

Report of the General Synod Council on Global Mission

“Just as it is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world, so it has been bearing fruit among yourselves from the day you heard it and truly comprehended the grace of God” (Colossians 1:6).

The Reformed Church in America is a fellowship of congregations called by God and empowered by the Holy Spirit to be the very presence of Jesus Christ in the world.

Our shared task is to equip congregations for ministry—a thousand churches in a million ways doing one thing—following Christ in mission, in a lost and broken world so loved by God.

The church, led by the Holy Spirit, is called to bear witness through God’s unconditional love to those who are among the poor, who are strangers, and who have become outcasts.

The vision of the Global Mission staff of the RCA is to support congregations and members as they personally, prayerfully, and financially support mission personnel, mission partners, and mission teams to do the following:

- Bring the good news of God’s grace in Jesus Christ to those who have never heard its joyful message.
- Increase the leadership, education, and technology capacities of mission partners.
- Transform the local mission engagement of congregations and members through global connections.
- Respond to disasters and injustice with actions of relief, development, and advocacy.

A Tradition of Mission

RCA Global Mission has engaged in cross-cultural mission for more than 150 years and has a record of excellence that is well known both within the RCA and throughout the ecumenical mission world. Missionaries who sign on for long-term assignments have been the backbone of RCA global missions. These career missionaries make a lasting and sustainable difference in the lives of people, communities, and indigenous churches. Emerging global churches are born, disciplined, trained, sustained, and sent in mission through long-term missionaries. The RCA remains committed to long-term mission assignments as the most effective approach to the sustainable development of indigenous churches around the globe.

Volunteers and Mission Teams

RCA Global Mission is also committed to short-term volunteers and mission teams. In the last thirty years, the sending of short-term mission teams both locally and globally has escalated rapidly. RCA Global Mission is committed to facilitating mission trips that accomplish meaningful and sustainable work but, more importantly, that transform the lives of the participants, the people “on the ground,” and the sending church.

RCA Global Mission is committed to long-term missionaries and short-term volunteers and mission teams. In today’s world of mission, the two approaches are not in conflict. Rather each contributes a distinctive role in God’s mission to reconcile the world to himself in Jesus Christ.

Growing Global Mission Opportunities

As Christians we are called to bring the whole gospel to the whole world. We also believe that focus is critical to effective mission work. All new RCA global mission projects must clearly address one or more of the following critical priorities:

- Evangelizing unreached peoples
- Empowering global partners
- Equipping RCA churches and leaders for mission
- Embracing compassion and justice

Evangelizing Unreached Peoples

RCA missionaries and funding enable the spread of the gospel to unreached peoples around the globe:

- In Chile with the Christian Presbyterian Church.
- In Honduras with the Moravians.
- In Alaska with the services of Mission Aviation Repair Center.
- In Italy with the Waldensians.
- In Niger with the Evangelical Church of the Republic of Niger.
- In Kenya with the Africa Inland Church.
- In China with the China Christian Council and the Yanbian and Rajin Foundation.
- In Myanmar with the Reformed Evangelical Church in Myanmar.
- Through Scripture translation and dissemination by RCA mission personnel assigned to Wycliffe, United Bible Societies, and Audio Scripture Ministries.

Empowering Global Partners

RCA Global Mission most often works in partnership with indigenous churches. The number one priority of our global partners is leadership development. RCA missionaries and mission grants equip leaders:

- In a doctoral program based in Latin America.
- At Bible schools in Honduras; Chiapas, Mexico; and Niger.
- Through worship and discipling of believers of international congregations in Oman and Bahrain.
- At the Al Amana Centre in Oman.
- At St. Paul's United Theological College in Kenya.
- At the Evangelical Theological Seminary and Reformed Christian Church in Croatia.
- With the Ukrainian Center for Christian Cooperation.
- In Albania with the Albanian Evangelical Alliance.
- At Tokyo Union Theological Seminary in Japan.
- In Estonia with Union of Free Evangelical and Baptist Churches of Estonia.
- At the Evangelical Seminary of Caracas in Venezuela.
- Through the Quiché Evangelical Church in Guatemala.
- At Mekane Yesus Theological Seminary in Ethiopia.
- At seminaries of the China Christian Council in Heifei and Shenyang.
- At Tainan Theological College and Seminary and Yu-Shan Theological College and Seminary in Taiwan.
- Through the diaconal program of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa and the Dutch Reformed churches of southern Africa.
- Through the Church Planting Center of the Reformed Evangelical Church in Myanmar.

Equipping RCA Churches and Leaders for Mission

Mutual mission describes a two-way relationship between mission partners, each of them both sending and receiving. The gifts of the global church are precious treasures for the church in the West as we seek to understand local mission in a racially diverse and religiously pluralistic world. RCA Global Mission facilitates mutual mission in several ways.

For the past several years RCA Global Mission has partnered—first with Western Theological Seminary and later expanding to include the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency and New Brunswick Theological Seminary—in providing seminary students with cross-cultural immersion experiences that develop their skills to communicate the gospel effectively across cultural lines. Global Mission also sponsors experiential journeys for RCA pastors to key mission sites around the world.

RCA Global Mission is in a good position to partner in these learning experiences, since that is what it has been doing effectively for over 150 years: crossing cultural lines with the good news of the gospel in ways that are sensitive to cultures and true to the gospel. Working with RCA pastors and seminaries, Global Mission hopes to contribute to the competencies of future church leaders while building a partnership in ministry and mission with them that will last a lifetime.

