Coordinating Communication

Communication trends are in constant flux, reflecting changes in our world, our homes, and our churches. GSC staff strategically provide communication tools that align with the needs of RCA members. To best serve the diversity in the RCA, communication happens both in print and electronically through social media, email, the RCA website, and other websites.

With the blessings of a more ethnically diverse denomination, there is also the need and opportunity to communicate in a number of languages.

Communication efforts are coordinated across these various channels and languages to connect with RCA members most effectively.

Changing Electronic Communication Meets the Needs of Leaders, Members, and Seekers

The RCA digital communication team manages an array of websites and social media interactions online. A growing number of people have seen, shared, and interacted with the RCA on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Vimeo in the last year.

The digital communication team continues to use a Google AdWords grant of $10,000 per month in free advertising. Ad campaigns have included helping searchers find an RCA church nearby, highlighting seasonal worship resources, and promoting the Gift of Hope Christmas campaign for RCA Global Mission. The RCA website has seen more than 80,000 visits as a result of this grant since it was awarded in 2015.

More and more people are accessing the RCA’s digital communications from smartphones and tablets rather than computers. Emails, social media content, and the RCA website are optimized for mobile use, and a mobile-friendly online donation system was introduced two years ago. Online giving is up 400 percent since 2013 due to improvements in usability, easier options for giving, and mobile-friendly forms.

Print Pieces Continue to Serve the Church

While technology allows communication to take place in a number of ways, there is still a need for print communication. Within the RCA, this includes RCA Today magazine, which is produced three times a year for each RCA household. RCA Today continues to support Transformed & Transforming by communicating stories of church and individual discipleship, leadership development, and mission. A bulletin insert, also called RCA Today, shares RCA ministry stories and increases connection with RCA mission work around the world.

To better marry new technology with print communication, a new app-based electronic edition of RCA Today magazine debuted in spring 2016. The app includes the full content of the magazine, formatted for easy reading on a phone or tablet, plus additional interactive features such as videos, photos, music, and more. The app is available on the App Store and Google Play.

Translation Efforts Increase

As the RCA grows in diversity, the need for translated materials also grows. In addition to offering the 2016 Book of Church Order in Spanish, Korean, and Mandarin, the RCA Today bulletin is produced in Spanish and Korean each month. Select Transformed &
Transforming resources have also been translated, including a multiyear leadership development curriculum. Several church multiplication resources are being translated into Spanish for the growing number of Spanish-speaking church planters in the RCA. A Korean translation of *Worship the Lord*, the RCA’s liturgy, was completed this spring.

In order to make these resources available to the largest audience, the majority of the translated material is posted on the web in lieu of printing. This is cost effective and allows translated material to be made available more quickly, at no cost to churches. This momentum will continue as we look to bring RCA communications into the languages in which our members worship the Lord.

**Report on the Faith Alive Christian Resources Partnership**

The RCA continues to work with Faith Alive Christian Resources as a partner in distributing resources. RCA staff meet with Faith Alive leadership to ensure the partnership is working well and supporting the resource needs of both the RCA and the Christian Reformed Church in North America. Staff cooperation between Faith Alive and the RCA is strong. The RCA receives revenue from the Reformed Church Press materials sold through Faith Alive, and that revenue is then used to produce additional resources to support the RCA and other Reformed congregations throughout the United States and Canada.

**The Office of Historical Services**

The conception of archives is a musty room with piles of paper, but it’s more than that—it’s also photographs, videotapes, CDs, cassette tapes, hard drives, floppy discs, and LP records—and it’s not musty. The RCA Archives maintains the long-term memory of the RCA. On its shelves and on its hard drives are stored the stories of all those who have engaged in the ministry of the church and built a strong foundation for where we are today.

The archives looks forward as it gathers, preserves, and makes available the stories of a past generation so that tomorrow has a yesterday.

The Office of Historical Services assists in the proclamation of the gospel over time. The acts of remembering allow today’s people to be inspired and encouraged by yesterday’s mission. The RCA has left a significant historical footprint in its more than 385 years of life and ministry. That footprint is found in the missionary correspondence and represents many stories of transformation.

The office preserves records from congregations, classes, regional synods, the General Synod, our mission fields, and staff offices in order to assure that a strong future is built upon a solid understanding of the past. The primary goal of the archives in this process is to offer stability and relevance to the long-term mission of the church.

**Records Storage**

The main storage area for the archives is at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, where the office rents space. More than 1,000 cubic feet of records are also stored in an underground storage area in Grand Rapids, and all the records relating to the RCA in Canada are stored in the offices of the Regional Synod of Canada. Many records valuable for family history research have been digitized and are available on ancestry.com, with which we continue to partner. This partnership both makes records accessible to a worldwide audience and allows for less expensive off-site storage.
Historical Series

The archivist also assists with the publication of the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America and serves as its production editor. The archivist works closely with the general editor and the Commission on History in the promotion and production of the volumes in the series by designing and typesetting the books and assisting in photo research and fact checking. A full list of the nearly 90 volumes can be found at www.rca.org/series.

The Growth and Development of the Archives

Last year, New Brunswick Theological Seminary offered the RCA a challenge grant to help grow and develop the archives. That challenge was matched by the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America. In the last half of 2016, the archives began moving forward, aggressively increasing efforts at digitization and moving through the backlog of records, radically upgrading the technology of the office for more efficient and increased digitization. It increased promotion of the Historical Series at several events, enabled more efficient movement of records to underground storage and the transfer of large groups of records from older congregations, and provided several displays in Sage Library and “on the road.” Records continue to come into the archives from disbanded churches, and an increasing number of active congregations are taking advantage of the services that the archives offers.

The RCA Archives assists many congregations as they celebrate their anniversaries and seek to challenge the present with their rich heritage. The archivist advises on retention of records and facilitates transfer to the denominational archives. The archives also has an experimental site to provide resources as needed at rcaarchives.omeka.net, which features an increasing variety of documents and images.

The archivist continues to serve the professional archival community through active involvement, participation, and presentation of papers at the Society of American Archivists and the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archivists Conference. He serves as the secretary for the Archivists of Religious Collections section and continues as a member of the Academy of Certified Archivists.

This office recognizes its important position in the ministry of memory as it continues in its stewardship of our shared heritage. Preserving our memory is an important task, and our historical footprint continues to increase as we travel the path from yesterday to tomorrow.