
Each spring, the general secretary is required to report to the General Synod Council about progress on the various ends policies established by the GSC. The monitoring report on ends policy E-4: Christ’s Kingdom Mission follows.

ENDS POLICY E-4: CHRIST’S KINGDOM MISSION

The RCA will engage, equip, and encourage congregations and missional communities to participate in Christ’s kingdom mission, both locally and globally.

GENERAL SECRETARY’S INTERPRETATION

“May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, that your way may be known upon earth, your saving power among all nations” (Psalm 67:1-2).

Mission becomes a way of life when we reach out to people with the gospel, meeting needs in neighborhoods, cities, and throughout the world. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we boldly give witness to the hope within us and willingly serve others by becoming the hands and feet of Christ in every corner of the world. The RCA’s commitment is to respond with God’s love to meet spiritual and individual needs around the globe. It is envisioning the people of the RCA as a movement of faithful followers who live and love like Jesus as they radically follow Christ in mission together.

Individuals and churches experience transformation as they open themselves to be used by God and reach out in giving and receiving, learning and sharing, and extending the kingdom of God through missional engagement. This means bringing the good news of God’s grace in Jesus Christ to those who have never heard the message, mobilizing RCA congregations to connect with global partners for greater kingdom impact, helping resource volunteers for expanding involvement in mission efforts, and extending compassion, mercy, and justice in places of discrimination, poverty, famine, disaster, and injustice. In a world of brokenness and need, we offer help, hope, and tangible expressions of God’s love.

OVERVIEW

Six initiative teams work within the Christ’s Kingdom Mission strategic priority: Local Missional Engagement, which helps congregations express the gospel of Christ in transformational ways in their local community; Global Missional Engagement, which equips congregations to increase their global mission impact; Church Multiplication, focused on reaching the spiritually disconnected with new churches that proclaim the gospel; Volunteer Engagement, which provides opportunities for volunteers of all ages to engage in service for Christ; and Missional Mosaic, focused on equipping congregations for cultural competency and empowering them to advocate on behalf of the marginalized. RCA Disability Concerns also falls under the umbrella of the Christ’s Kingdom Mission strategic priority.

LOCAL MISSIONAL ENGAGEMENT

Local Missional Engagement helps churches and individuals look beyond the obvious for new ways to bring hope to their communities. Local mission also brings groups of churches together to explore what mutual mission looks like in their context. Effective local mission ministries can transform neighborhoods and cities. The Local Missional Engagement initiative is led by Eliza Bast.
Year Four Goals (by June 2017)

- Launch two high-quality learning communities.
- Launch two local impact areas that mobilize at least three congregations for collective impact on their community.
- Hold six to eight connection events.

Progress

- One Local Missional Engagement leadership community has been completed. Two of the congregations involved in that leadership community are now leading or will be leading a Local Missional Engagement learning community in their area.
  - North Branch Reformed Church in Bridgewater, New Jersey, is now leading a Local Missional Engagement learning community in the New Jersey area that includes six additional churches.
  - Bethany Reformed Church in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, launched a Local Missional Engagement learning community in Wisconsin in May 2017, with a goal of engaging six churches.
- Local Missional Engagement is partnering with Church Multiplication for an experiential joint learning community with five church planters in the southwest Michigan and northern Illinois areas, which began in late spring 2017.
- Local Missional Engagement is partnering with churches and civic leaders in Holland Michigan, to form a local impact area focused on addressing the affordable housing crisis for people who have lower incomes in Ottawa County. This project involves churches in the Classis of Holland and the Classis of Zeeland.
- Through the Local Missional Engagement initiative, the RCA was awarded a planning grant from the State of Michigan to develop math interventions for students in the Wyoming, Michigan, area. Local Missional Engagement staff met with local superintendents, district leaders, and educators to help design a math program targeting the students in this low-income area who are struggling to perform at grade level in math. The RCA will submit an application to AmeriCorps for an implementation grant to help support this project over the next three years. Congregations engaged in this effort are primarily church plants in Wyoming.
- In Chicago, 12 RCA and CRC churches are currently participating in a hybrid local impact area and learning community. They are considering a collaboration that would impact the Chicagoland area.
- Local Missional Engagement is looking at starting a local impact area within the state of Iowa in the summer or fall of 2017.
- Five connection events have been completed this year. Local Missional Engagement is currently working on collaborative connection events with the African American Black Council, Church Multiplication, Next Generation Engagement, and Thriving Leaders, Thriving Churches.

Five-Year Goals (June 2013 to June 2018)

- For churches that have engaged in Local Missional Engagement learning and leadership communities:
  - By 12 months after the process, at least 50 percent of congregations will have adjusted ministry plans and begun work with key community partners.
By 18 months, at least 50 percent of congregations will have begun new ministry projects and processes with key community partners and stakeholders.