Embracing Compassion and Justice

Through Global Mission missionaries and grants to mission partners, the Reformed Church in America participates in the compassion and justice proclaimed by Jesus in Luke 4: “Today this scripture [Isaiah 61] has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

- The sick are healed in Nicaragua, Honduras, Chiapas, South India, Niger, Mozambique, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Bahrain.
- The broken and oppressed find wholeness and peace in Hungary, Italy, Egypt, South Korea, the United States, South India, Sudan, Palestine, and Malawi.
- Sustainable development supports brothers and sisters in Christ in Niger, Mozambique, South India, Ethiopia, Malawi, Kenya, and South Africa.
- Children are lovingly cared for and educated in Japan; Nicaragua; Malawi; Argentina; Ecuador; Hawaiian Gardens, California; Sioux Falls, South Dakota; Grand Rapids, Michigan; Staten Island, New York; Mescalero and Dulce, New Mexico; and Jackson County, Kentucky.
- Through Reformed Church World Service (RCWS), RCA members continue a ministry of compassion and hope throughout our lost and broken world. Gifts to One Great Hour of Sharing and in response to crisis appeals provide emergency relief to disaster survivors, grants for rehabilitation, the development of long-term solutions, and advocacy for justice for people who are poor and hungry.

GSC GLOBAL MISSION ENDS MONITORING REPORT

Each spring the RCA’s general secretary is required to report to the General Synod Council (GSC) on progress on the various ends policies established by the GSC. The monitoring report for Global Mission follows.

Global Mission Ends Policy

The RCA will be a fellowship of congregations intentionally crossing boundaries in word and deed with the love of God known in Jesus Christ resulting in:

- Evangelizing unreached peoples
- Empowering global partners

- Equipping RCA churches for mission
- Embracing compassion and justice

General Secretary’s Interpretation

This policy calls upon the GSC to make a difference through RCA Global Mission by connecting RCA churches and members in mutuality to the global church through mission personnel, projects, and partners. Global mission is a continuing focus of the RCA. With the support of Global Mission staff, RCA congregations and members will personally, prayerfully, and financially support mission personnel, mission partners, and mission teams to do the following:

- Bring the good news of God’s grace in Jesus Christ to those who have never heard its joyful message.
- Increase the leadership, education, and technology capacities of mission partners.
- Transform the local mission engagement of congregations and members through global connections.
- Respond to disasters and injustice with actions of relief, development, and advocacy.

Statistics on RCA Church and Member Giving

Churches	2008	2007	2002
RCA church pledges to Global Mission	\$6,084,743	\$6,276,909	\$6,373,893
Churches with no pledge	357	340	286
Average amount of church pledge	\$12,121	\$10,621	\$9,716
Per-member average through churches	\$28.18	\$37.60	\$35.95

Individuals	2008	2007	2002
Total Global Mission pledges by individuals	\$496,462	\$256,550	\$105,800
Total number of individuals holding pledges	287	195	75
Average pledge per person	\$1,729	\$1,315	\$1,411

Reformed Church World Service	2008	2007	2002
Donations by individuals*	\$59,468	\$38,438	\$24,482
Total number of individual donors	210	85	134
Average gift per person	\$284	\$452	\$183
Donations by churches*	\$213,188	\$222,487	\$204,809
Total number of church donors	158	169	170
Average gift per church	\$1,349	\$1,318	\$1,204

*Does not include contributions to disaster appeals.

Global Mission Funding Challenges

The financial crisis gripping the United States, Canada, and the rest of the world has significantly and negatively impacted giving at all levels of the church. RCA members are no less generous, but lost jobs, lost income, and lost investments have had an obvious bearing on contributions. In the current fiscal year of 2009 Global Mission, faced with a probable revenue shortfall in excess of \$800,000, has taken unprecedented measures to cut costs and increase savings. With no end to the economic crisis in sight, these economizing efforts have been translated into the 2010 budget as well. There is no doubt that these measures somewhat restrict the work of RCA missionaries, mission partners, and Global Mission staff. Salaries of Global Mission staff and missionaries will be frozen for 2010. Travel budgets will be restricted. However, this is the pain of belt-tightening with which the whole of the church is struggling.

The RCA Global Mission program does not receive any portion of the assessments paid by congregations. Investment interest income has always been a small source of income and it has slowed to a trickle. Partnership-in-Mission pledges by congregations and individuals are virtually the only source of revenue to carry Global Mission through these very challenging times. With great appreciation for the faithfulness of churches and individuals that support RCA missionaries, and with every intention to be faithful stewards of the gifts of God's people, the following recommendation is offered.

R-43

To retain the Partnership-in-Mission (PIM) share for 2010 at the 2009 value of \$6,000; and further;

to encourage all RCA churches—and particularly the 364 RCA churches who do not support RCA missionaries through PIM shares—to take a collection for Global Mission in 2010. (ADOPTED)

Categories and Numbers of Mission Personnel

RCA mission personnel are appointed by RCA Global Mission for specific ministry. Global Mission establishes their salaries and benefits and supervises these missionaries. **Mission partner personnel** are employed by partners' organizations. They are under the supervision of the partner, who also establishes and regulates salaries and benefits. **Volunteers** are appointed by the RCA Mission Volunteer Program to specific job responsibilities; they generally receive housing and a stipend.

Number of Mission Personnel by Category, 1996-2009

YEAR	MISSYS	MPP	VOLUNTEERS	TOTAL
1996	89	25	30	144
1997	83	24	31	138
1998	80	40	35	155
1999	74	45	34	153
2000	77	52	41	170
2001	85	45	35	165
2002	79	49	41	169
2003	75	41	46	162
2004	69	57	38	164
2005	72	62	31	165
2006	70	54	29	153
2007	74	58	21	153
2008	70	60	17	147
2009	71	56	19	146

Mission Personnel Changes

Rick and Stephanie Peterson have been assigned to work with the Kurdish people, a marginalized ethnic group. Rick and Stephanie will work to establish a local, indigenous church that is both uniquely Kurdish and distinctly Christian.

