

OVERTURES

Dissolution of a Call Upon Reaching the Age of Seventy

1. The Reverend Classis of Albany respectfully overtures the General Synod to amend the *Book of Church Order* Chapter 1, Part II, Article 12 as follows, and renumber the following sections appropriately, and then to forward this amendment to the classes for approval:

~~Sec. 10. When a minister of a church has attained the age of seventy years, the ministerial relationship to that church shall be terminated. The classis shall terminate the relationship at a special meeting, or not later than the next regular meeting. The classis shall then appoint a supervisor over the church, unless other contractual relations approved by the classis are in effect. Those who reach the age of seventy years may continue to be employed by contract. The contract shall be for no more than twelve months and any renewal shall be subject to approval by consistory and classis. Retired ministers may be commissioned to a form of ministry.~~

Reasons:

1. In Reformed polity, the consistory is the body who initiates a pastoral call (1.I.2. Sec. 3); the classis' role is to approve the call in its supervisory function (1.II.2.Sec.10). The section violates the general principle, upheld in all other parts of the Constitution, that the classis' role is supervisory and cannot usurp the consistory's authority to provide a minister for the congregation.
2. Historically, our polity's basis for terminating the call between a minister and church is not the age of a minister but the competence to perform the duties of the office (Janssen, *Constitutional Theology*, p. 195; Meeter, *Meeting Each Other*, p. 31).
3. The use of a minister's age as a standard to measure competence has recently been acknowledged to be arbitrary by the General Synod (*MGS 2007*, p. 291f). This arbitrariness undercuts the fundamental fairness due to both congregation and minister in determining whether their call remains an effective one. Further, arbitrariness may be the basis for a claim of discrimination against the church.
4. The Constitution identifies the consistory as the proper body for the evaluation of a minister's competence through performance evaluations (1.II.7.Sec.1h). The classis' supervisory role is limited by RCA polity to asking whether the consistory has performed a performance evaluation. The classis is not given authority either to perform the evaluation of competence or even to assert access to the results of the consistory evaluation of the minister's performance.
5. The current rule harms the minister by arbitrarily terminating the ministerial relationship of a competent pastor, even if the minister continues to serve the church on a contractual basis. A minister under contract is stripped of the role of president of the consistory, denying the minister's strengths as a gifted leader, seriously diminishing the minister's effectiveness (Janssen, *Constitutional Theology*, p. 195).
6. The current rule harms the congregation by usurping the consistory's constitutional authority to provide the minister for the church, diminishing their constitutional role of carrying out Christ's ministry in the congregation (Janssen, *Constitutional Theology*, p. 55).
7. The current rule creates a flashpoint for distrust and disharmony between congregation and classis.
8. This classis has just such a situation now, and sees no reason to depose the installed consistory in order to end this relationship.
9. The current rule is redundant since 1.II.12. Sec.13.b provides for the dissolution of a pastoral relationship in the event of incapacity of the minister.

10. As the denomination seeks to live up to the goals set by “Our Call,” it stands to reason that more ministers will be required, especially competent, experienced ministers.
11. If 1.II.12. Sec. 10 were removed, the classis would retain the authority to establish its own age for mandatory dissolution of pastoral relationships, affected by writing this into any and all calls it approves.

In response to Overture 1, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended:

**R-17
To deny Overture 1. (ADOPTED)**

Reason:

A similar overture to the 2006 General Synod was forwarded to the Commission on Church Order, which studied the issue and did not recommend any change to the *Book of Church Order* at that time.

Status of Belhar

2. The Reverend Classis of Canadian Prairies overtures the General Synod to instruct the General Synod Council, its officers, and employees to consider adopting Belhar as a “statement of the church’s faith” for use in its ministry of witness, teaching, and worship along side of the confessional and theological witness of the RCA’s Our Song of Hope, and not to treat it as a fourth confession of the RCA.

1. Our Song of Hope was adopted by General Synod of 1978 after a creative process in which the church sought to add a modern standard to its historical trilogy of the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dort. They instead accepted it as a “statement of the church’s faith for use in its ministry of witness, teaching and worship,” and not on the same level of our historical standards.
2. While this confession instructs us well from its historical context of racism out of which it was birthed, its voice may be ambiguous in other settings, such as may be found in Canada and the United States. For example, our current culture increasingly accepts new connotative definitions of the phrase “other human or social factors.”
3. This confession, which originated in the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa, ostensibly seeks greater unity within the church; however, to this point it has not found acceptance in the Dutch Reformed Church (NG Kerk) or in their sister church, the Reformed Church in Africa, who wrestled through the painful history of apartheid in South Africa into the freedom of Christ Jesus in the gospel.
4. It is helpful to distinguish between the witness of the Word of God which forms the basis for our faith and is the test for all confessions, the ecumenical confessions that all Christian churches confess (such as the Apostles Creed), the formational confessions that tie the Reformed Church to the Reformation, and a further level of timely confessions in the church that it can adopt as we did Our Song of Hope.

