

In early spring of 2009, following consultation with a staff implementation team, Marti Bultman, a member of the former GSC Disability Task Force, was asked to accept a part-time contract to serve as an RCA liaison to the Christian Reformed Church. Bultman agreed to serve; however, she insisted that her work be on a volunteer basis. She began her service on March 1 and will continue until June 2009. Bultman is working with her CRC colleagues to strengthen and make more feasible the original partnership plan so that the disability ministries of the CRC and RCA can work ensure improved support for congregations of both denominations to become hospitable, inclusive, and healthy communities.

As reported to General Synod in 2008 the plan is to enter into a partnership that will enhance the ability of the RCA and CRC to provide:

- *Resources*: Resources for congregations are 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 Office of Disability Concern newsletter could be used in a newsletter directed to the RCA. It will be relatively simple for the offices, working in partnership, to develop a joint newsletter. Curriculum material can also 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, cooperation could produce economies of scale. The possibility of joint training for congregational volunteers and advocates for this ministry could benefit the congregations of both denominations.
- *Networking*: There are many agencies and non-profits that provide opportunities and information regarding federal and state guidelines that will be beneficial to both denominations.

The funds currently being raised from the 2009 assessment have not yet been spent. A continuation of the assessment in 2010 will enable the GSC to establish a program at a scale and scope that is financially sustainable later in 2009 and provide secure funding to continue the program into 2011. Staff and the GSC will continue efforts to bring the program fully into the regular budgeting process during this time.

## **GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO GENERAL SYNOD 2008 REFERRALS**

***MGS 2008, R-11, pp. 81-82***

### **REPORT OF THE GSC R-11 TASK FORCE**

“Our General Synod does not look like our churches.” So noted general secretary Wesley Granberg-Michaelson in his report to General Synod last year.

In RCA congregations there is increased ethnic diversity, as well as both women and young people serving in leadership roles. Yet this is not well reflected in the representation of delegates at General Synod.

In light of the general secretary’s proposal, P-1, the Committee of Reference, through the Special Advisory Committee on Inclusivity, developed 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 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 (*MGS 2008*, R-11, pp. 81-82).

That task force consisted of Mary Clark, Kirsty DePree, Anna Gonzales, Earl James, Steve Mathonnet-VanderWell, Lizbeth Moss, and Phil Pratt and met in Grand Rapids, Michigan, on December 5 and 6, 2008.

As the general secretary noted last year, broadening the representation at General Synod is vital as we move forward with Our Call. Together we have committed to more than one-third of four hundred new congregations being racial-ethnic congregations different from the majority. Currently, this goal is being exceeded. Moreover, the addition of a sixth element—a multiracial future freed from racism—to Our Call by the 2008 General Synod now needs to be lived out and clearly reflected in the acts of General Synod. The provisional adoption of the Belhar Confession as a fourth confessional standard only adds to the urgency.

The Reformed Church needs to see and hear from these underrepresented people. In other words, no one should think that striving for greater inclusivity and representation is any sort of favor or concession by the majority. Rather it is recognition that for the good of the church and the integrity of the gospel we all need broader representation at General Synod.

The general secretary rightly pointed out that there are some legitimate and sound reasons for the differences between the face of General Synod and the face of our congregations. “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” (*MGS 2008*, p. 30). Honoring this wise tradition, while simultaneously stretching and seeking broader representation, requires some creative responses.

Voting Delegates: Of course, all voting delegates at General Synod must be ministers of Word and sacrament or elders. Most delegates are sent to General Synod as representatives of their home classis. However, the inclusion of chaplains and furloughing missionaries as voting delegates is somewhat of an anomaly. The presence of chaplains and missionaries as voting delegates at General Synod expresses the awareness that their voice is needed and that ways can be found within our polity to include these indispensable voices.

Similarly, the representation of racial and ethnic groups, women, and younger people is indispensable. Amending the *Book of Church Order* so that each of three underrepresented groups would have five delegates would be extremely helpful in increasing the diversity at General Synod. Like chaplains and furloughing missionaries and chaplains, these

additional delegates would be sent by their home classis, in consultation with the appropriate constituent bodies: the Commission for Women, the Commission on Race and Ethnicity, and the Commission on Christian Education and Discipleship. Persons selected to serve as such delegates would be eligible for this particular delegate role only once in every five General Synods. Moreover, a rotation that would offer every classis the opportunity to send a delegate from these underrepresented groups would insure that all of the classes would receive equal representation.

Corresponding Delegates: These are delegates who have the privilege of the floor at General Synod but do not vote. They do not need to be ministers of Word and sacrament or elders. Among those currently listed as corresponding delegates according to the Bylaws of the General Synod are college students from the RCA colleges, seminary students, RCA members involved in women's ministries, and two women and one young adult from each regional synod.

As R-11 noted, modifying and expanding corresponding delegates is another way to broaden representation at General Synod. The Commission for Women, the Commission on Race and Ethnicity, and the Commission on Christian Education and Discipleship would each name three corresponding delegates, persons who are not members of their commissions but would be people of racial or ethnic backgrounds other than the majority, women, and young people.

Expanding the number of delegates sent from regional synods to include two women, two young people of high school or college age (a young man and a young woman), and two people from non-majority racial-ethnic backgrounds would be another avenue for wider and more diverse representation at General Synod.

Of course, corresponding delegates do not vote. However, the ability of General Synod to better hear their voice and sample their thoughts could be a wonderful gift to the voting delegates of synod. With today's electronic voting, it would not be difficult to make some sort of arrangement where their opinion could be "polled"—an informal, non-binding vote intended for the information and guidance of the voting delegates as they consider their own upcoming vote. This privilege of polling is an innovation that does not significantly alter our form of government; instead it requires only a change in the Special Rules of General Synod. At any point, the president of synod could request any group or groups from the corresponding delegates to be polled for their views on the issue at hand. Similarly, a voting delegate could also move that all or some of corresponding delegates be polled, and if a majority of synod approved, this polling would occur.

Structural Issues: It is not difficult to wonder how the very structure, atmosphere, length, and location of General Synod also hinders broader representation. These, however, are large, complex issues that seemed beyond the scope of a task force gathered for one meeting. The efforts in recent years to make General Synod a more hospitable and understandable atmosphere are to be commended and further creativity should be encouraged. Might first-time delegates receive background and initiation through webinars? Perhaps a system of linking first-time delegates with mentors would be helpful? Pre-synod gatherings of underrepresented groups—racial-ethnic groups, women, and young people—to explain and familiarize them could possibly make these delegates feel more welcome and empowered. Would a shorter General Synod (Thursday through Sunday?) allow younger and working people more flexibility to attend? Would holding General Synod only every other year produce savings in both finances and staff resources that could allow for a General Synod to be coupled with a intergenerational nurturing event at an attractive destination? Would a General Synod lodged within a family-friendly and festive event help attract younger and working people to serve as delegates to General Synod? These sorts of questions should continue to be discussed among General Synod Council.

The task force recommended:

R-14

To adopt the following amendments to the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 1 and Article 3, Section 7, and renumbering subsequent sections, for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined, deletions are stricken out):

Article 1. *General Synod Defined*

The General Synod is the highest assembly and judicatory of the Reformed Church in America. It consists of two minister delegates and two elder delegates from each of the classes having four thousand or fewer confessing members on the roll of its churches, and one minister delegate and one elder delegate for each two thousand confessing members, or fraction thereof, from each of the classes having more than four thousand confessing members on the roll of its churches as computed in accordance with the Bylaws of the General Synod; one elder or minister delegate from each of the regional synods; two General Synod professor of theology delegates from each of the theological seminaries of the Reformed Church; a number of furloughing missionary and chaplain delegates; five additional elder or minister delegates who are women, five additional elder or minister delegates who are racial/ethnic minorities, and five additional elder or minister delegates who are thirty years of age or younger; and corresponding delegates provided for in the Bylaws of the General Synod. Voting rights shall be limited to elder delegates and those minister delegates who are actively serving in ministries under the jurisdiction or with the approval of an assembly. The General Synod is a permanent, continuing body which functions between stated sessions through the General Synod Council, commissions, and agencies.