Jack Buteyn has been appointed to be the RCA interim co-chaplain at the Protestant Church in Oman, replacing Edward and Tamera Schreur, whose mission assignment was completed. Jack's wife, Linda, is hoping to teach during their term of service in Oman.

Marlin and Sally Vis have returned to the United States to continue ministry related to Israel after the Israeli government denied the renewal of their visa to live and work in the country. Marlin and Sally will continue to present issues facing Israel and Palestinian Christians to RCA congregations and lead pilgrimages to Israel/Palestine.

A new missionary has been appointed in the area of Christian-Muslim relations. His work will include increasing the awareness and involvement of RCA churches in Islamic mission by helping them understand Islam and helping to prepare, teach, and consult with missionaries who want to work in Islamic settings.

Mission Partner Personnel

David Ford has been appointed to work as a linguistic analyst with SIL International. This is a joint appointment with Wycliffe Bible Translators. Ford will be working in Sudan. He is currently fundraising for his appointment and will graduate in June 2009 with a master's degree in applied linguistics. After graduation he will move back to Sudan, where he spent ten years of his life with his parents, RCA missionaries Peter and Patty Ford.

Atef Ageib Londi, RCA mission partner personnel serving as coordinator of the Theological Education by Extension program with the Presbyterian Church of Sudan, passed away in October 2008 after suffering from heart disease. Stephen Kulang Jiech, who has been appointed to replace Londi, is an ordained pastor in the Presbyterian Church of Sudan.

Completion of Assignment

Vern and Carla Sterk have retired from missionary service in Chiapas. The Sterks served in Chiapas for over forty years in the areas of teaching, nursing, and Bible translation. They continue to serve by teaching at Western Theological Seminary and leading groups of seminarians to Chiapas to experience the culture and mission of the National Presbyterian Church of Mexico in Chiapas.

Volunteer Services Assignments

Bahrain:	Jena Helmus Alicia Pashby Jennifer Yeske
Ethiopia:	Joe and Sara Blevins
Honduras:	Merle Vander Sluis
Japan:	Robyn Anderson Nathan Blakeslee Nicholas Boyes Myra Cubos Tabitha Ekvall Anna Herzog Josephine Kimura Elizabeth King

Tonya Nelson
Kevin Oosting
Maribeth Voss

Niger: Elizabeth Wierengo

United States: Dan Whalen

Deaths

Albertha J. Biegel, an RCA missionary to India, passed away on March 4, 2008. Biegel served from 1946 to 1982 as the nursing superintendent at Mary Lott Lyles Hospital in Madanpalle and also taught Bible classes.

The Retirement of Vern and Carla Sterk

The Reformed Church in America does not have a global mission program. In reality, the RCA has people in global mission. We do not send programs. We send people who give their lives on behalf of the RCA in service to the world and the global church. We support them in their ministries, and celebrate with them in retirement.

In 1966 while a student at Western Theological Seminary, Vern Sterk and his wife Carla spent a life-changing year of internship in Chiapas, Mexico. What has rightly been called the “charm of Chiapas” turned into the calling of a lifetime of ministry. From the beginning the charm was also filled with challenge.

After being commissioned as RCA missionaries in 1969 and studying linguistics and Spanish, Vern and Carla began their on-the-job training for reaching the unevangelized Zinacantecos by living ten years in Navenchaut, a village without one Christian believer.

Later, Vern and Carla moved to San Cristobal de las Casas to assist in the translation of the Old Testament into the Tzotzil language. This was also a time of persecution of evangelical Christians in Chiapas.

In 1992, Vern was awarded a doctorate degree from the School of Mission at Fuller Theological Seminary. His thesis, “The Dynamics of Persecution,” explored the relationship between persecution and the growth of the church. His study tells how the translation of the Scriptures into the “heart language” of persecuted Christians can mitigate the forces of persecution and enable new believers to stand fast in the face of oppression.

In 1997, Vern and Carla began to teach courses in missiology part-time at Western Theological Seminary (WTS) while continuing to serve in Chiapas. In 2005, they became full-time professors at WTS, returning to Chiapas during the summers to teach and encourage the church. They were instrumental in the founding of AMICH, the global mission agency of the National Presbyterian Church of Mexico in Chiapas, and in the mentoring and sending of the agency’s first missionary.

The Sterks’ retirement after forty years of commitment to the people of Chiapas in service of the gospel of Jesus Christ coincides with the 2009 meeting of the General Synod.

R-44

Whereas Vern and Carla Sterk responded to the call of God to ministry and mission by entering seminary in 1964 and being commissioned as RCA missionaries to Chiapas in 1969; and

Whereas Vern and Carla Sterk committed themselves to an incarnational presence among the Tzotzil tribes of Chiapas, learning their language, customs, and culture; and,

Whereas Vern and Carla Sterk used their gifts of teaching, nursing, translation, and administration in the proclamation of the gospel in Chiapas; and,

Whereas Vern and Carla Sterk stood in solidarity with the persecuted church in Chiapas, made the plight of the church known, and marshaled the prayers and encouragement of the RCA for the church in Chiapas; and,

Whereas Vern Sterk almost single-handedly raised the level of basketball skills and competition in the city of San Cristobal de las Casas, and in so doing represented the RCA with hard fought yet, it is hoped, good sportsmanship; and,

