

## 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 the 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 met October 16-18, 2008, in Chicago, Illinois (in conjunction with the other commissions and the General Synod Council), and January 29-30, 2009, at First Reformed Church and 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, how does history enrich and inform a denomination that is forward-focused on mission, revitalization, and growth? Doesn't attention to history make the church a prisoner of its past? Quite the contrary; the Protestant origins of the Reformed Church in America are missional and reformed through and through. In fact, this year Reformed communities throughout the world are celebrating the five-hundredth anniversary of the birth of John Calvin. In his life, ministry, and scholarship Calvin sought to reform preaching, revitalize worship, and nurture churches devoted to mission and the transformation of society. In fulfillment of its charge to inform the RCA of pertinent history and traditions (*BCO* Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 5), this year the Commission on History highlights John Calvin and his contributions to our past, present, and future. (See *MGS 2008*, R-62, p. 254.)

In addition to items related to Calvin's legacy, RCA archives and historical collections include a treasure trove of accumulated wisdom, experience, and devotion awaiting 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. Indeed, 2009 marks the one-hundred-fiftieth anniversary of RCA mission in Japan. Growth and progress in the RCA can further be celebrated this year with attention to the history of women in the denomination: thirty years ago the General Synod judicial session upheld the ordination of women. History gives us cause to celebrate and provides vital perspective. In fact, 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 more profound sense of calling, and a greater commitment to the church. Thus, grasp of history can nurture personal and church-wide growth. If young people are so moved by history, then a series of questions are worth pondering. What historical resources and wisdom lie 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 over forty years the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America has been answering these urgent questions. Fifty-seven volumes have appeared since the inception of the series in 1968. The commission is pleased to announce the pub-

lication of three additional volumes, which are now available for purchase: *Old Wing Mission*, by Robert Swierenga and William Van Appledorn; *Herman J. Ridder: Contextual Preacher and Seminary President* (George Brown Jr., editor); and *Chinese Theological Education, 1970-2006* (Marvin Hoff, editor).

The commission would also like to highlight another Historical Series publication that it considers invaluable 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: *By Grace Alone: Stories of the Reformed Church in America*, by Donald J. Bruggink and Kim Nathan Baker. A list of all the titles of the RCA Historical Series and information on availability and purchasing is posted online at [www.rca.org](http://www.rca.org). From the "About Us" drop-down menu, choose "Archives" and then "The RCA Historical Series."

The Commission on History continues to fulfill its calling in part by reviewing manuscripts for future publication in the Historical Series and encourages persons who are contemplating RCA research projects and new volumes to contact the commission for guidance and possible collaboration.

This year the commission is delighted to recognize and celebrate the eightieth birthday of Donald J. Bruggink. For over half of his life he has served as the tireless and superb general editor of the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America. The commission thanks him for his outstanding dedication and service to the church.

#### **R-66**

**WHEREAS** the Rev. Dr. Donald J. Bruggink has contributed to the education of many throughout the church both at New Brunswick Theological Seminary in 1960 and at Western Theological Seminary from 1962 until his retirement in 1999; and,

**WHEREAS** the Rev. Dr. Donald J. Bruggink has faithfully served as the general editor of the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America from its inception in 1968, and has developed the series to include more than sixty volumes, and has been a faithful steward of the resources needed to publish that series; and,

**WHEREAS** the Rev. Dr. Donald J. Bruggink has represented the Reformed Church in America on ecumenical bodies and agencies, in many and diverse ways enriching our worship life, enhancing our theological understanding, and strengthening our ecumenical commitments,

**THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the two hundred third regular session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting at Hope College and Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan, June 4 through 9, 2009, along with the RCA's Commission on History, his friends and family, presents the Rev. Dr. Donald J. Bruggink with a festschrift in honor of his contributions to the life and ministry of the church and on his eightieth birthday and gratefully thanks him for his persistent, diligent service to the church and praises God for the gifts given to and shared by the Rev. Dr. Donald J. Bruggink. (ADOPTED)