Article 3. *Delegates*

Sec. 7. The five additional delegates who are women, five additional delegates who are racial/ethnic minorities, and five additional delegates who are thirty years of age or younger shall be eligible for appointment as delegates to the General Synod from the classis of membership. A delegate shall be eligible once during each succeeding five year period as a representative of any of these categories. After a delegate from any of these categories has been appointed by a classis, that classis shall not have a delegate from that same category until such time as all other classes have had the opportunity to appoint a delegate in that category.

~~Sec. 7~~ 8. The General Synod shall pay travel expenses within Canada and the United States (exclusive of Alaska and Hawaii) to and from the synod's place of meeting.

R-15

To adopt the following amendments to the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 8, and new Part II, Article 3, Section 5 for approval by the synod and to be affirmed by the 2010 General Synod (additions are underlined, deletions stricken out):

Article 8. *Corresponding Delegates*

*Sec. 1. Corresponding delegate privileges*

Corresponding delegates fully participate in General Synod but cannot vote, make motions, or be elected to office. As part of any poll, the president may poll the opinion of any or all corresponding delegates on a matter before the assembly.

*Sec. 2. General Synod Professors of Theology*

A professor of either of the theological seminaries who is present at the session of the General Synod, but who is not a regular delegate from a seminary, shall be recognized as a corresponding delegate.

*Sec. 3. Colleges*

a. The presidents of the colleges officially related to the Reformed Church in America or other persons designated by the respective boards of trustees in place of the presidents shall be corresponding delegates.

b. Each college shall appoint two students as corresponding delegates.

*Sec. 4. Church Herald*

The editor of the *Church Herald* shall be a corresponding delegate. The Editorial Council may appoint one of its members, who shall also be a corresponding delegate.

*Sec. 5. Seminary Students*

The students of each RCA seminary shall appoint two of their members as corresponding delegates.

The Ministerial Formation Certification Agency (MFCA) shall appoint two students not enrolled in an RCA seminary as corresponding delegates.

~~*Sec. 5. Reformed Church Women's Ministries*~~

~~Reformed Church Women's Ministries shall appoint two of its members as corresponding delegates.~~

*Sec. 6. General Secretary*

The general secretary shall be a corresponding delegate.

*Sec. 7. General Synod Council*

The members of the General Synod Council shall be corresponding delegates.

*Sec. 8. Commissions*

Each General Synod commission shall appoint one of its members as a corresponding delegate.

*Sec. 9. Seminary Presidents, Moderators, or Members of Boards of Trustees*

The presidents of the seminaries and the moderator or another member of the respective boards of trustees for the seminaries and for the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency shall be corresponding delegates.

*Sec. 10. Ecumenical Delegates*

The Commission on Christian Unity may invite not more than eleven ecumenical delegates, who shall be corresponding delegates.

*Sec. 11. Regional Synods*

~~a. Two women shall be appointed corresponding delegates by each regional synod; said appointments may be made in consultation with the Commission for Women.~~

~~b. One young adult may be appointed as a corresponding delegate by each regional synod.~~

Regional synods shall appoint two women, one young man and one young woman in high school or college, and two racial/ethnic minority members, totaling six corresponding delegates; said appointments shall be made in consultation with appropriate constituent bodies.

*Sec. 12. Board of Benefits Services President or Member*

The president of the Board of Benefits Services, or another of its members designated by the Board of Benefits Services, shall be a corresponding delegate.

*Sec. 13. Specific Commission Additional Appointments*

The Commission for Women shall appoint three delegates who are women and are not members of the commission; the Commission on Race and Ethnicity shall appoint three delegates who are racial/ethnic minority members and are not members of the commission; the Commission on Christian Education and Discipleship shall appoint three delegates who are young adults and are not members of the commission.

Chapter 3, Part II, Article 3, Section 5

Sec. 5. Polling

Prior to a vote on a matter before the General Synod, the president may poll any group represented at the synod. A member of the General Synod shall have the right to make a subsidiary motion for the president to poll any group represented at the synod. A motion to poll

takes precedence of the main motion and is not debatable. It must be supported and approved by a majority vote for the poll to occur. The president shall indicate that any such poll is informal and not binding on the vote of the voting delegates.

The Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance recommended the following amendments to the original recommendations:

AMENDMENT (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken; additions proposed by this amendment are double underlined):

#### **R-14**

##### *Article 1. General Synod Defined*

The General Synod is the highest assembly and judicatory of the Reformed Church in America. It consists of two minister delegates and two elder delegates from each of the classes having four thousand or fewer confessing members on the roll of its churches, and one minister delegate and one elder delegate for each two thousand confessing members, or fraction thereof, from each of the classes having more than four thousand confessing members on the roll of its churches as computed in accordance with the Bylaws of the General Synod; one elder or minister delegate from each of the regional synods; two General Synod professor of theology delegates from each of the theological seminaries of the Reformed Church; a number of furloughing missionary and chaplain delegates; ~~five~~ three ~~additional elder or minister delegates who are women, five~~ three ~~additional elder or minister delegates who are racial/ethnic minorities, and five~~ three ~~additional elder or minister delegates who are thirty years of age or younger;~~ and corresponding delegates provided for in the Bylaws of the General Synod. Voting rights shall be limited to elder delegates and those minister delegates who are actively serving in ministries under the jurisdiction or with the approval of an assembly. The General Synod is a permanent, continuing body which functions between stated sessions through the General Synod Council, commissions, and agencies.

##### *Article 3. Delegates*

*Sec. 7. The* ~~five~~ three ~~additional delegates who are women, five~~ three ~~additional delegates who are racial/ethnic minorities, and five~~ three ~~additional delegates who are thirty years of age or younger shall be eligible for appointment as delegates to the General Synod from the classis of membership. A delegate shall be eligible once during each succeeding five year period as a representative of any of these categories. After a delegate from any of these categories has been appointed by a classis, that classis shall not have a delegate from that same category until such time as all other classes have had the opportunity to appoint a delegate in that category.~~

Reasons:

1. The amendment confirms the intention of the recommendation of the task force, yet with sensitivity to cost.
2. Securing a lesser number of delegates will be easier to implement.

AMENDMENT (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken; additions proposed by this amendment are double underlined; deletions reinstated by this amendment are shaded):

**R-15**

*Sec. 11. Regional Synods*

a. Two women shall be appointed corresponding delegates by each regional synod; said appointments may be made in consultation with the Commission for Women.

b. One young adult may be appointed as a corresponding delegate by each regional synod.

~~Regional Synods shall appoint two women, one young man and one young woman in high school or college, and two racial/ethnic minority members, totaling six corresponding delegates; said appointments shall be made in consultation with appropriate constituent bodies.~~

*Sec. 13. Specific Commission Additional Appointments*

~~The Commission for Women shall appoint three delegates who are women and are not members~~ **one delegate who is a woman and not a member** of the commission; the Commission on Race and Ethnicity shall appoint ~~three delegates who are racial/ethnic minority members and are not members~~ **one delegate who is a racial/ethnic minority member and not a member** of the commission; the Commission on Christian Education and Discipleship shall appoint ~~three delegates who are young adults and are not members~~ **one delegate who is a young adult and not a member** of the commission.

Reasons:

1. The amendment confirms the intention of the recommendation of the task force, yet with sensitivity to cost.
2. Securing a lesser number of delegates will be easier to implement.

NOTE: Adoption of R-14 and R-15 would result in an addition of \$.01 (one cent) per additional delegate, per confessing member, for a total of \$.12 (12 cents).

