the concerns and issues involved. Continuing the communication process the commission addressed specific issues it had with the document in order to attempt to help bring it into better compliance with the polity of the RCA. The commission will remain in discussion with the Church Multiplication Team and/or the General Synod Council (GSC)—which had voted that the document is not in violation of GSC policies—as the commission believes that continued refinement of such a document is in the best interest of all.

Formation of an Affinity Classis

It was brought to the attention of the commission that the Synod of the Far West was in the process of forming a classis based upon a common affinity rather than traditional contiguous geographical bounds. The commission looked at how this fits into RCA polity regarding classes and synods.

Because of elements common to both, this discussion on affinity classes was part of the aforementioned discussion on the Church Multiplication Team Conviction that was hosted by the General Synod president. Good communication and better understanding resulted from that meeting.

Although the commission believes that the historical intention of the BCO was for classis bounds to be geographic lines, nothing was found that clearly prohibits the formation of this type of classis. The BCO gives the regional synods the power to “form, combine, and disband classes, and may transfer churches from one classis to another within its bounds” (BCO, Chapter 1, Part III, Article 2, Section 3). While it is not within the area of responsibility of the commission to determine the merits of such a decision, several suggestions were offered to the regional synod to consider in the process.
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. 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 of the RCA, its classes, and its congregations in order to help the denomination learn from its past and grow into the future God has in mind.

The Commission on History met October 11-13, 2007, in Minneapolis, Minnesota (in conjunction with the other commissions and the General Synod Council), and February 1-2, 2008, at New Brunswick Theological Seminary in New Brunswick, New Jersey.

While delegates to the synod and others across the RCA may see obvious reasons for commissions addressing issues such as church order, Christian action, worship, and education, questions can arise from time to time about the continuing relevance of history to the church. For example, why is this commission making its forty-first report to the General Synod, especially in a denomination that is forward-focused on mission, revitalization, and growth? With this future orientation, who needs history and heritage? Does not attention to history make the church a prisoner of its past?

RCA archives and historical collections include a treasure trove of accumulated wisdom, experience, and devotion waiting discovery. The heritage of the RCA is a vital source of inspiration and direction as the church discerns its path and calling for the future. For example, the remarkable story of RCA missions and missionaries around the globe reminds the church that the term “missional” aptly describes both the past and the future of the RCA. Moreover, year after year the current moderator of the commission is impressed by the reaction of Hope College students as they explore the riches of Christian history. Many report that their encounter with history results in a deeper faith, a greater sense of belonging, and a more profound sense of calling. Grasp of history can nurture personal and church-wide growth. If the young are so moved by history, then a series of questions are worth pondering. What historical resources and wisdom lie as yet untapped in local churches and classes, regional synods, and denominational archives? How can knowledge of Reformed and RCA heritage provide a crucial foundation for the mission and growth of the church? Is it even possible to find and explore this heritage?

There is very good news. For the past forty years the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America has been answering these urgent questions. Under the guidance of the Commission on History, the Rev. Dr. Donald J. Bruggink continues to serve as the tireless and superb general editor of the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America. Fifty-four volumes have appeared since the inception of the series in 1968. The commission is pleased to announce the publication of three additional volumes that are available for sale at this General Synod meeting: Henry J. Kuiper: Shaping the Christian Reformed Church, 1907-1962 (James A. De Jong), A Goodly Heritage: Essays in Honor of the Reverend Dr. Elton J. Bruins at Eighty (Jacob E. Nyenhuis, editor) and Liturgy among the Thorns: Essays on Worship in the Reformed Church in America (James Hart Brumm, editor). Moreover, as an invaluable tool for communicating an essential knowledge of the RCA’s heritage both to new members and to those who would wish renewed pride in our past, take time to explore By Grace Alone: Stories of the Reformed Church in America (by Donald Bruggink and Kim Nathan Baker) and peruse all the titles of the RCA Historical Series online at www.rca.org; from the “About Us” drop-down menu, choose “Archives,” and then “The RCA Historical Series.” Know the RCA’s roots and prepare for the future!

Meanwhile the Commission on History will continue to fulfill its calling, in part by review-
ing manuscripts for future publication in the historical series and encouraging persons who are contemplating RCA research projects to contact the commission for guidance and possible collaboration. In this venture, the exceptional work of William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company has been indispensable and should be so honored.

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WHEREAS William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company of Grand Rapids, Michigan, has graciously served as publisher for the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America since its inception as an unproved, unfounded idea in 1968, and

WHEREAS they have supported the growth and development of the series through distribution, promotion, and art direction services,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the two-hundred and second General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, this June of 2008, thanks God for William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company and for William B. Eerdmans Jr., its president, and looks forward to a long and fruitful relationship in the continuation of the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America. (ADOPTED)

The 2003 General Synod voted “To have the Commission on History offer a historical perspective, either orally or in writing, on matters being presented to the General Synod” ([MGS 2003], R-41, p. 159). A perennial issue for General Synod has been the role of women in leadership and the ministry. At the dawn of a new millennium Reformed Church Women’s Ministries (RCWM) offered its final report before dissolution ([MGS 2001], pp. 220-224). RCWM was replaced by the Office of Women ([MGS 2001], p. 221).

The Commission on History presents to General Synod a brief essay asking that the church attend to the current status of women in leadership in the RCA. Is the RCA making progress in embracing women in leadership or falling back?

**The Continuing Marginalization of RCA Women**

Inasmuch as women today represent 63 percent of all RCA members, why are women today consigned to so small a percentage of the paid and unpaid leadership positions within the RCA?

Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, RCA women achieved extraordinary success in becoming a powerful political force within the church. This success stemmed from establishing what became the Women’s Board of Foreign Missions, a monumental RCA women’s organization that utilized the gifts and talents of almost all RCA women to promote international mission work among women and children.

By 1946, the Women’s Board of Foreign Missions had become the largest and most effective organization within the history of the denomination. In the interest of efficiency, the Women’s Board agreed to merge with the all-male Board of Foreign Missions. The newly created Board of World Missions included fifteen women and twenty-seven men. Women comprised 35.7 percent of the combined board, a clear sign of the place of women in the RCA at that time.

Since that time, how far have women come as leadership partners in our denomination? Consider the membership listings in the 2007-2008 General Synod Directory and Plan Calendar. Utilizing membership lists for the General Synod Council and all commissions
and the agencies of the denomination, and subtracting those positions indicated as non-voting/observer, ex-officio, and vacant, here is how the numbers look:

1. There are a total of 26 General Synod Council members, of whom 11 are women and 15 are men.
2. Of the total of 85 commission members, 30 are women and 55 are men.
3. Of the total of 37 members of the boards of RCA agencies (apart from those involved in ministerial education), 10 are women and 27 are men.

Of 148 positions of leadership/power in the RCA today, 51 of these positions are held by women and 97 of these positions are held by men. That is, 34.5 percent of the highest level volunteer leadership in the denomination today is held by women, as compared to 35.7 percent held by women on the merged Board of World Missions in 1946.

Consider the highest level of paid leadership in the denomination today. Among this top echelon would be included the Office of the General Secretary (three persons) and ten denominational directors, a total of thirteen positions. Of this number, one person is a woman and twelve are men.

Ponder also the executive leadership of our eight regional synods. Seven regional synod executives currently are men; the eighth position is currently vacant. This makes 100 percent of the current regional synod executive positions held by men.

These statistics suggest the following. If one adds all the totals of the 168 leadership positions mentioned above (26+85+37+13+7 or 168), women hold 52 of the positions (11+30+10+1+0). Men hold 116 of these positions. Figured as percentages, women today hold 31 percent of the positions of power in the denomination, and men hold 69 percent of these same positions. To put this in historical perspective, the numbers suggest that women in 1946 held a larger percentage of denominational leadership as reflected in the denomination’s Board of World Missions than do RCA women today.

* * * * *

In fulfillment of its charge to inform the RCA of pertinent history and traditions (BCO 3.I.2, 5), the Commission on History from time to time highlights certain critical dates and anniversaries.

**Liturgy and Psalms at 40**

This year marks the fortieth anniversary of the publication of *Liturgy and Psalms*—a both radical and conservative shift from the prior three centuries of liturgical usage: radical in its departure from recent practice, conservative in its return to a Calvinian form of worship, which itself was a return to early Christian usage. As such, it directed the Reformed Church in America to the consensus of the early church.

The radical nature of this conservatism is indicated by the fact that except for page 5, the Service of the Word and the Service of the Sacrament were still printed in separate sections. This separation was redressed in *Rejoice in the Lord* (1985) and *Worship the Lord* (1987), bringing together what for the RCA on this continent had been torn asunder.

*Liturgy and Psalms* was the result of synod’s stellar committee of Dr. M. Stephen James, president of New Brunswick Theological Seminary; Dr. Gerrit T. Vander Lugt, president of Central College, and later professor of systematic theology at New Brunswick Theological Seminary; Dr. Richard C. Oudersluys, professor of New Testament at Western Theological Seminary; and Dr. Howard G. Hageman, pastor of North Church in Newark, New Jersey, and later president of New Brunswick Theological Seminary. To these four the
RCA owes a debt of gratitude for offering a return to its Calvinian roots, and those of the early church.

R-61
To encourage the Reformed Church in America, in celebration of the fortieth anniversary of the publication of *Liturgy and Psalms*, to renew its study of that liturgy as outlined in the “Directory for Worship” in *Worship the Lord* (2005), pp. 295ff. (ADOPTED)

John Calvin at Five Hundred
Reformed communities and denominations around the world are making plans to celebrate the five-hundredth anniversary of the birth of John Calvin in 2009 and to honor and remember his contribution to history in general and the church in particular.

R-62
To incorporate into General Synod 2009 a celebration of the five-hundredth anniversary of John Calvin’s birth. (ADOPTED)
Report of the Commission on Judicial Business

The Office of the General Synod received one appeal and one complaint during the past year, each of which was referred to the Commission on Judicial Business for review, recommendation, and report to the 2008 General Synod. The appeal was from an action by the Regional Synod of New York. It was filed by Susan Kuo, and may be referred to herein as the Kuo Appeal. The complaint filed was against the Regional Synod of New York. It was filed by the Classis of Queens, and may be referred to herein as the Queens Classis Complaint. Both the Kuo Appeal and the Queens Classis Complaint arise out of the same general set of underlying facts and circumstances.

1. THE KUO APPEAL

A. The Parties to the Appeal

The appellant in this appeal is Susan Kuo (Kuo). The respondent is the Regional Synod of New York (the Regional Synod). The minister and board of elders of Winfield Reformed Church (Winfield Minister and Elders) were also considered a party respondent in light of Book of Church Order (BCO) Chapter 2, Part III, Article 2, Sections 4 and 5, which provide generally for all parties to be involved.

The parties waived their respective rights to a hearing (which right is provided pursuant to BCO Chapter 2, Part III, Article 2, Section 5). Accordingly, a hearing on the appeal was held by conference call on Friday, March 28, 2008, in the absence of the parties.

B. Pre-Hearing Procedural Matters

All filing and notice requirements for the appeal were met. The only party that submitted a written brief was the Winfield Minister and Elders. It was prepared and submitted by their counsel, the Rev. Ben Lin (Rev. Lin).

C. The Nature of the Kuo Appeal

The Kuo appeal arises out of action taken by the Regional Synod at its meeting on November 17, 2007, which affirmed action by the Queens Classis Judicial Business Committee dismissing two charges after a finding that they lacked sufficient merit to warrant further consideration.

D. Procedural Matters

Kuo filed two charges against Winfield Minister and Elders. In each of them, Kuo alleged that the Winfield Minister and Elders acted improperly when they installed an elder and deacon to the Winfield Reformed Church while objections to the election were pending. The charges were filed with the Queens Classis, which referred them to its Judicial Business Committee for investigation (pursuant to BCO Chapter 2, Part I, Article 4, Section 4). The Queens Classis Judicial Business Committee, in its role as an investigative committee, concluded that there was not sufficient merit, and therefore dismissed the charges (pursuant to BCO Chapter 2, Part I, Article 4, Section 6).

Thereafter, in each case:

- a) the dismissal was appealed by Kuo to the Regional Synod;
- b) the Regional Synod Judicial Business Committee recommended that the dismissal be upheld and the appeals be dismissed;
- c) one member of the Regional Synod Judicial Business Committee submitted a written dissent from the committee’s recommendation; and
d) at its November 17, 2007, meeting the Regional Synod voted to adopt the recommendation of its Judicial Business Committee and dismiss the appeal.

It is from this action by the Regional Synod that Kuo appeals. The grounds for her appeal are as follows:

1. the Queens Classis Judicial Business Committee erred in dismissing the charge because installation or ordination of an elder is contrary to BCO Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 15, as long as an appeal or complaint is pending from an objection to the installation or ordination;
2. there was irregularity in the proceedings of the Regional Synod in that part of its work was conducted in the absence of Kuo but in the presence of members of the Queens Classis.

E. Procedural and Factual Background

The facts and history surrounding the dispute between the parties are found in the record provided to the Commission on Judicial Business, pages 300.001-300.094. The BCO requires that Kuo, as the appellant, has the responsibility to establish that the lower judiciary (the Regional Synod) erred in its decision (BCO Chapter 2, Part III, Article 2, Section 9). The General Synod, according to the BCO, shall give deference to the decision of the lower judiciary, and shall uphold the decision of the lower judiciary if it is supported by substantial evidence in the record when the record is viewed as a whole (BCO Chapter 2, Part III, Article 2, Section 10).

1. First Ground for Appeal - Ordination/Installation While Appeal is Pending.

The appellant in her written submissions asks for a ruling on the question of whether a person may be installed or ordained as an elder or deacon after the board of elders has dismissed an objection to the installation or ordination of the person made in accordance with BCO Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 15, and while an appeal to the classis from that decision is pending.

However that question does not arise in the proceedings before us. The disposition of the charge is all that is in question in this appeal. An error in applying or interpreting the BCO, assuming without deciding that the persons accused made one, does not necessarily constitute an offence. Unless the Queens Classis Judicial Business Committee acted with irregularity in the proceedings or manifest injustice, or committed some other error described in BCO Chapter 2, Part III, Article 1, Section 2, there is no basis for reversing its decision not to proceed with a charge. The BCO confers the power to deal with objections to ordination and installation of elders and deacons on the board of elders.

It is regrettable that the appellant has brought this litigation. If she wishes an opinion on a point of church order, there are provisions in the BCO for obtaining such an opinion from the Commission on Church Order (BCO Chapter 3, par I, Article 5, Section 4(b)(2)). It is unfortunate that the appellant has decided instead to subject the pastor and elders of her church to groundless disciplinary proceedings.

2. Second Ground for Appeal - Procedural Irregularity by Regional Synod.

The appellant has failed to establish the error of which she complains. The Regional Synod heard the parties and then retired to deliberate. The record does not show that anyone who participated in the decision had a conflict of interest or that anyone who voted had voted on the matter in the lower judiciary.
F. Recommendation

Based upon the foregoing findings, the Commission on Judicial Business makes the following recommendation to the General Synod:

R-63
To affirm the decision of the Regional Synod of New York and dismiss the appeal of Susan Kuo. (ADOPTED)

2. THE QUEENS CLASSIS COMPLAINT

A. The Parties to the Complaint

The Queens Classis Complaint was filed by the Classis of Queens (Queens Classis) against the Regional Synod. As mentioned above, it arises out of the same general set of underlying facts and circumstances as the Kuo Appeal.

B. The Nature of the Complaint

The Queens Classis Complaint arises out of the same general set of underlying facts and circumstances as the Kuo Appeal. The essence of the Queens Classis Complaint is that the Regional Synod should not have heard an appeal of the decision by the Queens Classis Judicial Business Committee to dismiss the charges following a finding that the matters lacked sufficient merit to warrant further consideration. Queens Classis bases its argument on BCO Chapter 2, Part I, Article 4, Section 6, which provides as follows (emphasis added):

If the charge is not otherwise resolved, and the committee determines there is sufficient merit in the charge, the judicatory shall proceed to trial. If there is not sufficient merit, the committee shall dismiss the charge. This dismissal shall be the final resolution of the charge by the judicatory.

The footnote that accompanies the foregoing passage reads as follows (emphasis added):

Section 6 gives the committee of the judicatory great authority, including the authority to dismiss a charge(s) or to arrive at a negotiated agreement or to determine sufficient merit to have the judicatory proceed to trial....

...If a member of the judicatory or the accuser is dissatisfied with the decision of the committee of the judicatory, a new charge(s) may be filed.

C. Procedural Matters

All filing and notice requirements for complaint were met, and a Pre-Hearing Order was entered, pursuant to which a briefing schedule was established and a hearing date was set. The Queens Classis submitted a written brief, but the Regional Synod did not. Both parties waived their respective rights to a hearing (which right is provided pursuant to BCO Chapter 2, Part III, Article 2, Section 5). Accordingly, the Commission on Judicial Business limited its consideration to the appeal itself, the record of the case, and the written brief submitted by the Classis, and conducted its work during conference calls on January 16, 2008, March 10, 2008, and March 28, 2008.
D. Procedural and Factual Background

The facts and history surrounding the dispute between the parties are found in the record provided to the CJB by the clerk of the lower judicatory (pages 300,001-300,094).

The Classis of Queens complained against the Regional Synod for taking the following actions:

i) holding hearings and taking action with respect to charges dismissed by the investigatory committee of the Classis that had been appointed pursuant to BCO Chapter 2, Part I, Article 4, Section 4; and

ii) distributing to all members of the Regional Synod a written dissent by one of the members of the Regional Synod’s Judicial Business Committee from the report and recommendation of the committee.

The Classis had received two charges in January of 2007. The Classis appointed an investigatory committee pursuant to BCO Chapter 2, Part I, Article 4, Section 4. Pursuant to the authority granted to it under BCO Chapter 2, Part I, Article 4, Sections 4-6, the Classis’ investigatory committee investigated the charges, determined that they lacked sufficient merit to warrant further consideration, and therefore dismissed them. BCO Chapter 2, Part I, Article 4, Section 6 states that “[t]his dismissal shall be the final resolution of the charge by the judicatory.”

The accuser appealed this dismissal to the Regional Synod. The Regional Synod’s Judicial Business Committee heard the appeal and by a majority vote recommended to the Regional Synod that the appeal be dismissed. One member of the Regional Synod’s Judicial Business Committee prepared a written dissent, and it was distributed to the members of the Regional Synod. (At its fall 2007 meeting the Regional Synod voted to adopt the recommendation of its Judicial Business Committee, which was to uphold the action of the Classis [dismissing the complaint] and dismiss the appeal.)


The Classis’ first complaint is that the Regional Synod’s Judicial Business Committee heard the appeal rather than rule it out of order. Classis submits that since BCO Chapter 2, Part I, Article 4, Section 6 provides that dismissal of the charges by the Classis’s investigatory committee is the final resolution of the charge by the judicatory, there can be no appeal. The Classis goes on to argue that by hearing the appeal the Regional Synod’s Judicial Business Committee proceeded irregularly.

BCO Chapter 2, Part I, Article 4, Section 6 does indeed provide that dismissal of a charge by an investigative committee constitutes final resolution of the charge by the judicatory. This does not, however, detract from the general right of appeal contained in BCO Chapter 2, Part III, Article 1, Section 1, which defines an appeal as “the transfer to a higher judicatory of a complaint, a charge, or an appeal on which judgment has been rendered in a lower judicatory.” On the clear words of that section, once a lower judicatory has rendered judgment, a party who is aggrieved may appeal. Consequently, the Regional Synod’s Judicial Business Committee did not err by hearing the appeal and making a report and recommendations to the Regional Synod.

2. Distributing the Written Dissent.

The majority of the Regional Synod’s Judicial Business Committee found no irregularity in the proceedings of the Classis’ investigatory committee, and recommended that the appeal be dismissed. The Regional Synod adopted the recommendation.
At the meeting of the Regional Synod at which the appeal was dismissed, members of the Regional Synod were provided with the report and recommendation of its Judicial Business Committee, as well as a written dissent by one of the committee’s members. The Classis argues that this is an irregularity in the proceedings which caused manifest injustice. The Classis cites $BCO$ Chapter 2, Part III, Article 2, Section 11. It provides as follows:

No member or groups of the Reformed Church in America, nor any person connected with the case, shall circulate, or cause to be circulated, any written or printed arguments or briefs upon any appeals before the final disposition of same.