In response to Overture 2, the Advisory Committees on the Belhar Confession recommended:

**R-18
To deny Overture 2. (ADOPTED)**

Reasons:

1. The prevalent opinion among delegates in the advisory committees was to deny the overture.
2. The advice to adopt R-55 makes this overture unnecessary.

Classis Boundaries

3. The Classis of the Greater Palisades overtures the General Synod to instruct its Commission on Church Order to make clear in the *Book of Church Order* that the boundaries of classes are to be considered geographical in nature.

Reasons:

1. The historical Reformed principle that classes are formed by neighboring churches (see the church order of the Synod of Emden) witnesses the unity and catholicity of the church as it resists congregations gathering by any other principle than the Word of God.
2. The practice of forming classical boundaries by geography honors the Confession of Belhar where it is stated that “this unity [made manifest in Christ’s work of reconciliation] must become visible so that the world may believe that separation, enmity and hatred between people and groups is sin which Christ has already conquered, and accordingly that anything which threatens this unity may have no place in the church and must be resisted (John 17:20-23).”
3. Formation of classical boundaries by geography guards against the importation of patterns of relationship whereby churches or ministers exercise inappropriate authority on the basis of interest, allegiance, theological inclinations, and the like.

In response to Overture 3, the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance recommended:

R-19
To deny Overture 3. (ADOPTED)

Reason:

Because of the synod’s support of R-65, approval of this overture would limit continuing conversation around bounds, which is beneficial to the RCA at this time.

Classis Boundaries and Affinity Classes

4. The Reverend Classis of Rochester overtures the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America to deny seating to delegates from any so-called “affinity classis,” and to direct the Commission on Church Order to prepare revisions to the *Book of Church Order* making clear that the “bounds” of classis of which the *BCO* speaks are *geographical bounds*.

Reasons:

1. To permit affinity classes on a permanent rather than a temporary basis (as was done with Dutch speaking immigrants in an earlier period) would be to make something other than the Standards normative and binding for a classis, and would, in effect, permit an assembly to elevate an affinity over the Standards.
2. Because the Commission on Church Order has offered its opinion that non-geographic or “affinity” classes are not expressly prohibited by the *BCO*, it is necessary for the General Synod to make explicit in the *BCO* what has always been implicit and assumed and thus normative: that the bounds of a classis, for reasons both practical and theological, concern geography.

3. The establishment of affinity classes threatens practical difficulties in the relationships between affinity and geographically defined classes. Those potential difficulties raise important questions about parity between classes.
4. The assemblies of the RCA have available to them several proven ways of affirming and upbuilding creative new ministries in non-traditional settings besides the formation of affinity classes.

In response to Overture 4, the Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance recommended:

R-20
To deny Overture 4. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. Because of the synod's support of R-65, approval of this overture would limit continuing conversation around bounds, which is beneficial to the RCA at this time.
2. The seating of delegates from a so called "affinity classis" should not be challenged until this matter is decided within the RCA.
3. Delegates to the 2009 General Synod have already been seated, and this action was not challenged.

Global Mission/Church Revitalization Partnership-in-Mission (PIM) Shares

5. The Reverend Classis of Montgomery respectfully overtures the General Synod to instruct the General Synod Council in cooperation with the Global Mission staff to develop new Global Mission/Church Revitalization Partnership-in-Mission (PIM) shares that give RCA congregations the opportunity to invest in revitalizing existing churches; and further; to encourage every RCA church to consider becoming a church partner for revitalization with a Partnership-in-Mission share for the next six years to help revitalize churches across North America.

Reasons:

1. Mission is one.
2. Scripture compels us "whenever we have an opportunity, [to] work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith" (Galatians 6:10).
3. Much of the energy, efforts, and resources committed to church revitalization are devoted to the development of pastoral leadership, particularly through the development of coached pastoral networks. Many of the churches who most need revitalization, however, are not capable of supporting a full-time pastor, therefore much of the energy, efforts, and resources devoted to church revitalization do not reach those churches most in need of them.
4. Partnership-in-Mission shares for church revitalization would allow congregations that have a greater abundance of resources to invest in the ministry, mission, and leadership development of sister congregations by providing them with the resources necessary to call a pastor.
5. These gifts, to be administered for church revitalization through the RCA's successful Global Mission Partnership-in-Mission (PIM) share system, will multiply many times over in coming years. They will help revitalize congregations, providing them with pastoral leadership and encouraging them in their ministry and mission.
6. This is a practical way for more churches to actively engage in church revitalization. With a mission share for revitalization, churches will receive frequent reports and receive speakers from the congregations they support. This will seed further vision and commitment to church revitalization as one united church under Our Call.

In response to Overture 5, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended:

R-21
To deny Overture 5. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. The RCA's polity already assigns to classes oversight in revitalizing existing churches.
2. There are already informal means for providing resources beyond classis boundaries (e.g., the Program Coordination Team, or PACT, group) which is a regional and denominational staff gathering.