Whereas Vern and Carla Sterk, along with eighty-five years of RCA missionary presence in Chiapas, contributed to the growth and maturation of the evangelical church among the Tzotzil tribes, and in so doing were also forever privileged and transformed by joining hands and hearts with these sisters and brothers of the faith;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the two hundred and third session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting June 4 through 9, 2009, at Hope College and Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan, with gratitude to God for their lives and witness, honors Vern and Carla Sterk with a prayer of thanksgiving and a token of our esteem. (ADOPTED)

Global Mission Consultation

The demographics of the RCA are changing. We are racially and ethnically far more diverse than we were two decades ago. And, the rate of this change will increase—perhaps dramatically—in the next twenty years. With new ethnicities and cultures come new ways of worship, fresh biblical perspectives, and different methods of mission. This has become very apparent over the last few years in conversations with both Korean and Hispanic leaders and pastors. Rather than engaging in individual conversations scattered throughout the denomination, what emerged was the need for a mission consultation.

Here's how the event was announced in the letter of invitation that was sent to thirty-five potential participants including Hispanics, Koreans, African Americans, missiologists (Chuck Van Engen and Vern Sterk), young RCA pastors, global partners, RCA missionaries (J.P. Sundararajan, Bertalan Tamas, and Brad Olson) and Global Mission staff.

For over 150 years the RCA has participated faithfully and fruitfully in God's mission in Jesus Christ. We've made contributions to global mission beyond our size because we know that "together is better." However, early in the twenty-first century, we need to discern anew what "together is better" means for RCA Global Mission.

Though the RCA Global Mission program has a long and strong history, our historic principles and strategies do not resonate with our increasingly diverse

RCA constituency. Because of our different cultural contexts and histories, it has been a challenge for some within the RCA family to find their place as full partners at the RCA Global Mission table. In order to address this concern, RCA Global Mission is hosting a Mission Consultation in November 2008.

The purpose of the consultation is to create a Global Mission program for the twenty-first century that all constituencies in our increasingly diverse RCA family will embrace and engage. The strategy is to build a broad based consensus regarding the principles that will guide RCA Global Mission into the future.

Thirty-two participants gathered to build community centered in worship, tell stories of how culture and experience shaped their understanding of mission, hear each other's perspectives, and discern how all of these components of their lives related to the RCA's mission principles, and in particular the principle of working in partnership with indigenous global churches.

After considerable conversation about the RCA's mission principles, the following patterns of thought were discerned.

Affirmations

- There is a shift of mission partnership to North America.
- The RCA's mission principles are affirmed, but they also need to be revisited.
- Partnerships need to be highly relational rather than simply based on budgets and paper agreements.
- Partnerships are not optional; none of the groups proposed doing away with the partnership principle.

What to add or amend

- Revisit and rewrite the definition of the principles.
- Teach RCA students and churches the reality of missions.
- Mutuality/reciprocity; both giving and receiving. The "we" in the principles is too one-sided.
- Expand the definition of partnership, including who may be included in such partnerships.

This is raw data from the consultation that needs further refining and the development of strategies going forward. In addition to suggesting trajectories for RCA Global Mission in the future, the consultation helped establish rich relationships through which to work in the future.

Japan Mission 150th Anniversary

In July 2009, Global Mission will celebrate the 150th anniversary of RCA mission in Japan. The celebration is being organized by the Church of Christ in Japan, the Japan Bible Society, and the United Church of Christ in Japan, the RCA's mission partner.

The Reformed Church in America entered Japan in 1859, just a short time after the ports of Yokohama and Nagasaki were opened to Western powers by the Treaty of 1858. Three missionaries arrived from the RCA: Samuel R. Brown, Guido F. Verbeck, and Dr. Duane B. Simmons (who left the mission in 1860). James Ballagh joined the mission in 1861. The life and ministry of that mission exemplified three foundations of RCA mission: evangelism, education, and ecumenism.

At the start, direct evangelism was impossible due to 250 years of Christian prohibition and persecution following earlier Roman Catholic missionary activity. It was a delicate and difficult situation into which the missionaries entered. In spite of the difficulties, Ballagh was able to perform the first Protestant baptism in 1864. Brown was instrumental in the theological training of several of the earliest converts, who later became leaders in the Christian movement in Japan.

Like other early missionaries, the early pioneers to Japan engaged in intense language study and then Bible translation. Brown and Verbeck worked to provide language learning materials for future generations of missionaries and played key roles in the translation of the Bible into Japanese. The New Testament was published in 1880, and in 1888 the completed translation of the entire Bible was published.

In 1872, the government retracted the prohibitions against Christianity. The publication of Christian literature also became possible. While not completely free of restrictions, the missionaries were able to do more than was previously permitted. The first Protestant Christian church in Japan was organized at Yokohama on March 10, 1872, under the leadership of Ballagh of the RCA Japan Mission.

Following the successful example of the missionaries in China about twenty years earlier, the RCA worked in cooperation with other missions for the purpose of creating a unified, evangelical, and independent church in Japan. Three missions cooperated with the early Japanese Christians, and on October 3, 1877, nine congregations were organized as the United Church of Christ in Japan. Japanese Christians quickly assumed responsibilities in the life and ministry of the churches, and also cooperated with the missionaries in the development of theological education.

In the early years, missionaries engaged in teaching both boys and girls in their homes or wherever the opportunity presented itself. Henry Stout arrived in 1869 and immediately engaged in teaching. Verbeck, working with the government schools, was influential in helping to establish the modern Japanese educational system. His name is still well-known throughout Japanese education circles. Mary E. Kidder formed Ferris Seminary, the first Christian school for girls in Japan in 1870. The RCA Japan Mission founded three mission schools, Steele Academy for boys and Ferris Seminary and Sturges Seminary for girls, and also cofounded Meiji Gakuin University with a Presbyterian mission.