- In the local impact areas, all churches will have identified their key community partners and stakeholders. Within six months of the process, all churches will have begun to implement their strategy to impact their local community. Within 12 months of the process, all churches will have adjusted resources to appropriately support their area’s focus.
- One leadership collaborative with Local Missional Engagement leaders (pastors and Christian community development leaders) will have launched.
- Local Missional Engagement will develop and launch an experiment lab model for new approaches to local mission in learning and leadership communities.
- 100 RCA congregations will be equipped for increased local missional engagement with tangible missional impact, reflecting sacrificial service, authentic relationships, and spiritual transformation.
- 50 congregations will have engaged in substantial and quantifiable local missional engagement, with identified and sustained community partnerships.

GLOBAL MISSIONAL ENGAGEMENT

For more than 150 years, RCA Global Mission has been bringing the Word of God to people around the world. Hundreds of missionaries and volunteers have left the comforts of their own communities to be present in distant places, all in an effort to “live and love like Jesus.” We are excited to continue to live out that goal while we more closely engage with congregations.

The Global Missional Engagement initiative is focused on engaging and equipping congregations to serve Christ by serving our international neighbors around the world. Through service, congregations have transformational experiences that equip them to become agents of transformation to the indigenous populations with whom they serve in our global community.

This team, led by Megan Hodgin, is focused on providing clear pathways to help congregations explore their call from God in a global context, to develop the capacity to live out that call, and to develop partnerships with other congregations and missionary organizations in order to carry out God’s call for mission.

This initiative has three areas of focus:

1. Church equipping: Developing, implementing, and working with individual congregations and clusters of congregations to provide consulting services, learning communities, and leadership communities that expand the work of RCA congregations around the world in quantity, quality, and impact.
2. Global strategies: The Global Missional Engagement team will collaborate with Global Mission staff to develop strategic goals for RCA mission in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Europe that have measurable outcomes over the next five years. These goals will lead to ministries of transformation that will bring congregations and indigenous populations closer to Christ.
3. Restructuring: Collaborating with Global Mission staff to develop and identify missionaries and mission partners that will work with our congregations to achieve our strategic goals.
Year Four Goals (by June 2017)

- Launch one learning community focused on Re:Forming Missions, which will equip a cluster of congregations to discern and implement a mission action plan.
  - By six months after launch, at least 80 percent of participating congregations will commit to deepening their global engagement in at least one of the following ways: committing to a new global partnership, increasing their mission giving, developing or restructuring their mission team, providing an educational opportunity in their congregation, or committing to a vision or mission trip.
  - By 12 months after launch, at least 80 percent of the congregations will have developed and implemented a mission action plan.
- Hold six to eight connection events designed to provide equipping and connect participants to learning communities and direct missional engagement.
  - At least 50 percent of the congregations involved in the connection events will commit to a learning community or new mission partnership.
- Mobilize one church network with three or more congregations who work together to have a collective impact in a global impact area.

Progress

- Two learning communities have been started, equipping six congregations to develop and implement a mission action plan. The members of one learning community will complete their action plans just prior to General Synod. The second learning community will continue the process in the fall of 2017. A seventh congregation began the process of building its mission action plan in April 2017 and will likely complete the process by August 2017.
- Four connection events have engaged 20 congregations in the U.S. and Canada in discussing the transformational impact global mission has at home and abroad.
- One church network has been established with a focus on the strategic impact area in Nicaragua. More than 140 individuals are participating in the network, engaging in online discussions and discernment facilitated by Olivia Holt, an RCA missionary in Nicaragua.
- An immersive global mission experience engaged RCA women in the global mission work of JJ and Tim TenClay in Italy in April 2017. This was a collaborative effort with Women’s Transformation and Leadership. The participants are networked together for continued learning and implementation of ministry initiatives among their congregations.

Five-Year Goals (June 2013 to June 2018)

- 25 congregations will have participated in Re:Forming Missions, and 75 percent of these congregations will have developed and begun implementing their mission action plan.
- Three church networks will have formed, equipping and encouraging groups of churches to collaborate with each other and RCA Global Mission personnel for deep impact in three global impact areas.
- Two immersive global engagement experiences will have been facilitated, introducing participants to a global impact area and equipping them to implement their learning by initiating a global ministry in their own congregation.
- Partnerships will have been established with ten RCA congregations who were not previously engaged with RCA Global Mission.
CHURCH MULTIPLICATION

The RCA continues to start new churches that further the gospel—reaching the spiritually disconnected, bringing them into a community of authentic relationships, and introducing them to the God of grace who transforms lives and eternities.

The RCA fosters a sustainable movement of church multiplication by starting new congregations and missional communities. An environment for church multiplication is created through an intentional system and process, which begins with prayer and empowering through the Holy Spirit. “Then [Jesus] said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest’” (Matthew 9:37-38).

A multiplication movement is built on a solid foundation of assessment and evaluation of church planters and church planting locations, and then strengthened through training. It encourages the ongoing ministry of church planters and new churches by providing coaching relationships and networks of planters for learning, support, and accountability. It expands as new congregations reproduce and established churches join in starting new churches.