Frequency of the Celebration of Communion

6. The Reverend Classis of Montgomery overtures the General Synod to strongly encourage all congregations to celebrate communion on at least a monthly basis for the next year rather than the *Book of Church Order* minimum of "once every three months."

Reasons:

1. To acknowledge and honor the five-hundredth anniversary of John Calvin's birth. Calvin himself wanted the sacrament to be celebrated on a weekly basis, but had to settle for a compromise of only four celebrations. Recognizing that weekly celebrations may not be feasible, compromise is needed today and a monthly celebration would be fitting.
2. Article 35 of the Belgic Confession declares that we are strengthened and sustained in body and soul through communion. Further, it states, "Now it is certain that Jesus Christ did not prescribe his sacraments for us in vain..." Simply put, given the state of the church today, there are solid theological and constitutional grounds supporting the frequent celebration of communion.
3. As we consider various elements of Our Call—revitalization, discipleship, leadership, mission, starting new congregations, and a multicultural future freed from racism, each of these areas can be advanced by the strengthening of individuals and faith communities that comes through the celebration of communion.

In response to Overture 6, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended:

R-22
To deny Overture 6. (ADOPTED)

Reason:

The requirement in the *Book of Church Order* that the sacrament of the Lord's Supper be administered, if possible, at least once every three months is sufficient as a minimum, and typically is already exceeded by most congregations.

Access to Adoption Records

7. The Classis of New Brunswick overtures the 2009 General Synod to go on record as giving its full and wholehearted support of the passage of legislation throughout the United States that would permit an adopted person, or the adoptive parent or guardian of a minor who was adopted, access to a copy of the adopted person's original birth certificate and related medical and cultural information, upon request.

Reasons:

1. For children adopted in the era of secrecy (1940s to 1990s), amended birth certificates were issued naming the adoptive parents as the parents at birth and the original records were legally sealed, unavailable even to the adopted persons when they become adults.
2. As a matter of justice, all persons should have the civil right of knowing their own family history information, which includes medical, cultural, and social history important to their medical concerns and emotional health.
3. Mothers who gave birth during the era of secrecy in adoption were never promised anonymity and in the majority of cases welcome knowledge about their children and some form of contact. Regardless, suggested legislation allows birth mothers to block access to their records but requires that they provide family medical and social history.
4. Under the current closed records legislation, adopted adults cannot marry without fear of committing incest.
5. Some opponents to adult adoptee access to their own records argue that the lack of birth mother secrecy would lead to higher abortion rates. No evidence supports this. In Kansas and Alaska, where adult adopted persons always had access to their original birth certificates, abortion rates have been lower than in surrounding states and less than the U.S. average.
6. Many civilized nations and eight states now provide adult adoptee access to records.
7. Most national adoption and child welfare organizations support adoptee access, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Adoption Agency Council of New Jersey, the executive directors of Catholic Charities, the Child Welfare League of America, the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, the National Adoption Center, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and the General Convention of the Episcopal Church.

In response to Overture 7, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended:

R-23

To direct the Commission on Christian Action to study the possible benefits of RCA support of legislation that would permit an adopted person, or the adoptive parent or guardian of a minor who was adopted, access to a copy of the adopted person's original birth certificate and related medical and cultural information, upon request, for report to a subsequent General Synod. (ADOPTED)

Reason:

Most national adoption and child welfare organizations support adoptee access, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Adoption Agency Council of New Jersey, the executive directors of Catholic Charities, the Child Welfare League of America, the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, the National Adoption Center, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and the General Convention of the Episcopal Church.

Discontinuing Covenant of Care Medical Premiums

8. The Classis of Zeeland overtures the General Synod of the RCA to continue to require that full medical benefits be provided for all ordained, full-time staff, but to discontinue requiring the Covenant of Care contribution if a church/pastor does not participate in the RCA medical insurance plan.

Reasons:

1. The RCA should continue to require its churches to provide all full-time ordained pastors and their families with full medical coverage.
2. At the same time, the cost of the RCA plan, in certain parts of the country, is far more expensive than plans with other reputable companies (which carry the same or better benefits). As a result, high medical insurance costs are hurting RCA congregations, and especially small (single pastorate) churches.
3. Continuing to require a Covenant of Care contribution for non-participants could be a contributing factor to smaller churches needing to close their doors.
4. Most RCA pastors and staff will be able to get insurance through other reputable companies, except for exceptional cases where pre-existing conditions exist.
5. In the case where pre-existing conditions make it impossible to be accepted by other companies, a per-member assessment could be mandated by the RCA to help cover the RCA premiums for these pastors or staff. A precedent for this type of assistance has already been established when one considers the per-member assessment put into place for pension assistance for our elderly pastors.
6. We believe by removing the mandated Covenant of Care, churches, classes and synods will be allowed to be better stewards of their limited resources.