Throughout the nineteenth century and up until World War II, the RCA Japan Mission assisted in the development of Japanese churches that are not only self-governing but also self-supporting and self-propagating. Since the war, and into the twenty-first century, the Reformed Church has continued to serve as a partner in mission with Japanese Christians in evangelism, Christian education, and leadership development.

R-45

Whereas the Protestant Christian movement in Japan has reached the significant milestone of one hundred and fifty years since the arrival of the first Protestant missionaries on Japan's shores; and

Whereas the Reformed Church in America, in response to God's call, was privileged to send three of the first six missionary families to enter Japan in 1859, the year in which Protestant mission was commenced; and

Whereas more than three hundred of the sons and daughters of the

Reformed Church in America have served as missionaries in Japan alongside Japanese Christians; and

Whereas the United Church of Christ in Japan, as an independent, evangelical, self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating body of Christ, shares today with the Reformed Church in America in the mission of proclaiming Christ as the only hope for a lost and broken world; and

Whereas the United Church of Christ in Japan and the Reformed Church in America are united by a mutual agreement as partners in mission;

Therefore be it resolved that the two hundred and third session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting June 4 through 9, 2009, at Hope College and Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan, with gratitude to God for the faithfulness of the United Church of Christ in Japan, hereby offers its heartfelt congratulations upon this anniversary occasion, with the prayer that the Holy Spirit of power may strengthen and uphold and guide and embolden the church in Japan for mission in the days to come. (ADOPTED)

Solidarity with Christians in the Middle East

The 2008 General Synod approved the following recommendations from the Commission on Christian Action, and the General Synod Council assigned them to Global Mission for implementation.

R-51

To encourage the congregations of the RCA to uphold indigenous historic Christian churches of the Middle East in their prayers, specifically asking members to join the prayers of efforts such as the Covenant of Prayer by the Iraq Network and the Presbyterian Week of Prayer and Witness, and of the blog by RCA mission associates Marlin and Sally Vis.

R-52

To direct the General Synod Council to gather, share, develop, and distribute materials on the situations faced by Middle Eastern Christians to RCA agencies and congregations.

R-53

To encourage congregations and individuals to support Reformed Church in America, Christian Reformed Church, and Formula of Agreement partner denomination programs to support Middle Eastern Christians in their struggles, specifically such projects as the Mount of Olives Housing Project, which provides Christian Palestinians living in Jerusalem with housing.

In March 2009, in fulfillment of these recommendations, the following resources were made available through the RCA's website.

- *The Cradle of Our Faith* DVD and PowerPoint presentation chronicling the history and plight of Christians in countries of the Middle East.

- A link to the booklet and study guide that complement *The Cradle of Our Faith*, published by the PCUSA Palestine/Israel Network.
- A liturgy by John Paarlberg on related themes.
- A list of ministries appropriate for donations in support of Christians and peace in the Middle East.

Global Mission Stories

The following stories help bring the four elements of Global Mission's ends policy to life. They provide a snapshot of ways God has blessed the RCA's commitment to global mission.

1. Evangelizing Unreached Peoples

Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus—Gumuz Initiative

From a report by Derrick Jones, supervisor of RCA mission in Africa:

The RCA has been working with the outreach department of its partner, the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY), to share the gospel with the Gumuz people, an unreached people group in northwestern Ethiopia. Their population is estimated to be over 120,000 in Ethiopia and Sudan. The Gumuz have been marginalized by the Amhara and other larger people groups for centuries.

The EECMY evangelist and church planter Birhanu, who is Amhar, said God gave him a vision to go share the gospel with the Gumuz. This defies the normal communal and tribal dynamic because traditionally the Amhara and the Gumuz are still considered enemies.

After a year and a half of this vision, in February 2006, when Derrick Jones visited the Gumuz people with EECMY outreach coordinator Beredo Bekalo, 140 people in three villages gathered under trees to hear the gospel. Several people were coming to faith in Christ. Wonde, one village leader, in expressing his thanks to EECMY and the RCA said, "All of us want to believe in Jesus. We need change, change of life. We were in darkness. With the teaching of Jesus, now we are in the light. We will not be in darkness again. God bless you."

On his second visit to the Gumuz, Jones preached and assisted Bekalo in worship. Sixty people gathered under a temporary facility of wood and grass built on property donated by the local government. Seven adults and eleven children were baptized.

With God's leading, the obedience of evangelist Birhanu, and RCA Global Mission working in partnership with the EECMY in holistic mission, the "least of these" in Ethiopia—the Gumuz people north of the Blue Nile River—are being reached with the gospel of Jesus the Christ.

2. Empowering Global Partners

Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus—Christian-Muslim Relations

RCA missionaries Peter and Patty Ford also work with the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY). Peter directs the program in Christian-Muslim relations at the Mekane Yesus Seminary in Addis Ababa. (In 2009, the Fords will move to St. Paul's Theological College in Limuru, Kenya, to establish and build a similar program.) The following excerpts are from the Fords' 2008 report to supporting churches.

My primary goal is to train a growing number of committed theological students to serve their church as evangelists among Muslims and as teachers of congregations, helping them to better understand Islam in Ethiopia and to bear witness to Christ among their Muslim neighbors. This training has taken shape in the program in Christian-Muslim Relations (CMR) at Mekane Yesus Seminary. In this I work closely with two Ethiopian seminary teachers who have been specially trained in teaching CMR. I also teach graduate courses in Islam as part of the missions program at the Ethiopian graduate school of theology.