RCA Church Multiplication reaches out to those not yet found among the churches and Christians who make up the Reformed Church in America (John 4:23, Luke 15).

Seven strategic benchmarks fill out the multiplication vision statement and 15-year strategic plan. We seek to increase both the quantity and the quality of our church plants every year through 2028. One central qualitative benchmark is to organize our new congregations within five years of their launch date; at the time of organization, the church will be thriving, missional, reproducing, self-supporting, and self-governing. Another benchmark is that more than 40 percent of our new plants will be congregations of color or multicultural from the start. More than 50 percent of the growth of these congregations will come from new professions of faith and adult baptisms.

We are thoroughly pursuing a movement, working intensely with the innovators and the most energized partners we can find. Intentional factors include anticipating change and growth, creating pathways for leadership capacity, cultivating the spiritual giftedness of movement leaders, gospel foundations, incarnational practices, and Holy Spirit empowerment. All of these contribute to an expanding, exponential movement, as opposed to the maintenance of current patterns and structures. These culture shifts are in alignment with the global kingdom of God and have encouraged an environment of risk and reward in RCA Church Multiplication.

The Church Multiplication initiative is led by Mike Hayes, Tim Vink, and Randy Weener.

Year Four Goals (by June 2017)

- 22 New Congregation Plans (NCPs) will be approved.
- Organize 14 church plants and/or new sites of already organized churches.
- Launch four learning communities focused on equipping potential parent congregations.
- Launch one MC² leadership community of at least 15 high-capacity parent churches (defined as churches who parent a new church every year, every other year, or every third year).
- Launch one learning community focused on foster parenting and mutual mission
with smaller churches. This learning community will include ten or more churches.

- Launch one pilot learning community focused on learning to be led and to lead through the Holy Spirit’s presence and power for kingdom expansion. This learning community, called Kingdom Ambassadors, will include 20 or more churches.
- See 100 percent of planters complete a full assessment process, including an initial screening assessment (ISA), church planter profile (CPP), and Multiply Assessment Center, and/or Ridley behavioral assessment tools (or comparable assessments).
- Train six new parent church coaches and work to have 75 percent of all planters paired with qualified coaches.
- Provide Multiply training for 25 planters and to train four new equippers.

**Progress**

- Five of twenty-two NCPs are fully approved. Others are in the process of being approved.
- Four of fourteen church plants have either organized or been started as additional sites of organized churches.
- Three learning communities focused on equipping potential parent congregations have been launched in Iowa, Chicago, and Wisconsin, with several churches in each one.
- We have launched a strong MC² leadership community of at least 15 high-capacity parent churches. Several of these churches have started 4, 8, 14, or even 35 congregations directly in the past two decades, and are individually committed to 5 more, 8 more, even 23 more plants by 2023.
- We launched one learning community with 12 churches (two more than the ten in our goal) focused on the sustainability and multiplication of smaller congregations in their own unique way. The RCA has more than 400 congregations with fewer than 95 people in attendance at worship; these congregations need a pathway of their own to learn, grow, and multiply.
- We launched one pilot learning community focused on learning to be led and to lead through the Holy Spirit’s presence and power for kingdom expansion. The West Michigan pilot group is called Kingdom Ambassadors; 22 churches and more than 250 regular participants of all ages are involved. Exploration of reproducing this 12-month training in California and Iowa is underway now.
- We have used the Multiply Assessment Center, ISA, CPP, and Ridley tools (or comparable tools) with 100 percent of planters.
- We have trained four of the six new parent church coaches, and are on track to have 75 percent of all planters paired with qualified coaches by June 2017.
- We are on track to provide Multiply training to 25 RCA planters and to train four new equippers.

**Five-Year Goals (June 2013 to June 2018)**

- 100 new RCA congregations will be planted in all eight regional synods, reflecting increased church multiplication momentum and effectiveness.
- 50 congregations will have organized and be thriving, missional, and reproducing.
- 40 intentionally ethnic/multiethnic/multiracial church plants, congregations of color, or congregations led by a female planter will be started.
- 5,000 new disciples of Jesus Christ will be engaged in new church plants.
VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT

The Volunteer Engagement initiative is focused on empowering, equipping, and engaging RCA volunteers of all ages in service for Christ through mission volunteer opportunities that have a transforming impact on individuals, congregations, and the partner communities in which they serve. We believe that as volunteers serve in the name of Christ, whether in their local community or around the world, their service can have long-term impact on all participants.

This team, led by Stephanie Soderstrom, is focused on supporting congregations and equipping volunteers for service with RCA missionaries and mission partners. We work with volunteers throughout the planning process, providing support in the field and helping ensure effective debriefing and follow-through.

Four areas of focus:

- Mission trips: Working with local, long-term ministries, mission teams can help meet needs, build relationships, and share the hope of Christ. Mission trips are available for teams of all ages.
- Disaster response: When disaster strikes, RCA volunteers can help provide much-needed support in the months and years that follow. Individual and group opportunities are available.
- Individual volunteer opportunities: Opportunities are available for students and adults to serve for a few weeks or up to two years alongside RCA missionaries and partners.
- Church equipping: Working with RCA churches, we will offer resources, training, and equipping processes to help them take their next step in volunteer engagement. These equipping resources will be available to both churches that serve through the RCA and those that do not.