A motion was made and adopted to further amend R-15 (to delete the following passages regarding “polling” (deletions stricken):

Article 8. Corresponding Delegates

*Sec. 1. Corresponding delegate privileges*

Corresponding delegates fully participate in General Synod but cannot vote, make motions, or be elected to office. ~~As part of any poll, the president may poll the opinion of any or all corresponding delegates on a matter before the assembly.~~

Chapter 3, Part II, Article 3, Section 5

*Sec. 5. Polling*

~~Prior to a vote on a matter before the General Synod, the president may poll any group represented at the synod. A member of the General~~

~~Synod shall have the right to make a subsidiary motion for the president to poll any group represented at the synod. A motion to poll takes precedence of the main motion and is not debatable. It must be supported and approved by a majority vote for the poll to occur. The president shall indicate that any such poll is informal and not binding on the vote of the voting delegates.~~

The synod voted the final version of the recommendations to read as follows:

#### **R-14**

To adopt the following amendments to the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 1 and Article 3 Section 7, and renumbering subsequent sections, for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined, deletions are stricken out):

#### *Article 1. General Synod Defined*

The General Synod is the highest assembly and judicatory of the Reformed Church in America. It consists of two minister delegates and two elder delegates from each of the classes having four thousand or fewer confessing members on the roll of its churches, and one minister delegate and one elder delegate for each two thousand confessing members, or fraction thereof, from each of the classes having more than four thousand confessing members on the roll of its churches as computed in accordance with the Bylaws of the General Synod; one elder or minister delegate from each of the regional synods; two General Synod professor of theology delegates from each of the theological seminaries of the Reformed Church; a number of furloughing missionary and chaplain delegates; three additional elder or minister delegates who are women, three additional elder or minister delegates who are racial/ethnic minorities, and three additional elder or minister delegates who are thirty years of age or younger; and corresponding delegates provided for in the Bylaws of the General Synod. Voting rights shall be limited to elder delegates and those minister delegates who are actively serving in ministries under the jurisdiction or with the approval of an assembly. The General Synod is a permanent, continuing body which functions between stated sessions through the General Synod Council, commissions, and agencies.

#### *Article 3. Delegates*

Sec. 7. The three additional delegates who are women, three additional delegates who are racial/ethnic minorities, and three additional delegates who are thirty years of age or younger shall be eligible for appointment as delegates to the General Synod from the classis of membership. A delegate shall be eligible once during each succeeding five year period as a representative of any of these categories. After a delegate from any of these categories has been appointed by a classis, that classis shall not have a delegate from that same category until such time as all other classes have had the opportunity to appoint a delegate in that category.

*Sec. 7 8.* The General Synod shall pay travel expenses within Canada and the United States (exclusive of Alaska and Hawaii) to and from the synod's place of meeting. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

R-15

To adopt the following amendments to the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 8 for approval by the synod and to be affirmed by the 2010 General Synod (additions are underlined, deletions stricken out):

Article 8. *Corresponding Delegates*

*Sec. 1. Corresponding delegate privileges*

Corresponding delegates fully participate in General Synod but cannot vote, make motions, or be elected to office.

*Sec. 1 2. General Synod Professors of Theology*

A professor of either of the theological seminaries who is present at the session of the General Synod, but who is not a regular delegate from a seminary, shall be recognized as a corresponding delegate.

*Sec. 2 3. Colleges*

a. The presidents of the colleges officially related to the Reformed Church in America or other persons designated by the respective boards of trustees in place of the presidents shall be corresponding delegates.

b. Each college shall appoint two students as corresponding delegates.

*Sec. 3 4. Church Herald*

The editor of the *Church Herald* shall be a corresponding delegate. The Editorial Council may appoint one of its members, who shall also be a corresponding delegate.

*Sec. 4 5. Seminary Students*

The students of each RCA seminary shall appoint two of their members as corresponding delegates.

The Ministerial Formation Certification Agency (MFCA) shall appoint two students not enrolled in an RCA seminary as corresponding delegates.

~~*Sec. 5. Reformed Church Women's Ministries*~~

~~Reformed Church Women's Ministries shall appoint two of its members as corresponding delegates.~~

## GENERAL SYNOD/JUNE 2009

### *Sec. 6. General Secretary*

The general secretary shall be a corresponding delegate.

### *Sec. 7. General Synod Council*

The members of the General Synod Council shall be corresponding delegates.

### *Sec. 8. Commissions*

Each General Synod commission shall appoint one of its members as a corresponding delegate.

### *Sec. 9. Seminary Presidents, Moderators, or Members of Boards of Trustees*

The presidents of the seminaries and the moderator or another member of the respective boards of trustees for the seminaries and for the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency shall be corresponding delegates.

### *Sec. 10. Ecumenical Delegates*

The Commission on Christian Unity may invite not more than eleven ecumenical delegates, who shall be corresponding delegates.

### *Sec. 11. Regional Synods*

a. Two women shall be appointed corresponding delegates by each regional synod; said appointments may be made in consultation with the Commission for Women.

b. One young adult may be appointed as a corresponding delegate by each regional synod.

### *Sec. 12. Board of Benefits Services President or Member*

The president of the Board of Benefits Services, or another of its members designated by the Board of Benefits Services, shall be a corresponding delegate.

### *Sec. 13. Specific Commission Additional Appointments*

The Commission for Women shall appoint one delegate who is a woman and not a member of the commission; the Commission on Race and Ethnicity shall appoint one delegate who is a racial/ethnic minority member and not a member of the commission; the Commission on Christian Education and Discipleship shall appoint one delegate who is a young adult and not a member of the commission. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

**R-16**

**To encourage the General Synod Council and the staff to continue to discuss and study possible changes to the atmosphere, length, and location of General Synod that might make for broader representation, and to bring proposals to General Synod as appropriate. (ADOPTED)**

Note: Adoption of R-14 and R-15 will result in an increased assessment of \$.18 (18 cents) per confessing member beginning in 2011 pending approval of the *BCO* changes by two-thirds of the classes on R-14 with a declarative act by the next General Synod, and the declarative act by the next General Synod after second reading for R-15.

**Response to *MGS 2007*, R-16, p. 101-102 and *MGS 2008*, R-13, p. 94**

**CONTINUING THE REFORMED AND MISSIONAL CONVERSATION**

The Reformed and Missional Implementation Team continues to carry out its work with joy and diligence, seeking to be faithful to the mandate as given in R-16 from the 2007 General Synod (*MGS 2007*, R-16, pp.101-102):

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.

**DVD and Leader's Guide**

The team is pleased with the final product of the Reformed and Missional DVD resource featuring 2008 General Synod speaker Dr. Richard Mouw and a panel of scholars, pastors, and missionaries in the RCA. The purpose of the DVD project is summarized in this way: **To provide a brief and inspiring resource that will (continue to) frame the discussion, guide the conversation, and nurture trust.** The DVD resource consists of six sessions and is designed to be flexible so as to help facilitate a conversation around what it means to be Reformed and missional in a variety of groups and settings. The DVD and accompanying study guide are available both online and as hard copies. Spanish and Korean translations of these resources are also available.

Feedback has been received from several classes throughout the denomination who have used the DVD in a classis gathering. Some feedback from consistories of local congregations who have used the material has also been received. The feedback has been both affirmative and constructive in nature, and it seems that it is serving its purpose to facilitate a lively conversation around the important issues at hand. The team knows of several classes who intend to engage the material in the near future, and both local congregations and classes are urged to utilize this resource and offer feedback in terms of both the value of the material as well as the kinds of conversations, learnings, and insights it spurred. This is one very important avenue by which individuals and congregations can engage the dialogue and "have a voice" in the denomination-wide discernment.

