Transformed & Transforming Overview

In July 2018, Jill Ver Steeg became chief ministry officer for the Reformed Church in America (RCA), and in March 2019, she became chief operating officer. Jill assumed responsibility for the RCA’s 15-year-goal, Transformed & Transforming. She sets vision for this goal, leads the team of initiative leaders who execute the outputs, and holds the team accountable for the ends and outcomes reporting.

The nine initiatives within Transformed & Transforming are Discipleship, Local Missional Engagement, Volunteer Engagement, Disability Concerns, Advocacy, Leadership Development, Women’s Transformation and Leadership, Next Generation Engagement, and Thriving Leaders, Thriving Churches. In this new organizational structure, the Church Multiplication and Global Mission teams collaborate with the Transformed & Transforming team but stand outside the scope of the monitoring ends.

In this next five years of Transformed & Transforming—named Transformed & Transforming 2.0—Jill will lead this team through the decentralization of leadership in order to build out the vision and execution of Transformed & Transforming, reproducing catalysts and champions across the RCA. Jill is working strategically with the Lilly Endowment to further deepen the work of Transformed & Transforming.

The Transformed & Transforming team collaborates regularly with the work of Church Multiplication and Global Mission. Specifically, the team is working on building out discipleship, leadership, and missional engagement in phase two of the church multiplication process.

Earl James has provided leadership on cultural agility through the first five years of Transformed & Transforming. In that capacity, we treated cultural agility from an institutionally siloed, rather than an embedded, perspective. In Transformed & Transforming 2.0, we are going to attempt to embed cultural agility as a value and practice into all our initiatives. This is like saying, “Disciples are culturally agile,” “Leaders are culturally agile,” and “Mission must be culturally agile.” Our goal is to assist the Transformed & Transforming executives to increase their cultural agility outcomes in ways that equip them to lead in the RCA’s multicultural future freed from racism. We will implement this goal through three strategies:

1. To increase knowledge and understanding of cultural agility and how to apply it intersectionally to life and leadership.
2. To assist Transformed & Transforming initiative leaders to develop diverse sets of personal and ministry relationships.
3. To ensure Transformed & Transforming resources focused on long-term, sustainable changes in congregations are equitably utilized among white and racial-ethnic congregations.

We contracted with Communities First Association (CFA) to train and coach. CFA’s executive director, Reesheda Graham-Washington, will provide a day-long training at our next four quarterly team retreats. She and Earl are developing an agenda as well as customizing for us tools, techniques, and materials CFA developed and uses.

Each initiative leader has one or two team partners with whom they will work on assignments and projects between our quarterly training sessions. Earl and Reesheda will provide coaching for each duo and trio to help us ensure the best benefits from the material as we increase our capacities as more culturally agile leaders.
The Transformed & Transforming team will gather in September 2019 with each initiative’s guiding coalition for equipping, dreaming, and collaborating toward the next faithful steps of Transformed & Transforming 2.0.

Report of the General Synod Council on Discipleship

POLICY WORDING

The RCA will engage, equip, and encourage congregations and missional communities in the work of cultivating transformation that results in faithful and passionate disciples of Jesus.

GENERAL SECRETARY’S INTERPRETATION

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20).

Jesus’s command to make disciples is the church’s mandate to help all people grow and deepen their faith as they live it out in everyday life. Transformed disciples become more like Christ as they read and reflect on God’s Word, pray and listen to God, spend time in community with other Christ followers, and engage in Christ’s mission. The RCA’s commitment is to help in providing accessible environments, processes, resources, and relationships that can be used by local congregations to foster, in cooperation with the Holy Spirit, more fully devoted followers who willingly and boldly live and love like Jesus.

The discipleship pathways uniquely created by congregations will foster transformation in both hearts and minds, exhibited in changed actions in the lives of equipped and empowered disciples. These growing disciples will make contributions as leaders, teachers, and people of influence within their congregations. Transformation will be manifest in our relationships with one another, our increasing love for each other, our sacrifice for the cause of Christ, and our willingness to influence our world for the gospel. Transformation will also be manifest in how we advocate for justice with compassion in communities where we live and serve. As we live and love like Jesus, it will impact how we reach out to those who live on the margins, to those who have been disempowered in our society, and to those who have no voice in the broken world in which we reside.

DISCIPLESHIP
(formerly called Transformational Processes)

“Go … and make disciples of all nations” is a pretty clear instruction from Jesus. In Transformed & Transforming, the discipleship strategic priority is called Cultivating Transformation in Christ—with Jesus’s words at its heart. As we follow Jesus as disciples, both leadership and mission follow.