Many RCA churches have been engaged in sending volunteers in mission for years. Our vision is to become value-added for these churches as well as churches that are new to engaging volunteers in mission. Additionally, we will seek to engage individuals, especially the next generation, in dynamic volunteer opportunities and internships that allow volunteers to utilize their unique gifts to contribute to the long-term goals of our mission partners.

Year Four Goals (By June 2017)

The RCA will engage all generations of volunteers in service for Christ through North American and global mission volunteer opportunities that will have a transforming impact on individuals, congregations, and the partner communities where they serve.

- Engage 1,250 RCA volunteers in service with RCA missionaries and mission partners.
- Support 60 RCA congregations through volunteer equipping processes or mission volunteer opportunities.
- Establish baseline metrics to track volunteer satisfaction and mission partner impact through RCA volunteer engagement experiences.
- Engage 35 volunteers in service through an RCA Local Mission Engagement intensive.
- Send at least three volunteer groups to serve in partnership with the RCA Peace Project in Israel/Palestine.
- Send at least two volunteer groups to serve in partnership with World Vision through their U.S. programs.
Progress

- Engaged 1,155 volunteers in service with RCA missionaries and mission partners, as compared to 1,075 in year three.
- Supported 82 congregations through volunteer equipping processes or mission volunteer opportunities.
- Baseline metrics have been established and data is being collected.
- The Local Missional Engagement intensive was postponed due to scheduling difficulties.
- Sent eight volunteer groups to serve in partnership with the RCA Peace Project in Israel/Palestine.
- Three groups were connected with World Vision U.S. programs, though none were able to serve with them.
- In the 2016 calendar year, the Next Generation Missional Engagement fund awarded 76 scholarships. These scholarships totaled $68,430 and benefited 332 young volunteers.

Five-Year Goals (July 2013 to June 2018)

- We will engage 5,000 volunteers with measurable impact on youth and adult participants, sending congregations, and partner communities.
- We will support 200 congregations through volunteer equipping processes or mission volunteer opportunities.
- We will become fully accredited with the Standards of Excellence in Short-Term Mission and develop tools to help volunteers, congregations, and mission partners align with standards.

MISSIONAL MOSAIC

Missional Mosaic focuses on helping congregations to live more fully into the biblical vision of shalom and the human hope of the beloved community. The initiative is led by Earl James.

The ancient Hebrews spoke the word shalom both at greeting and parting. The word meant “peace,” but conveyed more, including life with complete wholeness wherever one lived, worked, and worshiped.

The beloved community grows naturally out of Jesus’ own hunger for the felt unity of his followers, mirroring the unity he shared with the Father (John 17:20-23). That unity expresses a readiness to engage everyday life in close friendship and to actively take a stand when society and societal systems block access to the abundant life for people and places God created.

Missional Mosaic offers congregations two pathways as they strive for shalom and the beloved community, helping congregations:

- Increase their cultural agility.
- Advocate by addressing public policy.

“Cultural agility” begins with whatever culturally rooted style of communication a person or congregation has and focuses on adapting that style when communicating, negotiating, and building trust with other people, congregations, or groups whose cultures differ from one’s own.
As congregations increase in cultural agility, tangible, sustainable transformations can occur in leadership, outreach, and worship.

In advocacy, congregations come to see and engage public policy matters as simply a third expression of their shared compassion ministries. Many congregations express compassion by “giving a fish.” They see a need and meet a need. Food pantries are excellent examples of “giving a fish” compassion ministry.

Congregations also express compassion by “teaching to fish.” By sharing any particular knowledge, skill, or ability, they assist a person or family in overcoming a particular life challenge that threatens them. Tutoring and financial stewardship ministries are excellent examples of “teaching to fish” ministries.

Not very many congregations ask, “Why do so many people and families need those fish to begin with?” Advocating by addressing public policy results in congregations partnering with others to make tangible differences in everyday life challenges locally or globally for hundreds of thousands of people and to add greater liveliness and focus to the shared life of the congregation itself.

Year Four Goals (by June 2017)

- Launch three cultural agility learning communities. By April 2017, see at least 50 percent of the congregations involved make a shift in leadership, outreach, or worship with the long-term goal of better reflecting their communities.
- Launch one learning community focused on advocacy. By June 2017, at least 50 percent of the congregations involved have a ministry partnership with a pertinent advocacy group and/or have launched a new congregational advocacy ministry.
- Launch one learning community, in partnership with New Brunswick Theological Seminary, focused on interfaith relations. By September 2017, at least 50 percent of the congregations involved develop a significant new partnership.
- Hold seven connection events designed to provide equipping and connect participants to direct engagement with learning communities and/or direct missional engagement.