In the past we took in a new group of CMR students every two years for the two-year CMR program. Last August we accepted a new group of eleven students, even though the existing group of nine students had completed only one year of the program. Teaching two separate groups at different levels has been challenging for me and my two Ethiopian colleagues, but manageable by God's grace.

Remember our CMR graduates serving in various locations around Ethiopia and in other nearby African countries, that the knowledge and attitudes they gained in the CMR program may help them share their faith lovingly yet effectively among Muslims in their areas.

Dominican Reformed Church

The RCA is partnering with and assisting the emergence of the Dominican Reformed Church (Iglesia Reformada Dominicana, or IRD). On January 11-12, 2009, director of operations for the RCA Ken Bradsell and RCA general secretary Wes Granberg-Michaelson joined members of the RCA-IRD Coaching Team in a meeting with IRD officers in Santo Domingo. The following excerpts are from Granberg-Michaelson's "Monday Morning" reflections for January 12, 2009.

I've been privileged to witness a group of congregations joining together on the beautiful island that contains the Dominican Republic to form the Dominican Reformed Church. It's a story that began five years ago when RCA pastors Andres Serrano and Brigido Cabrera, together with Ken Bradsell and other RCA staff, met with a group of pastors in the Dominican Republic who shared their enthusiasm for the Reformed faith. Andres and Brigido were both born in the Dominican Republic and have long had a vision and passion for the witness of faith in the Reformed tradition in their native land of ten million people. From his base in southern California, Andres established a Christian radio station, then built a transmitter in the Dominican Republic through which his broadcasts reach 80 percent of the island. The radio station's preaching, teaching, and call-in programs include the sharing of the Heidelberg Catechism.

What I found fascinating was the genuine thirst and interest among pastors here for Reformed theology, polity, and organizational structure. It's hard to recall when I've seen more interest and heard more probing questions about how the Reformed Church in America is structured and governed than I saw in the Dominican Republic. Things that we take for granted, such as assemblies (consistory, classis, synod) that provide for the orderly governance of churches that are linked together in covenantal commitments, are explored here like a welcome breath of fresh ecclesiological air.

Further, a theology that begins with the primacy of grace—stressing that we can't earn our salvation—and that values serious theological foundations is embraced with enthusiasm and gratitude. That's why Andres' teaching of the Heidelberg Catechism on the radio draws many interested listeners.

At least thirty-five Dominican pastors are interested in partnering with the Reformed Church in America. They've been sharing this journey with the RCA for the past five years, and the RCA has committed to form a genuine partnership with them. In the afternoon and evening on Sunday, January 11, Ken Bradsell, Luis Perez, Jon Norton, Andres Serrano, Brigido Cabrera, and I met with the executive committee of the IRD to work out a partnership agreement between the RCA and the IRD. This is a new form of missional partnership for the RCA, one that will draw us closer together.

As we sat outside in a circle, discussing our partnership agreement, I said that this would be compared to other times in RCA history, such as when David Abeel first went to China, when Ida Scudder first went to India, and when the first RCA missionaries went to Bahrain and Oman. The difference is that, in this case, we are coming alongside a church that already is emerging and deeply desires to learn and be mutually enriched through our own journey. It's a promising new chapter as we discover together what it means to be missional and Reformed in the Dominican Republic.

3. Equipping RCA Churches for Mission

The Evangelical Church of the Republic of Niger

Bruce and Laurie Hawley are RCA missionaries working with RCA volunteers in long term mission projects both in the United States and internationally. The following excerpts are taken from reports written by Laurie Hawley from Niger where the RCA mission partner is the Evangelical Church of the Republic of Niger (EERN). RCA missionaries in Niger include Tom and Aïchatou Johnson, and Jeremy and Susan Beebout.

Our project is to build a guesthouse for the EERN. Our dorm will return to office space once this guesthouse is in place. No other church has a guesthouse and they think it will be well used. Permits have taken time to secure so the foundation was not in place when we arrived. We will get to see it from below the ground and going up. The first week we made a concrete pad about 12 by 15 feet that the cement blocks are being made on. A local crew of three are out there now mixing sand, cement, and water and making solid blocks for the foundation. The architect is here laying out string to mark the foundation wall area and I believe we will get to start digging this afternoon.

Outside our compound on a wide dusty dirt street pass big trucks loaded with one-hundred-pound sacks of grain, rice, millet, etc. from a port in Nigeria and coming to a very large storehouse just up the street. Also on the street are donkeys pulling heavy carts, camels loaded with huge straw mats (used in some instances as sides for buildings), goats by the dozens, guinea fowl, chickens, kids, women carrying anything and everything on their heads and in colorful garb, and dusty cars as well as motorbikes. But the people we see begging on the street who are maimed, crippled, or hungry are the ones that tear at our hearts. I was so struck by a woman walking across the street on her hands and knees. On her hands were flip-flops, and her feet dragged behind her. Also by a woman who came up to the car window carrying her little girl without one arm. Blessed are those who mourn, blessed are the poor, blessed are the meek. I am without words. Prayer helps.

There is so much to tell from just our first week here but I shall end with just one story we heard the Wednesday when we had a groundbreaking, stone laying ceremony for the guesthouse with the heads of the EERN and our team and church pastors and leaders in attendance. A pastor told the story about the vice president of EERN. Years ago when he was the coordinator for development for the church nationwide, he was responsible for getting wells dug in villages. Many of those villages are totally Christian today

because of that one blessing, that one good deed done for the people. What a witness Christians are here. The EERN is committed to serving the people of Niger with health care, education about growing things, teaching good agriculture practices, and training youth for a job...