### RCA Story Project

The team is also pleased with the continued development of the second part of the Reformed and missional initiative—the “RCA Story Project.” This project is modeled loosely on National Public Radio’s StoryCorps project and the book *Listening Is an Act of Love* (New York: Penguin Books, 2007). The purpose of the RCA Story Project is summarized in this way: **To help the RCA to share and to hear authentic and compelling stories of how God has worked and is working among us in our various missional contexts.**

The stories, hopes, and dreams of members from across the RCA have intentionally been collected. Two to three-minute edited snapshots of these stories can be heard on the RCA website (under the “Reformed and Missional” tab). Ways are being found to continue to urge members of the RCA to record their stories and submit them to the RCA website. Beyond just collecting these stories to be shared on the website (and utilized in other mediums), the goal of the RCA Story Project is to equip and inspire local congregations to cultivate a culture of “story telling” and share their own stories with each other and the community into which they have been sent to join God in mission. We believe that the RCA Story Project can become a local catalyst for missional revitalization and discipleship at the congregational and classis levels. More information on how to be part of the RCA Story Project as well as a brief instructional guide for interviewers can be found on the RCA website.

### Reformed and Missional Survey

Thirdly, the team has worked in partnership with Megan Mullins at the Frost Center in Holland, Michigan, to draft a written survey that was disseminated electronically this past spring via email. This survey has gone out to all RCA ordained pastors currently serving congregations; specialized ministers; retired ministers; elders and deacons currently serving or who have served since 2004; commission members; and task force, committee, or team members. The purpose of this survey, as mandated in R-16, is **to assess how the structures (committees, task forces, and teams) that support the work of the four assemblies (consistories, classes, regional synods, and General Synod) of the RCA can better equip congregations and churches to fulfill their purpose of joining God’s mission in the world. Additionally, we hope the survey adds to the wider, ongoing discussion with the RCA on what it means to be Reformed and missional.** Following General Synod 2009, the team will meet to begin the exciting work of discussing the findings and making recommendations, if necessary, to assist in the completion of the dialogue.

A final report with “future steps,” if any, will be presented at General Synod 2010. The team has been careful to avoid predetermined outcomes and instead trust the Holy Spirit’s guidance through good process. We have found our work to be both overwhelming and invigorating, and it has been a joy to cultivate deeper relationships with each other as team members and learn from each other’s differing perspectives. In the midst of our own diversity, we have named these particular values and practices that have guided us and we offer them as values and practices to guide us all as we engage in this dialogue:

- *Intentionality and commonality.* We need to be talking about the same subjects using the same parameters, while acknowledging that our contexts for ministry and the language we use to describe them might be very different.
- *Cooperation.* We need to live out this process together with our other assemblies and educational institutions. No one group “owns” this; it is “our” work, and through it, we hope that our trust for each other begins to grow as well.
- *Explicit feedback.* 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.* We believe that the Holy Spirit is guiding our work, and must design any process with that expectation.

In closing, the team does believe that the Holy Spirit is guiding our work—our work both as a team and as a denomination. We believe more than ever that this conversation matters. We give God thanks for the fruit that has already come from this dialogue, and we are hopefully expectant of the fruit still to come.

Respectfully Submitted,  
The Reformed and Missional Implementation Team:

Eddy Aleman (Synod of the Far West)  
Carol Bechtel (Synod of the Great Lakes and president of General Synod)  
Carson Culp (Synod of Canada)  
Dan Eisnor (Synod of Mid-America)  
Jan Hoffman (Synod of Albany)  
Brian Keepers (Synod of the Great Lakes and team moderator)  
Denise Kingdom Grier (Synod of the Great Lakes)  
Marianne Lin (Synod of New York)  
Gregg Mast (Synod of the Mid-Atlantics)  
Curry Pikkaart (Synod of the Great Lakes)  
Bob Rook (Synod of the Heartland)  
Dennis TeBeest (Synod of the Mid-Atlantics)

***MGS 2008, R-16, p. 109***

#### **REPORT ON THE FRESH WIND LETTER**

To instruct the General Synod Council to send the Fresh Wind Letter to every consistency 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 (*MGS 2008, R-16, p. 109*).

The Fresh Wind Letter was sent to every congregation in the RCA, with an invitation to join a church-wide conversation about the vibrant future that might unfold when RCA elders, deacons, lay people, and pastors all work together as equal partners in ministry following Christ in mission. The mailing also included two litanies to introduce the Fresh Wind Letter in a Sunday morning worship service. Consistories were encouraged to schedule a time to discuss the Fresh Wind Letter and respond to the following questions:

- Based on your study of and reflection on the Fresh Wind Letter, what do the leaders of your congregation want to communicate to the members of the task force?
- What does it mean for each of us to look at the world with Christ's eyes?
- How do we see the Holy Spirit leading us to join him in mission?

Among the several responses received was this one:

I wanted to share with you the outcome of our using the Fresh Wind Letter as part of our congregational meeting on Sunday. First let me say that in 22 years of leading congregational meetings this was by far the most inspirational, energizing, and empowering one. The letter was distributed to the congregation two weeks prior to our meeting. The congregation clearly had read the letter. One response to the letter was that it has opened our eyes to what God is doing in our midst and has helped us feel the prompting of the spirit of God to come along side of God's work. In other words it encouraged us to look within and out with new eyes. At one point during the meeting as we met in small groups, the volume in the room was rising and all I could hear was 'babble' (it was during the Bible study piece) at the conclusion each small group had come up with leadership traits. I shared with them that it sounded and felt like Pentecost with all the Spirit of God coming upon us.

Another piece that surfaced was how important our prayer life together and separate will be to our working along side of God. We shared the need to use intercessory prayer for more than just the needs of specific people in need but also for our ministry, community, and how God will work with us and through us to accomplish much. (*Pastor Nancy Ryan, Fort Plain, New York*)

The task force met February 27 through March 1, 2009, at the Prince Conference Center in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Task force members included:

Mary Bechler, West Sioux Classis  
 Janet Benitez, Passaic Valley Classis  
 Steve DeYoung, Holland Classis  
 Cindy Heinen, Wisconsin Classis  
 Brad Lewis, Albany Classis  
 Curt Patterson, Central Iowa Classis  
 Bart Strong, Ontario Classis  
 Cora Taitt, New York Classis  
 Don Werkhoven, Central California Classis

Ellen Ratmeyer, coordinator of consistory training and Ministry Services, provided leadership for the task force. Kenneth Eriks, director of Congregational Mission, and Kirsty DePree, coordinator of discipleship, also assisted.

In reflecting on the responses received from congregations throughout the RCA, the task force listened to how the Spirit is calling forth the gifts of people in our congregations in new and fresh ways. On Saturday, February 28, task force members participated in the Equipping God's People for Ministry training event sponsored by the Synod of the Great Lakes. With a focus on the Fresh Wind Letter, this event provided a firsthand look at ways church leaders are being equipped for ministry. Following Sunday morning worship at Ada Reformed Church and a meeting with pastor Julie VanderVeen Van Til and leaders from that church, the task force meeting concluded.

The task force will continue its work in the coming year and anticipates presenting a final report to the 2010 General Synod.

**MGS 2008, R-28, p. 125**

To direct the president of the General Synod to appoint a task force to review the constitutional inquiry questions (*BCO* 1.II.12.7.1) for their contemporary theological and eccle-

siological relevance, practical usefulness, and missional focus, for report to the General Synod of 2010.

*The president appointed a task force in the fall of 2008. Budget constraints (no additional funding was authorized for this team to meet) and limitations on staff time prevented the task force from meeting prior to the 2009 General Synod. The work will begin in the fall and a report will be ready for the next General Synod meeting.*

**MGS 2008, R-31 and 32, p. 127-128**

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.

*These reports can be found behind the section titled "Communication."*

**MGS 2008, R-35, p. 130**

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.

*The team appointed by the GSC concluded that given the current economic environment, cut backs, and hiring freeze, now is not the time to move ahead with R-35. That is not to say the issues raised in R-35 are not important. Continued funding for the HOPE team and assessment of the need for a denominational minister for prayer must stay on our agenda as we continue our emphasis on prayer and pray for more advantageous economic times. The Houses of Prayer Equipping (HOPE) team continues to offer effective ministry and support to the church (evidenced in part by their presence and leadership at this meeting of General Synod) through volunteer and part-time contracted leaders and staff coordination.*

**MGS 2008, R-37, p. 130**

To encourage the General Synod Council to continue to find ways to explore alternative strategies for funding the church's work.