In response to Overture 8, the Advisory Committee on Finance and Benefits recommended:

R-24
To deny Overture 8. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. Passage of this overture, without revision to the Formulary 5 agreement, would require all full-time pastors under call or contract and spouses to enroll in the current RCA medical program.
2. Passage would create adverse claim selection for the plan, which could threaten its financial viability.
3. Our denomination is committed to the Covenant of Care for all pastors and their families at all ages during their lives.

Office of Women's Ministries

9. The Classis of British Columbia overtures the General Synod to rescind their decision to discontinue their funding for the position of Women's Ministries coordinator:

Reasons:

1. Women need to be part of the existing structure and continue to work within the whole body in order to fulfill the vision, mission, and calling of the Reformed Church in America.
2. Discontinuing the Women's Ministries coordinator position removes the denominational link advocating for women.
3. As borne out in past experience, global mission funds will be curtailed as the organizational structure will not be conducive to effective promotion and fundraising.
4. There will be no means to build unity and network meaningfully with women in other regional synods or across the denomination as a whole.
5. RCA resources will have less visibility from a promotion perspective thereby inhibiting its access and future development.
6. The Sister Share initiative, in its infancy, has four of the five missions yet to be completed.
7. Canadian women may need to turn to other denominations for support and expertise.

8. A message is being sent to women of this and future generations that the denomination sees little value in their participation.

In response to Overture 9, the Advisory Committee on Women's Ministries recommended:

R-25
To deny Overture 9. (ADOPTED)

Reason:

The concerns expressed in the overture are addressed by R-74.

10. The Reverend Classis of Canadian Prairies respectfully overtures the General Synod to instruct the General Synod Council, its officers, and employees to reconsider their decision to discontinue funding for the position of the Women's Ministries coordinator and to add the inherent cost of the continuation of that ministry to the per annum every member assessment.

Reasons:

1. Discontinuing the Women's Ministries coordinator position removes the denominational link.
2. As borne out in past experience, global mission funds will be curtailed as the organizational structure will not be conducive to effective promotion and fund raising.
3. There will be no means to build unity and network meaningfully with women in other classes, regional synods, or across the denomination as a whole.
4. RCA resources will have less visibility from a promotion perspective thereby inhibiting its access and future development.
5. The Sister Share initiative, in its infancy, has four of the five missions yet to be completed.
6. Canadian women may need to turn to other denominations for support and expertise.
7. Staff could consult and consider the churches within each regional synod to make up or provide for partial funding, in case the General Synod every-member annual assessment is not raised for this Women's Ministry position.

In response to Overture 10, the Advisory Committee on Women's Ministries recommended:

R-26
To deny Overture 10. (ADOPTED)

Reason:

The concerns expressed in the overture are addressed by R-74.

11. The Reverend Classis of Mid-Hudson overtures the General Synod to instruct the General Synod Council to continue the Office of Women's Ministries through an assessment to maintain a full-time coordinator with appropriate staff and budget beginning October 1, 2009.

Reasons:

1. Since two-thirds of the membership of the Reformed Church consists of women and they have made major contributions over the years in leadership, mission education, and financial support, it is inappropriate that this program and its staff be eliminated.
2. Since two-thirds of the members of the RCA are female, assessments are raised largely by women. It is reasonable therefore to support the work of Women's Ministries through assessments as RCA ethnic councils already are, and to provide parity with these councils.

3. To discontinue an office that is providing leadership and connections with women on a local church, classical, and synodical level without first providing an alternative program is premature.
4. When RCWM was disbanded in 2000, over a quarter of a million dollars was lost to RCA global missions. With no leadership provided on the higher levels of the denomination in these difficult financial times, will this not happen again?
5. With the elimination of Women's Ministries, the denomination stands to lose not only financial resources, but vital connections which the women provide in local congregations, classes, and synods. In addition, it is possible that the women will perceive this as marginalizing their gifts, gender, and service to the Kingdom of God.

In response to Overture 11, the Advisory Committee on Women's Ministries recommended:

R-27
To deny Overture 11. (ADOPTED)

Reason:

The concerns expressed in the overture are addressed by R-74.

12. The Reverend Classis of Nassau-Suffolk and the Reverend Classis of Passaic Valley respectfully overture the General Synod to instruct the General Synod Council, its officers, and employees to maintain the Office of Women's Ministries through an assessment to maintain a full time coordinator with appropriate staff and budget beginning October 1, 2010.

Reasons:

1. Full inclusion of women in the life of the RCA continues to be an issue of justice.
2. Women comprise 64 percent of the membership if the RCA while 75 percent of all elders and deacons are men.
3. The denomination determined a need for women at decision-making tables. The women closed their organization to come into the structure of the RCA, raising \$750,000 to pay for their place at these tables.
4. Under the justice heading, the Office of Women's Ministry needs to exist at parity with the other RCA councils and staff which also advocate for their constituencies and are funded by assessments.

In response to Overture 12, the Advisory Committee on Women's Ministries recommended:

R-28
To deny Overture 12. (ADOPTED)

Reason:

The concerns expressed in the overture are addressed by R-74.