A dissenting opinion by a member of a judicial business committee forms part of the report of the committee. It, together with the majority report, is exactly what the committee should provide to the judicatory that is to decide the matter. It is not circulated and it is not an argument or a brief. Therefore, the commission concludes that the Regional Synod followed the proper procedures, and that no injustice was occasioned.

The commission also disagrees with the Classis’ contention that the content of the dissent caused prejudice or injustice to the Classis. The dissenting member of the Regional Synod’s Judicial Business Committee does not criticize the Classis. The writer simply expresses his opinion that the interpretation by the majority of the committee members of $BCO$ Chapter 2, Part I, Article 4, Section 6 would give an investigative committee too much power.

The commission disagrees as well with the Classis’ contention that the circulation of the dissent resulted in a breach of confidentiality. The investigative committee is required by $BCO$ Chapter 2, Part I, Article 4, Section 5 to conduct its work in a confidential manner. It is also required by $BCO$ Chapter 2, Part I, Article 4, Section 7 to report its action to the judicatory. Nothing in the sections detracts from the duty of the higher judicatory (in this case the Regional Synod) to consider the matter on appeal, and the duty of the higher judicatory’s judicial business committee to make a report to the judicatory. The members of the judicial business commission and of the full judicatory cannot fulfill these functions if they do not know about the case.

E. Recommendation

Based upon the foregoing findings and reasoning, the CJB makes the following recommendation to the General Synod:

R-64
To dismiss the complaint of the Classis of Queens.
(NOT ADOPTED)

R-65
To uphold the complaint of the Classis of Queens. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. An appeal of a charge is in order only when a judgment has been reached. In the case of the dismissal of a charge by an investigative committee, a judgment has not been reached on the charge, it has been dismissed because of a lack of sufficient merit ($BCO$, 2.1.4.6; 2.III.1.1).

2. An appeal is not appropriate after an investigative committee has dismissed a charge, since no record of the case is available for review, as it would be after a trial ($BCO$, 2.III.2.3; Footnote 16).

3. The right of redress after the dismissal of a charge is available to the accuser in two forms:
a. A complaint against the actions of investigative committee may be filed, if one of the grounds of a complaint is alleged.
b. Footnote 15 of the Disciplinary Procedures provides the following redress: “If a member of the judicatory or the accuser is dissatisfied with the decision of the committee of the judicatory, a new charge(s) may be filed.”
Report of the Commission on Race and Ethnicity

Since its inception ten years ago, the members of the Commission on Race and Ethnicity (CORE) have served out of deep theological conviction that racism is sin and that our Lord redeemed for himself a church that is to be intentionally inclusive of all races and ethnic groups. The members of CORE also believe that the witness and credibility of the church are undermined and invalidated when the church does not radically transcend the norms of secular culture, which often perpetuates the grasp on privilege, power, comfort, and security by one group at the expense of others. Furthermore, as the Scriptures challenge us to look into our own hearts for hidden motives, CORE believes that racism can be so subtly present that those who are privileged may not even be conscious of its influence in their lives.

The General Synod of 1998 recognized the importance of this when it received a report from the Commission on Christian Action entitled “Bringing Racism to Light for a Decade Freed from Racism.” That same General Synod voted to declare the decade beginning in 2000 as the “Decade Freed from Racism in the Reformed Church in America” (MGS 1998, R-9, p.131).

The General Synod of 1998 also charged CORE to “coordinate planning for the Decade Freed from Racism” and to establish steps that would enable the denomination to work toward the goal of a multicultural denomination freed from racism. The four specific charges to CORE were (MGS 1998, R-10, p.131):

1. The commission shall advise the church on policies and initiatives that address institutional racism and the commitment of the Reformed Church in America to become a fully multicultural and multiethnic denomination.
2. The commission shall serve as an advocate for transformation of the Reformed Church in America in regard to its multiracial and multiethnic life.
3. The commission shall recommend policies, objectives, guidelines, and strategies to assist the Reformed Church in America in its effort through all of its agencies, commissions, institutions, and other affiliated bodies to become a fully multiracial and multiethnic church.
4. The commission shall monitor, evaluate, and report on the Reformed Church in America’s progress in achieving its multiracial and multiethnic objectives.

Currently, the RCA is eight years into the “Decade Freed from Racism.” According to its mandate to “monitor, evaluate, and report,” CORE presents the following:

Progress Report on the Decade Freed from Racism

Note: the original 1998 report can be viewed on the RCA website: http://images.rca.org/docs/synod/BringingRacismToLight.pdf.

1. Summary of key activities suggested in the 1998 report

Talk Activities
- Talk with people we normally do not talk with
- Tell our stories
- Gain new perspectives on ourselves
- One-to-one, plus other venues
- Planning and decisions must be made cross-racially
- Long-term commitments
Work Activities
- Work to learn each others’ ways and cultures
- Build cross-racial work teams
- Promote reciprocal exchanges between economically diverse congregations
- Think out of the box to develop creative projects
- Share agenda-setting power

Models Activities
- Create models of preferred futures that promote racial unity, racial reconciliation, and racial justice
- Publicize models to make our approaches to the future flexible and familiar
- Focus on racial healing
- Assess failure to promote learning
- Provide grants to facilitate development of models

Advocacy Actions
- Recognize that discomfort can lead to denial and to deliverance—engage for deliverance to be the outcome
- People learn to change biased-based structures in order to attain greater levels of racial justice

2. Overview of actions taken relative to those suggested activities

1998—General Synod designated 2000-2010 as the “Decade Freed from Racism in the RCA.”

1999—A recommendation from the African-American Council was approved, commending action against racism at all levels of the church. The council also had discussions with Faith Alive Christian Resources that produced changes in the way they did curriculum, including: 1) intentional ways of expanding the pool of writers to include more racial/ethnic writers, and 2) the establishment of a racial/ethnic review team for new curriculum projects.

2000—The Commission on Christian Action reported on a number of specific resources connected to the decade that had been offered to the church.

2001—CORE presented an extensive action plan for the decade, including:
- Adoption of the Belhar Confession.
- Increase in educational resources that are racially and ethnically sensitive, with diverse input and discussion.
- Cross-cultural dialogue within regional synods, classes, and congregations.
- Anti-racism/ethnic diversity training for a wide variety of General Synod Council (GSC) staff. (Apparently much of this anti-racism training for GSC staff was done through 2003.)

2002—General Synod instructed GSC, in consultation with CORE, 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. General Synod also instructed the Office of Christian Education to explore the unique educational needs of racial/ethnic communities.

2003—CORE noted the failure of the denomination to carry out the recommendations from the previous General Synod concerning consultation and survey. General Synod instructed GSC director of Mission Services, in conjunction with the
Urban Ministry Team, to identify ways to link congregations facing demographic change.

2004—CORE noted various accomplishments, especially around forward movement with the Belhar Confession and with anti-racism training for staff, and recommended that people be trained to extend anti-racism training to classes and churches.

2005—Minutes of General Synod reflected that there is work going on in racial and ethnic churches regarding discipleship, leadership, ministry, justice, mission, multiplication, and revitalization. CORE encouraged participation in cross-cultural events for all RCA bodies.

2006—General Synod adopted recommendations to:

- Affirm the Belhar Confession and commend its study.
- Instruct GSC to explore development of a multi-day denominational conference on racism.
- Require a report from GSC on which GSC staff and General Synod staff had undergone anti-racism training.
- Instruct GSC to specify who should undergo anti-racism training.
- Instruct GSC to ensure training of people to conduct anti-racism workshops and to make these workshops available for each regional synod in 2007.
- Create a staff position to move the denomination toward its goal of being freed from racism.

2007—Provisional adoption of the Belhar Confession. General Synod also voted to:

- Instruct CORE to gather stories of racial discrimination, healing, and reconciliation.
- Instruct GSC to hold a youth conference on anti-racism and other forms of social injustice.
- Urge seminaries, colleges, classes, and congregations to study the Belhar and incorporate it in worship and policymaking.
- Instruct GSC to develop by January 2008 a set of hiring strategies and practices that fully ensure a diverse slate of candidates for all new staff hires.


In order for the various RCA agencies, staff, and judicatories to be maximally aligned with the objectives of the “Decade Freed from Racism” (MGS 1998, pp. 119-131), CORE recommends:

R-66
To urge that the General Synod Council, staff, regional synods, classes, congregations, colleges, and seminaries study the “Progress Report on the Decade Freed from Racism” together with the original 1998 paper “Bringing Racism to Light for a Decade Freed from Racism,” and consider whether any operating procedures and practices need to be revised in order to be more consistent with the denomination’s goal of becoming a multiracial denomination freed from racism.

The Advisory Committees on Inclusivity offered an amendment to R-66:
R-66
To instruct that the General Synod Council, staff, and to strongly urge regional synods, classes, congregations consistories, and RCA colleges and seminaries to study the “Progress Report on the Decade Freed from Racism” together with the original 1998 paper “Bringing Racism to Light for a Decade Freed from Racism,” and consider whether any operating procedures and practices need to be revised in order to be more to evaluate and, if necessary, revise their policies and practices to ensure that they are consistent with the denomination’s goal of becoming a multiracial denomination freed from racism; and further, to instruct the General Synod Council to prepare guidelines to be distributed with the two papers named, and to request and receive responses from the assemblies and institutions named above, for report to the General Synod of 2010. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

Reason:
The intent of the original recommendation needed strengthening and clarity of process.

Ongoing Concerns

During the “Decade Freed from Racism” various General Synods have approved far reaching recommendations, and a good number of them have been implemented or are in the process of development. These are good tactical steps that evidence the denomination’s desire for racial justice. But how well has the Reformed Church in America in its administration and grassroots life progressed toward being freed from racism? As we are now in the eighth year of the decade, can we say that personal and institutional racism and all their consequences have been eight-tenths eliminated, and that in another two years we will be freed from racism, thank God, freed indeed?

Eight years into the “Decade Freed from Racism” CORE observes that:

- RCA churches in changing communities continue to move to racially homogeneous communities.
- The RCA has few strong “minority” churches that take leading roles in the denomination.
- There are not many “multiracial” congregations in the RCA (the accepted standard being a church that has at least 20 percent membership of people belonging to a different race than the majority of the congregation).
- Until a year ago (which was the seventh year into the “Decade Freed from Racism”) all staff and employees of the denominational office in Grand Rapids were white, and many people in the denomination appeared to be comfortable with that.
- Various General Synods have voted for the establishment of antiracism training workshops for members of the RCA, but little has been done to make them available at regional and local levels.
- If the General Synod itself is a true microcosm of the denomination at large, the racial makeup of its delegates reflects that the RCA is still a denomination with only a token presence of minorities, and we have made insufficient progress in changing this.
- Multicultural competency training for RCA clergy, staff, and lay leaders is not a major objective of most of our judicatories.
- Sunday morning is still the most segregated time in America, and the RCA is not an exception.
CORE makes these points not just out of the blue, but in the context of the RCA being in its eighth year of the “Decade Freed from Racism.” These are the kinds of issues on which the church ought to be making great progress during this specially designated decade. There are many good things going on the RCA, but CORE believes that the commitment to a “decade freed from racism” has not received the energy, resources, and sense of urgency it deserves.

The members of CORE recognize that the 1998 commitment to a “Decade Freed from Racism” was in itself an expression of naïve enthusiasm. Eliminating racism and its consequences will not be accomplished in a decade. It requires intentionality, commitment, education, vision, passion, allocation of resources, and structural and attitudinal changes at all levels of church life. CORE believes that beyond the “decade” the RCA must be perpetually committed to a multiracial future freed from racism.

CORE is grateful that in the past year the position of coordinator of multiracial initiatives and social justice has been established, and filled so capably by Earl James. Under his leadership a number of significant decisions by various General Synods will soon be implemented. This will move the RCA forward.

But a staff position alone will not bring the denomination to its goal of being freed from racism. This objective must be built into the very structure of the church’s significant endeavors. Presently the RCA’s major undertaking is “Our Call.” Tremendous energy, financing, strategizing, planning, and training is poured into this revitalization vision. This is to be admired and celebrated. But it is noteworthy that as “Our Call,” with its five dimensions, was adopted and developed within the church’s declared “Decade Freed from Racism,” it did not include freedom from racism as a sixth dimension. CORE knows and appreciates that the denomination’s leadership has built into “Our Call” strategies for establishing ethnic and multiracial churches. Also, that there are plans for multicultural competence training for some church-planting pastors. But in order to accomplish, in some significant measure, the high vision of the “Decade Freed from Racism,” the denomination would be well served if “freedom from racism” were elevated to become one of the dimensions of Our Call’s visionary kingdom building endeavor. CORE therefore presents the following recommendation:

R-67
To affirm that, in the spirit and intention of the “Decade Freed from Racism,” the RCA’s racism-free multicultural future is a critical and strategic component of the working out of Our Call, and further:

to instruct the General Synod Council to suitably reflect that affirmation by adding to the five dimensions of Our Call the following as a sixth: “A Multiracial Future Freed from Racism,” and to develop objectives, goals, and strategies for implementation and measuring outcomes.

The Advisory Committees on Inclusivity offered an amendment to R-67:

R-67
To affirm that, in the spirit and intention of the “Decade Freed from Racism,” the RCA’s racism-free multicultural future is a critical and strategic component of the working out of Our Call, and further:

to instruct the General Synod Council to suitably reflect that affirmation by adding to the five dimensions of Our Call the following as a sixth: “A Multiracial Future Freed from Racism,” and to
developing objectives, goals, and strategies for implementation and measuring outcomes.

Reason:
In the advisory committee meetings, the recommendation as presented was not supported. However, the spirit and intent of the original recommendation was supported, and this must be lived out through all five dimensions of Our Call.

VOTED: TO NOT ADOPT THE AMENDMENT.

A motion was made from the floor to amend as follows:

R-67
To affirm that, in the spirit and intention of the “Decade Freed from Racism,” the RCA’s racism-free multicultural future is a critical and strategic component of the working out of Our Call, and further:

to instruct the General Synod Council to suitably reflect that affirmation by adding to the five dimensions of Our Call the following as a sixth: “A Multiracial Future Freed from Racism,” and to develop objectives, goals, and strategies for implementation and measuring outcomes.

to direct the General Synod Council, in collaboration with appropriate commissions and agencies of the RCA, to prepare a proposal to integrate, within the framework and language of Our Call, a commitment to the core values of the Belhar Confession: unity, reconciliation, and justice, for report to the 2009 General Synod.

VOTED: TO ADOPT THE AMENDMENT.

A further motion was made from the floor to amend the recommendation by inserting the deleted paragraph two as paragraph three:

To affirm that, in the spirit and intention of the “Decade Freed from Racism,” the RCA’s racism-free multicultural future is a critical and strategic component of the working out of Our Call; and further,

to direct the General Synod Council, in collaboration with appropriate commissions and agencies of the RCA, to prepare a proposal to integrate, within the framework and language of Our Call, a commitment to the core values of the Belhar Confession: unity, reconciliation, and justice, for report to the 2009 General Synod; and further,

to instruct the General Synod Council to suitably reflect that affirmation by adding to the five dimensions of Our Call the following as a sixth: “A Multiracial Future Freed from Racism,” and to develop objectives, goals, and strategies for implementation and measuring outcomes.

VOTED: TO ADOPT THE AMENDMENT TO THE AMENDMENT.
R-67
To affirm that, in the spirit and intention of the “Decade Freed from Racism,” the RCA’s racism-free multicultural future is a critical and strategic component of the working out of Our Call; and further,

to direct the General Synod Council, in collaboration with appropriate commissions and agencies of the RCA, to prepare a proposal to integrate, within the framework and language of Our Call, a commitment to the core values of the Belhar Confession: unity, reconciliation, and justice, for report to the 2009 General Synod; and further,

to instruct the General Synod Council to suitably reflect that affirmation by adding to the five dimensions of Our Call the following as a sixth: “A Multiracial Future Freed from Racism,” and to develop objectives, goals, and strategies for implementation and measuring outcomes. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

As the RCA moves through the “Decade Freed from Racism” it would greatly facilitate the measuring of progress and setting of objectives if there were statistics on the racial/ethnic makeup of the denomination. Some may object to gathering racial statistics on the grounds that “we should be colorblind.” This may be a well meant objection. But the goal of being freed from racism is not to be colorblind. Race and ethnicity are realities of our human existence. We ought not to pretend that they do not exist. Rather, diversity should be recognized and celebrated. It appears that even in the eternal heavenly kingdom of God human distinctions are not eliminated, for it is said in the Bible that a great multitude “from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” stands before the throne (Revelation 7:9). CORE recommends:

R-68
To instruct the General Synod Council to so revise the annual Consistorial Report that it will include a numeric accounting of the races and ethnicities among the members and adherents so that the church will have a benchmark by which to measure its progress toward a multiracial future; and further,

to use the following categories from the U.S. Census Bureau: American Indian alone; Asian alone; Black or African American alone; Hispanic; White alone; Other race alone; Two or more races.

The Advisory Committees on Inclusivity offered an amendment to the recommendation:

R-68
To instruct the General Synod Council to so revise the annual Consistorial Report that it will include a numeric accounting of the races and ethnicities among the members and adherents so that the church will have a benchmark by which to measure its progress toward a multiracial future; to include the following questions: How does your church reflect the racial and cultural context in which you conduct your ministry? What are you doing to build bridges that develop and deepen mutual ministry that is multiracial or multicultural? and further.
to use the following categories from the U.S. Census Bureau: American Indian alone; Asian alone; Black or African American alone; Hispanic; White alone; Other race alone; Two or more races. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

Reasons:
1. The desire is to put questions before congregations and consistories that will invite reflection on their own ministries.
2. If the commission wishes to benchmark or determine current percentages of racial-ethnic persons in our congregations, they can still seek that information in other ways.

CORE joins with our sisters and brothers on the Commission for Women and the Commission on Christian Action observing that:

[C]urrent denominational staff, especially at classifications I and II (upper-level executives), do not reflect the diversity of the denomination, especially the female majority of the RCA’s membership (63 percent). This overwhelming preponderance of male (and Caucasian) leadership defies a vision of equality, much less a practice of justice. The RCA has an opportunity to demonstrate its commitment to justice and equality by paying special attention to the manner in which future denominational staff positions are filled, especially key upper level staff positions.

From the Report of the Commission for Women

Especially in light of the Belhar Confession reminding us to live into Christ’s call for justice, CORE fully supports the Commission for Women’s recommendation:

That throughout the remaining years of Our Call (2008-2013), the General Synod Council develop and implement a process to recruit and train leaders who represent the array of ethnicities and races that make up God’s world, with particular attention to gender inclusion, so that in the future the pool of candidates for denominational staff positions, particularly at classifications I and II, better reflect the denomination’s commitment to a multicultural and multiracial future; and further, that the General Synod Council create a task force (to include representatives from the Commission for Women, the Commission on Race and Ethnicity, and the RCA Women’s Ministries Advisory Team) to develop a plan for greater inclusion of women and people of color at all levels of staffing within the RCA, and to develop leadership training opportunities consistent with this goal.

Conclusion

The members of CORE are Asian, black, Hispanic, Native American, and white. They are enriched by each other’s diverse experiences and insights, which blend into a common vision for God’s church. May the denomination as a whole increasingly experience how beautiful it is when diverse brothers and sisters dwell in unity together.
Report of the Commission on Theology

The Commission on Theology met on October 12-14, 2007, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in conjunction with the annual joint meeting of all General Synod commissions and the General Synod Council (GSC), and again on February 8-9, 2008, in Chicago, Illinois. In addition, the commission met via conference call on Tuesday, February 26, 2008.

Introduction

The commission received four referrals from the 2007 General Synod: to prepare a study on whether there is a theological basis for including deacons as full members of the church’s higher assemblies; to engage in a study of the historic marks of the church, in conversation with the General Synod professors of theology; to consult with the General Synod Council in GSC’s design and implementation of an appropriate process or processes through which church members, congregations, assemblies, agencies, and institutions may submit to the Commission on Theology theological inquiries arising in connection with the provisional adoption of the Belhar Confession; and to serve as consultant to the Commission on Church Order in its review of the proposed GSC bylaws as to their conformity with the RCA Constitution. These referrals are set forth in detail in the appropriate sections of the body of this report.

