Concluding Comments

With much love and many prayers we submit this report to you. We are thankful for the work that the interim general secretary, the director of strategic leadership development and coordinator of Hispanic ministries, and the General Synod Council have done for the Hispanic people of the Reformed Church in America. We know and understand that there is a long way to get to where we want to be, but we are going in the right direction. We believe that Transformed & Transforming is giving us focus for ministry effectiveness. We pray for God’s blessings and for the anointing of the Holy Spirit to be with us as we continue on this journey of transformation to live and love like Jesus.

Respectfully submitted,

The executive committee of the Council for Hispanic Ministries

REPORT OF THE GENERAL SYNOD COUNCIL ON COMMUNICATION

“I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind ...” (1 Corinthians 1:4-5)

Since its origins in 1628, the RCA has given testimony to the goodness and faithfulness of God. Now, in the midst of Transformed & Transforming, we continue to share stories of how God is at work among us. We also share ideas, goals, concerns, prayer needs, and other information and resources. This happens in a wide variety of ways, utilizing longstanding communication channels alongside new ones.

Supporting Transformed & Transforming

Over the last year, GSC staff have worked to raise awareness of Transformed & Transforming, the denomination’s vision to engage in discipleship, leadership, and mission. Stories of transformation have taken the form of magazine and website features. They’ve also been tweets, Facebook posts, and video testimonies.

Transformed & Transforming initiatives were designed in response to needs expressed by churches and leaders. As those initiatives took shape, congregations and leaders were invited to take their next step in order to better fulfill God’s call for them. A plethora of learning and equipping opportunities are available. The RCA communication team has supported each initiative in sharing these opportunities and in developing related resources where needed.

Over the past year, communication staff have also worked to share a clear vision of what Transformed & Transforming is and the opportunities it holds for RCA congregations and members.

Responding to Disasters

Hurricanes. Earthquakes. Wildfires. 2017 was a particularly devastating year. The communication team shared frequent news updates on disasters, including how they impacted RCA churches, communities, and mission partners; reported how RCA Global
Mission responded and is responding to each disaster; and invited churches and individuals to help by donating and by volunteering.

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, other websites, and apps.

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 and meet their communication needs.

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

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

The digital communication team continues to utilize 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 122,000 visits as a result of this grant since it was awarded in 2015.

More and more people are accessing the RCA's digital communication channels from smartphones and tablets rather than computers. Emails, social media content, and the RCA website are optimized for mobile use, including a mobile-friendly online donation system.

Print Pieces Continue to Serve the Church

While technology allows communication to take place in a number of ways, many people still desire print communication. Within the RCA, this medium 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. RCA Today underwent a redesign in the last year, introducing a new look and new content features. A readership survey is underway to measure engagement and identify opportunities for growth.

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, an app-based electronic edition of RCA Today magazine debuted in fall 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 in the iOS 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 2017 *Book of Church Order* in Spanish, Korean, and Mandarin, the *RCA Today* bulletin is produced in Spanish and Korean each month. A number of Transformed & Transforming resources have also been translated, including a multi-year leadership development curriculum. Resources for church multiplication, disability advocacy, cultural agility and advocacy, volunteers and mission teams, and women’s leadership development have also been translated this year. A Korean translation of *Worship the Lord*, the RCA’s liturgy, was completed in the last year. The RCA’s annual Advent devotions were bilingual for the first time in 2017, distributed in both English and Spanish.

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, and 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 Archives of the RCA serve as the documentary memory of the church. It includes documents, photographs, videotapes, CDs, cassette tapes, hard drives, floppy discs, LP records, and more as technology changes. These records tell 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 past generations so that tomorrow has a yesterday. It is the record of Transformed & Transforming for sure!

The office assists 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 Archives are housed in space leased from New Brunswick Theological Seminary and also stored in an underground area in Grand Rapids. This year, the regional synod of Canada transferred all Canadian records to the RCA Archives so that a separate storage facility and operation is no longer needed there.

In 2016, New Brunswick Theological Seminary offered a challenge grant to the RCA for the further development of the Archives. That grant allowed for increased staffing and the start of a more aggressive digitization program to make records available more widely.
One of the first efforts has been the completion of the scanning of the minutes of General Synod. All minutes will be available on the RCA website from the first volume through the last synod.

More digital equipment has been procured so that an increasing amount of material will be available to researchers, making RCA history more accessible than ever before.

**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, typesetting, and indexing 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**

This year the Archives held an open house and offered an RCA History Day as a means of outreach and familiarization with our collections and denominational history.

The archivist also connects with people, groups, and congregations both within and outside the RCA. He met with the Dutch Cousins in Frankfurt, Kentucky, and preached for them at the Old Mud Meeting House in Harrodsburg, Kentucky.

The office also prepared a video on women in mission and ministry for the Women’s Sankofa trip in the fall and a display on RCA women in Sage Library. Regular postings on Facebook and social media also help popularize both the Archives and RCA history.

Researchers from around the world continue to visit and use RCA records. This past year we enjoyed visitors from the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Poland, Germany, Japan, and Bahrain. A volunteer from Illinois also spent ten days in the Archives to assist with data entry for a minister’s pamphlet database.

The archivist continues to be active and speak at regional and national professional gatherings.