13. The Reverend Classis of Nassau-Suffolk and the Reverend Classis of Passaic Valley respectfully overture the General Synod to continue to operate the Office of Women's Ministries from October 1, 2009, through September 30, 2010, on monies solicited, raised, collected, or designated for the Office of Women's Ministries. The office shall have the authority to solicit said funds for its maintenance and mission for the year. The RCA will provide and pay for office space and a part time assistant to support the continuation of the ministry. Continuity will be provided by maintaining this office.

Reasons:

1. To discontinue this office may send a message to women that they don't count and are not a part of the missional church.
2. At the closing of Reformed Church Women's Ministries in 2000, Global Missions realized a \$250,000 loss per year, which has cost our denominational missions approximately \$2,000,000.
3. At a time when a new initiative, Sister Share, is beginning to encourage women to reengage with and support RCA Global Mission, it makes no sense to close down Women's Ministries.
4. No matter the rationale given for closing this office, the women of the RCA will perceive this move as a marginalizing their gifts, gender, leadership, and service to the Kingdom of God.

In response to Overture 13, the Advisory Committee on Women's Ministries recommended:

R-29

To deny Overture 13. (ADOPTED)

Reason:

The concerns expressed in the overture are addressed by R-74.

14. The Reverend Classis of Ontario respectfully overtures the General Synod to instruct the General Synod Council, its officers, and employees to reconsider their decision to discontinue funding for the position of Women's Ministries coordinator and to enter into dialogue as to how the ministry and its mandate can still be achieved.

Reasons:

1. Women need to be part of the existing structure and continue to work within the whole body in order to fulfill the vision, mission, and calling of the Reformed Church in America.
2. Discontinuing the Women's Ministries coordinator removes the denominational link advocating for women.
3. As borne out in past experience, global mission funds will be curtailed as the organizational structure will not be conducive to effective promotion and fund raising.
4. There will be no means to build unity and network meaningfully with women in other regional synods or across the denomination as a whole.
5. RCA resources will have less visibility from a promotion perspective thereby inhibiting its access and future development.
6. The Sister Share initiative, in its infancy, has four of the five missions yet to be completed.
7. Canadian women may need to turn to other denominations for support and expertise.
8. A message is being sent to women of this and future generations that the denomination sees little value in their participation.
9. Staff could consult and consider the churches within each synod to make up or provide for partial funding.

In response to Overture 14, the Advisory Committee on Women's Ministries recommended:

R-30

To deny Overture 14. (ADOPTED)

Reason:

The concerns expressed in the overture are addressed by R-74.

Homosexuality Dialogue

15. The Classis of Brooklyn, the Classis of Delaware-Raritan, and the Classis of Queens overture the 2009 General Synod to refrain from making any legislative or policy decisions at this General Synod related to the theological matter of homosexuality or to the standing of gay and lesbian persons in the Reformed Church in America; and further; to urge congregations, classes, and regional synods to continue the faithful and fruitful conversations begun during the past three years of the formal dialogue process mandated by the 2005 General Synod (*MGS 2005*, R-94 (substitute), p. 372).

Reasons:

1. The dialogue process has modeled a healthy means by which the Reformed Church in America, in its congregations, classes, regional synods, and at the General Synod, can continue to engage this important issue in ways that are both theologically and pastorally faithful to our calling as Reformed Christians.
2. The dialogue process revealed a wide range of biblical and theological understandings within the Reformed Church in America. Continuing study and dialogue will deepen both our understanding of the Scripture and of each other, and in that way strengthen both our fellowship with each other and our witness to the world. Conversely, new legislative action at this time would favor one “side” over the other, sowing seeds of distrust where there is now emerging relationship and a deepening participation in mission.
3. An ongoing commitment to dialogue and theological study in no way changes or diminishes RCA policy or the actions of previous General Synods on this subject. In fact, it reinforces those actions by keeping them as an integral part of any conversation.
4. The dialogue process has shown that the RCA’s historic commitments to purity and to unity can indeed be complementary, each more visible and more influential when held together with the other in active theological conversation. In doing so with integrity, the RCA can also be a model to the church worldwide.

In response to Overture 15, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended:

**R-31
To deny Overture 15. (ADOPTED)**

Reason:

The substance of this overture is adequately addressed by R-54 (as amended).

16. The Classis of New Brunswick overtures the 2009 General Synod to refrain from making any legislative or policy decisions at this General Synod related to the theological matter of homosexuality or to the standing of gay and lesbian persons in the Reformed Church of America, and further; to urge congregations, classes, and regional synods to continue the faithful and fruitful conversations begun during the past three years of the formal dialogue process as mandated by the 2005 General Synod (*MGS 2005*, R-94 (substitute), p. 372).

Reasons:

1. The dialogue process has modeled a healthy means by which the Reformed Church in America, in its congregations, classes, regional synods, and at the General Synod, can continue to engage this important issue in ways that are both theologically and pastorally faithful to our calling as Reformed Christians.