*The General Synod Council discussed this topic at the October meeting by reviewing historic income trends from assessments, contributions, interest income, and outside sales, including an analysis of inflation adjustments. The discussion that followed included answering questions in small groups about the opportunities and threats around the two main sources of revenue, contributions and assessments, as well as opportunities to increase contribution revenue. As a result of the ideas generated through answering these questions, the GSC instructed the general secretary to have staff further the process of finding ways to explore alternative strategies for funding the church's work. Specific areas of discussion focused on the use of communication about financial needs and uses of the funds, the relationship between assessments and new church starts, and alternative calculation methods.*

*In light of the economic crisis between the time of the October GSC meeting and the writing of this report, the focus of staff has been on the immediate budget concerns for 2009 and preparing the budget for 2010. Both the GSC and the staff recognize the incredible value that the Reformed Church in America has with the assessment system because it is not only a source of income that allows the denomination to do the work*

*we are called to do but, more importantly, because it aligns with our common understanding and acceptance of covenantal relationships as together we carry out the work of God's church in the world.*

*Staff will continue to move this topic forward through a review of the prior assessment studies and will address the specific ideas generated from the October GSC meeting to a future GSC meeting.*

**MGS 2008, R-44, p. 219**

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.

*The study guide referred to has been made available on the RCA's website:  
[www.rca.org/Page.aspx?pid=4796](http://www.rca.org/Page.aspx?pid=4796).*

**MGS 2008, R-45, p. 222**

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.

*In the summer of 2008 an online survey was conducted that included questions related to R-45. The survey results were compiled in a guide entitled "Church-Based Community Outreach Resource Guide," which is available on the RCA website at [www.rca.org/Page.aspx?pid=1542](http://www.rca.org/Page.aspx?pid=1542).*

**MGS 2008, R-47, p. 223**

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.

*Please see the above response to R-45, which represents the beginning steps regarding the formation of affinity groups. More work will follow.*

**MGS 2008, R-48, p. 225**

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.

*To read these papers and find a resource list go to [www.rca.org/Page.aspx?pid=3843](http://www.rca.org/Page.aspx?pid=3843).*

**MGS 2008, R-49, p. 226**

To direct the General Synod Council to advise RCA consistories on how to monitor online activities on computers within their churches.

*This information was provided to all consistories through the RCA's leadership mailing in January 2009. To access this information on filtering Internet content go to [images.rca.org/docs/resources/0109-R49.pdf](http://images.rca.org/docs/resources/0109-R49.pdf).*

**MGS 2008, R-50, p. 227**

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 infor-

mation 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.

*This information was provided to congregations in 2008. Please see the following website for an extensive list of human trafficking resources as well as encouragement to use the curriculum entitled "Hands that Heal": [www.rca.org/Page.aspx?pid=4812](http://www.rca.org/Page.aspx?pid=4812). Also, please see the following RCA website location for an article entitled "Have You Really Thought about Human Trafficking?": [www.rca.org/Page.aspx?pid=5287](http://www.rca.org/Page.aspx?pid=5287).*

**MGS 2008, R-52, p. 229**

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.

*This information was provided to congregations in 2008. To access the information on this subject go to [www.rca.org/Page.aspx?pid=5324](http://www.rca.org/Page.aspx?pid=5324).*

**MGS 2008, R-54, p. 230**

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.

*Membership in NRCAT was established in July 2008. RCA churches will be made aware of resource materials via the RCA website and mailings.*

**MGS 2008, R-55, p. 232**

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.

*See the report of the GSC on Discipleship in the General Synod Council section and the report of the Commission on Christian Education and Discipleship in the reports of commissions.*

**MGS 2008, R-62, p. 254**

To incorporate into General Synod 2009 a celebration of the five hundredth anniversary of John Calvin's birth.

*The General Synod celebrates this anniversary on Monday, June 8, 2009.*

**MGS 2008, R-66, p. 264**

To instruct the General Synod Council and to strongly urge regional synods, classes, 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 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.

*The Multiracial Strategy Coalition met in its first annual meeting to develop guides and expectations. Twenty-four recommendations resulted and most were placed in a strategic ministry plan for the sixth dimension of Our Call—A Multiracial Future Freed from Racism, which was forwarded to GSC in March 2009. The report, titled “Report of the General Synod Council on the RCA’s Multiracial Future Freed from Racism,” can be found in the General Synod Council section.*

**MGS 2008, R-67, p. 267**

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.

*The General Synod Council and the commissions of the General Synod devoted a major portion of their joint fall 2008 meeting to study and discussion of the Belhar Confession and to how GSC could best integrate within the framework and language of Our Call the core values of the Belhar Confession: unity, reconciliation, and justice. Based on advice from the commissions GSC moved forward in October to draft revised “ends statements.” These are the policy statements adopted by GSC that are central to its oversight and evaluation of the fulfillment of the goals established from time to time by the General Synod. The ends statements provide guidance for the formation of measurable goals and strategies by the general secretary and staff that are then monitored by GSC at its fall and spring meetings. GSC heard a follow-up report at its spring 2009 meeting from a small writing team of its own membership and adopted a revised “global ends statement” and a specific end statement focused on “a multiracial future freed from racism.” The two statements are:*

**E-1 GLOBAL ENDS POLICY**

Empowered by the Holy Spirit, grounded in Scripture, 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 faithful and fruitful denomination where congregations are following Christ in mission, equipped and empowered to embrace unity, reconciliation, and justice, 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 will reflect God’s vision of the kingdom: embracing complete unity; reaching all people (every race, tribe, people, and language, every disability and special need, including those living on the margins) with the love and grace of Jesus Christ; actively engaging in love, acceptance, forgiveness, and justice (John 17:23; Revelation 7:9).

**E-7 MULTIRACIAL FUTURE POLICY**

The RCA will be a fellowship of congregations resisting the sin of racism and committing to a multiracial future engaging all of God’s people in mission and ministry.

*In February 2009 the general secretary invited a “Multiracial Strategy Coalition,” a group of RCA leaders representative of the RCA’s current multiracial and multicultural*

*life, to a three-day meeting in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Twenty-four recommendations resulted and most were placed in a strategic ministry plan for the sixth dimension of Our Call—A Multiracial Future Freed from Racism (E-7 above). The report, titled “Report of the General Synod Council on the RCA’s Multiracial Future Freed from Racism,” can be found in the General Synod Council section, pages 200-207.*

*GSC also directed staff to revise the promotional material used to communicate and support Our Call to include the new emphasis. The revised promotional material is being used at this meeting of the General Synod.*

**MGS 2008, R-68, p. 267-268**

To instruct the General Synod Council to so revise the annual Consistorial Report 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?

*Staff has begun implementing these and other changes in the report. The 2009 report will reflect these changes.*

**MGS 2008, R-69, p. 277**

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.

*The paper can be found online at [www.rca.org/Page.aspx?pid=4994](http://www.rca.org/Page.aspx?pid=4994). The study guide will be written by the disabilities staff person once that person is hired.*

**MGS 2008, R-70, p. 280**

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 executive staff levels, better reflects the denomination’s commitment to a multicultural and multiracial future; and further, 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.

*The report on the processes and training opportunities outlined above follows:*

**RECRUITING AND TRAINING LEADERS**

Following the instructions of the 2008 General Synod, the R-70 Task Force was appointed by GSC to respond to the recommendation. Task force members were Mark Kellar and So Ae Lee-Heintzelman, representatives from the Commission on Race and Ethnicity; Lynn Japinga, a representative from the Commission for Women; Christina Labbé, a representative from the Women’s Ministries Advisory Team; and David Smith, a consultant from The Employers’ Association who helped develop a new salary grade system for the RCA. GSC personnel director Sharon Hayes also served the task force as a consultant.