In addition to work on these referrals and in connection with developments arising therefrom, the commission’s work this year included: completion of a study requested by the Task Force on Disabilities; initiating a study of Christian-Muslim relations in response to a world profoundly changed by the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon and their aftermath; and consulting with a joint RCA-Christian Reformed Church (CRC) task force appointed to prepare a common translation of shared confessional standards for inclusion in a joint CRC-RCA hymnbook scheduled to be published in 2013.

Deacons in Higher Assemblies

The commission was instructed by the 2007 General Synod “to prepare a study on whether there is a theological basis within a reformed and missional ecclesiology for the inclusion of deacons as full members of classes, regional synods, and the General Synod, for report to the 2009 General Synod (MGS 2007, R-18, p. 103). The commission is at work on this study, and is considering such issues as the role of deacons vis-à-vis the role of elders, the nature and purpose of the church’s various assemblies and the theological impact involved if the make-up of the assemblies were to be changed to include deacons, and the history of the RCA’s engagement with the nature of the office of deacon and with this question particularly, as well as the history of this question within the Reformed tradition generally. The commission anticipates its study will be ready for submission to the 2009 General Synod as mandated by the 2007 General Synod.

Marks of the Church

The commission was instructed by the 2007 General Synod “in conversation with the General Synod professors of theology, to engage in a study of the historic ‘marks’ of the church, as articulated in the RCA Standards and in light of missional understandings of the gospel, and to consider the recommendation of the addition of a fourth ‘mark’ of the church, for report to the General Synod no later than 2010” (MGS 2007, R-20, p. 103). The commission is at work on this mandate, which it perceives to arise from the current lively conversations happening throughout the denomination on what it means to be a church that is both Reformed and missional, and accordingly, to be an invitation to reflect carefully on the most profound questions the church can ask itself—questions regarding vision and
shape for ministries that respond faithfully and creatively to God’s call to be Christ’s church for the world, in this particular time and in the many and diverse places where the RCA may be found. In recognition of its perception of the profundity of these questions, the commission offers the following statement to the General Synod:

The Commission on Theology is eager and ready for further involvement in the denominational dialogue around what it means to be Reformed and missional. It would welcome further referrals from the General Synod on this topic, and is ready for informal consultation with other groups in the denomination around this issue.

The Belhar Confession

In its report to the 2007 General Synod, the commission expressed its encouragement to the church “to take the Belhar Confession seriously, and to engage it as deeply as possible” and its hope that, as part of this deep engagement, church members, congregations, assemblies, agencies, and institutions would submit to the commission any theological inquiries that might arise in the course of its provisional reception, thus enabling the commission to participate in this process as fully as possible. In response to the commission’s recommendation to this end, the 2007 General Synod voted “to direct the General Synod Council, in consultation with the Commission on Theology, to design and implement an appropriate process or processes through which church members, congregations, assemblies, agencies, and institutions may submit to the Commission on Theology theological inquiries arising in connection with the provisional adoption of the Belhar Confession; and further, to provide opportunity and resources for the commission or individual members thereof to participate in dialogues, workshops, or other forums that may by planned to engage with the Belhar as part of its provisional reception” (MGS 2007, R-101, p. 346).

Follow-up meetings among the commission, the Commission on Christian Unity (CCU), the Commission on Race and Ethnicity, representatives of other commissions, as well as GSC staff resource persons, were held at the October 2007 joint GSC-commissions meeting. The commission is very pleased to report that these meetings resulted in the establishment of a Belhar Implementation Team (the “Belhar team”). The Belhar team is composed of representatives of various commissions (for details, please see the CCU report), as well as staff resource persons, and is mandated to coordinate the work of the commissions, GSC, and GSC staff, as they seek to assist the whole church in faithfully living out the decision of the 2007 General Synod to adopt the Belhar for a two-year provisional period. The Belhar team has met twice, and has identified among its priorities the centralization of existing resources, working with appropriate individuals and denominational entities in the creation of necessary new resources, design and facilitation of transformative educational experiences, and continued close attention to communication and the encouragement of participation on all denominational levels.

GSC Bylaws

The 2007 General Synod voted “to instruct the Commission on Church Order in consultation with the Commission on Theology to review the proposed General Synod Council bylaws as to their conformity with the Constitution of the RCA and report to the 2008 General Synod” (MGS 2007, R-7, p. 51). The commission reviewed the proposed GSC bylaws, as well as a number of other GSC working documents, and during the October 2007 joint meeting of GSC and the commissions, met with the Commission on Church Order to discuss the same. Several GSC staff members also attended this meeting as resource persons. Following this meeting, the commission prepared a memo to the Commission on Church Order setting forth in written form the comments and concerns it had raised in the meeting. In February, GSC presented to the commission a new draft of the bylaws, as well as an explanatory memo on the revisions from GSC staff. The com-
mission feels that its concerns with the proposed bylaws were addressed by the revisions, thanks GSC for considering the commission’s input, and has no further input on the bylaws at this time.

Task Force on Disabilities

As was reported to the 2007 General Synod, in response to a request from the Task Force on Disabilities, and out of a desire to be of service as the church seeks to respond more faithfully to God’s calling persons of diverse abilities and gifts into the community of faith, the commission had begun a study of the theological issues involved in how the church welcomes and includes persons with disabilities. The commission is pleased to report that its study is complete, and submits the following paper and recommendation to the General Synod:

SPIRITUALITY AND HOSPITALITY: WHAT THE CHURCH CAN LEARN BY WELCOMING PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

This paper explores the theological and spiritual issues at stake in the church’s response to persons with disabilities. The focus here is not so much on practical considerations about accessibility and accommodation, important as they may be. Nor is the focus primarily on the experience of persons who have a disability, though those issues will always be in view. Rather, this study focuses primarily on the experience of the church, the Christian community, as it responds—whether positively or negatively—to the presence of persons with disabilities. What is at stake, from a theological perspective, when the church engages persons with disabilities? How can the church grow in its self-understanding and in its responsiveness to the Triune God, through deeper reflection on its encounter with persons with disabilities?

This study therefore does not attempt to speak “for” persons with disabilities. Nor does it attempt to speak “to” persons with disabilities. Rather, it speaks to the RCA as a denomination, and to individual congregations within the RCA, in an attempt to invite deeper reflection on how the RCA can simply become more obedient to Jesus Christ. In the practice of such obedience, the RCA may also discover how it can grow in its capacity to welcome persons with disabilities, and how it can grow spiritually as a result of such practices of welcome.

How does one define “persons with disabilities”? The very word “disability” might suggest that the entire range of human experience can be neatly divided into two camps: the “able-bodied” and the “disabled.” Such divisions can give the appearance of making the world more manageable and understandable, but they can obscure other important truths. In reality, human beings are all differently-abled. We do not all have the same intelligence, athletic ability, flexibility, vision, or mobility. Many of these differences among us are evident to all. Other differences are hidden to almost everyone: differences of psychological makeup, emotional experience, or cognitive processing. We differ from each other in countless ways that evade simple categorization.

Moreover, we are all dependent on each other in varying and complex ways; none of us can live without our relationships with others. Yet by dividing the world into the “able-bodied” and the “disabled,” those who see themselves as “able-bodied” may be tempted to reassure themselves of their “normalcy,” and obscure from themselves their deep dependency upon others in society as a whole, and even more importantly, within the body of Christ.

In reality, both “wholeness” and “disability” acquire their full meaning only within the shared contexts of communities of persons. People sometimes only recognize and identify a “disability” in comparison to others whose experience differs from theirs. In this specif-
The very notion of disability is a relative and communally shaped concept. But at a deeper and more important level, persons with disabilities find wholeness in the shared experience of community. We experience wholeness, ultimately, when we find a place in community marked by contentment, acceptance, mutual caring, and love. These communities are always diverse and dynamic, made up of people with changing experiences, changing capacities to participate in community, and changing relationships within community.

For the sake of convenience and efficiency, then, we use a word such as “disability,” but we must acknowledge, from the beginning, its potential dangers. We must recognize that in speaking of disabilities, we are speaking of a range of conditions and a range of experiences that will resist easy categorizing. We are also speaking of dynamic communities of persons, whose changing experience is “on the way,” moving toward God’s redemptive future.

It may be that one of the most helpful biblical categories to assist the church in reflecting on its welcome of persons with disabilities is the biblical discussion of “welcoming the stranger.” Of course, almost every congregation has members with disabilities—members who are not “strangers” at all to the rest of the congregation, but rather people who are known and loved. But at another level, persons with disabilities are indeed strangers to their more able-bodied neighbors. Those who can walk have difficulty fully understanding the experience of someone confined to a wheelchair. Those with “normal” intelligence cannot fully fathom the experience of someone who is cognitively impaired. Moreover, more able-bodied people often experience a subtle, low-grade anxiety in the presence of persons with disabilities. The thought of losing one’s mobility, cognitive ability, health, or strength is not a welcome thought. People with disabilities often awaken feelings of loss or discomfort in other, more able-bodied people. In this more particular sense, persons with disabilities are “strangers” to more able-bodied people. Their experience of the world is different and alien in profound ways.

Persons with disabilities are also “strangers” who can help the church learn something important about hospitality in another sense. Persons with disabilities often do not “fit” into the normal patterns of social life. They cannot always navigate society’s buildings. They may not “fit” into the church’s educational programs. They may not always exhibit the social graces that other expect. As a result, they are often marginalized, excluded, made to feel inferior and unwelcome. In this respect as well, they are often treated as “strangers” in the midst of the church.

Yet in biblical parlance, the stranger is always potentially the friend not yet discovered, the brother or sister not yet recognized, the presence of Jesus not yet discerned. Throughout Scripture, there is a powerful mandate to welcome such strangers. This is a challenge, not to persons with disabilities, but to the church that often struggles to recognize and welcome them as full members of the body of Christ.

A closer look at the biblical discussion of “welcoming the stranger” bears this out. The Bible was written in the ancient world, and the ancient world was a clanish place. To be a “stranger” in the ancient world was to live a precarious existence on the margins of society, without the normal supports of village, clan, and family. People might become “strangers” in migration for a variety of reasons—economic hardship, military campaigns, escape from famine or plague—but the lot of the stranger was never easy. Beyond mere loneliness and isolation, strangers faced daunting practical problems. They often had no place to sleep at night, and no way to prepare food, even if they could afford to buy it. They were vulnerable to thugs and thieves. It was not an easy existence.

In this light, it is striking that the Bible places such a high value on hospitality to strangers. God is proclaimed in the Bible, not only as the vindicator of the orphan and the widow, but
also as the friend of the stranger (Deuteronomy 10:17-18). Israel was always to remember that Abraham—the father of Israel as a nation—was a wanderer and a stranger (Genesis 23:4; Deuteronomy 26:5). Therefore it is the responsibility of all of God’s people to attend to the needs of the stranger (Job 29:16).

Nowhere is this concern for the stranger more evident than in Jesus’ gripping account of the final judgment narrated in Matthew 25:31f. Here all the nations are judged on whether, in caring for the thirsty, the naked, the sick, and the stranger, they cared for Jesus himself. Jesus declares, “I was a stranger, and you welcomed me” (Matthew 25:35).

Here we come to the crux of the matter from a spiritual and theological perspective: Insofar as persons with disabilities are strangers in the midst of the church (that is, insofar as they embody what may seem alien to their more able-bodied neighbors), they also represent—as all strangers do—the presence of Jesus in the midst of the church. The more the church grows in its capacity to welcome such persons who are strangers, the more deeply the church will welcome and serve Jesus.

This is not merely pious rhetoric. Welcoming the stranger, in biblical parlance, is an exercise in welcoming whatever it is that threatens us about our own humanity. None of us as human beings can be completely whole in our relationship with ourselves if we cannot welcome those who are strangers to us, because we are always, in some important sense, strangers to ourselves. We all know, at the deepest level, the precariousness of our own embodied existence, our own vulnerability to loss. And almost all of us, if we live long enough, will experience some sort of disability, as our bodies grow more frail. Persons with disabilities thus can assist the church to discover more deeply and powerfully the mystery of its own embodied existence, the diverse ways in which we are “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:14). The ability of the Christian community to welcome persons with disabilities, and the ability of persons with disabilities to live joyfully in the midst of the church, will be an important measure of the church’s ability to live fearlessly and joyfully in the midst of a broken world, as it awaits the restoration of the whole creation.

As the church welcomes persons with disabilities, it will thus necessarily confront more deeply the mystery of its own embodied existence. Our bodily existence is indeed complex, and full of paradox. Paul speaks of our “mortal bodies,” subject to the power of death and beset by weakness (Romans 6:12, 8:11; 1 Corinthians 15:53f.). At the same time, Christians celebrate and affirm the resurrection of the body. Bodily existence is not something for this life alone. Our bodies matter so much that they will be raised in the life to come. This importance of the body is what leads Paul to summon believers to “glorify God in your body” (1 Corinthians 6:20). In welcoming persons with disabilities, the church necessarily confronts the joys, sorrows, limitations, and beauties of its embodied existence—tasting the mortality and weakness of life in the body, but also reveling in its exquisite and eternal beauty. In so doing, the church becomes more deeply what Jesus declares it to be: the light of the world, the pointer to a deeper joy that awaits the whole creation.

But if the church is to become such a light in this world, it must also recognize and confront its shadow side. Precisely because persons with disabilities can be strangers to the church—disruptive, alien, and threatening—the natural human tendency is to try to make such strangeness more manageable. One of the ways this happens is by objectifying and categorizing people with disabilities. Far too often, the person becomes defined by their disability: “Jack is blind.” “Maggie has Down Syndrome.” “Mike is mentally ill.” “Susan is a paraplegic.” These labels then acquire a kind of defining power that shapes the way others interact with these people. What seems most obvious (the disability) to more able-bodied people who may not know the person well becomes the only thing to be noted about a person. In so doing, the church can lose sight of the manifold unique ways in which each person is gifted and called by God to his or her unique place in the body of Christ.
If labeling and categorizing is one way in which humans objectify and depersonalize others, another is the subtle tendency to identify persons with disabilities as “disruptions” in the shared life of the church. Persons with disabilities don’t always arrive on time. They can’t always sit in neat rows. They may not be able to read the church’s mass-produced bulletins. They may not be able to remain still for the prescribed length of the worship service. They may not be able to understand the material presented in church-school classrooms. They may not be able to fill their own plates at the congregational potluck. In our modern culture, with its love of standardization, these “disruptions” are often unwelcome. They “upset the flow” of things, and many congregations find innumerable ways, both overt and implied, to discourage and shame such “disruptors” of the status quo, and to reestablish the “normal” order of things. The tragedy, of course, is that this shaming of “disruptions” diminishes all our humanness, replacing the rich diversity of the body of Christ with a boring and oppressive uniformity. To say this is not to reject the orderly life of the church, but to challenge the church to widen and deepen its understanding of how the “good order” of the church can be most fully welcoming, and most fully reflective of the diversity God intends for the body of Christ.

These tendencies to objectify persons with disabilities may also appear in particularly problematic ways in the spiritual life of the Christian community. One characteristic problem is the tendency to associate disability with sin or uncleanness. Parents of children with mental illness may be tempted to blame themselves for their child’s problems, and other onlookers may harbor the same suspicions. There is at times in our hearts an almost instinctive response to failure and loss—wondering what we have done to deserve such misfortune. Jesus’ disciples, when confronted with a man born blind, assumed that someone must have sinned to cause this state of affairs (John 9:2), and yet Jesus rejected these assumptions, and demonstrated a very different perspective, which reveals that what passes for blindness is often real vision, and what passes for sight may conceal a deeper blindness. The church must say loudly, and believe heartily, that disability is not a divine punishment.

But this tendency to link disability and sin can take subtler forms as well. Those facing disability may be encouraged to pray for healing, and may be led, sometimes in subtle and indirect ways, to doubt their own faith if the prayed-for healing does not arrive. Indeed, the church’s bold proclamation of the power of God to heal can have unintended consequences in the lives of persons with disabilities, as they find themselves forced to choose between either rejecting such proclamation as inadequate or rejecting their own faith as inadequate.

A particularly subtle way of marginalizing persons with disabilities can take the form of excessive admiration. Sometimes, rather than being overtly marginalized and objectified, persons with disabilities are treated as “super-spiritual” persons whose extraordinary courage and spiritual strength places them in a class by themselves. In other cases, parents of children who experience disability may be idealized for their incredible devotion. These expressions of respect may indeed be warranted, but these tendencies to idealize can also be another way in which the church creates boundaries that mark off persons with disabilities, inhibiting the capacity of the church to be a fully welcoming community for all persons who are sinners, saved by grace.

How is the church to address such problems, and to grow in its ability to be a welcoming community for persons with disabilities? There are wonderful resources in Scripture and the Christian tradition to help the church to grow. Interestingly, we see within Scripture itself a growing movement in which the vocation of the people of God as a welcoming community deepens over time. Early in the history of the people of God, eunuchs are singled out and excluded from worship at the temple (Deuteronomy 23:1). Similarly, women who could not bear children were routinely marginalized in the cultures of the biblical world. Both men and women who could not fulfill society’s ideal of “fruitfulness” were second-class citizens at best. Yet the Old Testament also contains numerous promises of blessing and inclusion for the barren woman (Isaiah 54:1). The book of Acts records the
conversion of a eunuch (also a stranger from Ethiopia) as one of the early converts to Christianity, welcomed into the people of God (Acts 8:27).

Jesus himself embodies this posture of welcome to the stranger, the marginalized, and the excluded. He touched the “unclean.” He shocked the crowds by going to dinner with Zacchaeus, a hated tax collector who was also short in stature. He regularly showed interest in people who could not walk, who could not speak, who could not hear, who were disfigured through leprosy. He was surrounded by crowds seeking healing. His normal entourage was not made up of “normal” people, but people with a wide variety of disabilities.

The early church followed Jesus’ lead when confronted with gentiles who accepted the good news of the gospel. Though the decision took a major council of the church to implement (Acts 15), early Christians quickly began to welcome gentile “strangers” into their midst, without requiring them to eat kosher, to observe Sabbath as Jews did, or to be circumcised. The mandate of welcome into the people of God took priority over the need for uniformity in cultural practice. To be sure, the inclusion of gentiles raised all sorts of new challenges and problems. We see almost all of Paul’s letters wrestling with the challenges faced by these communities, as they tried to live out God’s welcoming grace in the midst of deep diversity. Yet it might be observed that where the church is no longer struggling with such challenges, it has ceased, in important ways, to be the welcoming church God calls it to be.

These challenges persist today in churches that seek to follow Jesus in fully welcoming persons with disabilities. One of these challenges arises from the church’s need to find balance in its proclamation of the healing power of the gospel. The church rightly proclaims God’s healing power, and recognizes that there are times when, by the mercy and power of God, some people are set free from some disabilities. Jesus points to the times in his ministry when “the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them” (Matthew 11:5). Yet throughout the experience of the church, healing does not always happen, and a one-sided emphasis only upon healing will almost always have the effect of marginalizing and stigmatizing persons with disabilities who have not experienced physical healing. Indeed, an excessive preoccupation with physical healing may be driven more by human anxiety than by the hope of the gospel, as we become desperate for God to “fix” us and to return us to a societal ideal of “normalcy.”

At a deeper level still, the church must wrestle with the question of whether wholeness can coexist with disability. If persons are defined by their disability, then their whole existence becomes defined by an absence, a lack, an aberrancy. The church must boldly proclaim that Christian identity—both for more “able-bodied” persons and for persons with disabilities—does not arise from what we can and cannot do, but rather from our union with Christ and with Christ’s church. If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15). This core identity in Christ permits the apostle to boast even about his weaknesses (2 Corinthians 11:30f.). It is only this deep and fundamental transformation in Christ that can free the church to be most deeply welcoming, both when healing comes and when it does not come. Who knows whether, just as the resurrected body of Jesus still showed its wounds, so our resurrected bodies will still bear the marks of our disabilities as well, not as limitations on our existence before God, but as the traces of divine grace, the signs of our deepest union with the Christ who shared our sufferings?