...Chako is the director of development for EERN. His father died last week and he has been in Maradi for the funeral. His father was a beloved pastor and founding past president of EERN. Chako came for lunch today and while talking with us afterwards his son came in and he introduced him to all of us. He said Sandee was from New York, Sue and Kay from New Jersey, Wanda and Karen from Iowa, Loren from California, Elmer from New York, and Jimi from Grand Rapids, Michigan. He continued to tell him that all these people came because they belong to the family of Christ. The color of our skin, the language we speak, the range in our ages, from 26 to 76, the places we came from all did not matter because we are from the same family. He said it was his son's grandfather, the man who had just passed away, who was the first Christian in the family and taught Chako to love the Lord. Chako told his son that we had all come here to work with people from the church because God had first loved us.

4. Embracing Compassion and Justice

Resource Centre for Civil Leadership in Sudan

RCA missionaries Deb and Del Braaksma work with the Resource Centre for Civil Leadership (RECONCILE) program in Yei, Sudan. The following excerpts are from the Braaksmas' 2008 report to supporting congregations.

The primary goal of RECONCILE is to build peace in Sudan. The country has experienced only twelve years of peace since independence in 1956 and thus a "culture of war" has developed. The New Sudan Council of Churches created RECONCILE to provide Christian-based training in trauma healing, reconciliation, conflict transformation, and civic education through workshops held in areas experiencing inter-ethnic conflicts, as well as longer term courses held at the RECONCILE training center where we are based in Yei, Sudan.

In 2008 Del oversaw the completion of five staff houses, enabling us to move out of tents. Hardly an evening goes by that we don't sit on our couch and look around our 420-square-foot home and say, 'Isn't this wonderful!' It's been a joy for Del to see our Sudanese colleagues build their capacity whether it's in providing training or learning a computer program. Del was in charge of organizing and teaching a three-week Key Mobilizer Training, equipping volunteers to minister to communities experiencing severe inter-ethnic conflicts. We were inspired by their commitment and enthusiasm to heal the wounds of war and teach peace and forgiveness.

Debbie co-led ten workshops on trauma healing and reconciliation in Liberia, remote areas of Sudan, Northern Uganda, and at the Yei Training Centre. It was a joy to hear and see:

- A chief/evangelist who came to a workshop ready to "finish" another tribe commit himself to making peace.
- Children in Liberia begin to heal the wounds of their hearts by writing laments.
- Women in Magwi organize to spread the word through their churches about how to stop rape.
- One of the Key Mobilizers tell how he personally intervened to stop inter-ethnic fighting.

Almost nothing comes easily in Sudan—the infrastructure is so broken from the war that organizing things often becomes a logistical nightmare. But it makes us as RECONCILE staff really surround our work in prayer and doubly thankful to God as we marvel at all of the good things RECONCILE is able to accomplish amidst the chaos.

Please pray for peace in Sudan, for the opening of the RECONCILE Peace Institute and for us as we develop new materials to minister to women and children who have been traumatized.

Report of Words of Hope

Words of Hope was founded in 1945 by classes of the Reformed Church in America in order to “proclaim Christ as the world’s only Savior.” We are deeply grateful for the prayers and gifts of congregations, individuals, foundations, and businesses that make this ministry outreach possible. Please join in praising God for his mercies and provision in 2008, and in praying that he will likewise provide in 2009, as Words of Hope seeks to faithfully serve him as his witnesses “to the ends of the earth.”

Broadcasting

Albania: During the days of government imposed atheism, Words of Hope programs reached many Albanians from international stations airing programs from outside the country. Now Christian FM stations have emerged inside Albania and air the daily Words of Hope Albanian program. “The Words of Hope ministry has been very effective,” reports pastor Albert Dosti, Words of Hope Albanian speaker. “We have heard many testimonies about how the programs touch the hearts of Albanian listeners. There are many people, believers and unbelievers, who are encouraged and blessed by the Words of Hope programs.”

Arab World: Arabic outreach has been a top Words of Hope priority for more than three decades. April 2008 marked an important milestone as these Arabic broadcasts to the Middle East and North Africa expanded from fifteen to thirty minutes every night. Production teams and volunteers in Cairo (Egypt), Beirut (Lebanon), Khartoum (Sudan), and Amman (Jordan) have designed a creative, fast-paced mix of program segments to attract and hold listeners’ interest. Thousands of listeners are responding via email and SMS text messages.

India: In 2008 Christians, who officially comprise less than 3 percent of India’s 1.1 billion people, faced serious persecution in regions where Hindu nationalists are strong. Indian observers note that the persecution began and has been most intense among tribal peoples and outcasts “Dalits” who have been committing their lives to Christ in recent years. As Christians now face increased opposition and threats, the broadcasts help many believers deepen their understanding and conviction to stand firm in their faith. Words of Hope broadcasts gospel programs to the Indian subcontinent in the languages of Bhojpuri, Dogri, Dzongkha, Garhwali, Hindi, Kashmiri, and Tibetan. A highlight this past year was a September 2008 trip to India by representatives from Words of Hope and Back to God Ministries International, the international media ministry of the Christian Reformed Church, in preparation for joint ministry there. India will be the fourth Words of Hope-Back to God partnership project, along with Arabic, International English, and Spanish.

Iran: It is an unspeakable privilege to be involved in building the church in Iran, one of the most difficult places for Christians today. Words of Hope, together with its partners in Iranian ministry, Middle East Reformed Fellowship and Trans World Radio–Canada, does that through nightly radio broadcasts, Bible teaching/training conferences, supporting Christian workers inside the country, and through literature production and Bible distribution. Iran continues to be a place of suffering for Christians, but the number of believers and house churches is growing.