GSC staffing statistics were distributed to the task force members identifying current staffing demographics showing gender count and racial/ethnic count by regional office, gender and ethnic make up of administrative staff by head count and percentage, and gender and ethnic make up of executive staff by head count and percentage.

**Brainstorming Session I:** Time was designated to brainstorm and share ideas on how the R-70 task assignment could be completed. The following ideas were suggested and discussed:

- Utilize a variety of recruitment resources: website, *Church Herald*, stated clerks within the geographic area of the position.
- Upcoming director of development position—consider locations.
- Network recommendations.
- Utilize racially diverse networks; a current challenge is that people sometimes don't "trust" reformers.
- Utilize RCA racial and ethnic councils for recruitment.

At the request of the task force, the director of personnel outlined the current interview process:

- The personnel director distributes a job description, issues a job posting, screens resumes, schedules phone interviews, and completes initial phone interviews to help prioritize candidates. At this initial phase the candidate pool is screened down to four to six potential candidates depending on the size of the initial pool.
- Potential candidates participate in another phone interview with an interview panel of four to five people. (The panel focuses on specific questions related to the position.) At this second phase the candidate pool is screened down to two to three potential candidates.
- Candidates then meet with the interview panel face-to-face for executive positions. Administrative candidates usually meet face-to-face with the personnel director and the supervisor.
- The personnel director makes a final offer.

The director of personnel also indicated that performance evaluations can help identify people with leadership potential, abilities, relational skills, and other qualities that may make them good candidates for another position. The personnel director added that recommendations from current staff with regard to people they have relationships with are also valuable.

**Recommendation 1:** After much discussion it was agreed that the current hiring process needs to be formalized and communicated. Part of the formulation should include an appropriately diverse interviewing panel. The task force recommended to the general secretary that he communicate clearly to the church the current hiring process used to fill staff positions that support the General Synod Council and the other General Synod agencies, noting that candidate searches are open and that interviewing is conducted by panels appropriate for the position being filled and whose members have completed anti-racism training.

**Brainstorming Session II:** Time was designated to brainstorm and share ideas regarding leadership. The following ideas were suggested and discussed:

- RCA camps should be used as a resource for identifying and recruiting emerging leaders who may consider ministry or professions that are needed in the employed ministries of the church.

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- Someone who has leadership qualities would be proactive, take initiative, and be a good role model.
- Support programs should be provided to help individuals acquire skills they may lack.
- Offer week-long seminars for women.
- Identify role models and mentors.
- Network.
- Current leaders should be promoting relationships that are intentional to help them identify the gifts and passions of others. To be successful at identifying potential future leaders, they need to be comfortable with those who are different.
- Hiring panelists should have anti-racism training.
- Perceptions of current jobs and hiring processes.
- RCA work ethics.

**Recommendation 2:** In order to proceed and accomplish the task given by the General Synod “throughout the remaining years of Our Call” (2008-2013), the task force recommends to the general secretary that he 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 denomination staff positions, particularly at Classification I and II executive staff levels (Grades 18-23), better reflects the denomination’s commitment to a multicultural and multiracial future; and, further, that the general secretary ensure the following principles are included in the hiring process for all positions.

- Include the RCA’s racial and ethnic councils and other constituency groups including non-RCA racial and ethnic networks, universities, seminaries, community groups, and constituency groups in the recruitment process.
- Dissemination of job description should include the possibility of choice of RCA office location where this is feasible.
- Expand networking to include ethnic and racial networks, universities, seminaries, community groups, and constituency groups.
- Develop a three-phase interviewing process:
  - Personnel director screens resumes and completes phone interviews to help prioritize candidates.
  - Panelist phone interview utilizing specific, focused questions.
  - Following the in-person panelist interview the panelists and supervisor for the prospective position must reach consensus regarding the candidate to hire. The personnel director makes the offer following consultation with the supervisor and cluster director.
- When interviewing at the executive level, a psychological assessment will be given. The results will be “weighed” equally with other qualifiers.
- Qualifiers that the panelists should include are proven ability to perform the job, psychological assessment, other assessments, interview process, internal and external references, and background checks.
- Interviewing panelists should have completed training in racism/diversity.
- All new staff should complete racism/diversity training within six months of hire. (Note: current staff should complete training no later than January 2010.)

**Recommendation 3:** In order to proceed and accomplish the task given by the General Synod, the task force recommends to general secretary that he:

- Establish that the personnel director be responsible for the cultivation of staff leadership and that the director of congregational mission be responsible for the cultivation of non-staff leadership.

- Consider asking that the coordinator for leader renewal and the coordinator of church health and coaching be responsible for training trainers for external (non-staff) leadership.
- Ensure that the church develop a highly diverse pool of candidates and make sure they continue to grow and develop through programs such as (but not limited to) week-long seminars for women, role models and mentoring, networks of women and minorities, leadership classes.
- Internal leadership candidates should be identified through performance evaluations.
- External leadership candidates should be identified through internal recommendations and a written essay on leadership.

## REFERRALS FROM PREVIOUS SYNODS

### *MGS 2005, R-94, p. 372*

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.

*That report is as follows:*

### RCA DIALOGUE ON HOMOSEXUALITY

#### Overview

Dialogue is a form of human interaction which provides opportunities to hear the viewpoints and experiences of others and to understand how they, being different from ourselves, understand issues about which both of us care. Reciprocally, participants also enjoy the opportunity to be heard and understood. Dialogue differs from deliberation. Deliberation invites opposing speeches, and it settles issues by voting; the church's assemblies such as classes or General Synod engage in deliberation.

This is consequently not a position paper; it is a report on a process. The dialogue coordinator and steering committee designed and directed a dialogue program of several sessions for the purposes of listening and encounter within the RCA on the emotionally loaded subject of homosexuality and church life. The sessions brought about increased understanding of the issues involved and increased acceptance of differences among participants. In that sense, the dialogue sessions "worked."

When participants from conflicting views encountered each other in dialogue sessions, they often agreed to accept each other without insisting on changes of viewpoints. Their encounters with each other never resulted in a call that one or the other should leave the church. This suggests that more time and more encouragement for face-to-face dialogue may, in fact, enable us to continue to live together, pursuing the primary agenda of Our Call.

The dialogue also worked in the sense that it revealed the great complexity of RCA members' views on homosexuality. Widely scattered views emerged as the steering committee and coordinator listened to the ways in which RCA members talked about homosexuality and about their lives in the church. These many views were treated as "voices" within the RCA that are speaking, as it were, around a table, concerning homosexuality and church life.

Additionally, the dialogue succeeded in the sense that it equipped participants to engage each other more sensitively and charitably on future issues that may threaten to be divisive. A dialogue experience yields a set of skills that the church can use, perhaps primarily at the local-church level, whenever an emotionally loaded issue must be addressed.

In the matter of homosexuality, no consensus emerged among RCA members as a result of the dialogue program. Therefore no policy recommendations to the General Synod appear in this report. The church's ability to handle its deliberations regarding homosexuality has improved, at least among those who participated in the dialogue's events. This ability was among the purposes which the General Synod Council (GSC) specified when it authorized the program in 2005.<sup>1</sup>

### **People, Their Cultures, and Their Voices**

The dialogue was always, and ultimately will be, about people. The individuals, families, and congregations who constitute—and who will in the future constitute—the church face the issue of homosexuality in a variety of “up close and personal” ways. It will be helpful if, in considering this report, the reader will keep human faces in view, and not see this as an issue only in the abstract—as something clinical or institutional rather than something personal.