Progress

- Four cultural agility learning communities have been launched, two of which are now completed. In March, using the Sankofa journey ministry model, the Synod the Heartland experimental learning community traveled to Cincinnati, Ohio, to visit a church that, with its leaders, has been on the cultural agility journey for more than ten years. All the churches have agreed to build a long-term relationship that emphasizes “beloved community warmth” and learning together about increasing the impact of cultural agility within their congregations and in their outreach.
- One advocacy learning community focused on mass incarceration has been launched. A second group of congregations who met at a connection event is close to a decision about becoming an advocacy impact learning community.
- A critical recruitment feature of the learning community in partnership with NBTS was to ensure sufficient numbers of leaders from various faiths would participate. The local interfaith group was not prepared at this time to endorse or participate. NBTS and Missional Mosaic have agreed to revisit this learning community in 2017–2018.
• To date, for this program year, Missional Mosaic has completed five connection events. Participants in these connection events were encouraged to engage in learning communities or in direct impact opportunities. Since tracking of connection events began, Missional Mosaic has completed 25 connection events.

Five-Year Goals (June 2013 to June 2018)

• Nine cultural agility and advocacy learning communities or advocacy impact teams will have launched, involving 40 congregational teams.
  o At least 50 percent of the cultural agility learning community congregational teams will make a shift in leadership, outreach, or worship with the long-term goal of better reflecting their geographic communities.
  o At least 50 percent of the advocacy learning community teams will form ministry partnerships with pertinent, successful advocacy groups or launch their own congregational advocacy ministries.

• 35 cultural agility and advocacy connection events will have been held, engaging representatives from 200 congregations.
  o At least 25 percent of the cultural agility participants will become directly connected to successful cultural agility groups or their congregations will participate in cultural agility learning communities.
  o At least 50 percent of the advocacy participants will become directly connected to successful advocacy groups or their congregations will participate in advocacy learning communities or impact teams.

DISABILITY CONCERNS

Scripture’s vision of the kingdom is a unifying embrace of the love and grace of Jesus Christ that reaches all people—every race, tribe, people, and language, every disability and special need. Raising awareness and making our churches accessible to people with disabilities establishes a needed foundation, but our own attitudes require even greater transformation, so that ministries to and for people with disabilities grow into ministries with and by people with disabilities. The vision of RCA Disability Concerns is to welcome and engage the gifts of all people in Christ’s ministry—becoming accessible, inclusive, missional churches where everybody belongs and everybody serves.

The Disability Concerns initiative is led by Terry DeYoung.

Year Four Goals (by June 2017)

• Launch one combined RCA-CRC learning community focused on Disability Concerns initiatives in the local church. By 2019, at least 50 percent of the congregations involved will conduct an accessibility audit, adopt a church disability policy, launch a new disability ministry, develop a new strategic partnership, or make shifts in church staffing or budget.

• Hold three to four connection events designed to raise awareness about advocacy with people with disabilities, provide equipping, and connect participants to learning communities. At least 50 percent of the congregations involved in the connection events will commit to a learning community or appoint a church disability advocate.

• Through the leadership of church disability advocates, 15 churches will conduct an accessibility audit or adopt a church disability policy—with at least five of these congregations removing barriers to full participation.
Progress

• In October 2016, RCA-CRC Disability Concerns hosted a three-day leadership conference in Niagara Falls, Ontario, that equipped 25 RCA disability advocates—enfolded within a larger disability conference cosponsored by Christian Horizons, a faith-based disability service provider in Ontario. One day was devoted exclusively to RCA-CRC advocates and incorporated teaching on a learning community model in local missional engagement that included a conversation with an RCA disability advocate whose church has launched a weekly day program for residents of area group homes.

• In November 2016, RCA Disability Concerns initiated an accessibility survey of all RCA churches to assist in evaluating physical barriers, communication barriers, and inclusive programming. Results of this yearly survey will be added to each participating church’s information in the RCA’s online church search, in part so that potential visitors with disabilities can anticipate if the church will be able to accommodate their needs.

• In February 2017, all church disability advocates in the RCA database were encouraged to facilitate an accessibility audit (identifying and addressing barriers in attitude, communication, and facility design) and/or work with leaders to adopt a disability policy for their church.

• Planning is underway for RCA-CRC Disability Concerns connection events in Arizona, Florida, Iowa, Michigan, and Ontario.

Five-Year (June 2013 to June 2018)

• 40 churches will have conducted an accessibility audit or adopted a church disability policy so that substantive changes are made in their welcome of people with disabilities.

• 100 churches will have identified a church disability advocate who is empowered to champion the full welcome and engagement of people with disabilities so that disability awareness is deepened and people with disabilities are engaged.

• 15 churches will have engaged in local mission efforts, volunteer engagements, or public advocacy campaigns that address issues that are harmful in some way to people with disabilities so that people with disabilities can flourish as active community members.

• 125 churches will have participated in connection events designed to raise awareness about advocacy with people with disabilities, provide equipping, and connect participants to learning communities.

• Three RCA-CRC learning communities focused on Disability Concerns initiatives in the local church will have been established.