2. The dialogue process revealed a wide range of biblical and theological understandings within the Reformed Church in America. Continuing study and dialogue will deepen both our understanding of Scripture and of each other, and in that way strengthen both our fellowship with each other and our witness to the world. Conversely, new legislative action at this time would favor one “side” over the other, sowing seeds of distrust where there is now emerging relationship and deepening participation in mission.
3. An ongoing commitment to dialogue and theological study in no way changes or diminishes RCA policy or the actions of previous General Synods on this subject. In fact, it reinforces those actions by keeping them as an integral part of any conversation.
4. The dialogue process has shown that the RCA’s historic commitments to purity and to unity can indeed be complementary, each more visible and more influential when held together with the other in active theological conversation. In doing so with integrity, the RCA can also be a model to the church worldwide.
5. We are charged with the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:19-20).

In response to Overture 16, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended:

R-32

To deny Overture 16. (ADOPTED)

Reason:

The substance of this overture is adequately addressed by R-54 (as amended).

17. The Classis of Nassau-Suffolk overtures the 2009 General Synod to refrain from making any legislative or policy decisions at this General Synod related to the theological matter of homosexuality or to the standing of gay and lesbian persons in the Reformed Church in America; and further, to urge congregations, classes, and regional synods to continue the faithful and fruitful conversations begun during the past three years of the formal dialogue process mandated by the 2005 General Synod (*MGS 2005*, R-94 (substitute), p. 372).

Reasons:

1. The dialogue process has modeled a healthy means by which the Reformed Church in America, in its congregations, classes, regional synods, and at the General Synod, can continue to engage this important issue in ways that are both theologically and pastorally faithful to our calling as Reformed Christians.
2. The dialogue process revealed a wide range of biblical and theological understandings within the Reformed Church in America. Continuing study and dialogue will deepen both our understanding of the Scripture and of each other, and in that way strengthen both our fellowship with each other and our witness to the world.
3. An ongoing commitment to dialogue and theological study in no way changes or diminishes RCA policy or the actions of previous General Synods on this subject. In fact, it reinforces those actions by keeping them as an integral part of any conversation.
4. The dialogue process has shown that the RCA’s historic commitments to purity and to unity can indeed be complementary, each more visible and more influential when held together with the other in active theological conversation. In doing so with integrity, the RCA can also be a model to the church worldwide.

In response to Overture 17, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended:

R-33**To deny Overture 17. (ADOPTED)**

Reason:

The substance of this overture is adequately addressed by R-54 (as amended).

18. The Classis of Rockland-Westchester overtures the 2009 General Synod to refrain from making any legislative or policy decisions at this General Synod related to the theological matter of homosexuality or to the standing of gay and lesbian persons in the Reformed Church in America, and further, to urge congregations, classes, and regional synods to continue the faithful and fruitful conversations begun during the formal dialogue process mandated by the 2005 General Synod (MGS 2005, R-94 (substitute), p. 372), extending that mandate for at least three more years.

Reasons:

1. The dialogue process has modeled a healthy means by which the Reformed Church in America, in its congregations, classes, regional synods, and at the General Synod, can continue to engage this important issue in ways that are both theologically and pastorally faithful to our calling as Reformed Christians.
2. The dialogue process revealed a wide range of biblical and theological understandings within the Reformed Church in America. Continuing study and dialogue will deepen both our understanding of Scripture and of each other and in that way strengthen both our fellowship with each other and our witness to the world. Conversely, new legislative action at this time would favor one "side" over the other, sowing seeds of distrust where there is now an emerging relationship and a deepening participation in mission.
3. An ongoing commitment to dialogue and theological study in no way changes or diminishes RCA policy or the actions of previous General Synods on this subject. In fact, it reinforces those actions on this issue as well as others by keeping them as an integral part of any conversation.
4. The current dialogue process has shown that the RCA's historic commitments to purity and to unity can indeed become complementary again, each more visible and more honored when held together with the other in active theological conversation. This integrated model is a return to the wisdom of the early church when it followed the scriptural admonishment to bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2), and to let mutual love continue (Hebrews 13:1). Scripture, the early church and the early Reformers pleaded for an organic and 'medical' approach in the face of a bruised Body of Christ, instead of resorting to 'juridical' ways by either side. The banner at the bottom of the RCA crest reads 'Union Makes Strength' (not 'unity' as 'Eendracht' is often wrongly translated; literally it means 'one-bearing').
5. General Synod in recent years has moved toward that historical and biblical model. It is a fresh discernment of the work of the Holy Spirit in our new millennium. To wit:
 - a) The schisms of the 1800s in the Reformed churches in the Netherlands that were also brought to the American continent were bridged in Europe through a rejoining in an organic and organizational union early in this twenty-first century in the Protestant Church in the Netherlands.
 - b) The World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC) have agreed to join together in the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) in June 2010, in Grand Rapids, Michigan. This union of more than 80 million Reformed Christians in one organization is a new appreciation of the need to visibly work together as a sign of the Kingdom of God.