This recovery of core Christian identity in welcoming persons with disabilities—an identity that can endure through all sorts of suffering or loss—invites the church to rediscover and revalue a virtue common in the New Testament, but often overlooked in our success-oriented North American culture: the virtue of endurance. The question is not whether the church is called to endure persons with disabilities, but whether the church can learn something more about the endurance to which Scripture calls all Christians, through sharing life
with persons who struggle with disabilities. In Romans 5:3f., Paul speaks of how “suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us.”

Endurance is a complex virtue. In the New Testament, it involves not only the capacity to “put up with” losses and troubles; it is the discovery and embodiment of a deeper hope and joy, in the midst of such troubles and losses. This hope is not for a quick fix. This joy is not a passing giddiness. Rather, Christian endurance is grounded in the deeper hope that absolutely nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, who shared our suffering, and with whom we will share eternal joy. It grows from the whisper of the Spirit in the heart, in the midst of the darkest night, that “all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.” The experience of disability is just one of the many ways in which the church is called to endurance, but the capacity of the church to deeply and fully welcome persons with disabilities will be an index of the church’s embrace of its deep calling to live lives of endurance with joy (Hebrews 12:2).

This call to endurance brings us to that curious way in which thanksgiving and lament blend with each other in Christian faith and experience. In welcoming persons with disabilities, the church recognizes two paradoxical truths: on the one hand, each life—including the lives of those who experience disability—is pure gift, to be received with grateful thanksgiving from the providential hand of God. On the other hand, as Paul says, “while we are still in this tent, we groan under our burden, because we wish not to be unclothed but to be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life” (2 Corinthians 5:4). Even among persons with disabilities, the complex balance between gratitude and hope, between praise and lament, will vary, depending on the season in life and the specific point in one’s spiritual journey. For example, those who have lost capacities of the body or mind experience their disability differently from those who have never known those capacities to begin with. The church’s embrace of both gratitude and lament is one of the richest and most unpredictable of its spiritual movements. In welcoming persons with disabilities, whose lives are deeply shaped by this complex spirituality, the church may learn more about and enter more deeply into its distinctive vocation to live “between the times,” groaning with the whole creation, while also sharing in a foretaste of the age to come.

The hospitality commended in this paper will naturally find its culmination when persons with disabilities are no longer merely the “recipients” of the church’s ministry, but when they find their rightful place within the body of Christ, assisting the church as a whole to embody the good news of Jesus Christ. Scripture tells us that Christ’s capacity to save us flows directly from his incarnation—the fact that he shared our life in all its weakness and vulnerability (Hebrews 2:18). If this is true, it is reasonable also to expect that the church’s own witness will come to its fullest expression when it is mediated through the voices, bodies, and stories of those who have tasted, by divine grace, both the losses and riches, the weaknesses and strength that flow from life in this groaning world, redeemed by the precious blood of Christ.

This paper thus invites the church not only to deepen its welcome to persons with disabilities, but to take the opportunity, in its encounter with persons with disabilities, to deepen its grasp of the gospel, and to enter more deeply into its union with Christ, not only in his resurrection, but also in his suffering (Philippians 3:10-11). For it is only in practicing such welcome that we ourselves will find our own deepest welcome before God. A fully welcoming encounter with persons with disabilities will almost inevitably lead the church into the very center of the gospel, and deepen the church’s capacity to follow Jesus. In short, the church must welcome persons with disabilities, not just because persons with disabilities need to be welcomed; the church must welcome persons with disabilities because, without such welcome, the church will not fully discover the unspeakable riches of its life in Christ.
Bibliography


R-69
To approve the paper “Spirituality and Hospitality” and make it available to congregations, agencies, and assemblies of the RCA; and further,

to direct the General Synod Council to prepare a study guide to accompany the use of “Spirituality and Hospitality” in congregations; and further,

to direct the General Synod Council to find ways to communicate, within the RCA, how congregations are growing in their ability to welcome persons with disabilities more fully into their life and witness. (ADOPTED)

Christian-Muslim Relations

It hardly need be said that the world was changed profoundly by the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon and their aftermath. These changes have in turn exerted deep, abiding, and often negative influences on Christian-Muslim relations, locally and globally. In order to assist the church in thinking through these complex and critical issues, the commission has retained a team of RCA missionaries with the requisite experience and expertise to initiate a study. It should be noted at the outset that this study is not intended to replace the commission’s 1996 paper, “Christian Witness to Muslims: An Introduction to the Issues” (*MGS 1995*, pp. 357-368), but to build upon that previous work in order to address new issues that have arisen since that work was done.

Common Translation of the Confessions with the CRC

The Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC) and the RCA are working on a joint hymnbook, scheduled to be published in 2013. This book will include the confessional standards shared by both denominations. Currently, however, the RCA and the CRC use different translations of their shared standards. The new hymnbook presents the opportunity for the two denominations to move toward common texts in their confessions. To this end, the RCA and CRC have appointed a joint task force, commissioned to develop a common translation of the confessions. Todd Billings was affirmed by the Commission on Theology as its representative to this task force, working together with Eugene Heideman as the other RCA representative to the task force. The task force will report back to the Commission on Theology for a recommendation to be brought to General Synod, after its work is completed.
A Note on Commission Leadership

Jeanne Boland has with no small regret decided to resign from the position of moderator, effective as of the close of this year’s synod, in order to focus her efforts on serving as the commission’s representative to the Belhar Implementation Team; she wishes to express her thanks to all the commissioners for their hard work, graciousness, faithfulness, and patience, and for making the opportunity to lead a privilege. The commission is pleased to announce that James Brownson has agreed to serve as the commission’s new moderator, and is grateful for his particular graciousness and willingness to step into the gaps and lead in the transition.
Report of the Commission for Women

In attending to various tasks outlined in the purpose statement in the *Book of Church Order*, the Commission for Women seeks to balance involvement in the shared meetings with General Synod Council (GSC) and other commissions with listening to and affirming the voices of women throughout the denomination, including women seminarians.

The Commission for Women met with the GSC and other commissions October 12-13, 2007, in Bloomington, Minnesota, and February 25-27, 2008, at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan. The Commission for Women agenda included meetings with women seminary students and West Michigan women who are theologically trained (with an invitation extended also to area women of the Christian Reformed Church), as well as interviews with RCA leaders. These interactions have helped inform commission members about current RCA functioning and its inclusion of women at various levels. Information and perspectives from these interviews also help the commission to collaborate with various offices and commissions within the denomination.

As described in the *Book of Church Order* (3.1.5.10a), members of the Commission for Women “shall share a strong desire to work for the full and complete participation of women in realizing the vision of a church and society inclusive of all gifts of all persons.” In response to specific responsibilities given in the *BCO*, the Commission for Women offers several observations and a recommendation.

**Women and Men in Partnership**

“The commission shall participate and provide information for appointments to committees, commissions, agencies, and staff positions to insure partnership of men and women in the professional and decision-making leadership of the denomination” (*BCO* 3.1.5.10b).

The Commission for Women observes that current denominational staff, especially at classifications I and II (upper-level executives), do not reflect the diversity of the denomination, especially the female majority of the RCA’s membership (63 percent). This overwhelming preponderance of male (and Caucasian) leadership defies a vision of equality, much less a practice of justice. The RCA has an opportunity to demonstrate its commitment to justice and equality by paying special attention to the manner in which future denominational staff positions are filled, especially key upper-level staff positions.

The Commission for Women, in collaboration with the Commission for Christian Action and the Commission on Race and Ethnicity, hearkens to the spirit of the Belhar Confession’s call to justice, equality, and fairness. Together, we affirm the RCA’s desire always to embrace and live into these ideals based in Scripture:

- A church that is called to embody God’s justice in all aspects of its life together.
- A church in which RCA members work toward a representation that reflects the diversity of all God’s people.
- A church that “the Son of God...gathers, protects, and preserves...a community chosen for eternal life and united in true faith” (*Heidelberg Catechism* Answer 54), and one Christ gathers from north and south, east and west, “from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne” (*Revelation* 7:9).
- A church, as envisioned in *Our Call*, that is committed to a multicultural and multiracial future, one “working with all the partners God provides.”

The Reformed Church in America has already affirmed the Belhar Confession’s invitation and challenge to justice and peace. Yet, even though 63 percent of RCA members are women, we observe that only a small minority of women have been appointed to upper-
level staff positions serving the General Synod and General Synod Council. Therefore, the Commission for Women, in solidarity with the Commission for Christian Action and the Commission on Race and Ethnicity, makes this recommendation:

R-70
That throughout the remaining years of Our Call (2008-2013), the General Synod Council develop and implement a process to recruit and train leaders who represent the array of ethnicities and races that make up God’s world, with particular attention to gender inclusion, so that in the future the pool of candidates for denominational staff positions, particularly at classifications I and II, better reflect the denomination’s commitment to a multicultural and multiracial future; and further,

that the General Synod Council create a task force (to include representatives from the Commission for Women, the Commission on Race and Ethnicity, and its RCA Women’s Ministries Advisory Team) to develop a plan for greater inclusion of women and people of color at all levels of staffing within the RCA, and to develop leadership training opportunities consistent with this goal.

The Advisory Committees on Inclusivity offered an amendment:

R-70
That throughout the remaining years of Our Call (2008-2013), to instruct the General Synod Council to develop and implement a process to recruit and train leaders who represent the array of ethnicities and races that make up God’s world, with particular attention to gender inclusion, so that in the future the pool of qualified candidates for denominational staff positions, particularly at classifications I and II executive staff levels, better reflects the denomination’s commitment to a multicultural and multiracial future; and further,

that to instruct the General Synod Council to create a task force (to include representatives from the Commission for Women, the Commission on Race and Ethnicity, and its RCA Women’s Ministries Advisory Team) to develop a plan for greater inclusion of women and people of color at all levels of staffing within the RCA, and to develop leadership training opportunities consistent with this goal, and further,

to have such processes ready for report to the 2009 General Synod and for implementation no later than 2010.

(ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

Reasons:
1. These amendments are in agreement with the spirit of R-66 in creating opportunities to live out the calling of God by all peoples.
2. Because the staff classification system for RCA staff is changing, the new wording is necessary.
3. There was a clearly expressed desire to raise up qualified leaders.
Collaboration

“The commission shall collaborate with other RCA bodies working on issues affecting women” (BCO 3.1.5.10b).

Women seminarians in the RCA report general affirmation by seminary faculty and staff, with varying levels of challenge from other students. Women students experience greater difficulty than men in finding placements and opportunities to fulfill their requirements in area churches, especially when it comes to meeting the number of preaching assignments. Generally, they are optimistic and hopeful of finding positions once they complete their training for ministry. Many women students observe the disproportionate number of ordained women who serve in specialized ministries rather than in parish settings.

Inclusive Language

“The commission shall assist the church toward insuring inclusive attitudes, images, and language in all materials published, designed, or provided for use in the denomination” (BCO 3.1.5.10b).

In the past year members of the commission have been present at a variety of worship services during General Synod in Pella, Iowa, the One Thing event in San Antonio, Texas, most of the eight regional synod meetings, and the 2007 Women’s Conference in Chicago, Illinois. Commission members observe that contemporary worship styles, particularly songs and prayers, present a preponderance of male-only language and metaphors for God, and thereby limit the worship experience of the many ways God is known and God’s presence is realized. Commission members observe that worship leaders tend to call upon God only as Father in invocations, even though Scripture provides a richness of God’s many names and ways of working in our world. God’s character as one who enlivens, sustains, and continues to create and heal seems far removed from the overused and limiting metaphor of God only as Father. Furthermore, the commission calls upon worship leaders and planners to consider gender balance in the selection of members of praise teams, preachers, liturgists, readers, and narrators. The Commission for Women encourages a variety drawn from Scripture in the language used to address and describe God.

Theological Training

“The commission shall develop, advocate, and implement strategies for systematic change to enable the full and complete participation of women in church and society” (BCO 3.1.5.10b).

Of the 235 theologically trained women included in a directory of women, ninety-four serve RCA congregations as senior pastor, associate pastor, organizing pastor, or minister under contract. In addition, twenty-six women are listed as “without charge,” and three are military chaplains. Remaining venues of ministry include missionaries, professors, institutional chaplains, interim ministers, and positions in churches of other denominations. The directory does not include the numbers of women who are theologically trained but not ordained.

The Commission for Women endorses a leadership development proposal submitted to the RCA’s office of leadership and revitalization by Lynn Japinga for Lilly grant money. The proposal calls for the use of Lilly funds to underwrite a women’s training and education component.
Women’s Ministries Advisory Team

“The commission shall provide opportunities and resources for developing awareness and raising consciousness concerning human liberation related to the role of women in church and society” (BCO 3.1.5.10b).

Members of the Women’s Advisory Team, a diverse group representing the voices of women in the eight regional synods, offer perspective and advice in designing resources connecting women to RCA Global Mission, and they offer gatherings and retreats training leaders and encouraging congregational health through RCA Women’s Ministries. The Women’s Ministries Advisory Team keeps the Women’s Ministries office connected to the RCA vision and mission statement and attentive to the needs of women in RCA congregations. This team meets biannually with the coordinator of Women’s Ministries.
Report of the Commission on Nominations

The Commission on Nominations met in person on February 5, 2008, and again by conference call on March 4, 2008, April 1, 2008, and April 21, 2008. Throughout the year 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 General Synod, or on the board of directors of one of its related corporations or an RCA educational institution. In these ways the commission sought to fulfill its responsibilities as stated in the Bylaws of the General Synod—namely, “in consultation with the general secretary, [to] 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” (Book of Church Order [BCO] Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 8.c.2).

The commission seeks to nominate individuals for service on agencies, commissions, and boards of directors on the basis of their Spiritual gifts, Heart (or passion), Abilities, Personality, Experience, and special Leadership abilities, and when possible seeks to involve young adult members of the RCA (so they can be nurtured and encouraged to serve the RCA in a variety of ways in the future). The commission remains mindful of these criteria through the use of the acronym “SHAPELY.”

Through its efforts, the Commission on Nominations has proactively fulfilled its responsibility to “search the denomination” (BCO Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 8.c.2) and believes those nominated have the “SHAPELY” traits that make them particularly well-suited for the work of the positions to which they are being nominated. In addition to finding people who are exceptionally well suited to serve on a General Synod commission or agency or the board of directors of a related corporation or an RCA educational institution, 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.

When the number of qualified candidates from which to choose increases, the commission’s work is made easier and the work of the RCA’s agencies, commissions, and corporations is carried out more effectively. Consequently, the commission encourages anyone interested in serving on a General Synod commission or agency or on the board of directors of an RCA-related corporation or educational institution to complete a Talent Bank Form and submit it to the Commission on Nominations as indicated on the form. Forms are available from staff to the Commission on Nominations (Paul M. Karssen [1-712-737-4958 or pkarssen@rca.org] or Laura Tarbous [1-212-870-3279 or ltarbous@rca.org]), or through the “Talent Bank Form” link on the General Synod page of the RCA website (by either clicking on the “General Synod” button on the home page or by inserting www.rca.org/synod in the address bar or your web browser).

Prior to presenting nominees to the General Synod, the Commission on Nominations must address an issue regarding the terms of service for members of the board of trustees of New Brunswick Theological Seminary. The seminary board has noted that the terms of membership on the board are such that a substantial number of members may conclude their service simultaneously. The board prefers a more orderly, gradual transition of board members, and therefore proposes that the terms for the following current board members be revised as indicated:
As it continues to work on this issue, the board may propose additional term revisions to future General Synods. For now, the Commission on Nominations believes that the foregoing revisions are in the best interest of New Brunswick Theological Seminary, and therefore makes the following recommendation:

R-71
To reassign terms for the following members of the Board of Trustees of New Brunswick Theological Seminary as follows:
(ADOPTED)

The nominations below take into account these revisions of terms. Nominees identified by the Commission on Nominations are as follows: (Note: * indicates a final term, and # indicates an official nomination from the assembly, institution, or agency listed.)

GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL

Class of 2009
The Rev. James Cobb (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America)#
The Rev. Christopher Poest (Regional Synod of Mid-America)#

Class of 2010
*The Rev. Ned Beadel (Regional Synod of the Far West)#
*James Steward II
*Arnold Van Ankum

Class of 2012
*Randall Bohl
*John Busman (Regional Synod of the Heartland)#
*Rhonda Johnson
*The Rev. Toni Macon (Regional Synod of New York)#
*David Patterson
*Evan Vermeer

COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN ACTION

Class of 2011
*The Rev. Thomas Goodhart
*Terry Provance (Reformed ecumenical observer)
Dayber Rodrigues
Cora “Nicky” Solomon
Vacant (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America)#
COMMISSIONS

COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AND DISCIPLESHIP
Class of 2011
Lois Fieg! Mitchell Kinsinger

COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN UNITY
Class of 2011
*The Rev. Judith Cobb (ecumenical member)
*The Rev. Harold Delhagen
*Christopher Dorn
The Rev. Fernando Jensen

COMMISSION ON CHRISTIAN WORSHIP
Class of 2010
Glenda De Koster
Class of 2011
Adrienne Thorne
The Rev. Lisa Tice

COMMISSION ON CHURCH ORDER
Class of 2011
*James Donkersloot
*Randy Kooy

COMMISSION ON HISTORY
Class of 2011
*Mary Kansfield
*J. Jeffery Tyler

COMMISSION ON JUDICIAL BUSINESS
Class of 2011
*The Rev. Wayne Sneller (Regional Synod of the Heartland)#
*John Wood (Regional Synod of New York)#

COMMISSION ON NOMINATIONS
Class of 2011
*Carol Mutch (Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics)#
Reva Waldron-Turner (African American Council)#
*The Rev. Paul Wernlund (Regional Synod of Mid-America)#
Vacancy (Native American Indian Ministries Council)#

COMMISSION ON RACE AND ETHNICITY
Class of 2011
*The Rev. Mark Kellar (African American Council)#
*The Rev. Barbara Pekich
The Rev. Kenneth Petty, Jr.
COMMISSION ON THEOLOGY

Class of 2009
Eugene Fisher

Class of 2011
The Rev. James De Jong (Christian Reformed Church in North America)#
The Rev. Steven Hoogerwerf
The Rev. Philip Hougen (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America ecumenical observer)
The Rev. Renee House
*The Rev. Young Aie Na

COMMISSION FOR WOMEN

Class of 2011
Leonor Caballero
The Rev. Lynn Japinga

BOARD OF BENEFITS SERVICES

Class of 2011
*The Rev. Paul Pratt
The Rev. Carl Van Voorst
*Gerald Vander Wal

CHURCH GROWTH FUND

Class of 2011
Diane Faubion
John Koerselman

EDITORIAL COUNCIL OF THE CHURCH HERALD

Class of 2009
The Rev. Mary Wisner (At-large)

Class of 2011
David Cheadle (Regional Synod of the Far West)#
*The Rev. P. Stephan Sickler (Regional Synod of New York)#
*Cheryl Thacker (At-large)
David Walsh (Regional Synod of Albany)#

MINISTERIAL FORMATION CERTIFICATION AGENCY

Class of 2011
The Rev. Dwight Bailey Jr.
*The Rev. Ann Callender

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.
COMMISSIONS

Class of 2012
*Johannes Burrink (Regional Synod of Mid-America)
Brian Clark
Sandra Fisher (Regional Synod of the Far West)
*The Rev. Nathaniel Grady
The Rev. Hak Joon Lee
Mary Linge (Regional Synod of New York)
Luciano Marquez
Marti Robinson
Nancy Ruiter
*Diane Tice (Regional Synod of Albany)

WESTERN 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.