• One leadership community will be established for churches that are engaging people with disabilities exceptionally well.

ADDITIONAL GLOBAL MISSION REPORTING

The purpose of RCA Global Mission is to support the growth of the kingdom of God on earth, to foster the presence of the living Christ deeply in the hearts of people, and to advance ministries of compassion, justice, reconciliation, education, economic development, and disaster relief.

The way that Global Mission engages God’s mission in the world has changed. The gospel complements and grows in and with the cultures of the world. Rather than to impose a North American understanding of the church and of ministries of compassion onto other cultures and countries, RCA Global Mission seeks to partner with national churches, indigenous
church planting movements, and local organizations. Its purpose is to build the capacity of in-country organizations to engage in God’s mission in each place. The RCA is no longer exporting its definition of mission. Instead, the RCA is listening to people at the local level as they define God’s mission in their context and is seeking to build capacity in the places where the local people invite the RCA in.

Missionaries from North America are still urgently needed to conduct this capacity-building work. Rather than sending RCA missionaries out to provide direct services, they are sent out to come alongside, to equip, and to train local populations to lead.

Global Mission has also developed a new global mission consulting service for RCA congregations, including the following services:

- Training for mission committees and pastors to develop their own strategy for effective global mission programs.
- Helping RCA congregations evaluate potential mission partners. With the emerging marketplace of independent global mission agencies, there is a need to discern the effectiveness of these organizations. What percent of every dollar goes to their administrative overhead? Are they seeking to empower in-country leaders and movements? How effective are they in achieving their organizational goals?
- Helping congregations add value to and scale up their mission goals.

The Challenge

These are tough times for North American denominational mission programs. Denominational mission programs are experiencing a decline in funding. RCA Global Mission, too, has less income than it did a decade ago. There has been a decline in bequests and designated gifts for mission over the past ten years. As a result, Global Mission ended the 2016 fiscal year with a $430,000 deficit (6.5 percent of the Global Mission budget). In order to balance the budget in 2017, several areas of the budget have needed to be cut, including the elimination of two and a half staff positions in Global Mission. Supervision and administrative overhead have been streamlined. Global Mission believes that it has been able to maintain its effectiveness.

The Vision

The exciting news is that we are living through the greatest growth of Christianity in human history. In parts of Asia, Africa, Europe, and South America, indigenous church planting movements are thriving and local capacity for mission is increasing. It is a joy that RCA churches are able to be a part of this tremendous global growth in the body of Christ. It is an inspiration to realize the incredible work we are supporting throughout the world.

PIM Shares

RCA Global Mission is grateful for the faithfulness of congregations and individuals in their support of the RCA’s ministries overseas. PIM (Partnership-in-Mission) shares pledged by congregations and individuals are the major source of financial support for RCA missionaries and programs, providing mission personnel with adequate resources to fulfill their ministries. Global Mission staff give thanks to God for the faithfulness of RCA congregations and individual members.

General Synod 2016 set the value of a PIM share for 2017 at $6,400; Global Mission is recommending an increase of $300 in the value of a PIM share for 2018. It is also asking
that all congregations consider increasing pledges to RCA missionaries by $300 to address
the increasing costs of doing ministry around the world. That 4.7 percent increase would
add $247,200 to the Global Mission budget, which would close the budget gap.

R 17-37
To set the value of a Partnership-in-Mission (PIM) share for 2018
at $6,700. (ADOPTED)

Global Mission Statistics

The RCA impacts the church of Jesus Christ around the world through the work and witness
of 44 in-country workers employed by RCA global partners and 49 RCA missionaries,
supported by RCA congregations through PIM shares. Together, these 93 mission personnel
serve and relate to 81 national churches and Christian service agencies in 26 different
countries. These mission personnel around the world are supported by the pledges of 460
RCA congregations.

Transitions in Mission Personnel: Retirements

Jhonny Alicia-Báez

Jhonny Alicea-Báez retired from RCA Global Mission on December 31, 2016. In 2001,
Jhonny was hired by RCA Global Mission to serve as the supervisor for Latin America.
Jhonny served on the board of Words of Hope and helped bring the RCA into new mission
relationships. In 2007, Jhonny was appointed director of Global Mission, a position he held
for many years.

Ken and Marcia Bradsell

After Ken retired from his service with the General Synod Council and the Board of
Benefits Services, he and his wife, Marcia, followed God’s call to serve the Protestant
Church in Oman (PCO). Ken served the church with pastoral leadership of an expatriate
congregation of more than 500 families in the capital city of Muscat. He also served as the
liaison between the PCO and the Omani Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs and was
a mentor and guide to other staff members.

Duncan Hanson

In 2002, Duncan joined RCA Global Mission staff as the supervisor for Europe, the
Middle East, and India. Duncan led the RCA into a commitment with the Roma of Central
Europe, with the Kurds in the eastern Mediterranean, and with African, Syrian, and Iraqi
refugees in Italy. He also introduced the RCA to a relationship with the Waldensian Church.
Additionally, Duncan helped to resolve a number of serious conflicts and strengthen
partnerships in his region.