The Discipleship guiding coalition, led by Chad Farrand (co-led by Rod Tucker through March 2019), is a team of people who are passionate about changing lives and communities for greater kingdom impact. This is a team of 15 practitioners in the field of discipleship...
who help shape the goals of this priority area and the approach to accomplishing them through coaching, webinars, resourcing, writing, teaching, and facilitating. The guiding coalition is working passionately toward the goal of every RCA congregation having a discipleship pathway, process, or environment in place to grow disciples who make disciples who bring greater kingdom impact and deeper transformation, both personally and systemically.

The Discipleship guiding coalition is focusing on the following nine processes to help congregations create a discipleship pathway in their context.

**Discipleship Coaching**

The purpose of discipleship coaching is to explore the question, “How am I growing in my capacity to participate in what God is doing?” This question is asked of the individual being coached in order to get at the next question, “How is the church growing in its capacity to participate in what God is doing?” The goal is to guide the person being coached toward greater discipleship in his or her own life in order to facilitate discipleship movements in his or her church and community. Coaching often happens monthly for 12 sessions, based upon the need(s) of the person being coached.

**Discipleship Connection (Taste and See) Events**

The purpose of a discipleship connection event is to help congregations discern and dream about what future ministry could look like. It serves as an on-ramp for a discipleship learning community. This is a group of 12 to 20 churches in relatively close geographical proximity that share current discipleship challenges and celebrations, together creating a sense of urgency around seeing greater transformation in their context. The goal of a discipleship connection event is to paint a picture of a future with greater ministry impact around discipleship and to invite churches to take a next faithful step toward that future.

**Discipleship Workshops**

The purpose of a discipleship workshop is to provide intentional, focused training and facilitation to move a congregation forward in specific discipleship initiatives. It involves a group of 5 to 20 churches who are geographically close to one another. These workshops include integration with other Transformed & Transforming initiatives, such as Volunteer Engagement, Leadership Development, and Local Missional Engagement. One unique discipleship workshop is centered on children/youth and family. Workshops provide “taste and see” experiences and, at the same time, give congregations enough content to continue on their own with limited follow-up if desired.

**Discipleship Pathway Learning Communities**

A discipleship pathway learning community is a cluster of eight to ten RCA congregations in relatively close geographical proximity. Each congregation gathers a team of three to five people, including the pastor, to learn about discipleship together. Each congregation in the learning community will develop its own unique pathway(s) in which people will be transformed through the power of the Holy Spirit into passionate, outwardly focused followers of Jesus who live for the sake of others.

**Discipleship Leadership Communities**

Teams of three to five staff and leaders from RCA congregations engage in this two-year process; each leadership community will have between five and seven congregations, drawn
from all geographic regions of the RCA. The latest discipleship leadership community finished its two-year process in April 2018. Reports from all eight congregations were extremely positive. Since then, discipleship leadership communities have continued to evolve and have provided excellent learning experiences for RCA congregations.

*Faithwalking Learning Communities*

Faithwalking is the personal transformation component of Ridder: Churches Learning Change (formerly Ridder Church Renewal). Many RCA congregations lead Faithwalking experiences with neighboring congregations as one dimension of their discipleship pathway. A long-term goal is to expand Faithwalking to non-Ridder congregations through the development of learning communities.

*3DM Learning Communities*

3DM learning communities consist of 10 to 12 RCA, CRC, and neighboring congregations that gather four times over the course of two years, implementing what they learn between gatherings. Each congregation will learn and employ the 3DM missional community process as a primary way to focus on multiplying disciples, leaders, and mission. The RCA has partnered with Jeff Allen of 3DM and is currently engaged with 15 churches at various stages of the process.

*Discipleship Training at the Classis Level*

Queens, Great Lakes City, Wisconsin, and Illinois Classes have opened themselves to discipleship training in 2019. The purpose of these trainings is to connect RCA churches with the support Transformed & Transforming initiatives have to offer and also provide churches with practical steps to establish a discipleship culture in their specific contexts. These trainings are designed to lead RCA churches to coaching, workshops, connection events, and learning communities. We hope to be able to offer discipleship training at meetings of every classis across the United States and Canada.

*Online Learning Platform*

An online learning platform is being developed across all of Transformed & Transforming in order to engage churches in effective ways that will cause their congregations to flourish in discipleship, leadership, and mission. The purpose of this platform is to disseminate best practices to RCA churches in order to grow thriving congregations.