- c) The Reformed Churches in South Africa continue to work together toward the vision as expressed in the Belhar Confession. The RCA, through the encouragement of recent General Synod decisions, is in a process of discovery of what the “confessing” of this confession might mean for our own community of faith.

Continuing the RCA dialogue process is a practical expression of that discovery process toward a discerning of the health and wholeness. “A bruised reed God will not break” (Isaiah 42:3). God desires healthy communication and communion for the people of God, the body of Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, for the sake of the whole creation.

In response to Overture 18, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended:

R-34

To deny Overture 18. (ADOPTED)

Reason:

The substance of this overture is adequately addressed by R-54 (as amended).

REGIONAL SYNOD OVERTURES

19. The Regional Synod of New York respectfully overtures the General Synod to instruct the General Synod Council, its officers, and/or employees to maintain the position of full time coordinator of the Office of Women’s Ministries, through an assessment, with appropriate staff and budget beginning October 1, 2009.

And further, the coordinator for the Office of Women’s Ministries will operate from an assessment for October 1, 2009, through September 30, 2010. The office shall solicit, raise, and/or collect funds for the position of coordinator of the Office of Women’s Ministries. The office shall have the authority to solicit said funds for its maintenance and mission for the year. The RCA will provide and pay for office space and a part time assistant to support the continuation of the ministry. Continuity will be provided by maintaining this office.

Reasons:

1. Full inclusion of women in the life of the RCA continues to be an issue of justice.
2. Women comprise 64 percent of the population of the RCA while 75 percent of all elders and deacons are men.
3. The denomination determined a need for women at the decision-making tables. The women closed their organization to come into the structure of the RCA, raising \$750,000 to pay for their place at these tables.
4. Under the justice heading, the Office of Women’s Ministries needs to exist at parity with the other RCA councils and staff which also advocate for their constituencies and are funded by assessments.
5. To discontinue this office may send a message to women that they don’t count and are not a part of the missional church.
6. At the closing of Reformed Church Women’s Ministries in 2000, Global Mission realized a \$250,000 loss per year, which has cost our denominational missions approximately two million dollars.
7. At a time when a new initiative, Sister Share, is beginning to encourage women to reengage with and support RCA Global Mission, it makes no sense to close down Women’s Ministries.
8. No matter the rationale given for closing this office, the women of the RCA will perceive this move as once again marginalizing their gifts, gender, leadership, and service to the Kingdom of God.

In response to Overture 19, the Advisory Committee on Women's Ministries recommended:

R-35
To deny Overture 19. (ADOPTED)

Reason:

The concerns expressed in the overture are addressed by R-74.

20. The Regional Synod of New York overtures the 2009 General Synod to refrain from making any legislative or policy decisions at this General Synod related to the theological matter of homosexuality or to the standing of gay and lesbian persons in the Reformed Church in America; and further, to urge congregations, classes, and regional synods to continue the faithful and fruitful conversations begun during the past three years of the formal dialogue process mandated by the 2005 General Synod (*MGS 2005*, R-94 [substitute], p. 372).

Reasons:

1. The dialogue process has modeled a healthy means by which the Reformed Church in America, in its congregations, classes, regional synods, and at the General Synod, can continue to engage this important issue in ways that are both theologically and pastorally faithful to our calling as Reformed Christians.
2. The dialogue process revealed a wide range of biblical and theological understandings within the Reformed Church in America. Continuing study and dialogue will deepen both our understanding of the Scripture and of each other, and in that way strengthen both our fellowship with each other and our witness to the world. Conversely, new legislative action at this time would favor one "side" over the other, sowing seeds of distrust where there is now emerging relationship and a deepening participation in mission.
3. An ongoing commitment to dialogue and theological study in no way changes or diminishes RCA policy or the actions of previous General Synods on this subject. In fact, it reinforces those actions by keeping them as an integral part of any conversation.
4. The dialogue process has shown that the RCA's historic commitments to purity and to unity can indeed be complementary, each more visible and more influential when held together with the other in active theological conversation. In doing so with integrity, the RCA can also be a model to the church worldwide.

In response to Overture 20, the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business recommended:

R-36
To deny Overture 20. (ADOPTED)

Reason:

The substance of this overture is adequately addressed by R-54 (as amended).

Response to the Report of the President

The Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business offered the following recommendations created from the proposals from the Report of the President:

From P-1 (p. 24) from the Report of the President the advisory committee recommended:

R-37

To affirm that worship is a part of every dimension of Our Call, and therefore to encourage the General Synod Council to incorporate more explicit language about worship into its global end, ends, and sub-ends policies. (ADOPTED)

Reason:

Worship is rightly an integral part of the denomination's identity.

