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.

Coordinating Communication

Communication trends are always evolving, 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 with RCA Today magazines and newsletters, and electronically through social media, email, the RCA website, other websites, and apps.

With the blessings of a denomination that includes people from many cultures and ethnicities, 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 to 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.

Many 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.
Video is growing in frequency as a communication tool, and beginning in 2018, all RCA-produced videos have been closed captioned for greater accessibility.

**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 the *RCA Today* magazine, which is produced three times a year for each RCA household. (For a free subscription, email updates@rca.org.) *RCA Today* continues to support Transformed & Transforming by communicating stories of church and individual discipleship, leadership development, and mission.

A readership survey of *RCA Today* readers was conducted in 2018, offering a better understanding of readers and their engagement with the magazine. Many respondents felt *RCA Today* is trustworthy and seek out *RCA Today* as a source of information. More than 40 percent of readers reported sharing or talking about a story with a friend. Survey results have shaped content choices and the formation of a new online platform, Faithward.org. Survey results also led to an effort to get new congregations signed up for the magazine and to more intentional thought about how to build trust with demographic groups whose current engagement with the magazine is limited.

The *RCA Today* magazine app was discontinued after the fall 2018 issue due to low reader engagement. With the winter issue, a new digital strategy unfolded with the launch of Faithward. The site, focused on moving faith forward, includes ideas for living out your faith, reflections on Scripture, and resources for your church. Faithward includes many stories and resources from *RCA Today*, as well as added content from a regular rotation of contributors from throughout the church.

A bulletin insert, called *RCA Today*, shares RCA ministry stories and increases connection with RCA mission work around the world. The *RCA Today* bulletin was redesigned in 2018.

**Translation Efforts Continue**

As the RCA grows in diversity, the need for translated materials also grows. In addition to offering the 2018 *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, and women’s leadership development have also been translated this year. The RCA’s annual Advent devotions were bilingual again in 2018, distributed in both English and Spanish. Devotions for the popular Jesse Tree resource on the RCA website are now available in Spanish. Several video projects were subtitled in Spanish, or recorded in Spanish, Portuguese, or Afrikaans and subtitled in English.

Over the past year, the RCA and the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) have shared several translations of creeds and confessions. 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 CRCNA. 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.

**Office of Historical Services**

The Archives of the RCA serves as the memory of the Reformed Church through its collection of documents, videos, photographs, and electronic records. The stories of life and ministry from the past provide a strong foundation for faithful witness in the future. While the archivist gathers the records of our past and present ministry, the outlook is always looking forward to tomorrow—the stories of a past generation provide inspiration and encouragement for today as we grow into tomorrow. The office assists congregations, classes, regional synods, and staff with their historical and records needs.

**Records Storage**

Archival collections are housed in space leased from New Brunswick Theological Seminary and also in an underground storage facility in Grand Rapids—more than one-half mile of paper and other materials. The Archives receives records from disbanded and active congregations on a regular basis. This year, it is exploring the possibility of receiving electronic records online and is increasing its digital work with congregations and other agencies of the church.

The Archives is partnering in a major project to digitize the Amsterdam Correspondence—the correspondence of the domines with the Classis of Amsterdam. This collection of nearly 2,000 pages dating from the 1640s through 1800 will provide the basis for a new translation and publication of these documents. A continuing grant from New Brunswick Theological Seminary and the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America, along with gifts from several donors, has provided for more equipment and staffing to accomplish this task.

**Historical Series**

The archivist also serves as the production editor for the Historical Series and assists with the design, typesetting, and production of the books in that series as well as the Congregational History Series. A full list of the nearly 100 volumes can be found at www.rca.org/series. The Archives assists with the promotion and marketing of the publication and is exploring ways to publish the series as e-books as well as make individual chapters available.

**Growth and Development of the Archives**

The Archives’ Facebook page has an increasing following, and the use of social media and other online possibilities continues to be explored to disseminate more information about our history. A sampling of some materials can be found at rcaarchives.omeka.net. More useful information about our history and retention of records by congregations and assemblies can be found on the Archives’ web page, www.rca.org/archives. Archives staff have also enjoyed providing videos about the RCA and the Archives on an internet channel (soon to be moved to the Archives’ YouTube channel): www.vimeo.com/channels/RLGasero.
The archivist continues to speak and lead professionally through national and regional archival meetings and as a guest at gatherings such as the Dutch Cousins. He preached for them at their annual meeting in the historic structure of Old Mud Meeting House in Harrodsburg, Kentucky, one of our earliest western (at that time in the 1790s) extension efforts.

Researchers from around the world continue to use the records that we are preserving and making available. For more about the ongoing work of the Archives, see also the report of the Commission on History, demonstrating again that we have a goodly heritage.

RESOLUTION FOR STAFF

Upon the retirement of Kenneth Eriks as director of special projects for the RCA, the General Synod Council offers the following resolution:

EC 19-12
WHEREAS, the Rev. Dr. Kenneth Eriks pastored local churches for more than 30 years, and then brought that experience and wisdom to the denomination when he joined staff as coordinator of revitalization; and

WHEREAS, Ken shifted responsibilities from revitalization to congregational mission to transformational engagement to special projects, ably demonstrating his flexibility and leadership; and

WHEREAS, during his 14 years on denominational staff, Ken championed renewal, raised up leaders, and worked tirelessly to expand opportunities for the denomination, pastors, and staff;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the 213th regular session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in Holland, Michigan, offers thanks to God for Ken Eriks and his years of faithful service. (ADOPTED)