Class of 2011
*William Blunt
*The Rev. Jane Brown (Regional Synod of the Heartland)
Robert Hilarides
*Cheryl Schregardus (Regional Synod of Mid-America)
Stephen Thomas
Vacancy (Regional Synod of New York)

CENTRAL COLLEGE

Class of 2012
Sue Brandl
Elizabeth Farver
Judith Vogel

HOPE COLLEGE

Class of 2012
*The Rev. Timothy L. Brown
The Rev. Taylor W. Holbrook
*The Rev. Peter C. Semeyn

NORTHWESTERN COLLEGE

None

R-72
To elect the above-named nominees to General Synod commissions and agencies and the boards of directors of RCA-related corporations and educational institutions as indicated. (ADOPTED)

R-73
To elect Carol Mutch moderator of the Commission on Nominations for the 2008-2009 term. (ADOPTED)
Report of New Brunswick Theological Seminary

New Brunswick Theological Seminary is a teaching institution of the Reformed Church in America, called by God to be a servant of the whole church of Jesus Christ. The seminary’s mission is to continue the ministry of Jesus in our time and place by enabling persons to translate their calling and gifts into faithful Christian ministry.

This mission statement has led the seminary through decades of faithful and fruitful ministry. Because it is a living document, it will be reviewed in this coming year as the seminary embarks on an intentional process of strategic planning. It is expected that this process will lead to the adoption of six to eight strategic visions that will inspire our development and direction in the next decade as well as a realigning of the mission to better reflect the realities and dreams of the day-to-day life of the community. Classes and worship at New Brunswick reveal the dramatic growth in diversity the seminary has undergone. Not only is the seminary one of the most diverse institutions in the Reformed Church in America, it is also one of the most richly diverse seminaries in North America. As the denomination seeks a multicultural and multiethnic future, New Brunswick Theological Seminary stands ready and eager to share its insights and challenges. The experience of New Brunswick is that it has moved from an almost exclusively white and Reformed institution to one that has a student body that is three quarters people of color. It has become essential to our faithfulness to the gospel and to the future of the seminary that it is becoming a more passionate and articulate anti-racist and thus inclusive community of faith and learning.

Welcome to New Faculty
The retirement of Drs. Fries, Waanders, and Kraai after a combined tenure of more than eighty years has brought an unusual opportunity for the seminary to call new professors into service. The Rev. Raynard Smith, a hospital chaplain with more than two decades of experience, a doctoral candidate of the highest rank at Drew University in the area of pastoral care, and an ordained minister in the Church of God in Christ, Inc. has moved from his role as adjunct faculty to become assistant professor of pastoral care. The Rev. Dr. Rothney Stok Tshaka, an ordained minister in the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa, has assumed his role as the first global scholar and is serving as associate professor of ethics and community. This three-year commitment has brought with it enormous opportunities for the New Brunswick community and the wider church to learn lessons regarding reconciliation from one who has been formed for ministry in the cradle of apartheid. Dr. Tshaka’s dissertation focused on the Belhar Confession and the writings of Karl Barth, which is an added gift to the RCA during our time of reflection on the Belhar and its confessional role in the church.

Anti-Racism and an Inclusive Community
The seminary is in the second of a three-year process of reflecting on the diversity of the community and the ways that racism has played a role in our history and structure. While the seminary has grown dramatically in its diversity, it has often not paused to understand the ways it needs to change in response to God’s call for justice in our common life. Racism is understood not as individual prejudice, a sin all Christians need to confess, but rather the results of power added to prejudice that produces a structure that favors some and leaves others marginalized. It is expected that this three-year process of reflection, being led by twenty-five members of the extended seminary community, including all full-time faculty, will produce a twenty-year plan to address issues of racism and to move very intentionally toward a just and inclusive seminary life. While the report from the team is not expected until this fall, the faculty, board, curriculum, and mission will all feel the benefits of the report and its recommendations.

Fiscal and Enrollment Stability
The seminary has continued to seek fiscal and enrollment stability in its life and mission.
These challenges were met last year with a move from a significant deficit to a balanced budget. One year, however, does not make a trend! The seminary is seeking to broaden its appeal to the many denominational partners that have sent students to it over the last decades. We seek individuals in the RCA and other denominations who find our mission in a diverse and metro-urban area one that inspires their contributions. In addition, it is our expectation that the intended direction of the seminary’s mission in the next few years will be in establishing strategic partnerships with significant congregations and ministries in the New York metropolitan area. Just as New Brunswick was founded more than two hundred years ago to provide accessible theological education for candidates for the ministry who were undergoing dangerous travel back to the Netherlands, accessibility in these days means that the seminary needs to project its resources into local and regional communities that seek our partnership and passion.

**Campus Development**

For the past two years this report has included some words about the expectation that the east end of the campus would be developed into an apartment building, which would produce a revenue stream that would allow the seminary to subsidize student housing. In anticipation of this plan, our residential students (less than 10 percent of our total enrollment) vacated Scudder Hall and moved into Rutgers graduate housing. The Collegiate Corporation of New York has been a faithful and encouraging partner in the plan. However, through the sudden and unexplained inactivity of the developers of the project, the seminary has just begun to imagine new strategic uses of our property to assist our operating budget and to address the housing needs of our residential students. During this interim period, residential students will continue to have the option of Rutgers graduate housing.

**Ministry in an Interfaith World**

It is apparent to all that the church will need to better prepare its pastoral leaders for service in a world that will either be destroyed by interfaith warfare or be kept safe for our grandchildren through interfaith cooperation. Because most of our graduates serve in communities that include mosques and synagogues and temples as well as churches, there is a growing sense that the seminary needs to do a better job of preparing ministers to know and love their neighbors. This commitment is slowly unfolding with the assistance of the interfaith community of Rutgers University and Central New Jersey.

**Denominational Identity**

It is clear that New Brunswick Theological Seminary has in many ways much in common with the world mission partnerships of the Reformed Church in America. The mission of the seminary calls for it to serve the whole church of Jesus Christ and to be responsive to a world profoundly loved by God. The diversity of NBTS provides an alternative for ministerial candidates who want to prepare for ministry in highly diverse settings. It is our hope and expectation that NBTS will continue to provide unique service to the RCA and to many denominations that seek the formation of its candidates for a church and world that is at our doorsteps. Since 1784, New Brunswick Theological Seminary has provided affordable, accessible, and pastoral ministry formation for succeeding generations of pastoral leaders. We are deeply grateful for this privilege and responsibility.

**Gratitude**

We remain deeply grateful for the extraordinary affection that inspires the support of RCA congregations and individuals for the seminary’s profound mission. For the third consecutive year, and we hope the last for a while, this report brings to the synod the retirement of one its faithful professors. We are deeply grateful for the decade-long service of Dr. Mark Kraai, and offer the following resolution to memorialize this day:
R-74
To adopt the following resolution:

BE IT RESOLVED that the two hundred and second regular session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting at Hope College, in Holland, Michigan, in the month of June, 2008, offers its deep gratitude to God for the inspired and faithful service to New Brunswick Theological Seminary and the Reformed Church in America by the Rev. Dr. Mark Kraai. Dr. Kraai’s ordained ministry began in 1974 and has included service at Fellowship Reformed Church in Lombard, Illinois, Bethany Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan, and United Reformed Church in Somerville, New Jersey. For the past decade he has served as director of supervised ministry and professor of practical theology at New Brunswick Theological Seminary.

WHEREAS Mark’s deep and pastoral commitment to the formation of his students for congregational service and leadership has served as an example to his colleagues and the seminary community; his service in many RCA committees, commissions, and task forces has brought with it a rare sense of practical and theological integrity; his faithful ministry as a teacher of the church has brought honor to the title General Synod professor of theology; and his sensitive ear and heart have taught all who have served with him how to be a caring and wise friend and colleague;

BE IT RESOLVED that the two hundred and second General Synod, on behalf of the Reformed Church in America, expresses to Mark Kraai its gratitude, admiration, and affection and offers its prayers for many years of health and joy in continuing service to Christ and his church. (ADOPTED)

R-75
To declare the Rev. Dr. Mark Kraai professor emeritus of the General Synod. (ADOPTED)

Remarks to the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America
Rev. Dr. Mark A. Kraai
General Synod Professor of Theology Emeritus

Beware of parents who pray.

Mom and Dad—that’s Harold and Henrietta Kraai to those of you who were not in the family—were a bit older when I was born. Mom was 42; Dad was 46. Both were Hope College graduates, although they didn’t meet in college. Mom, when she graduated from Hope with a degree in French, went to the Winnebago Indian Reservation in Nebraska. We joked that she was teaching the Native Americans to speak French. Dad, after he graduated from Hope, taught at Northwestern Academy in Orange City, Iowa. As I understand the story, they met at my Uncle Wilbert and Aunt Helene’s wedding. Aunt Helene and Mom worked together at the Winnebago Indian Reservation. Dad knew Uncle Wilbert. When they drove the two newlyweds back to their honeymoon hideaway in Winnebago, Mom and Dad fell in love. They were married in 1931 at the height (or depth, I suppose) of the Depression. My oldest brother, Dayton, was born in 1932 and, because the Depression affected even academia, my dad lost his job at the academy. They moved to Morrison, Illinois, where
Dad worked in a commercial laundry and Mom took care of my brother and their home.

While there, the pastor of their local Reformed church told them that the Dulce Indian Reservation needed someone to work in the school’s laundry. Dulce ran a boarding school for children at that time. I never heard Mom and Dad talking about it as a call from God, which it was. And I never heard how they made the decision, but they went. They did whatever needed to be done at the mission and, while there, my brothers John and LeRoy were born. Mom and Dad also fell in love with Dulce: the mountains, the land, but most importantly, the people. Dad was convinced that he would retire there.

After about three or four years, when the kids were getting into their school years, they moved back to Morrison, but when Dulce couldn’t find anyone to replace them, they went back for another four years. Who knows what it was. It may have been the cold New Mexico January. I trust it was their own delight in each other, but in the spring of 1948, my mother found she was pregnant with me. Finally, with the family moving steadily to six people, they moved from Dulce to Orange City, Iowa. Notice here, I was not the result of meticulous family planning. I showed up on the scene as the family’s surprise. Pay attention to that. That’s important.

And, beware of parents who pray.

Now, fast-forward to the day I graduated from seminary, more years ago than I would like to admit. During the post-graduation party, my father took me aside, put his hand on my shoulder, and said to me, “Your mother and I were praying that one of our sons would become a minister.” That’s me. I had thought it was my idea, although even then, I wasn’t all that excited about it. Or I thought I was answering God’s call, which I certainly was. I just never thought that call was orchestrated by my parents’ prayers. Also, notice it’s after I graduated from seminary. Notice, I’m the surprise.

Which simply says to me, beware of parents who pray.

I share this story first because you need to hear a small part of the story of Harold and Henrietta Kraai. They are two of the deeply committed, faith filled people who follow Jesus Christ without recognition or fanfare. They raised sons of faith. My brother Dayton has been a member first of the Reformed Church and then of the St. John’s Evangelical Lutheran Church all his life. My brother John has been an active member of the Baptist Church ever since he discovered a different way in his post-college education in Ames, Iowa. My brother Lee served as a short-term missionary teaching math in a girls’ school in Baghdad from 1964 to 1967. War brought him home early. Since then, he has been an elder in the Reformed Church, the Presbyterian Church, and the Covenant Church.

When I was pastoring a congregation in Kalamazoo, Michigan, I ran into Norwood K. Reck, the pastor of my home church when I was a teenager. He’d been the first to urge me to become a minister. He told me that when he was a pastor in Orange City, whenever he had a difficult call to make, he’d call my dad to go with him. He knew my dad had a pastoral heart and that he could trust my dad.

Mom and Dad had a retirement job. Dad had worked construction all the time that I was around. He didn’t have a pension and figured he’d have to work for most of the rest of his life. However, when he turned 65, the Pioneer Home—the local retirement home in Orange City—invited them to become the steward and matron. They sold the house out from under me—I was in college at the time—and moved into two rooms at the Pioneer Home, managing it. That also meant, by the way, that when I came home from college for the summer, I lived in a retirement home. Years later, I talked with Lawrence Van Wyke, my choir director when I was in Northwestern College. His mother was a resident of the Pioneer
Home. He said that she had told him that living in the Pioneer Home was good, but since
the Kraaïs had come, it was almost like heaven. And that’s what they did, whether they
knew it or not. Somehow, they tried to help folks around them sense a little bit of heaven.

And they prayed. I can remember coming home on a Saturday evening, after whatever
teenagers in Orange City were likely to do. To get to my room, I had to walk past my par-
ents’ bedroom. There I’d see them both, one on one side of the bed, the other on the other,
on their knees praying. I suspected that they were praying for me, at least some—perhaps
praying that I’d get home safely. I didn’t expect them to be praying me into seminary. But
they were. And I did.

Beware of parents who pray.

I share this story with you because I am who I am because of the grace of God and the
prayers of my father and mother. If you want to hear my story, talk to me. I’d be happy to
bend your ear. But Mom and Dad have both died. They can’t tell you their story. They
probably wouldn’t if they could. That wasn’t their way. But their story deserves to be
heard. Now you’ve heard it. I pray that now you can also give thanks to God for them.

And I hope that you, too, will pray. It may cost you something. My sense is that Mom and
Dad got more than they bargained for. But they also got what they prayed for. May it be so
for us as well.

For my part, I give thanks to the people of the churches I served: to those of Fellowship
Reformed Church of Lombard, Illinois, the good folks of Bethany Reformed Church in
Kalamazoo, Michigan, and the faithful folks of the United Reformed Church of
Somerville, New Jersey. It is an incredible honor to be invited into people’s lives as their
pastor. It is a miracle that God uses us humans to share that divine love with those God
calls into the church.

I give thanks to the people of New Brunswick Theological Seminary, my colleagues on the
faculty and the administration, including my friend and president Gregg Mast, the board,
and the students with whom I learned as much as taught.

And I give thanks to you who represent the Reformed Church in America for the solid rock
upon which the Holy Spirit has chosen to build my life and upon which God builds Christ’s
church. Together we are ambassadors for Christ. Together we work as the Spirit unfolds the
kingdom in all God’s glory. Together we learn more and more what it means to be God’s peo-
ple together. And, if we can take our cue from those who are faithful around us, we pray. May
it always be so, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**Report of Western Theological Seminary**

While programs and methods have kept pace with the changing needs of the church, the
primary ministry of Western Theological Seminary (WTS) has remained constant since its
establishment by the General Synod in 1866: to prepare leaders for the congregations of
the Reformed Church in America.

The following report to the 2008 General Synod contains two sections. The first provides
a brief update on the ministry of the seminary during the past year. The second poses three
significant questions pertaining to the role of the seminary as it seeks to serve the present
and future needs of the congregations of the denomination.
UPDATE ON THE MINISTRY OF WESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Enrollment
Overall enrollment has continued to remain strong following a decade of steady growth. During the 2007-2008 academic year a total of 230 students were enrolled, the majority of whom were candidates for the master of divinity degree, while the remaining students were enrolled in the master of theology and doctor of ministry programs. It will remain a continuing challenge for WTS director of admissions Mark Poppen to attract and retain qualified and dedicated students for degree programs.

Financial Support
The annual budget has kept pace with the growth in enrollment and programs since the early 1990s. The budget for the 2007-2008 academic year exceeded $6 million. In an effort to keep tuition from spiraling out of control, the advancement office, led by vice president of advancement and communications Ken Neevel, has sought increased support from individuals, congregations, and corporations. While WTS is exceedingly grateful for the generosity of its supporters, reaching budget goals will be daunting as the institution serves the church during the coming years.

Distance Learning Master of Divinity Program
In May 2008, the first cohort of Western’s distance learning master of divinity program will graduate during commencement exercises. Established as a response to the expressed needs of the church for a delivery system of theological education which would not require students to relocate to West Michigan, the distance learning program has grown to more than sixty students who receive instruction over the Internet and who attend two two-week face-to-face intensive educational experiences during each academic year. This creative hybrid distance learning program, led by director Dr. Meri MacLeod, has been exceedingly well received by its students. Moreover, the faculty who teach in this program have creatively adjusted to unique pedagogical and technological demands. All those involved are to be commended for their flexibility and dedication to this remarkable program, which has become a model for other theological schools.

Certificate for Urban Ministry Program
Under the leadership of professor Cynthia Holder Rich, a certificate program for urban pastoral ministry was established two years ago. Today twenty-three students, most of whom are leaders of African-American congregations, are enrolled in this program. Western has become the seminary of a growing and grateful new constituency. Several of the certificate students have enrolled in the master of divinity program.

Racial and Ethnic Diversity Initiatives
During the 2007-2008 academic year, Western has been dedicated to increasing the number of students, faculty, and staff who are members of racial and ethnic minorities. Aware that the church of the twenty-first century must prepare leaders from every segment of society to proclaim and live out the gospel of Jesus Christ, the WTS board of trustees has approved a fundraising effort which will increase the number of scholarships for racial and ethnic students as well as enhance the efforts of the seminary to attract racial and ethnic faculty. In addition, during the past year the seminary community has focused extensively on the cultural and institutional issues which hinder it as it seeks to make significant changes.

The One-Three-Five Initiative
A few years ago, in cooperation with leaders of the denomination, the seminary instituted a program in which graduates are invited to a reunion with members of their class after one year, three years, and five years of ministry. Studies have indicated that these reunion programs provide great support, encouragement, and learning for recently graduated pastors.
Indeed, such programs help to lower the rate of pastoral burnout. In 2008, WTS will host its fourth One-Three-Five Program, in which students become reacquainted and refreshed as they worship together and discuss the issues they face in ministry.

The Ralph and Cheryl Schregardus Friendship House
In September 2008, Western formally dedicated the Ralph and Cheryl Schregardus Friendship House on the corner of campus at Thirteenth Street and College Avenue. The Friendship House is an innovative housing project in which a high-functioning cognitively impaired young person is joined by three seminar students in an apartment unit. Seminar students provide friendship and support and learn about the special needs and unique blessings of a special segment of the population. The first year of this unique arrangement has gone extremely well and is providing a model for other seminaries and colleges.

Leadership Transition
In June 2008, the Rev. Dr. Dennis Voskuil will complete his presidency at Western Theological Seminary. Aware of the challenges that face the church and the seminary, President Voskuil is grateful for the outstanding service of faculty, staff, and trustees during an exciting time in the life of the seminary. He will continue to serve the seminary as the Marvin and Jerene DeWitt Professor of Church History.

The Board of Trustees of Western Theological Seminary wishes to thank Dennis publicly for the servant leadership that he has given to the seminary and the church for the past fourteen years. His concern for the RCA, his strong connections with congregations, his encouragement to the seminary’s faculty and staff, and his passion for student spiritual and vocational development have proven to provide the church with strong leaders for the future. The board thanks God for Dennis and Betty and prays for God’s continuing blessings as they begin a new phase in their lives and ministry.

The board of trustees has appointed the Rev. Dr. Timothy Brown to be the eleventh president of the seminary. With proven leadership in the church, he will lead the seminary with integrity and skill. The board of trustees asks for the church’s prayers as it moves forward with the seminary’s mission to prepare leaders for the church and world.

R-76
To adopt the following resolution:

WHEREAS the Rev. Dr. Dennis Voskuil has served as president of Western Theological Seminary during a period of dynamic growth, health, spiritual vitality, renewal, and effective ministry from 1994 to 2008, and

WHEREAS during his leadership, the master of divinity program tripled in size; the faculty grew by one-third; the endowment almost quadrupled in size; student scholarships tripled; and beautiful new buildings were built, and

WHEREAS during his presidency, innovative new programs were established, including a revised and missionally focused M.Div. curriculum, a distance learning M.Div. program, a new center for the church’s learning, a dual-track master of divinity/master of social work program, and a certificate in urban pastoral ministry program, and

WHEREAS during his time as president, he has nurtured a deep
sense of community, mutual care, compassion, and love—an environment that has helped to transform the 569 people who have graduated from Western Seminary during his presidency, deepening their capacity to lead the church in mission, and

WHEREAS he has traveled tirelessly and extensively, spending more weekends away from home than in Holland, laboring to keep the seminary close to the church and the church close to the seminary, and

WHEREAS he and his wife, Betty, have been gracious hosts to every student who has come through the seminary during their time there, and

WHEREAS he is a devoted and passionate teacher, a relentless encourager of others, a selfless supporter of the gifts of others, and a pretty good basketball player,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the two hundred and second General Synod, meeting in June 2008 in Holland, Michigan, sincerely and wholeheartedly offers its thanks to God for the ministry of the Rev. Dr. Dennis Voskuil as president of Western Theological Seminary, and prays that God will richly and abundantly bless his continuing ministry as he returns to full-time teaching at Western Theological Seminary. (ADOPTED)

Remarks to the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America
Rev. Dr. Dennis Voskuil
Past President of Western Theological Seminary

An Expression of Gratitude

Fourteen years ago, at Central College in Pella, Iowa, I was introduced to General Synod as the tenth president of Western Theological Seminary. I confess now that I accepted this daunting call with considerable anxiety and reluctance. To be perfectly honest, during those early months of the presidency, I thought often, like Jonah, of fleeing to Tarshish—or back to the religion department at Hope College.