The reader is also reminded that the RCA finds itself in a hyper-sexualized society which fosters numerous exaggerations and distortions with regard to human sexuality. The church is called to witness to—and sometimes against—the hypersexualization and the twistedness of society's portrayals of sexuality. If the church of Jesus Christ treats sexual behavior as the *centerpiece* of its belief and practice, it will already have failed because it will have let society's exaggerations and distortions set the agenda. As master-devil Screwtape wrote to junior tempter-devil Wormwood, “The game is to have them all running about with fire extinguishers whenever there is a flood, and all crowding to that side of the boat which is already nearly gunwale under” (C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, Letter XXV). The RCA must address the issue of homosexuality carefully and well, but it must not make sexuality its consuming interest.

When the dialogue proposal was crafted, the church had just experienced a divisive trial at the 2005 General Synod. The trial and associated activities left the impression in many minds that two opposing, adversarial positions regarding homosexuality existed in the RCA and that most members could basically locate themselves at one of those two positions or on a line drawn directly between them.

That impression has proven to be an oversimplification, noted at the steering committee's initial meeting. Recognizing that the dialogue should acknowledge and include the diversity of voices in the church, the coordinator and members of the committee engaged in an intentional, year-long process of listening to the church—attending and participating in a variety of RCA events, raising the subject of homosexuality, and pooling their observations. The committee also listened in a more formal, structured fashion, designing and distributing a questionnaire on the issue to RCA members.<sup>2</sup>

Widely scattered views characterize RCA members' beliefs about homosexuality. In the secular media, and often in the church, it is often presumed that people's beliefs fall into two opposing camps. The committee's research found otherwise. It would be unfair to many RCA members to represent their positions as lying along a line that is drawn, for example, between “open and affirming” on the one hand and “hate the sin but love the sinner” on the other.

Inherent in the GSC's action was the intent that the Reformed Church in America continue vigorously to pursue Our Call, including the missional dimension of Our Call.<sup>3</sup> This missional dimension makes it clear that the life of the RCA is not only about ministry to and with those who are currently part of the church. It is also about those who are *not yet* part of the church, but to whom Christ leads us to reach out.<sup>4</sup>

These "listening" activities, combined with an awareness of Our Call, resulted in a dozen, one-page characterizations of RCA "voices" with respect to homosexuality. We are a diverse church, expecting to become more diverse, with a variety of voices on the subject of homosexuality. Some of us use different vocabularies from others because it's not the same kind of issue for everyone.

### **Process: The Four-Session Design**

As the coordinator and the steering committee became more familiar with the variety of views in the church and with the nature of dialogue, and as they envisioned implementing this program, a four-session design for dialogue emerged. The four sessions may be summarized as follows.

- I. Entering dialogue
  - a. The nature of dialogue
  - b. Entry points (What draws RCA members to care about this issue?)
- II. Theological understandings
  - a. Scripture
  - b. Tradition (What the church has taught on the subject)
  - c. Natural revelation (Scientific inquiry)
  - d. Personal experience
- III. Recognizing and hearing the "voices" in the church
- IV. Ministry and polity (Living in community as Christians)

### **Dialogue Facilitation, Locations, and Participants**

The dialogue sessions have been facilitated by the coordinator, by members of the steering committee, and by a few associate facilitators who have been trained for the task.<sup>5</sup> A standard script has assisted the facilitators in the conduct of each session.

As of January 1, 2009, dialogues had been conducted in ten locations.<sup>6</sup> Attendance has ranged from 20 to 75. Most were classis-wide events, but some were regional. In general, the strategy was to offer the program first in the locations where there was the greatest expressed interest or apparent need. The stated clerks of the various classes and regional synods provided assistance in selecting the locations.

Returns from the questionnaire also guided the coordinator in scheduling dialogue events. Large numbers of returns came from those geographic areas in which the Reformed Church has maintained educational institutions: New Jersey, southwest Michigan, and central and northwest Iowa. Those locations were among the first to participate in the dialogue, and attendance was strong.

The dialogue was more welcome in some places than in others. The coordinator learned that at least two classes had voted not to participate in the dialogue. Other resistance to the

dialogue program took the more passive form of some classes neglecting to respond to the coordinator's correspondence. Some subpopulations of the RCA voiced strong opposition to the conduct of any dialogue on the subject. Additional dialogue events are planned for the winter and spring of 2009. By the time General Synod meets in June 2009, the dialogue will have been available within each of the RCA's eight regional synods. For those classes and regions that were not prepared to engage in the dialogue during the 2006-2009 time frame, the steering committee and coordinator suggest that the materials developed for this program be employed as the need and interest arise.

### Evaluations

The GSC specified that the dialogue program include an evaluation of the program's effectiveness. For that purpose, the coordinator and steering committee designed an evaluation form that was completed by most participants at the close of each dialogue session. At every dialogue event, the evaluations were strongly positive, averaging six on a seven-point scale, indicating a very high approval level of the experience and a commendation of the dialogue process regarding this and conceivably other issues.

### Recommendations

1. The dialogue coordinator and steering committee recommend that the General Synod postpone further policy deliberations regarding homosexuality and that the materials developed in this program be made available in appropriate form for future use by the church.

Wisdom suggests that it is wise to postpone further *Book of Church Order* proposals on this matter until additional local churches and classes become intentional about some form of dialogue. While some parts of the church were ready, even eager, for a dialogue on homosexuality, other areas were moderately to strongly resistant. The resources developed by the coordinator and the steering committee—all of which will now be available from the Office of the General Synod—can be used by interested parties in the future.

- 1a. The dialogue process is beneficial as a tool for helping participants understand and accept each other while simultaneously differing on emotionally loaded issues.

As noted earlier in the overview section, dialogue and deliberation are two distinctly different processes. The church's assemblies engage in deliberation. Many participants, although invited to a dialogue, arrived with a mentality of deliberation. Thus, the first portion of Session I was consistently directed at introducing the dialogue process and adopting norms for the group's interactions.

The dialogue coordinator directed a dialogue program for the purposes of listening and encounter. The steering committee and coordinator believe that some transformation took place in understanding. Dialogue facilitators also saw strongly held, persistent differences in beliefs. Beyond that, and distressingly, the RCA is a church that has not implemented the pastoral care and ministry recommendations that the General Synod commended in 1979 regarding homosexual persons.

Dialogue equips people to deliberate more sensitively and productively, but dialogue does not yield policy decisions—except in the instance in which a consensus emerges from the dialogue process. In the matter of homosexuality, no consensus emerged in the RCA as it engaged in the dialogue program.

- 1b. The dialogue program found no denominational consensus on the matter of homosexuality and ecclesiastical life.

Certainly, there is no consensus in the church regarding the antecedents of sexual orientation among humans, no consensus about whether same-sex unions can be faithful expressions of covenantal commitment, and no consensus about what ecclesiastical roles are appropriate for those who engage in homosexual practices. (Some participants in dialogue events would even deny certain civil rights to celibate persons of same-sex orientation, in contravention of the 1978 Commission on Theology paper.<sup>7</sup>)

2. The dialogue process regarding homosexuality should continue to be used on a locally initiated basis. It should also be employed regarding issues that may arise in the future, such as stem-cell research, genetic engineering, and others.
3. Future policy deliberations by the General Synod regarding homosexuality should recognize the ethnic diversity of the church today and of the increasingly non-Anglo membership that is likely in the future.

Respectfully submitted by John Stapert, dialogue coordinator, and steering committee members Philip Bakelaar, John “Jack” Buteyn, John Kapteyn, Mark Kellar, Robert Luidens, Tamara Schollaart, Marye Thomas (served for one year), and Fred Wezeman.

