Report of the Commission on Christian Action

The Book of Church Order states that “the commission shall inform and advise the church concerning current social issues and the scriptural and Christian principles by which critical evaluation may be exercised on those issues and proper action taken” (Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 2b [2018 edition, pp. 111–112]).

Through prayer and discernment, the Commission on Christian Action has come to a clear understanding that the work and identity of this commission as God has mandated is a call to biblical justice. Therefore, the Scripture that has guided our work this year is Micah 6:8, “He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” (KJV).


Quality time was spent during our fall meeting reviewing the Commission on Christian Action’s report to General Synod 2018. This gave us opportunity to have meaningful discussion about the progress of the commission and to think collectively about where God might be leading us for 2019 and 2020. This report informs the church of both ongoing and future work of the commission.

Biblical Justice

Biblical justice draws on the Scripture (Genesis 1-3) that tells the story of a just and righteous God who created a just world. God’s intended state of shalom is for humankind to live in a right relationship with God, self, neighbor, and creation. Justice is at the very heart of God’s character and at the core of what he desires from his people. According to the psalmist, “The Lord is known by his acts of justice” (Psalm 9:16, NIV) and “a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom” (Psalm 45:6, NIV). The Creator executes justice for the oppressed, gives food to the hungry, sets the prisoner free, and watches over the immigrant, the widow, and the orphan.

The Lord says, “Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue, that you may live and possess the land” (Deuteronomy 16:20, NASB), and he ties the future of his people to their treatment of the oppressed, the immigrant, the orphan, and the widow. What God wants from humankind is that we do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with him.

The church’s responsibility is to expose the social injustices in the world and to take just and merciful action to bring unjust acts in line with God’s justice. When the body of Christ is living the way God has called us to live as righteous and just people, the world will be the kind of world that reflects God’s kingdom on Earth. The church is the empowerment and mobilization of a biblical justice into the world. The Commission on Christian Action is the empowerment and mobilization of a biblical justice in the Reformed Church in America. Therefore, the work and identity of this commission is the work of biblical justice.

Commission on Christian Action on the Road

During our fall meeting in 2017, concerns were brought about how we raise and discuss issues of social justice with RCA college and seminary students and how we inform students of the work of the Commission on Christian Action. That discussion lead to the concept of a “CCA on the Road” initiative. Through prayer, sharing our idea with college and seminary leaders, and thoughtful discussion, CCA on the Road has taken form and will be implemented this year.
The purpose of CCA on the Road is as follows:

- To inform and interconnect the social justice and advocacy work of CCA with students and faculty of RCA colleges and seminaries.
- To hear social justice and advocacy concerns of college and seminary groups.
- To stir and advance our living out as the body of Christ the call to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8).

CCA on the Road will be delivered via a short video featuring topics of creation care, immigration, and criminal justice reform; each topic will be tied to the three pillars of Transformed & Transforming. The video is designed to promote conversation about critical social issues, share what the commission has done and continues to do related to such issues, and query students as to where the commission, the church, and their campus can engage social justice matters. The proposed colleges and seminaries to experience CCA on the Road include Central, Northwestern, and Hope Colleges and Western and New Brunswick Theological Seminaries. Commission on Christian Action on the Road is available at the CCA table in the display area for all delegates to experience.

**Weaponized Drones**

The commission continues to work in collaboration with the Interfaith Network on Drone Warfare. In this phase of the project, the goal for the Interfaith Network on Drone Warfare is to recruit 60 people of faith in 30 regions who will make a commitment until February 1, 2021, to educate both institutions and individuals of faith in order to build public awareness about the use of drones in targeted killings and to more effectively advocate for a change in U.S. lethal drone policies. A National Project Committee, consisting of representatives of denominational bodies, faith groups, and religious organizations concerned about drone warfare, will provide leadership to this effort. A member of the Commission on Christian Action serves on the National Project Committee representing the Reformed Church in America. The efforts of the committee will culminate in a three-day training conference that will be held at Princeton Theological Seminary.

As stated in our report to the church in 2018, the Reformed Church in America must commit to educate ourselves on the ongoing issue of U.S. drone strikes around the world, particularly in countries that are not “war zones” as defined in the law of armed conflict or international law. We must also encourage our congregations to continue to contact their legislators on this important moral issue. There is information on the CCA table for anyone interested in learning more about the opportunity to attend the training conference at Princeton Theological Seminary.

For more resources, see the Interfaith Network on Drone Warfare’s website: www.interfaithdronenetwork.org.

**Just Peace**

The commission’s discussion on militarized drone warfare turned to the need to take a fresh look at the issue of just warfare. Questions requiring clarification for the commission are as follows: What is our church saying about just peace? What does the church want to say on this issue? Members of the commission agreed that there is a need to think differently about the humanity and morality of war, the collateral damage, and how the church speaks peace. The commission will continue to study, think, and engage in discourse about just peace and will present a report and recommendations to General Synod 2020.
Creation Care

The Commission on Christian Action is engaged in a fruitful collaboration with Earl James and the Creation Care initiative, through our ecumenical representative from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). As a result of this collaboration, creation care will be one of the topics addressed in the CCA on the Road project, as well as in a “lunch and learn” forum at General Synod. Care of the creation is a critical moral issue facing the church today. A goal of the commission is to explore ways to generate a faithful response to creation care. This work will continue with a follow-up report and recommendations for General Synod 2020.

Opioid Crisis

There are more deaths, illnesses, and disabilities due to drug use in the United States than any other preventable health condition. In 2014, it was estimated that over 20 million adults were classified with substance dependence or abuse. It is also estimated that one in four Americans will at some time in their lives have an alcohol or drug problem. Unlike prevailing stereotypes, an addicted person can be anyone from anywhere.

The Commission on Christian Action has begun a conversation around what is typically called the opioid crisis. The opioid crisis, sometimes also known as the opioid epidemic, refers to the rapid increase in the use of prescription and non-prescription opioid drugs in the U.S. and Canada beginning in the late 1990s and continuing today.

The statistics are staggering:

- From 1999 to 2017, more than 700,000 people have died from drug overdoses.
- Around 68 percent of the more than 70,200 drug overdose deaths in 2017 involved an opioid.
- In 2017, the number of overdose deaths involving opioids (including prescription opioids and illegal opioids like heroin and illicitly manufactured fentanyl) was six times higher than in 1999.
- On average, 130 Americans die every day from opioid overdoses.1

The consequences of this crisis or epidemic are far-reaching. It has contributed to the unnecessary deaths of youth and has left children without parents. It has led to babies born with opioid-related medical conditions. It has led to lost productivity in work sites and has had financial impact on families and on state and local communities.

The aim of our conversation is to encourage congregations and classes to respond to this crisis in ways that are appropriate in their own contexts. Given the statistics above, it seems safe to assume that few congregations are unaffected by this epidemic. As a follow-up to this report, the commission will develop a handbook with helpful information, resources, and appropriate actions for pastors and church teams to cooperate with local organizations that are working toward harm reduction and a resolution to this crisis.

Commission on Christian Action Reference Table

This year, the Commission on Christian Action has a table in the display area at General Synod displaying information about CCA on the Road, a conversation deck of cards related to creation care, a list of critical biblical justice issues the commission has presented to the church over the past ten years, and information about how to access the CCA landing page.

Respectfully submitted,
Patricia Sealy, moderator