Today, I have no doubts that I had been called by God through the church to lead Western Theological Seminary. In fact, I now count it an unspeakable privilege to have served during a time of enormous challenge and change for the church.

Through it all, Western has sought to be faithful to its purpose of “preparing Christians called by God to lead the church in mission.” In fact, it is this missional understanding of the church which has propelled the seminary’s growth, dictated curriculum revisions, and stimulated the distance learning master of divinity degree program, the intercultural immersion program, the dual track master of divinity—master of social work program, the commissioned pastor distance learning courses, a revamped continuing education program, and initiatives around racial and ethnic leadership training.

It has been a privilege to serve alongside dedicated faculty, devoted staff, and a strong and visionary board of trustees, and to be blessed by wonderful students, many of whom are here as delegates.
This evening, on behalf of the entire Western Seminary family, I express heartfelt gratitude for the support which you have given to Western’s ministry. Over the years I have been privileged to visit and worship with hundreds of congregations and engage thousands of persons throughout the Reformed Church in America—congregations and individuals who are committed to the transformative gospel of Jesus Christ.

I love you. I love the Reformed Church in America, and I am optimistic about the RCA’s future as a denomination devoted to Reformed theology and polity—because I trust in the transformative power of God.

Thank you, friends, for your financial support. Thank you for encouraging students to consider theological seminary training, and thank you, most of all, for your prayers on behalf of Western’s ministry. Your prayers have sustained the seminary in God’s grace.

And now I am delighted to introduce the next president of Western Theological Seminary, my dear friend and colleague, Dr. Timothy Brown. An outstanding pastor and distinguished professor, Tim has served as the Henry Bast Professor of Preaching for the last thirteen years.

Tim and I will literally be trading offices this month. As he moves into the president’s office, I will be moving into his faculty office and will once again resume full-time teaching responsibilities. He will be my president and continue to be my friend!

Please welcome the eleventh president of Western Theological Seminary, Dr. Timothy Brown.

Petitions for an Alternative Means for Meeting the Biblical Languages Requirement for the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry

The Board of Trustees of Western Theological Seminary approved the petition from Holland Classis for an alternate means of meeting the biblical languages requirement of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry for Ryan Landt and permits substitution of upper level biblical courses to fulfill the academic requirements for the M.Div. degree.

The Board of Trustees of Western Theological Seminary approved the petition from North Grand Rapids Classis for an alternate means of meeting the Hebrew portion of the biblical languages requirement of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry for Mark Milkamp and permits substitution of upper level biblical courses to fulfill the academic requirements for the M.Div. degree.

Petitions for Substitution of a Period of Supervised Ministry for a Portion of the Twenty-Four Month Requirement of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry

The Board of Trustees of Western Theological Seminary approved the petition of the Classis of Holland to substitute an eight-month period of supervised ministry for part of the twenty-four month requirement of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry for Anna Bogertman.

The Board of Trustees of Western Theological Seminary approved the petition of the Classis of Holland to substitute a four-month period of supervised ministry for part of the twenty-four month requirement of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry for Nicholas E. Knebl.
Report of the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency

General Synod exercises oversight of ministerial formation and the standards for preparation for ministry through the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency (MFCA).

The Ministerial Formation Certification 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 minister of Word and sacrament.

It is also the intent of the Ministerial Formation Certification 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.

The Ministerial Formation Certification Agency board of trustees adopted a new mission statement:

The Ministerial Formation Certification Agency is to strengthen the ministry of Word and sacrament in the RCA by overseeing and awarding the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry to RCA candidates graduating from non-RCA seminaries or pursuing an approved alternate route.

The MFCA will accomplish this mission by:

- Ensuring that the RCA standards for preparation for ministry are upheld in the oversight of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry and by periodically reviewing the standards and the process by which they are applied.
- Evaluating progress of candidates and confirming their continuation in the process through the Reformed Candidates Supervision and Care (RCSC) and Approved Alternate Route (AAR) committees.
- Providing graduate level courses designed to meet the standards for the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry.
- Collaborating with and providing counsel to congregations and classes in the care and nurture of candidates for the ministry who are seeking the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry through the MFCA.
- Interpreting and advocating for the work of the MFCA to the larger church.

Strategic Planning

The strategic plan developed over the last three years has resulted in the decision to separate the key roles of the agency between coordinating functions and overseeing the programs resulting in the awarding of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry. The MFCA recommended new bylaws and a name change to accomplish this separation. These changes were adopted at the 2007 General Synod. The key roles of the agency will be:

To oversee and award the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry for Reformed Church in America master of divinity candidates enrolled at non-RCA seminaries.

To provide a flexible alternate route that culminates in ordination to the office of min-
ister of Word and sacrament for those who are gifted for ministry but not able to meet the requirements through a master of divinity degree.

To consult with and provide counsel to congregations, classes, and regional synods in the care and nurture of candidates for the Office of Minister of Word and Sacrament for whom the MFCA is the agent.

Board Members

The new definition and role of the agency resulted in a new configuration for the board. The board consists of nine members as opposed to twelve in its previous configuration; five of the nine will be drawn from the certification committees. The board will continue to be the agent awarding the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry to candidates completing the requirements of the AAR and RCSC programs.

The current board members for the MFCA are Ms. Anne Bawinkel, Rev. Dr. James Brownson, Rev. Ann Callender, Ms. Marjorie Giles, Rev. Renee House, Dr. Bradley Lewis, Rev. Dr. Andres Serrano, Mr. Barton Strong, and Rev. David Theonugraha.

Board Concerns Regarding the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry

Recently, the MFCA Board of Trustees has learned of several situations where candidates under care of the MFCA or applicants to the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry process have opted out of the RCA and sought ordination with other churches or organizations. But later some of these same individuals were being taken in by transfer as ordained ministers by one RCA classis or another, without careful review of the ordination credentials of these candidates, or their theological preparedness to serve as RCA ministers of Word and sacrament. These actions are a concern to the MFCA Board of Trustees because they impact the integrity of the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry process and compromise the standards for preparation established by the General Synod.

The MFCA Board of Trustees, along with the seminary boards, is responsible to the General Synod to do its part to help maintain the integrity of the Office of Minister of Word and Sacrament by upholding and implementing the General Synod’s standards on preparation for ordained ministry. Therefore, the board brings this concern to the General Synod and requests that the synod chart a course of action through which to respond, including a review of chapter 3, part II, article 11 in the *Book of Church Order* (*BCO*) to determine whether changes might be needed. The board would also appreciate if the Commission on Church Order would provide guidelines and illustrations of how to apply article 11 in practice. In the past, individuals such as William H.S. Demarest and Allan Janssen have served the denomination well by providing commentary and explanatory notes on the *BCO*. Currently no such commentary is available to guide classes in receiving ministers and licensed candidates from other denominations.

Furthermore, the MFCA board believes these specific cases are part of a larger picture. Although the General Synod in 2003 refused to attach a numerical target to planting new churches when it adopted the ten-year goal, it directed the GSC to formulate “measurable objectives” for meeting the ten-year goal (*MGS 2003*, R-9 substitute, p. 66). In response, the GSC reported in 2005 that it had adopted a numerical target of starting four hundred churches by December 2013 as part of the ten-year goal (*MGS 2005*, p. 266). Currently, five years into the ten-year goal, almost one hundred churches have been started. This leaves more than three hundred new churches to be started in the next five years as part of an accelerating multiplication process of church planting. The MFCA board is also aware that there are several RCA churches, such as Emmanuel Reformed Church in Paramount
where the board met in February, where independent and aggressive goals inflate the numbers further.

The MFCA board can only conclude that the present structures for leadership preparation in the RCA will be sorely pressed to produce the large number of new church planters needed over the next five years. Classes will face increasing pressure to lower standards of preparation and education for new leaders simply to meet these numerical targets within this timeframe. The board humbly recommends that a conversation about the relationship of the numerical goals within Our Call that have been set by the GSC and the candidate care and oversight process be included in the larger conversation about what it means to be missional and Reformed. The MFCA board believes that there must be fresh ways to move beyond the lose-lose choice of either sacrificing the quality of leadership formation or abandoning the goal of starting new churches.

**Distance Courses**

This past year saw the MFCA add a distance course. The course, offered exclusively online, was “RCA History and Mission (DL).” It was taught by the Rev. Dr. Daniel Meeter; Cornelis Kors supported the first-time effort. Fourteen individuals enrolled for “RCA History and Mission (DL).”

**Courses in Spanish**

For the third year the MFCA has offered an intensive course taught in Spanish at the Reformed Theological Studies Centre in Paramount, California. The course offered this year was “RCA History, Missions, and Polity,” and the instructor was the Rev. Jhonny Alicia-Báez. There were fourteen students in the class, mostly commissioned pastor candidates aspiring to seek ordination by means of the Approved Alternate Route (AAR).

**Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) and New Offerings**

The MFCA Board of Trustees has continued to include the requirement of one basic unit of CPE in order to award the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry. This past February the response was extremely positive with the board giving its full support for the academic requirement for CPE, as well as affirming the role it has played in forming the identity of its candidates. AAR and RCSC candidates consistently rate the summer intensives and CPE as the most beneficial aspects of the MFCA process.

The MFCA board has responded more intentionally to requests for alternatives for those who simply cannot access a unit of CPE by creating, for the first time, a special program called “Pastor as Person.” This seminar was offered online for thirteen weeks and included a one-week residential experience. The seminar was taught by the Rev. Dr. Jaco Hamman of Western Theological Seminary and had sixteen people participate in the spring of 2008. Plans are now being developed for assessing how the seminar did in meeting the goals established for Clinical Pastoral Education.

Despite the alternatives being offered, the board continues to be challenged on the CPE requirement. The value of CPE is not in question, but the CPE requirement difference between the MFCA and the two RCA seminaries is being challenged. The MFCA requires all of its candidates to complete one unit of CPE, while the two RCA seminaries, New Brunswick Theological Seminary and Western Theological Seminary, do not require it.

Given that the MFCA is accountable to the General Synod, the board decided that it would place the matter of the CPE requirement before the General Synod with the following recommendation:
The advice of the Leadership Advisory Forum was to not adopt the recommendation:

R-77
To affirm the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency requirement of one unit of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE), or an appropriate equivalent, in order to award the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry. (NOT ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. This action could set an inappropriate precedent allowing for a challenge to the interpretation and implementation of the General Synod–approved Standards of Fitness for Ministry established by any of the three Reformed Church in America theological agents.
2. The Ministerial Formation Certification Agency has the delegated authority to interpret, establish, and maintain the General Synod approved Standards of Fitness for Ministry for their area of responsibility.
3. The Board of Trustees of the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency is commended for establishing and maintaining high standards such as Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) or its equivalent.

Certificates of Fitness Awarded

The board of trustees awarded fifteen Certificates of Fitness for Ministry, thirteen through the RCSC process and two through the AAR process.

Reformed Candidates Supervision and Care

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Classis</th>
<th>Seminary</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behan, Ricky Lee</td>
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<td>Billings, John Todd</td>
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Approved Alternate Route

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<td>Fyffe, Jason Jeremiah</td>
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<tr>
<td>Schouten, Luke Aaron</td>
<td>Classis of Wisconsin</td>
<td>Sioux Falls</td>
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Alternate Means

The following requests for alternate means were considered by the certification committees and subsequently acted on by the MFCA Board of Trustees:
1. *Hebrew language*: The board approved a request from the Classis of New York on behalf of Susan Sgarlatt to recognize an alternate means for the Hebrew language (*BCO* 1.II.9.3). The committee identified four courses in Old Testament and Judaism in Ms. Sgarlatt's program at Union Seminary that substantiate requisite skills and knowledge for work with Old Testament texts and their nuances.

2. *Reduction in twenty-four month requirement*: The board approved a request from the Classis of Brooklyn on behalf of Jessica Bratt to substitute a period of time to make up any deficiency of the twenty-four months of being in the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry process (*BCO* 1.II.8.3). Ms. Bratt performed eighteen months of supervised ministry at Old First Church in Brooklyn while she was a student at Princeton Theological Seminary; the committee recognized this as meeting the requirement.

3. *Reduction in twenty-four month requirement*: The board approved a request from the Classis of East Sioux on behalf of Bob Holtrop to substitute a period of time to make up any deficiency of the twenty-four months of being in the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry process (*BCO* 1.II.8.3). Mr. Holtrop completed twelve months of supervised ministry at First Reformed Church of Sibley, Iowa, while a student at Sioux Falls Seminary; the committee recognized this as meeting the requirement.

4. *Reduction in twenty-four month requirement*: The board postponed a request from the Classis of Queens on behalf of Bryan Yi to substitute a period of time to make up any deficiency of the twenty-four months of being in the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry process (*BCO* 1.II.8.3). The committee did not want to make a decision at this time since it was apparent that Mr. Yi, in order to complete his program, will most likely be in the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry process longer than twenty-four months and thus will not require such a reduction. The committee agreed that if circumstances change, it will evaluate previous RCA service in a positive manner and give immediate attention to a request to reduce the required time.

5. *The M.Div. equivalency*: The board approved a request from the Classis of Southwest on behalf of Scott Kooiman to recognize an alternate means for the master of divinity (M.Div.) degree (*BCO* 1.II.9.3). The committee identified the courses completed in Mr. Kooiman’s program at Fuller Theological Seminary as being the same as those in the M.Div. degree, including the biblical languages. The requirements not listed (Christian education, pastoral care, and evangelism), were adequately supported by the classis as having been met by various experiences and studies.

**Statistical Program Reports**

The following is meant to provide a brief overview of the program and its candidates:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regional Distribution of Registered MFCA Candidates (AAR and RCSC)</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albany</td>
<td>3 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>10 percent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Far West</td>
<td>22 percent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Great Lakes</td>
<td>10 percent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heartland</td>
<td>25 percent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mid-America</td>
<td>11 percent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mid-Atlantics</td>
<td>2 percent</td>
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<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>17 percent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Age Distribution of RCSC Candidates
Ages 20 to 30  38 percent
Ages 31 to 40  27 percent
Ages 41 to 50  19 percent
Ages 51 to 60  15 percent
Ages 61 and up  1 percent

Average Candidate Ages
AAR program  48 years
RCSC program  36 years

RCSC Seminaries: Enrollment Concentrations
Fuller (Pasadena)  13
Fuller Satellite  4
Sioux Falls Seminary (formerly North America Baptist Seminary)  9
Princeton  5
TEDS  5
Bethel (Minnesota)  5
Denver  4
Union (New York)  3
Yale Divinity  2

Changes to the Bylaws

At General Synod 2007 in Pella, Iowa, the bylaws for the newly constituted Ministerial Formation Certification Agency were approved on an interim basis (MGS 2007, R-58, pp. 218-224). The understanding was that the MFCA board would present final changes to the bylaws to the General Synod in order to make them more permanent and no longer be considered “interim.” Although the board predicts there will be minimal changes recommended, it decided to wait on the results of a study on governance models before submitting more permanent bylaws. It will continue to use the existing interim bylaws approved by the 2007 General Synod until it is ready to submit final revisions to the General Synod for adoption.

Report of Central College

Ninety-two years ago the Reformed Church in America assumed denominational support of Central College in Pella, Iowa. Central is a residential liberal arts college dedicated to helping students discover and develop their greatest potential. Guided by its ecumenical Christian tradition, the college community engages in vigorous, open inquiry in pursuit of academic excellence. Central’s covenantal relationship with the RCA has grown into a mutually beneficial and meaningful bond. Central is privileged to share this annual report with the General Synod of the RCA.

Letter from Pastoral Board

We are ministers in the Reformed Church in America and members of the Central College Board of Trustees. We know Central College. We value the strong educational foundation that Central provides its graduates. Students have the opportunity to grow in knowledge, broaden horizons, and deepen their faith through experiences at Central.

Central graduates are leaders in business, education, and ministry. They are the hope for
our future. It is reassuring to know that Central is teaching these future leaders about service and stewardship, as well as providing academic excellence in specific major areas.

We believe in the quality of a Central College education and celebrate Central’s covenant with the Reformed Church in America.

Blessings,

Kevin Korver, pastor, Third Reformed Church, Pella, Iowa
Sophie Mathonnet-VanderWell, pastor, Second Reformed Church, Pella, Iowa
Charles Morris, pastor, Fort Washington Collegiate Church, New York, New York
John Schmidt, pastor, Second Reformed Church, Zeeland, Michigan

RCA Initiatives

At the 2004 General Synod there was a recommendation (MGS 2004, R-19, p. 119) passed to affirm the three RCA colleges in their mission and ministry, to encourage every RCA congregation to regularly pray for and support the colleges with students and financial support, and to review the historic covenant between the colleges and the RCA. With the recommendation came this charge—the General Synod Council, in dialogue with the colleges, should explore specific means to strengthen the relationship between the RCA and the colleges.

As a result of annual meetings held on the college campuses and the RCA offices in Grand Rapids in support of R-19, Central has committed to the following to strengthen its relationship with the RCA:

- Provide a $5,000 annual RCA Classis Scholarship to one freshman student in each of the forty-five RCA classes to attend Central. Students need to be recommended by their pastors, demonstrate need, and be a member of the RCA. The scholarships are renewable for up to four years. For an application visit www.central.edu/go/rca.
- The annual RCA Heritage Award of $1,500 to $2,100 is given to students of the RCA, children of alumni, or students with a sibling currently attending Central.
- Kristin Sullivan ’03 was hired as coordinator of RCA relations. She works closely with congregations and pastors to increase RCA enrollment, to encourage prayer support from individual churches, and to develop a program of more intentional interaction.
- “Mission: Central,” a publication which details the Christian environment at Central, was created to be given to congregations, pastors, and prospective students. To receive one send your name and address to sullivank@central.edu.
- Keep up to date with ministry offerings at Central (learn more at www.central.edu/faith).
- Central hosted the bi-annual meeting of the Central Iowa Classis in conjunction with the annual Staley Lecture. Members of classis were invited to meet, dine, conduct business, and attend the lecture given by Shane Claiborne of The Simple Way.
- Deep & Wide, an ecumenical youth event to promote unity in Pella, has occurred on three occasions this year with support from Central College and Campus Ministries. This promises to be a lasting and wonderful event for the community and has been driven by Andrea Taylor, youth pastor at Second Reformed Church in Pella.

Admission and Enrollment

Freshman enrollment for the 2007 fall semester continued to show strength in number and academic prowess. At the start of classes, there were 424 new freshmen, which was the eighth time in ten years Central has had an incoming class totaling over 400. Total enroll-
ment was 1,656. The RCA affiliated student population has increased slightly to 11 percent. An effort from the admission office to recruit in our out-of-state markets should yield a higher number of RCA students in conjunction with recruiting efforts of the coordinator of RCA relations and the RCA Classis Scholarship.

In February of each year, the college hosts Scholar Days, where top students and their families are invited to campus and students compete for Central’s most prestigious scholarships. This year Central hosted 470 students who scored a minimum of 25 on the ACT (1120 on the SAT), earned a 3.5 cumulative grade point average, and were ranked in the top 20 percent at their high schools.

Faculty

During the 2007-2008 academic year, Central faculty members demonstrated extraordinary achievements in teaching and scholarship. Professional activities included the publishing of several books and many articles in professional journals. In addition faculty members presented at regional and national workshops, were featured artists at exhibits and concerts, and were recognized by public leaders and national organizations for contributions to education and humankind. Below are examples:


The Supreme Court of Iowa appointed Chia Ning (history) to the Attorney Disciplinary Board as one of two lay members or one of eight members in the current board. Chia Ning is expected to bring the lay perspective, intellectual thought, voice of minority groups, and women’s point of view to the Iowa law practice.