#### End Notes

- <sup>1</sup> At its October 2005 meeting the GSC acted to initiate a dialogue process regarding homosexuality, and it articulated a purpose statement for that dialogue. That original purpose statement was slightly revised by the General Synod of 2006. The purposes included addressing this issue and also developing a dialogue process that might serve the church in dealing with future, emotionally loaded issues.
- <sup>2</sup> Copies of the survey and other materials created by this program have been archived with the Office of the General Synod.
- <sup>3</sup> Our Call: “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” (*Minutes of General Synod 2003*, p. 66).
- <sup>4</sup> Mission becomes a way of life when we reach out to people with the gospel, meeting needs in our own neighborhoods and cities and through global partnerships. This is what the church has always been about—faithful congregations, inspiring worship, and loving relationships that flourish as the church builds community, nurtures the gifts of all its members, and reaches out in mission both locally and globally (from an explication of Our Call. See the RCA website, [www.rca.org](http://www.rca.org), for more.)
- <sup>5</sup> The coordinator and the steering committee thank Helen Monsees and Peg Luidens for their generous assistance in guiding this development of the program and in preparing a script for the facilitators.
- <sup>6</sup> A continuously updated list of locations, participants, and leadership of the dialogue events has been supplied to the Office of the General Synod.

<sup>7</sup> Civil rights for homosexuals was addressed in 1978 when the Commission on Theology prepared a report on the biblical and theological appraisal of homosexuality in regard to the issue of human and civil rights. That report stated that approval of homosexuality is not a prerequisite to firm support of basic civil rights; denial of such rights is inconsistent with biblical witness and Reformed theology (*MGS 1978*, pp. 229-240). The commission again addressed similar issues in 1994 when it was following General Synod's resolution of 1990 to prepare a report indicating that homosexuality is contrary to Scripture while still affirming love and sensitivity to homosexuals. That action called for repentance on the part of the church for its poor treatment of homosexuals in the past (*MGS 1994*, pp. 370-378).

**MGS 2006, R-40, p. 144**

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 participated in the first annual anti-racism training in October 2008. Anti-racism training has been incorporated into the annual fall meeting of commissions, staff, and the GSC for all newly elected and appointed personnel and is open to all participants in the meetings.*

**MGS 2006, R-41, p. 144**

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 to report to the General Synod in 2011.

*See the response to R-40 above.*

**MGS 2006, R-43, p. 144**

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

*Earl James, coordinator for multiracial initiatives and social justice, was hired in November 2007. Since then, three training programs have been developed to meet the instruction given to GSC: 1) Breakfast Club—a twelve-month, one-on-one discussion-based program where pairs explore race, faith, and personal life journey, 2) Understanding Racism: Joining the Journey—a close review of history that examines the formation of and resistance to race-based governmental actions, power analysis, and racialization of self- and Christian-images, and 3) Sankofa—an intense four-day bus trip through the deep South to explore past and present places of racial injustice, speak with people, and examine feelings, attitudes, and behaviors.*

*Since then, the three training programs above have been made available to each regional synod. Breakfast Clubs have been started in two synods; Understanding Racism: Joining the Journey has trained over 125 RCA leaders and members including GSC and commission members, and discussions are underway in two synods to sponsor two or three trainings; twenty-one RCA leaders and members have participated in Sankofa journeys as guests of the Evangelical Covenant Church. In April 2009 the RCA launched its inaugural Sankofa experience with leaders of regional synods, GSC staff,*

*as well as church members participating. Discussions are underway for sponsoring at least eight Sankofa experiences over the next twelve months in three to four synods.*

## RESOLUTIONS

At its spring 2009 meeting the General Synod Council recognized the departure from staff of four dedicated servants of the church and adopted the following resolutions:

**Be it resolved** that the General Synod Council of the Reformed Church in America, meeting March 24-26, 2009, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, offers thanks to God for years of competent and faithful service to the ministries of the Reformed Church in America by Mary Clark, who began serving as coordinator of women's ministries for the RCA in April 2004. As coordinator she provided leadership and direction to the denominational commitment to encourage and support RCA women in carrying out ministry in the church and the world. Mary coordinated the InStep Together fund drive from January 2000 to December 2003, and the RCA Women's Conference in 2007. She also worked creatively and passionately as an advocate for women. Mary organized and promoted Sister Share, a women's ministries initiative that helps fund five projects that assist women and children in need around the world; and,

be it further resolved that the General Synod Council invites its delegates and guests to join in expressing to Mary its gratitude, admiration, affection, and prayers for years of health and joy in continuing service to Christ and his church.

**Be it resolved** that the General Synod Council of the Reformed Church in America, meeting March 24-26, 2009, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, offers thanks to God for years of competent and faithful service to the ministries of the Reformed Church in America by Irene Delgado, who served on GSC staff for nineteen years. She joined the staff in December 1989 as an administrative assistant for the finance department. In 1999 she was promoted to investment accountant and began recording accounting transactions for investments and endowments, as well as working on the contribution management team. She carried out her responsibilities with dedication, detailed accuracy, deliberateness, and a strong sense of due diligence; and,

be it further resolved that the General Synod Council invites its delegates and guests to join in expressing to Irene its gratitude, admiration, affection, and prayers for years of health and joy in continuing service to Christ and his church.

**Be it resolved** that the General Synod Council of the Reformed Church in America, meeting March 24-26, 2009, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, offers thanks to God for years of competent and faithful service to the ministries of the Reformed Church in America by Bruce Menning, who joined the RCA's Global Mission program as director in 1996. Since then, he has built on the RCA's rich heritage of sharing the good news throughout the world. New mission areas have opened, and under Bruce's leadership, Global Mission has strengthened its connection to mission partners around the globe. Nearly half of RCA missionaries now work directly with partner organizations, aiding them in their ministries. Until his retirement in March, Bruce crafted new strategies for mission outreach, evaluated programs, raised funds, and interpreted the work of Global Mission to the church; and,

be it further resolved that the General Synod Council invites its delegates and guests to join in expressing to Bruce its gratitude, admiration, affection, and prayers for years of health and joy in continuing service to Christ and his church.

**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL SYNOD 111**

**Be it resolved** that the General Synod Council of the Reformed Church in America, meeting March 24-26, 2009, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, offers thanks to God for years of competent and faithful service to the ministries of the Reformed Church in America by Dick Welscott, who served the Reformed Church for over twenty years, including many years as director of congregational services and evangelism. He led the denomination's efforts in new church development and congregational revitalization and was instrumental in organizing the 98 by '98 campaign to plant RCA churches in the 1990s. The current success of the RCA church multiplication movement owes much to the foundation of church planting that Dick helped lay. Beginning in September 2007 and until his retirement in March, Dick served as director of the RCA's development office. His leadership helped communicate the denomination's increasing need for funds from individuals and organizations to support the ministries and mission of the Reformed Church in America; and,

be it further resolved that the General Synod Council invites its delegates and guests to join in expressing to Dick its gratitude, admiration, 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 12/31/2008**

	2006	2007	2008	2007-2008 Increase or (Decrease)
1 Churches	931	931	933	2
2 Church Households	105,166	105,445	104,774	(593)
3 Confessing Members	166,921	165,953	161,272	(4,771)
4 Inactive Members	39,061	39,387	39,545	158
5 Baptized Members	64,876	65,238	59,303	(5,935)
6 Total Membership	270,858	270,518	260,120	(10,548)
7 Adherents	51,068	50,498	51,448	950
8 Average Worship Attendance	172	171	176	5
9 Received on Confession	6,863	7,040	6,536	(504)
10 Received on Certificate	3,409	2,989	2,977	(12)
11 Transferred	3,068	3,060	2,930	(130)
12 Deceased	2,545	2,580	2,711	131
13 Other Removals from Roll	5,656	5,034	6,503	1,469
14 Infants Baptized	3,468	3,351	3,141	(210)
15 Adults Baptized	1,488	1,404	1,476	72
16 Sunday Church School	0	0	0	0
17 New Membership Classes	0	0	0	0
18 Other Educational Programs	0	0	0	0
19a RCA Assessments	12,517,429	12,682,289	12,535,989	(146,300)
19b RCA Contributions	13,660,425	14,178,366	15,005,604	827,238
19c Other Contributions	18,042,115	19,036,289	20,132,770	1,096,481
20 Congregation Purposes	293,101,846	326,472,199	289,315,922	(37,156,277)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>337,321,815</b>	<b>372,369,143</b>	<b>336,990,285</b>	<b>(35,378,858)</b>