From P-2 (p. 26) from the Report of the President the advisory committee recommended:

R-38

To instruct the officers of the General Synod to appoint a task force of no more than eight persons to explore the nature of and funding for a major worship initiative in the RCA; and further;

to include on this task force persons with particular expertise and experience in the understanding and practice of Reformed worship, in worship education, in the unique worship needs of new and emerging congregations, and in funding development, so that any proposed initiative (and its aspects) might be multi-generational in scope, multi-faceted in approach, and affordable; and further;

to instruct the task force to report back to the next meeting of the General Synod with the results of its work and any relevant recommendations. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:

1. Worship is rightly an integral part of the denomination's identity.
2. Such an initiative would provide useful resources, particularly for new and emerging congregations.

From P-3 (p. 27) from the Report of the President the advisory committee recommended:

R-39

To direct the General Synod Council to engage in an anonymous electronic survey focused on 1) churches started in the RCA in the last ten years, and 2) a representative sample of other churches in the RCA. Questions should focus on the following:

- a. Is infant baptism an area of disagreement within the church? If so, where do the disagreements occur?
- b. Does the church practice infant baptism?
- c. How many infants were baptized in the last five years? How many adults?

- d. Has the church rebaptized anyone in the last five years?
- e. What percentage of parents in the church has not brought their infant children for infant baptism over the last five years?
- f. Has the church dedicated any infants in the last five years? If so, what percentage, in comparison to infant baptisms?
- g. Does the church allow baptized children to partake of the Lord's Supper before making a public profession of faith before the congregation?

and further;

to instruct the General Synod Council to refer the survey results to the Commission on Theology for study and report back to the earliest possible General Synod. (ADOPTED)

Reason:

Such a survey would provide a clearer and more objective sense of the nature and extent of actual practice in the RCA surrounding infant baptism.

From P-4 (p. 27-28) from the Report of the President the advisory committee offered a recommendation that was amended from the floor:

The following amendment to R-40 was adopted by unanimous consent (addition is underlined):

... to direct the Commission on Theology in consultation with the General Synod Council to ensure the expertise of persons directing the areas of Our Call that include Multiplication, Revitalization, and Global Mission to offer a paper on ...

R-40

To commend to congregations, consistories, ministers, classes, and regional synod staff the following studies on baptism produced by the Commission on Theology, and to make them available on both the RCA website and in a printed packet through the RCA's distributor, Faith Alive Christian Resources:

- 1967 "A Statement on Infant Baptism," which argues that infant baptism is valid biblically, theologically, sociologically, and historically.
- 1975 "Concerning Rebaptism," which explores why people may request rebaptism, rejects the practice of rebaptism on theological and pastoral grounds, and offers pastoral advice.
- 1977 and 1984 "Baptized Non-Communicants and the Celebration of the Lord's Supper," which argues that baptized children may be admitted to the Lord's Table.
- 1983 "Is Infant Dedication an Alternative to Infant Baptism?," which rejects dedication as an alternative to infant baptism and offers brief pastoral advice on working with parents around this issue.
- 2007 "Who May Present Children for Baptism?," which develops advice for elders dealing with unusual requests for infant baptism from Christians who may not be parents of the child (e.g., grandparents, caretakers, etc.);

and further;

to direct the Commission on Theology in consultation with the General Synod Council to ensure the expertise of persons directing the areas of Our Call that include Multiplication, Revitalization, and Global Mission to offer a paper on the place and significance of baptism (both infant and adult) in the life of a missional congregation. The focus of the paper should fall on the range of flexibility and variance from established RCA baptismal practice that may be justified and appropriate for a church in mission. The paper should be presented to the earliest possible General Synod. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

Reasons:

1. Existing resources regarding infant baptism would be made readily available.
2. A new resource appropriate to the RCA's current missional emphasis would be created.

From P-5 (p. 29) from the Report of the President the advisory committee offered a recommendation that was amended from the floor :

A motion was made to amend R-41 as follows (additions underlined, deletions stricken):

To direct the moderator of the General Synod Council, in consultation with the officers of the General Synod, to appoint a task force of not more than fifteen members consisting of one member from ~~representing~~ the Commission on Theology, one member of the Commission on Church Order, one member of the General Synod professors of theology, three members of the RCA Multiplication Team, one member of each regional synod who is actively using commissioned pastors, and any additional members as deemed necessary up to a maximum of fifteen ~~the leadership of the various regional synods, and commissioned pastors,~~ to review the training for and clarify the role of commissioned pastors in the RCA, and to bring a report and whatever recommendations they deem necessary to the next meeting of the General Synod.

R-41

To direct the moderator of the General Synod Council, in consultation with the officers of the General Synod, to appoint a task force of not more than fifteen members consisting of one member from the Commission on Theology, one member of the Commission on Church Order, one member of the General Synod professors of theology, three members of the RCA Multiplication Team, one member of each regional synod who is actively using commissioned pastors, and any additional members as deemed necessary up to a maximum of fifteen, to review the training for and clarify the role of commissioned pastors in the RCA, and to bring a report and whatever recommendations they deem necessary to the next meeting of the General Synod. (ADOPTED AS AMENDED)

Reason:

There is not consistency among classes as to what constitutes sufficient training for and the role of commissioned pastors.