Valerie Van Kooten (English) completed work on a couple’s devotional Bible for Zondervan Publishing through *Christianity Today*. She was one of ten writers across North America working on the project. The Bible is scheduled to be released in April 2008.

Russ Benedict (biology) is spearheading a project to explore using diverse plantings of prairie vegetation to provide biomass for energy production while simultaneously creating habitat for prairie plants and animals, many of whom are declining in numbers. Russ is collaborating with scientists at two other private colleges in Georgia and Vermont who are planning related research. This initiative is part of Central’s goal to be responsible stewards of the earth’s environment.

Spiritual Life

Spiritual life is an integral part of the overall educational environment at Central. Under the capable leadership of RCA minister of Word and sacrament Joe Brummel, Catholic Campus Services Ministries coordinator Don Efinger, and Worship/Ministry Team leader Matt Ploeger, campus ministries participation among students continues to grow. Below are a few of the many activities within the Christian community that have occurred this year:

• “The Calm” is an energetic, spirit-led worship weekly calling hundreds of students to a more dynamic life of faith and witness. Held on Sunday night, it often fills the chapel to its capacity.
• A group of sixty-one students and campus ministries staff traveled to Reynosa, Mexico, over Christmas and spring breaks, where they built homes for poverty-stricken people, led Bible schools at an orphanage and churches, and delivered forty boxes of shoes and blankets to shelters. Several Central elementary education students also enjoyed teaching at a Christian school while in Reynosa this year. Reynosa is an area of repeat ministry for Central students with the purpose of continually building a community.

• Campus ministries staff and students lead campus community worship every Tuesday morning. Recent themes have been “Broken and Beautiful,” “Is God Green?,” “Broken and Forgotten,” and “Everyone Has a Story.” Guests have included Jay Harsevoort of RCA Global Mission; Carolyn and Dick Otterness, RCA missionaries serving in Budapest; Joel Brummel, Central College chaplain; Greg Mast, New Brunswick Theological Seminary president; and local folk sharing their stories. These worship services have been a wonderful time of ministry and sharing and have been connecting us in ways that only God can imagine.

• In May 2008 ten students with faculty and staff will participate in a mission trip to Malawi, Africa. Students will work with children at an AIDS orphanage in the village of Ntcheu through Save Orphans Ministries; they also will build a kitchen for the orphanage.

• Lenten breakfasts were held in conjunction with Second Reformed Church of Pella.

• Catholic Campus Ministries continues a Sunday evening mass for college students at the local Catholic parish. Average attendance has been between 100-150 students.

• The Campus Ministries Justice Team has spent their efforts serving the homeless in Pella, Marshalltown, Polk County, and Ottumwa, Iowa.

Students Doing Interesting Things

“Students Doing Interesting Things,” a feature from campus newsletter CampusTown, tells of ways Central students respond to the mission of educating the whole person:

• In an effort to reach out to others and care for the environment, Central’s Campus Ministries Justice Team volunteered their time and efforts to help with the deconstruction of the married student housing apartments on campus. Students removed materials from the apartment building with the hopes of salvaging some of the better quality materials to donate to charity. The team removed doors, exterior light fixtures, and thirty windows. They saved some of the materials for a future mission trip to Reynosa, Mexico, and donated others to the Habitat for Humanity ReStore in Des Moines, where they will be resold to fund other Habitat projects. The team also collected almost five hundred pounds of copper pipe and aluminum sheeting that will be recycled for compensation to be used to help fund a mission trip to Malawi, Africa, in May.

• Senior Brooke Nederhoff of Grundy Center was accepted into the Wells Fargo Technology Information Group Leadership Development Program. Nederhoff was one of ten students nationwide to be given a position within the program.

• Senior Lindsay Kelderhouse, a chemistry major from Island Lake, Illinois, was awarded $1,500 for a presentation she gave during the Rubber Division of the American Chemical Society’s fourth annual student colloquium at the fall 172nd Technical Meeting and Rubber Expo at the Cleveland Convention Center in Cleveland, Ohio. The Rubber Division is a professional organization that provides educational programs, technical resources, and other services for people associated with rubber and affiliated industries.

• Central College held its first trash audit October 9. Approximately twenty-five environmental studies students and volunteers rummaged through fifteen hundred pounds of trash. All of the recyclable materials were removed and sorted into respective containers. There was about 1,140 pounds of actual rubbish and about 370
pounds of recyclables, which means about 25 percent of the trash was actually recyclable.

Service Learning
One of Central College’s stated goals is to prepare students for all aspects of life beyond college, including work, service, and leadership within local, national, and international communities (Central Strategic Plan). The college addresses this goal through service learning, which connects meaningful service with academic goals. Partnerships between the college and community agencies provide opportunities for students to reinforce classroom skills and knowledge while they engage in work that benefits the common good.

The Program for Learning Awareness of Cultures in Experiential Settings (PLACES) develops and sustains quality partnerships with approximately 40 community agencies and grassroots organizations throughout Central Iowa. Students engage in reciprocal learning experiences that provide opportunities for interaction with diverse populations.

Service Day
Central College is host to an annual service day whereby the entire campus community participates in helping community partners both near and far. Last year service day included over one thousand participants helping at more than seventy sites. This included more than 800 students, contributing 4,614 hours, and approximately 200 faculty and staff, contributing 1,104 hours. This year’s service day promises to exceed last year’s contributions and community building and also hopes to include our alumni in select cities in Iowa and around the nation.

The Campaign for Central

The Campaign for Central, Central’s largest ever capital campaign, has surpassed the $72 million mark. The total campaign goal of a minimum of $86 million includes the following projects: construction of an education and psychology classroom building ($12 million), installation of a new track and field at the Ron and Joyce Schipper Stadium ($2.5 million), increasing the Central Fund ($9 million), and increasing the permanent endowment ($12.5 million). Central College broke ground on its new Education & Psychology Building on April 18. This will be Central’s third LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified building to date. The plan is to achieve the first Platinum LEED certified building in the state of Iowa.

Conclusion

Central College is proud of our covenant with the Reformed Church in America to “infuse and deepen a superior education in the liberal arts with a mature understanding of the sources and resources of the Christian heritage, maintaining a friendly appreciation for the Reformed tradition and its implications for faith and learning.” As we strive to teach our future leaders to leave Central empowered to make an impact on this world, we continue to enlist the support of our community. The prayers, gifts, and support of the individual churches of the Reformed Church in America do not just enable us in part to uphold this covenant; they are vital to the heart and mission of Central College. Central is truly blessed to be part of the RCA family.
Report of Hope College

It is always a pleasure to share an annual report from Hope College with the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America. The college treasures its historic affiliation with the RCA and especially its nearly half-century old Covenant of Mutual Responsibilities. Every covenant, of course, has two parts. This one is easy to understand, reasonable in expectations, and realistic for accountability. In sum, for the colleges this covenant indicates that a quality Christian liberal arts education will be provided. For the churches, this covenant indicates that congregations will regularly uplift the colleges in their prayer life, encourage the young women and men of their congregations to consider attending one of the RCA colleges, and financially support the institutions as they carry out their missions.

Hope College takes very seriously its covenantal relationship with the Reformed Church in America. There are tangible evidences of the quality of Hope’s educational experience and also the vibrant nature of its commitment to the Christian faith. It is, in fact, this passion for providing an exceptional education together with a vibrant faith experience that most characterizes the institution. It may be helpful to judge Hope on the four dimensions of student development emphasized in a Hope education: intellectual, spiritual, social, and physical. They parallel Christ’s development as recorded in Luke 2:52, “And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men” (NIV).

Take a look at the intellectual dimension:

- Hope continues to be ranked a top-tier national liberal arts college.
- Once again, Hope’s faculty has met its annual average of twenty-five books published and two hundred articles printed in refereed journals—many of these articles are co-authored by students.
- Again this year, Hope has received more National Science Foundation undergraduate research grants than any other liberal arts college in the country. In addition, another prestigious Howard Hughes Medical Institute grant has been awarded in the sciences.
- One hundred eighty-three students and fifty-one faculty members were engaged in meaningful collaborative undergraduate research last summer—a most unusual number for an undergraduate institution.
- Hope belongs to the Great Lakes Colleges Association—an academic consortium of the twelve best liberal arts colleges in the Great Lakes region; and to the Annapolis Group—seventy-five select national liberal arts colleges.
- Hope’s Education Department tied for the top spot in the state for its teacher preparation program.
- Three Hope seniors have been awarded the prestigious Goldwater Scholarship for excellence in science.

And the spiritual:

- Students fill Dimnent Chapel to overflowing four days each week—in voluntary attendance at chapel services.
- Hope students developed a deepened sense of spirituality during their college years at three times the average of Hope’s peers nationally. Many view Hope as one of the great mission stations of the RCA.
- The college maintains a spiritual life team of seven full-time people.
- A $2.5 million Lilly-funded CrossRoads effort is designed to infuse the campus community with explorations and opportunities in Christian vocations.
- Three hundred to four hundred students participate in one of approximately twenty spring break mission trips throughout the country and abroad—at their own expense!
- Endowment-funded workshops and conferences are promoted to better prepare fac-
ulty for bringing a Christian perspective to their disciplines.
• Innumerable Bible study groups meet throughout Hope’s several residence halls.

And the social:
• The annual Dance Marathon fundraising event at Hope includes over eight hundred participants with more than $750,000 donated to DeVos Children’s Hospital during the last six years.
• Students raised over $50,000 this year for the American Cancer Society during their Relay for Life event.
• The Children’s After School Achievement Program (CASA) matches one hundred fifty Hope students with at-risk third to fifth graders in on-campus tutoring sessions four days a week.
• Students volunteer as tutors in Hope’s federally-funded Upward Bound program and also with programs organized by Latin Americans United for Progress.
• Hope is a finalist in the Michigan Campus Compact 2008 Carter Partnership Service Award for its Cameroon water purification initiative involving the Engineering Department (Engineers Without Borders), the Nursing Department, and the Education Department interdisciplinary research team.
• For the third consecutive year, Hope College has been selected as one of “West Michigan’s 101 Best and Brightest Companies to Work For.”

And the physical:
• The college has launched a very successful incentives-based wellness program for all faculty and staff.
• Hope has won seven consecutive MIAA Commissioner’s Cup Awards for supremacy in intercollegiate sport.
• Both the men’s and women’s basketball teams were ranked first in the country among the 420 members of NCAA Division III at the conclusion of the regular season.
• More than one thousand students are involved in intramurals with another four hundred participating in eighteen intercollegiate sports sponsored by the college.

Hope College is committed to providing an exceptional educational experience for young women and men of the Reformed Church in America. Preferential consideration is accorded RCA members in both admissions and financial aid. Twenty percent of Hope’s 3,200 students are from the Reformed Church in America. Collectively, they receive nearly $5 million in institutional gift aid from Hope each year. Hope’s budget for 2008-2009 is $83 million. One dollar of every thousand in budget revenue, or slightly less than $100 per year from each church on average, comes from RCA congregations.

The church’s half of the covenant is to uplift the RCA colleges regularly in prayer, encourage the youth of the church to attend one of the three RCA colleges, and support the RCA colleges financially as they are able. As delegates to this General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, you can discern how well your church or the denomination generally does in fulfilling its half of the Covenant of Mutual Responsibilities.

You could, for example, ask whether your church provides annual financial support for at least one of the RCA colleges. Or, you might recall whether the RCA colleges are regularly uplifted in prayer from your church pulpit. Perhaps you could inquire as to whether your congregation encourages your young people to consider one of the three RCA colleges and whether they share the names of prospective students with the colleges when they are asked to do so.
There can be little doubt that the colleges and the churches of the denomination are in a great position to help each other. In unity there is strength! The colleges are eager to partner with the denomination in educating our youth and transitioning them to leadership positions in Reformed churches.

The college continues to be grateful for strong student interest in a Hope education. Hope will receive close to three thousand applications for the eight hundred spots in the fall 2008 class. The passion at Hope is to provide an exceptional education in a caring Christian environment. The mission of Hope College is to educate students for lives of leadership and service in a global society through academic and co-curricular programs of recognized excellence in the liberal arts and in the context of the historic Christian faith. This is done so that Hope graduates will be educated to think about life’s most important issues with clarity, wisdom, and a deep understanding of the foundational commitments of the historic Christian faith. They are prepared to communicate effectively, bridging boundaries that divide human communities. They are agents of hope who live faithfully into their vocations. Hope graduates make a difference in the world!

By God’s grace and goodness, this is a very good time in the life of Hope College! Hope has been the recipient of God’s richest blessings in great abundance. This we acknowledge with gratitude.

The big challenges going forward are these:

- Increasing federal intervention in our autonomy as an independent college.
- Decreasing federal financial aid for students.
- Decreasing state financial aid and a sagging Michigan economy.
- The ability of universities a notch above Hope on the college “food chain” to offer tuition-free educations because of their multi-billion-dollar endowments.

College and church relationships are fragile. The record of history is that they hardly ever endure. This has happened with the RCA (Union, New York University, and Rutgers) and with the most prestigious institutions in the country. What happens? History would reveal this: A college gets too big for its britches and believes that truth exists apart from God’s truth, hires faculty and staff without regard to the faith, and gives no preference to the youth of the church. The church, on the other hand, offers few prayers on behalf of the colleges, fails to encourage their young people to consider their denominational colleges, and supports parachurch organizations at the expense of their own affiliated colleges.

Could the RCA colleges survive apart from the church? Probably, but as Hope’s president I am not positive. Is the RCA strong enough to survive without the colleges? Probably, but I’m not certain of it. What I am certain about is that together the three colleges and the RCA, in partnership and with unity, loyalty, commitment, and covenant, can for the foreseeable future survive as a great force in our society for the glory of God and benefit of humankind. Our children and grandchildren will know whether we had the conviction and resolve to enable it!
Report of Northwestern College

Northwestern College (NWC) celebrated its 125th anniversary this year and has much for which to be thankful. Dr. Bruce Murphy retired in December, completing seven years at NWC. President Gregory Christy began his tenure in January 2008; an inauguration is planned for October 10, 2008.

The focus of Northwestern’s synod report is on her students and the many contributions they are making to serve God and others in kingdom-building work. Sarah Palsma, Blaine Crawford, and Amy Larson share their stories and experiences of choir tour, Spring Service Projects (SSPs), and the women’s NAIA national basketball tournament. Our students and their stories are the best ways to explain what is happening at and through Northwestern College.

Choir Tour

Northwestern’s A cappella Choir has an extended national tour every other year. This year, sixty-five students toured in New Jersey and New York, singing in various churches and schools. One of the pastors from a host church mentioned in a letter, “Not only was their musical offering spectacular but the way in which they represented Northwestern College was a true testament to the fine job Northwestern is doing molding young lives in service of God and God’s world.”

Sarah Palsma, a senior majoring in religion and history from North Syracuse, New York, has been involved in choir since her freshman year. A member of Pitcher Hill Community Church, Sarah plans to attend Western Theological Seminary after graduating this spring. She shares her choir tour experience:

I have often wondered why I chose to spend my college career at Northwestern. When I was a first semester freshman I thought I had made a mistake. Moving to a small town in Iowa after growing up in upstate New York was a big culture shock. I was homesick and did not seem to be fitting in anywhere. Fortunately, I was embraced by the Northwestern community and encouraged to pursue my interests on campus. My involvement in A cappella Choir, Heritage Singers, the theatre department, and both the religion and history departments allowed me to form close relationships with the faculty and students whose influence will remain with me for many years to come. Northwestern enabled me to explore different areas and fields that I never thought possible, from getting involved in a local church as their Christian education intern, to spending time overseas and experiencing new cultures. One of my greatest joys from my time at Northwestern has been the spring break trips I have taken.

I have been on two SSPs (City Youth Ministry in Jonesboro, Arkansas, and Jordan Christian Hostel in Amsterdam, the Netherlands) and two choir tours (California and New York). This past spring break was a very special trip for me because I had the opportunity to share a part of my Northwestern community with my home state. It was great to see many members of the choir experience New York City for the first time and enjoy big city life. A few of them even spent their afternoon giving away their lunches to the hungry and talking to homeless people in Central Park. Much of our time on tour is spent listening and talking to each other, to the people we meet at our concerts, and to those who house us. We hear their stories of grief and joy and share some of ours as well, but most of all we offer our gift of music to God and to them. It is wonderful to see the audience engage in our singing and to know that we have lifted someone’s spirit through God’s gift of song. The choir was truly a testament to Northwestern College and was a bearer of Christ’s light to the places we sang and the people we met.
The things I have experienced from my four years at Northwestern are priceless memories that I shall cherish for the rest of my life, and I know that the friendships I have formed here are for life. I know that God set me on the path that led me to this place and is now leading me away from it, but I will proudly share with others my time at NWC and take what I have learned to wherever God may lead me next.

Spring Service Projects

This year, over 220 Northwestern students went with teams to fourteen locations nationally and internationally to serve various organizations over spring break. Their service touched countless lives around the world.

Blaine Crawford, a junior from Beloit, Kansas, is majoring in religion and minoring in youth ministries. After graduating in 2009, Blaine plans to attend seminary. His home church is Beloit First Christian Church. Blaine shares some of his experience in East Belfast, Northern Ireland, on a Spring Service Project and as a student at Northwestern College:

This SSP was a little different from the other spring break trips, as much of the time was spent engaging in learning about the conflict in Ireland and the ministry implications it holds for organizations in the area. Over the course of the trip, our group met with historians, community re-developers, ministers, philosophers, and counselors. This diverse group of perspectives contributed greatly to our knowledge of the complexity of the conflict in Northern Ireland. The perseverance and endurance of these people challenged our worldviews, beckoning us to broaden our perspectives on the concept of showing Christ’s love to the world. The lessons learned from this trip will not easily be forgotten and have shaped and will continue to shape who we are and how we live.

My experience at Northwestern College has been the most challenging and yet satisfying period of my life. I often find myself asking what makes Northwestern College so special. Without hesitation, my response is always the people. The friendships I have built with peers are ones that will endure for years to come. I have had mentors who have passed on years of wisdom to me. Some of these mentors have been older students, while others have been the faculty and staff. My relationships with the faculty and staff have been priceless in my spiritual development. I have learned plenty from textbooks and lectures at Northwestern, but some of the most memorable learning experiences took place in an informal setting with the faculty and staff. Professors have challenged me in the classroom by provoking critical thinking of the topics that we are studying. They have often created space for dialogue while also being honest about their own shortcomings. For me, there was not a better fit than Northwestern College. It has pointed me toward God in every aspect of my life, and I will leave forever changed because of it.

Athletics

This year Northwestern has been blessed with a tremendous season for all of the athletic teams. Men’s soccer made its first trip to nationals in the fall, volleyball advanced to the Elite Eight of the national tournament with one student named All-American, and women’s cross country placed tenth at national meet with two students named All-Americans. This winter wrestling placed seventeenth nationally with two students named All-Americans and two honorable mentions. The women’s indoor track team finished ninth nationally with five students named All-Americans. Men’s basketball advanced to the Final Four of the national tournament. They were given the Team Sportsmanship Award, with two students named to the All-Tournament Team and as All-Americans.
Women’s basketball won the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics Division II national championship. Additional accolades included coach of the year, player of the year, tournament MVP, and two students named as All-Americans. What’s most impressive, however, was the manner in which Northwestern’s athletes conducted themselves as representatives of the college.

