Report of the Commission for Women

The Commission for Women (CfW) is a group of eight women and men, lay and clergy, committed to the work of advocacy in the Reformed Church in America. Honoring the gifts of women strengthens the church and invites the full participation of all of God’s people. The Commission for Women seeks to raise awareness to provide opportunities for women in the church, to provide information so that women can participate in the leadership and life of the church, to work on systemic changes in the church for the full inclusion of women, and to collaborate and celebrate with other RCA bodies on women’s issues.

The Commission for Women met twice this year; our fall meeting was held in Grand Rapids with the other commissions and General Synod Council, and our 2018 winter meeting was held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on February 2 and 3. We were hosted by Liberti Church in Philadelphia and were heartened to see the good work that they are doing for their community and the support they have for women’s gifts and talents in the life of their church.

There were several topics at hand that the Commission for Women discussed, including the celebration of 40 years of women’s ordination in the RCA at General Synod 2018, working with the Commissions on Christian Action and Christian Discipleship and Education on their respective projects, and continuing to hear the stories of women in the RCA. However, the CfW felt that the main issue that we wanted to focus on and highlight in 2018 is the issue of harassment, abuse, and sexual violence against women, especially in light of the #meToo and #churchToo movements and the #wearespeaking statement put out by the RCA (www.rca.org/we-are-speaking/full-statement). To this end, we would like to make the following recommendation:

**W 18-1**
To affirm the #wearespeaking statement; and further,

To encourage that this statement and the subject of harassment, abuse, and sexual violence be used to inform services of worship; to encourage pastors to preach on this topic as well as to care for victims of harassment, abuse, and sexual violence; and to encourage congregations to form study groups to explore and reflect upon this topic. (ADOPTED)

In addition to being a moral and ethical issue, harassment, abuse, and sexual violence against women is also a financial issue. The CfW understands that there are churches already being dropped by insurance companies because these companies deemed churches to be a liability and a risk. Hence, the Commission for Women would like to submit the following recommendations:

**W 18-2**
To instruct the GSC to develop and implement a sexual harassment policy and procedures for reporting and responding to incidents; and further,

To enact denomination-wide education and training to include boards, institutions, agencies, commissions, regional synods, classes, consistories, and congregations, reporting back to General Synod 2019 its progress and details of implementation.
A motion was made and supported to amend W 18-2 as follows (additions are underlined, deletions are stricken):

To instruct the GSC to develop and implement a sexual harassment policy and procedures for reporting and responding to incidents; and furthermore ensure that investigations into such allegations will result in protection and non-retaliatory behaviors toward the reporters; and

To enact denomination-wide education and training to include boards, institutions, agencies, commissions, regional synods, classes, consistories, and congregations, reporting back to General Synod 2019 its progress and details of implementation.

VOTED: To amend W 18-2.

A motion was made and supported to refer W 18-2 as amended to the Committee of Reference to consider and report back to the General Synod before conclusion of the 2018 session.

VOTED: To not refer W 18-2 as amended.

VOTED: To adopt W 18-2 as amended.

W 18-2
To instruct the GSC to develop and implement a sexual harassment policy and procedures for reporting and responding to incidents; and furthermore ensure that investigations into such allegations will result in protection and non-retaliatory behaviors toward the reporters; and

To enact denomination-wide education and training to include boards, institutions, agencies, commissions, regional synods, classes, consistories, and congregations, reporting back to General Synod 2019 its progress and details of implementation. (ADOPTED)

W 18-3
To urge every classis to have a sexual harassment training in place by General Synod 2019 and to have a plan for sustained accountability through continued education. (ADOPTED)

In this joyful year of celebrating women’s leadership, gifts, and roles in the Reformed Church in America, the Commission for Women remains dedicated to honoring women’s stories and experiences. We believe that a church that honors women honors all people of the church, strengthening the work that we do together in service of God and God’s people.

Respectfully submitted,
Shirley Lin, moderator