Tom and Liz Stewart

Tom and Liz witnessed to and served international students on the Oklahoma State
University campus from 1980 to 2016. They ministered through retreats, welcome socials,
host-family events, evangelistic programs, Bible studies, pastoral guidance, one-to-one
witnessing, and gatherings in their home. More than 80 percent of OSU’s international
students return to their home countries after graduation and, by the grace of God, many
students to whom the Stewarts ministered received Christ and became influential witnesses
to their own culture. The Stewarts served in partnership with Mission to Internationals, Inc.
Marlin Vis

Marlin and Sally Vis have been leading educational tours in Israel and Palestine since 2005. In addition to tours of the Holy Land and the biblical history of the old city of Jerusalem, they have been leading tours of the Palestinian territories, helping groups of RCA leaders to understand the nature of the ongoing conflict in the region. Over the past several years, they have also supported programs for Israeli-Palestinian dialogue and summer camps designed to foster peace in the region. Marlin served on the board of directors of World Vision in Jerusalem, and they have supported a network of Christian organizations that provide aid and training to Palestinian Christians. Marlin and Sally’s son, Josh, has replaced Marlin as an RCA missionary leading these initiatives. Sally currently is continuing her work with logistics and administration assistance for the study tours.

R 17-38
Whereas the Rev. Jhonny Alicea-Báez has retired from the RCA Global Mission staff after more than 15 years of service, first as supervisor of Latin America and then as director of Global Mission; and

Whereas the Rev. Ken and Marcia Bradsell have retired from their service with the Protestant Church in Oman, following Ken’s years of service on the General Synod Council and Board of Benefits Services staff; and

Whereas the Rev. Dr. Duncan Hanson has retired from the RCA Global Mission staff after more than 15 years supervising RCA Global Mission personnel and projects in Europe, the Middle East, and India; and

Whereas the Rev. Tom and Liz Stewart have retired from the mission field after more than 35 years of ministering to international students at Oklahoma State University; and

Whereas the Rev. Marlin Vis has retired from the mission field after 12 years of leading educational tours in Israel and Palestine with his wife, Sally;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the 211th session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting June 8 through 13, 2017, on the campus of Hope College in Holland, Michigan, gives glory to God for the life and witness of Rev. Jhonny Alicea-Báez, Rev. Ken and Marcia Bradsell, Rev. Dr. Duncan Hanson, Rev. Tom and Liz Stewart, and Rev. Marlin Vis, and offers a prayer of thanksgiving for their service to RCA Global Mission. (ADOPTED)

New Mission Assignments

Larry Austin has been appointed to work in partnership with the Classis of Central California in the Inside-Out program in Oakland, California. Larry will be working with young men and boys as a chaplain at the Juvenile Justice Center and continuing those relationships after they are released back to their families and communities.
Michael and Carrie Johnson will partner with United World Mission to serve Christians in Scotland and to support church planters throughout Europe with mentoring, training, retreats, and workshops. Their work will include an internship program that will mentor and equip people to serve within the local community and across Europe.

Aaro Rytkönen has been appointed as the new director of the Al Amana Centre in Oman. The Al Amana Centre is dedicated to hosting visiting groups, college- and seminary-level educational programs, and dialogue between Christians and Muslims for the purpose of mutual understanding.

Filipe and Janelle Silva are serving with New Horizons Foundation in Romania, engaging youth through impact groups, camps, service in the community, and a climbing gym. Janelle is developing a ministry to women that will include a women’s center.

Lois Wanyoike is the project leader for Setshabelo Family and Child Services in Botshabelo, South Africa, one of the RCA’s new strategic impact areas. The goal of this strategic impact area is to reduce the number of orphans and vulnerable children and to strengthen families in Botshabelo.

Deaths

Eloise Bosch, former missionary in Oman, died on October 7, 2016. Eloise and her husband, Don, served in Oman from 1955 to 1985. Don was a surgeon at American Mission Hospital and Eloise was a teacher at Al Amana School. The Bosches were beloved by the Omani people. When the Bosches retired, Oman’s ruler gave them Omani citizenship and provided them a home near Muscat. Eloise epitomized what a missionary should be: caring, committed, creative, and imaginative. For many decades, Eloise has been a model of what it can mean to follow Christ. The Reformed Church in America, the people of Oman, and indeed, the people of the whole world, are poorer that she is gone but richer that she was with us.

Elinor Heusinkveld Faber (Ellie) died on November 17, 2016. Ellie was born in St. Paul, Minnesota, on November 2, 1922, to Christian and Hilda Gran. After graduation from the University of Minnesota as a registered nurse in 1943, she married Dr. Maurice Heusinkveld. Maurice and Ellie were RCA missionaries to the Arabian Mission from 1946 to 1967, with assignments in Kuwait, Iraq, Bahrain, and Oman. After Maurice died in 1967, Ellie returned to America and settled in Holland, Michigan.