Amy Larson is from Denison, Iowa, and is a senior majoring in business administration/management and minoring in accounting. Amy’s home church is Our Savior Lutheran Church. Amy shares some of her experience at the NAIA women’s national basketball tournament:

*Once again, I am at a point in my life where I am asking the question, “What now?” My senior year at Northwestern College is nearing conclusion, but I am excited to see what God has planned next for my life because he definitely did not let me down when he led me to college in Orange City, Iowa. Ever since I was young, I knew I wanted to play college basketball. Having the opportunity to attend a Christian college was just another benefit of competing for a team that would have the chance to contend for a national title. I did not realize at the time how I would grow in my faith just as much as I would grow as a basketball player.*

*After bowing out in the Final Four in 2006 and the Sweet Sixteen in 2007, the five seniors in our starting line-up were determined to lead the team to a national championship in our final campaign this year. That is why after many hours of defensive drills, shooting workouts, and weight training, we were able to enter the 2008 national tournament with a 30-2 record, coming off a win in the conference tournament championship game. As the other students left for home or Spring Service Projects, we spent our spring break having our final practices to prepare for the tournament. We received the overall number two seed in the tournament and breezed through our first three games by greater than 20 points each outing. Our toughest game was the national championship game—we were able to come back from a seven-point halftime deficit to defeat College of the Ozarks, 82-75, and claim our national title.*

*This season was memorable for everyone involved: players, coaches, parents, students, fans. The greatest attribute about our team, though, was the relationships that we built with each other as fellow Christians. We played as a team with great confidence because of our preparation. Coach Woudstra also stressed playing for your teammates with an audience of One. This season our team really bought into that mentality with each player focused on using her own gifts on and off the court. It was amazing to see what we were able to accomplish when we combined all those talents. In the years to come, I probably will not remember the scores of particular games, but I will remember the relationships with my teammates. I treasure the fact that they will be there to support me with whatever comes my way in life. Although I’m sad this particular chapter in my life is over, I’m grateful for having a loving God who I know has a plan for my life.*

Many other faculty, staff, and students have stories of similar experiences that could be shared. This summer nearly one hundred students will travel abroad to study and serve in various countries: Greece, India, Spain, Ghana, Mexico, Great Britain, Thailand, Tanzania, Ecuador, and many more locations.

Northwestern is continually grateful for the support the Reformed Church in America provides in prayer, students, and financial resources. For 125 years the partnership has flourished between NWC and the RCA and the hope and intention is for that to continue for the next 125 years and beyond.
Report of the Committee of Reference

Resolutions

The Committee of Reference presented the following resolutions:

R-78
WHEREAS Juel Grevenstuk and all of the volunteer and staff assistants did an amazing job in administering the logistics of the synod meeting and assisted delegates in securing everything they needed to effectively do the work of the synod; and
WHEREAS Juel Grevenstuk has loved and cared for each of us, helping delegates to attend to their business in the most comfortable means possible;
THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the 202nd General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the tenth day of June 2008, gives thanks to God for Juel Grevenstuk and her masterful job of arranging the logistics of our meeting.

R-79
WHEREAS Hope College has provided shelter and sustenance for the delegates of General Synod; and
WHEREAS the thunder did roll, the lightning did strike, the skies did open, and the deluge did fall upon both the regular and corresponding delegates alike regardless of office, position, or years of service in the church; and
WHEREAS the Hope College staff did practice inclusivity by both protecting all delegates alike from the storms outside and providing a place to dry off; and
WHEREAS delegates were provided with comfortable sleeping arrangements following their long and difficult travels into Holland, Michigan, from such places of purgatory known as O’Hare and Denver International Airport;
WHEREAS the Hope College staff did diligently anticipate the need to be cooled from warmer weather and thus created the effect of bringing a fall chill into our meeting space at DeVos Fieldhouse;
THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the 202nd General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the tenth day of June 2008, gives thanks to God for the staff of Hope College in providing incredible hospitality to the delegates of this synod.

R-80
WHEREAS the members of the General Synod staff are hardworking, conscientious, and dedicated servants of the kingdom of God and give themselves to their work in furthering the mission of Jesus Christ as it is expressed in the ministry of the Reformed Church in America; and
WHEREAS many members of the staff “joyfully” attend (are compelled against their will to attend) the synod meeting, sit through long hours of meetings, and work thanklessly behind the scenes in preparing the work of our meeting; and
WHEREAS the members of the General Synod staff deserve double honor as ones who labor in the work of the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ to a hurting and broken world so loved by God;
THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the 202nd General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the tenth day of June 2008, gives thanks to God for the General Synod staff in their service to Jesus Christ through the work of the Reformed Church in America.
R-81
WHEREAS En Young Kim shared in our opening worship service teaching us of the history of her own culture and faith and that each of our calls together come from the same Shepherd; and
WHEREAS John Ornee, Denise Kingdom-Grier, and Fred Harrell shared the Word of God with us in morning worship; and
WHEREAS they powerfully challenged us to consider what it means to be missional and Reformed; and
WHEREAS Fred Harrell did go above and beyond the call of duty by having a colleague procure needed undergarments in order to do his duty, and Fred must have truly been suffering from jet lag when he asked the Reformed Church to do something truly scary;
THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the 202nd General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the tenth day of June 2008, gives thanks to God for En Young, John, Denise, and Fred in sharing God’s Word with us in worship.

R-82
WHEREAS the worship planning and leadership of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship effectively brought us into the presence of God and provided us a forum to respond to the Word of God; and
WHEREAS Ron Rienstra provided inspirational leadership in our worship of God; and
WHEREAS we were led in worship to explore new ways to sing, pray, and confess before our Lord;
THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the 202nd General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the tenth day of June 2008, gives thanks to God the work of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship in leading us to glorify and honor our God during our meetings.

R-83
WHEREAS the local churches of the Holland area opened their doors for Sunday worship to the delegates of the synod; and
WHEREAS volunteers from the Holland area carted delegates to and fro in buses, vans, cars, and golf carts going at great speed; and
WHEREAS the community of Holland proved to be a wonderfully gracious host;
THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the 202nd General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the tenth day of June 2008, gives thanks to God for the RCA members in the Holland area and their gracious expression of Christian hospitality and support.

R-84
WHEREAS the Rev. Dr. Richard Mouw effectively framed our discussion about what it means to be both missional and Reformed by sharing with us from his breadth of theological knowledge and his wealth of personal experience; and
WHEREAS Dr. Mouw gave us permission to continue to work out our salvation with fear and trembling by sharing a significant insight into his personal journey in the Reformed faith with the admission that he is a little weak on the “L” in TULIP;
THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the 202nd General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the tenth day of June 2008, gives thanks to God for the Rev. Dr. Richard Mouw for effectively leading us to discuss what it means to be missional and Reformed.
WHEREAS Ruth Stafford Peale served Jesus Christ for 101 years and has on February 6, 2008, gone to be with the Lord; and
WHEREAS Ruth Stafford Peale was the first woman president of the Board of North American Missions of the Reformed Church in America and also served for ten years as president of the Women’s Board of Domestic Missions of the Reformed Church in America; and
WHEREAS Ruth Stafford Peale served the greater church in her community in many and varied ways;
THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the 202nd General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the tenth day of June 2008, gives thanks to God for the life of Ruth Stafford Peale and how she glorified and magnified the Lord Jesus Christ.

WHEREAS Anna Gonzales did effectively lead us into a new way to bring intercessory prayer during one of our sessions; and
WHEREAS we discovered that we must be careful in whom we call to pray while we are in session;
THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the 202nd General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the tenth day of June 2008, has learned to select the person we call to pray very carefully because we recognize that when you call a prayer warrior to pray you had better take the time to do it!

WHEREAS the General Synod was graced with the presence of our ecumenical guests: Dick Hamm from the Disciples of Christ Church; Bishop Richard J. Sklba from the Roman Catholic Church’s Archdiocese of Milwaukee; Stephen John Thurston of the National Baptist Convention of America; Steve Haas from World Vision; and Lydia Veliko from the United Church of Christ; and
WHEREAS they so eloquently shared the vision of Christian Churches Together; and
WHEREAS Bishop Richard J. Sklba, in modeling true ecumenical spirit, asked the Reformed Church in America “to receive his confession of sin” over the fraudulent entrance of the Roman Catholic Church into Christian Churches Together;
THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the 202nd General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the tenth day of June 2008, gives thanks to God for our ecumenical partners and resolves to pray for the witness of the Church of Jesus Christ as it is expressed through many sisters and brothers in a variety of contexts and in a multitude of ways.

WHEREAS Emmanuel LoWilla, executive director of RECONCILE in Sudan, moved us when he described the situation in the Sudan; and
WHEREAS he challenged us to advocate for our sisters and brothers in that area of the world by advocating on their behalf and educating ourselves using the website www.sudanadvocacy.com;
THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the 202nd General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the tenth day of June 2008, gives thanks to God for Emmanuel LoWilla and his ministry before the world to bring justice and reconciliation to the Sudan.
R-89
WHEREAS Wesley Granberg-Michaelson has encouraged us to remember that our churches are multiplying, our face is changing, our leadership is renewing, our anxiety is rising, and our hope is deepening in our work of living out Our Call to the glory of God; and
WHEREAS Wesley Granberg-Michaelson has prepared the church for its work at this gathering in many ways, large and small; and
WHEREAS Wesley Granberg-Michaelson has led the Reformed Church in America with grace and dignity and has represented our denomination in the greater church in a way that brings honor and glory to Jesus Christ; and
WHEREAS Wesley Granberg-Michaelson has adequately demonstrated his complete understanding and embracing of capitalism and an entrepreneurial spirit (otherwise known as “carpet bagging”) by acquiring a very cheap umbrella (at Wal-Mart no less!) and trying to get top dollar for it in a high demand culture like General Synod 2008;
THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the 202nd General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the tenth day of June 2008, expresses gratitude to God for the general secretary and his leadership and vision for the Reformed Church in America.

R-90
WHEREAS Lori Walber, in explaining the recommendation in Article 8.4 of the new recommended GSC bylaws to “terminate the employment of the general secretary,” did instead use the phrase that the “GSC may terminate the general secretary”; and
WHEREAS the GSC has no interest whatsoever in terminating, taking out, blowing away, polishing off, or smoking anyone, but will instead be diligent in holding the general secretary accountable for his performance;
THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the 202nd General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the tenth day of June 2008, expresses sincere commitment that no one shall for any reason be terminated by the GSC.

R-91
WHEREAS John Ornee, the president of the 202nd General Synod, has represented the Reformed Church in America in a way that reflects the best ideals of our church and that he presided over our gathering with grace and dignity; and
WHEREAS John Ornee did remind us that we do not want to find ourselves at the end of our lives saying that we could have done more, but instead to give all that we have and all that we are to the glory of God right now; and
WHEREAS John Ornee did strongly exhort delegates to “play nice” with one another and to have concern for one another; and
WHEREAS the delegates did respond to this exhortation in kind rather than choosing to disobey and go to bed without our dinner;
THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the 202nd General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the tenth day of June 2008, expresses gratitude to God for the leadership of John Ornee in his leadership of the Reformed Church in America this past year.

R-92
WHEREAS Brad Lewis has faithfully served Jesus Christ in the Reformed Church in America by leading us back to our heritage of celebrating the priesthood of all believers and the importance and necessity of mobilizing the offices of deacon and elder in the local church in order to fulfill Our Call; and
WHEREAS Brad Lewis led a gathering of deacons and elders that has called the Reformed Church in America through the Fresh Wind Letter back to understanding God’s purpose for these offices; and
WHEREAS Brad Lewis, while trying to explain the work of the major issue advisory committees instead did explain that we at this General Synod have “major issues”; and
WHEREAS that statement, while unintended, is extremely accurate;
THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the 202nd General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the tenth day of June 2008, expresses gratitude to God for the leadership of Brad Lewis and is also thankful for God’s unconditional love, acceptance, and forgiveness in spite of our “major issues.”

R-93
WHEREAS the delegates of synod were prepared and led in their work by a plethora of moderators; and
WHEREAS the moderators reported to Holland, Michigan, on Wednesday to be prepared in their work of leading the major issue advisory committees by Peggy Luidens; and
WHEREAS these moderators had limited time to accomplish their task but still managed to complete their work with grace and wisdom;
THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the 202nd General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the tenth day of June 2008, gives thanks to God for all of the moderators who gave so generously of themselves to lead us in our business of conducting the work of the synod.

R-94
WHEREAS Bruce Neckers is completing his work as parliamentarian and is an adequate illustration of what an oxymoron is in being a lawyer and still being able to “play nice”; and
WHEREAS Bruce Neckers did have an extremely slow year with few procedural snags to rule on or advise us on in his work as parliamentarian, and this General Synod did not send Bruce out with a bang by trying to tie him up with complex motions and procedural gymnastics; and
WHEREAS Bruce Neckers is training Susan Sgarlat to be next year’s parliamentarian and there was not sufficient opportunity for on-the-job training for Susan Sgarlat;
THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the 202nd General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the tenth day of June 2008, gives thanks to God for Bruce Neckers’ service to the church as parliamentarian (and politely requests that Bruce return next year to support Susan Sgarlat in her work as the parliamentarian just in case his experience is needed!).

R-95
WHEREAS the new voting keypads are really cool and an awesome tool for conducting the work of the General Synod; and
WHEREAS the corresponding delegates have not felt included in the use of said keypads and have, therefore, struggled mightily with coveting the toys of the regular delegates;
THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the 202nd General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the tenth day of June 2008, strongly recommends that corresponding delegates at future synod meetings get at least one opportunity to vote for something electronically.
R-96
WHEREAS the members of the Seminarian Seminar have diligently tracked trips to the microphone and have paid close attention to and taken to heart all of the wisdom shared forth from there; and
WHEREAS Jim Brownson and Dan Griswold have offered more comments, suggestions, amendments, and food for thought than any other delegates; and
WHEREAS Newton Fairweather did offer extremely helpful metaphors to explain to the General Synod his understanding of what is going on, using the word “virgin” in explaining that this is indeed his first General Synod meeting, explaining that he “drank the Kool Aid” to explain that he was naive about the truth of things, and using the phrase “sola BCO” to explain that he has experienced the Book of Church Order being elevated as the highest authority in the church;
THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the 202nd General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the tenth day of June 2008, awards Jim Brownson and Dan Griswold the Golden Microphone Award for prolific microphone attendance and Newton Fairweather the Silver Tongue Award for the use of poetic and powerful metaphors.

R-97
WHEREAS James Seawood was elected as General Synod’s 2008-2009 vice president; and
WHEREAS the election of James Seawood as General Synod vice president is a wonderfully fitting result in a year where we have stressed that the Reformed Church in America should be a church that reflects the Revelation 7:9 vision;
THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the 202nd General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the tenth day of June 2008, offers its thanks to James Seawood for accepting God’s call as vice president of the General Synod and promises to uphold him and his family in prayer in the days ahead.

R-98
WHEREAS Carol Bechtel was elected as General Synod’s 2008-2009 president; and
WHEREAS Carol Bechtel gave us a glimpse of her presidential year by affirming her sincere desire to fulfill the listening function of the General Synod president as described in the Book of Church Order; and
WHEREAS Carol Bechtel asked us to pray for her and her family in preparing to face her presidential year;
THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the 202nd General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, on the tenth day of June 2008, offers its thanks to Carol Bechtel for accepting God’s call as president of the General Synod and promises to uphold her and her family in prayer in the days ahead.

VOTED: To adopt the resolutions.
The Rev. Dr. Carol M. Bechtel, General Synod Professor of Theology, Holland, Michigan, was elected president. The Rev. James L. Seawood, pastor at Brighton Heights Reformed Church, Staten Island, New York, was elected vice president.

Address to the General Synod of the
Reformed Church in America
The Rev. Dr. Carol Bechtel
President-Elect of the General Synod

In a way, the only thing to say is “thank you.” But since that would be the shortest presidential acceptance speech in General Synod history, I will say a few more things. There are, after all, a few more people to thank.

Let me thank and introduce my family, first of all.

My husband, Tom Mullens—who will, I think, bear the brunt of my accepting this call. (In fact, if there are any of you from the Holland area who would like to sign up to help him mow the lawn and walk the dog…) Tom has his own call, his own vocation—he’s a drug and alcohol addiction counselor at OAR, Ottagan Addiction Recovery. So I ask your prayers for him and for us as we seek to balance our calls and support each other in the days ahead. I know I couldn’t ask for a more loving and supportive man to share my life. He’s also quite good at making me laugh and keeping me from taking myself too seriously.

And if you’re wondering why those able-bodied children can’t help us walk the dog—we’re actually going to be empty nesters in a couple of months. My son, Andrew, is going to be a junior at Miami of Ohio. He’s studying to be an environmental engineer. My daughter, Ellen, is a brand new graduate of Holland High—valedictorian! She’s headed off to Northwestern University in Evanston in the fall.

Not able to be here are my stepdaughter, Elyssa, her husband, Wes, and their new baby, Michael. Also, my stepson, Ian, a newly minted graduate of East Grand Rapids.

I’d also like to say a word of thanks to my parents, Glenn and Rhea Bechtel, from Spring Valley Reformed Church in Fulton, Illinois. They’re not able to be here today for reasons of health and strength—but I feel their presence in spirit and prayer. I always think of my parents when I read the psalm where the psalmist sort of pressures God to be nice to him by saying, “I am the child of your serving girl…” Do it for my mom’s sake, in other words! I’ve always suspected that when I pray, God says, “Oh, it’s Glenn and Rhea’s girl again—I guess I’d better see what she wants.”

And then there are teachers to thank. I’ve been blessed with so many good ones. Some of the best walked me down here a minute ago—Dennis Voskuil, Carol Myers, and John Paarlberg. I can’t name you all, but you know who you are. And I hope that even the ones who are in heaven can hear me say, “Thanks for teaching me—not by rote, but by heart.”

And then there are my students, from whom I have learned a great deal. One of the unexpected pleasures of sitting up here on the dais all week is to look out and see the faces of so many current and former students.

I’ve spent a lot of time in the Old Testament over the years, and one of the things I’ve noticed about prophetic call narratives is that the prophet almost always resists a bit. And while I’m not ready to run out and buy a one-way ticket to Tarshish, I will admit to a fair amount of fear and trepidation. That’s healthy, I think. I talked to Al Poppen the other day and he said, “Being president is one of the greatest jobs you’ll ever have—and you’ll never
want to have it again!” But then I think of Moses’s call story, and I remember God’s reassurances to him. As many of us heard in a sermon just this morning, when Moses said, in essence, “I’m not equal to this!”; God said “Bingo—you’re not, but I will be with you. And what’s more, I’ll send your brother Aaron to help you.” So I get it, God, and I pray that you will surround me with wise brothers and sisters. And I pray that you will give me the wit to listen and learn.

So, I’m serious about that listening thing—and from the job description we read earlier, that is one of the most important functions of the General Synod president. I hope you’ll invite me to your places of ministry and mission. I’ll take as many of your invitations as I possibly can. And since Western Theological Seminary has generously given me second semester free for this, I’ll be able to take a few more. Help me to understand both your joys and your challenges. And I will do my best to listen and learn and love.

Some presidents keep their cards fairly close to their vest in terms of their agendas for their time in office. And part of that is because their agenda is formed by what they learn as they travel around the church. I want to leave room for the Spirit, certainly, but I think I can give you some idea of what my interests and emphases will be.

Those of you who know me will not be at all surprised to hear that I’d like to emphasize education. You’ve heard the saying “You are what you eat.” Well, there’s a sense in which we as a church “are what we learn.” Our decisions are shaped and influenced by the Spirit working through our lifelong immersion in the Word—so we need to do as fine a job of that as we possibly can.

Another thing I’d like to emphasize is worship. Fred Harrell quoted Emil Brunner this morning, and I’d like to follow suit. But I’d like to make so bold as to tweak Brunner a bit. He said, “The church exists by mission, just as a fire exists by burning.” Who could argue with that? Not me—but I’d like to suggest that the following is also true: That the church exists by worship, just as a fire exists by burning.

Finally, I’d like to work on your behalf on the theme of reconciliation. We have been reconciled to God in Christ. I’d like to explore ways in which we can more fully live out that reconciliation by being more fully reconciled to and with each other.

So—that’s all. Not the shortest speech, but I hope it’s been just long enough to convey some of my thanks and hopes as we begin this journey together. I “count it all joy” to serve God and you in this way.
CLOSE AND ADJOURNMENT

President John Ornee presented president-elect Carol Bechtel with the traditional bell.

The meeting of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America was declared to be adjourned after closing worship, which included the installation of officers and communion. Thus, the two hundred and second session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America adjourned at 6:40 p.m. on Tuesday, June 10, 2008.