Niger: Words of Hope’s strategic partnership with the Evangelical Church of the Republic of Niger (EERN) began in 2005. As Hausa and French broadcasts continue to expand, the network now includes twenty-five local and regional radio stations in Niger’s principal population centers along its southern border with Nigeria. Listener response to the programs is growing, with reports of new radio converts who have joined EERN congregations. In 2008, Words of Hope’s Media Research Institute conducted extensive audience research throughout southern Niger and held a week-long communications workshop attended by twenty EERN pastors and evangelists.

Specialized English: “Everybody is very happy about that [*Spotlight*] program because it is a simple English and it is not so complicated and everybody can understand,” is the comment of a listener from Africa. In addition to a daily broadcast on more than sixty radio stations worldwide, *Spotlight* programs are also accessed through the Internet, especially in places such as China and Vietnam. Thanks to a major website redesign in late 2008, visitors are now better able to listen to or download programs and interact with producers. *Spotlight* programs are also being used as a resource by teachers and students who are learning English.

Sudan: Torn apart for fifty years by civil war, South Sudan now exists with a very fragile current peace. Nonetheless, there has been a great advance of the gospel. Approximately 2.8 million people now belong to the evangelical/reformed communities in South Sudan alone. Radio broadcasts in the Dinka and Nuer languages are a strategic means to teach God’s Word to a largely illiterate and widespread population. According to extensive 2007 audience research conducted by the Words of Hope–sponsored Media Research Institute, these programs are the most listened-to broadcasts among southern Sudanese listeners.

Turkey: Turkey has 70 million people and an estimated three thousand evangelical Christians. In an effort to reach more Turks with the gospel, producer Haluk Bilgen now has a weekly television version of his Words of Hope radio program. Broadcast over TURK-7 satellite TV, these programs present Christian faith in a challenging and practical way. “God is blessing the program tremendously,” shares Haluk. “Our prayer is that through this program the Holy Spirit will fill the hearts of those who watch with God’s words of hope so that they will come to know that hope in their own lives and experiences.”

Uganda: Throughout Uganda, church growth is most evident in areas where Words of Hope–Uganda broadcasts. A listener observed, “No matter the situation or purpose of gathering, people talk about Words of Hope–Uganda. Even in moments of bereavement, these programs become our consolation and comfort.” Titus Baraka, a graduate of Western Theological Seminary, produces the Bari radio programs and leads the ministry. Fellow Western alumnus Stephen Kaziimba, who now serves as bishop of Mityana Diocese, broadcasts in the Luganda language.

Additional Resources

Media Research Institute: Words of Hope's research arm, the Media Research Institute (MRI), convened its first ever follow-up research seminar in December 2008. Representatives from twenty-five of the thirty-three dioceses in Uganda assembled for three days to hear the results of the research project and to discuss the implications for the work. The seminar involved the delegates in extensive interaction, concentrating on the role of radio in assisting the church to meet its evangelistic, discipleship, and pastoral goals, and examining the relationship between the churches and the populations they serve. MRI operates under the auspices of Words of Hope and Far East Broadcasting Company.

Internet Outreach: Words of Hope is currently redesigning its website to make it both more attractive and user-friendly. Ongoing features on the woh.org website include: the *Daily Reflections* devotional meditations' *Read the Bible in a Year*, with daily installments from Genesis through Revelation; and the English-language radio program, available in three formats: web text, portable document format (PDF), and audio (mp3). Scripts from the weekly *Words of Hope* radio programs (from 1988 to the present) can also be searched by Scripture reference, topic, date, or keyword. Both the *Daily Reflections* and the weekly *Words of Hope* scripts are distributed to email subscribers, and can also be received monthly in audio CD format or downloaded via podcast. The website also includes a page where videos can be streamed or downloaded. Words of Hope encourages all RCA churches to link to woh.org.

Materials Available: Each quarter Words of Hope publishes 90,000 copies of the *Daily Reflections* meditations for worldwide distribution. Copies, including a large-print edition or a recorded version on CD, are available for individuals and churches. Words of Hope's devotional meditations can be imported by any website interested in daily updated content. For more information contact: woh@woh.org. Words of Hope also produces a bimonthly *Update* newsletter. Two issues each year are sent in quantity to each RCA congregation for distribution in church bulletins or mailboxes. A collection of ministry reports, including updates on Bhutan, Sudan, Niger, Iran, and the Radio Project, is available on DVD for use by congregations and individuals.

Grateful Thanks

Words of Hope is thankful for the involvement and support of so many friends of Jesus Christ drawn together around the great purpose of sharing the gospel with the world by radio. During 2008 RCA congregations contributed a total of \$689,262 to Words of Hope. Congregations are encouraged to support the ministry of Words of Hope by adopting one or more project shares designated for a particular ministry field and recognizing the leader of that field as one of their missionaries. In addition to faithful financial support, Words of Hope also asks that the ministry be prayed for regularly by RCA congregations. Each month prayer concerns from listeners and ministry partners are gathered and distributed to individuals and prayer groups.

"Preach the word...in season and out of season," the apostle Paul exhorted his young charge Timothy (2 Tim. 4:2, NIV). The ongoing economic troubles definitely make this an "out of season" time for ministry. Things are not easy, and difficult decisions continue to confront us all. But none of that is a reason for quitting. God has called us to be faithful, confident, and courageous. When RCA classes and congregations launched Words of Hope in 1945, war still raged in the Pacific. Now, in our sixty-fifth year of sharing Jesus Christ with the world by radio, RCA classes and congregations continue to uphold and guide this worldwide missionary arm. To God be the glory!