Marilyn Tanis Franken died in July 2016. Marilyn and her husband Darrell served as RCA missionaries in Bahrain for eight years from 1963 to 1968. Marilyn was a nurse at the American Mission Hospital and Darrell was pastor of the National Evangelical Church in Bahrain. The daughter of Edward Tanis, Marilyn graduated from Central College with a BS in 1954, having become a registered nurse at Iowa Methodist Hospital in Des Moines in 1953. She worked as a nurse and nursing instructor in Iowa before moving to Bahrain in 1955 to serve as a volunteer nurse at the American Mission Hospital. She returned to the United States in 1958, but her experience inspired a lifelong passion for mission service. During the first Gulf War in 1991, Marilyn served again as a Red Cross volunteer, this time in Kuwait. The Kuwait City Hospital had a staff of 300 before the war began, but only 24 staff members were left to treat the people of Kuwait during the war. Marilyn received a medal from the Department of Defense for her sacrificial service during that war.

A copy of the remarks made to the General Synod by director of Global Mission Doug Leonard is available from the RCA Archives upon request.
Report of Words of Hope

Words of Hope is an international media ministry founded by supporting classes of the Reformed Church in America. Words of Hope’s mission is to build the church in the hard places by equipping indigenous Christian churches and ministries to proclaim the gospel, especially through the use of media.

The areas where Words of Hope does ministry are difficult to reach with the gospel, either because of poverty, geography, persecution, or social antagonism toward Christianity. Words of Hope partners with existing Christian organizations in these hard-to-reach countries and equips them to more effectively minister in their own language and context, among their own people.

Currently, Words of Hope’s regions of ministry include Albania, the Arab world, Bhutan, India, Indonesia, Iran, Nepal, Niger, North America, South Sudan, Tibet, Turkey, and Uganda. Each ministry field requires its own unique media outreach approach. Depending on the variety of resources and preferences in a given region, an assortment of radio programs, CDs, DVDs, text messages, Internet, Skype, Facebook, print materials, and satellite television are used to proclaim the gospel.

Some notable highlights from Words of Hope’s ministry in the past year include the welcoming of a new president to lead the ministry, the start of daily devotional distribution in Uganda, and the expanse of outreach into five new tribal languages in the country of Niger.

Jon Opgenorth has succeeded David Bast as president of Words of Hope. “I am confident that God has called Jon to this role,” said Bast. “I am excited to see how God will use him to lead Words of Hope in new and wonderful ways to advance God’s kingdom and build Christ’s church in the world’s hard places.”

Opgenorth comes to Words of Hope from Trinity Reformed Church in Orange City, Iowa, where he served as senior pastor for 18 years. “My heart has been part of the Words of Hope family for many years,” Opgenorth said. “When I was ten I had a providential encounter with former Words of Hope president Dr. Bill Brownson. On a sabbatical I traveled to Uganda with the Rev. David Bast. And recently I served a number of years on the board. In these ways, I sensed God’s preparation for this new chapter,” he said. “I look forward to leading Words of Hope in the great work of proclaiming salvation in Jesus in the hard-to-reach places of the world.”

Opgenorth received a bachelor of arts in religion from Northwestern College in Orange City, Iowa, and a Master of Divinity degree from Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. He has a proven track record in fundraising, team building, and vision casting. He has also traveled extensively, most recently to Uganda, where he ministered with Words of Hope Uganda’s Titus Baraka.

The Words of Hope daily devotionals are now being printed and distributed in Uganda. In Uganda, good Christian materials are hard to find and expensive to buy. The Words of Hope devotional now provides Ugandans with theologically sound teaching. The booklets are available at a nominal fee that is charged to readers who can afford it or waived for those who cannot. The first print run of 10,000 copies was distributed across the country in all 13 dioceses that partner with Words of Hope. The original Words of Hope daily devotionals are contextualized by Ugandan editors to better apply to their own local readership, and devotional covers and ad pages are changed in order to direct Ugandan readers to Words
of Hope radio programming and church services within the country. The next print run of devotionals will include devotional submissions written by local Ugandan writers that will coordinate with themes being addressed in Ugandan churches.

In the strongly Muslim country of Niger, Words of Hope has been producing good news broadcasts for ten years in French, the national language of education, and in Hausa, the more commonly spoken native tongue. Now, because of partnership with Back to God Ministries International, Words of Hope has been able to start new language broadcasts in the country that are designed to foster church plants. In addition to being able to reach further in the languages of French and Hausa, programs will now be produced in five additional heart languages: Zarma, Kanuri, Tubu, Fulfulde, and Gourmantché.

Words of Hope is deeply grateful for the support of RCA churches that continues to allow this outreach ministry to grow. In 2016, contributions from RCA congregations totaled $584,405, an increase from 2015. We celebrate this increase in giving, knowing that these dollars are allowing people to be introduced to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Thank you for proclaiming hope to the refugee, the orphan, the oppressed, the impoverished, and the imprisoned. Thank you for sending the gospel out to the ends of the earth.