*Year Six Goals (June 2018 to June 2019)*

- Launch 10 to 12 coaching relationships.
- Train 5 to 7 guiding coalition members for leadership in 3DM and deploy them to do coaching.
- Engage 20 to 25 RCA churches in 3DM discipleship through Jeff Allen.
- Launch 5 to 7 children/youth and family ministry workshops, followed up with optional intentional coaching.
- Engage 5 different classes in discipleship training during classis meetings. These will be used as on-ramps for further discipleship engagement through discipleship learning communities.
Progress

- In the past 2 months, 4 RCA pastors have been or are currently in the process of being set up with coaching.
- 15 guiding coalition members are being trained for coaching and facilitation of 3DM discipleship processes.
- Discipleship learning communities:
  - 15 churches are engaged with 3DM discipleship through Jeff Allen.
  - Learning communities from 2018 (Syracuse, New York; George, Iowa; Fulton, Illinois) continue into the latter parts of the transformational experiences.
- 2 children/youth and family ministry workshops have been or are being organized in Grand Rapids and Canada and will provide an on-ramp to discipleship learning communities.
- 4 classis leaders have agreed to hold discipleship training at their classis meetings in 2019. These trainings will provide an on-ramp to discipleship learning communities.

Five-Year Goals (June 2018 to June 2023)

- The beginning of another discipleship leadership community in 2020. By the end of 2019, 20 to 25 RCA congregations will have completed a 2-year discipleship leadership community and will be providing other congregations with resources for discipleship.
- 40 to 50 RCA congregations participating in a discipleship learning community and implementing their own unique disciple-making pathway in their congregation.
- 65 to 75 RCA congregations engaging in Faithwalking as a core process for cultivating transformation in Christ.
- 25 to 35 RCA congregations participating in a joint RCA and 3DM learning community and launching missional communities focused on discipleship, leadership, and missional living.
- 85 to 100 RCA congregations participating in a discipleship connection (“taste and see”) event.
- 10 to 15 RCA congregations participating in the discipleship/leadership/mission pilot in the Far West Region.
- 15 to 20 RCA congregations participating in Organic Outreach as a core process for cultivating transformation in Christ.
- 75 to 100 RCA pastors and/or ministry leaders in discipleship coaching.
- 10 Creating Congregational Cultures of Generosity learning communities being facilitated from 2018 to 2023.

POLICY WORDING

The RCA will identify potential leaders and encourage and equip potential and existing leaders for missional, congregational, and pastoral leadership. These leaders will reflect the full diversity of the RCA with regard to such things as gender, age, race, ability, and cultural backgrounds, with a special emphasis on youth.

GENERAL SECRETARY’S INTERPRETATION

“Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith” (Hebrews 13:7).

Women and men who are open to being used by God help guide the church as they actively pursue God’s purpose for congregations and ministries. Leaders willingly and passionately live out their callings and giftedness to accomplish a missional vision that brings a gospel of grace and hope to a lost and broken world.

The RCA commitment is to help develop leaders, based on a foundation of discipleship, who

- know how to lead themselves (their leadership is focused on their inward journey).
- know how to lead others (they are equipped to lead and influence in a God-ordained direction, increasing their leadership gift).
- know how to produce new leaders (they view leadership development as a key component of their call to be a leader).

This commitment to leadership development requires environments and accessible opportunities for growth and learning that will help lead RCA congregations forward in mission.

The RCA vision for leadership sees the leadership potential in all followers of Jesus Christ. It helps to raise up servant leaders who develop courage and competence to lead in the church and the world in a multiplicity of environments and with an openness to equipping and empowering all people to be influencers for Christ’s kingdom. This leadership vision has a special focus on empowering people who may not have leadership positions, privilege, power, or even access to them, but who have been called and gifted by God to serve boldly. It is a vision that especially is committed to the next generation and developing leaders for the church of the future.

OVERVIEW

Four initiative teams work within the Equipping Emerging Leaders of Today and Tomorrow strategic priority: Leadership Development, which focuses on leadership mobilization and development; Thriving Leaders, Thriving Churches, which focuses on supporting the spiritual transformation and health of the leadership teams of RCA congregations; Women’s Transformation and Leadership, which focuses on full inclusion of the gifts and influence of women; and Next Generation Engagement, which empowers young adults, ministry teams, and congregations to create a culture of intergenerational ministry.
LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Who: The work of the Leadership Development initiative is guided by a coalition of pastors, regional executives, classis leaders, business entrepreneurs, and marketplace leaders, representing different areas of specialized expertise in leadership development. The initiative is led by staff member Sung Kim, who has been in this role (part-time) since November 2018.

What: The work of Leadership Development is to catalyze the multiplication of more and better leaders in ways that are smarter and faster than traditional methods of training both emerging and established leaders. Our goal is to develop leaders who demonstrate God-honoring character, emotionally healthy chemistry with others, and uniquely skilled competence where their “deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet” (Buechner).

Why: Great and godly leaders transform the world. They lead teams, departments, and organizations that are more faithful and fruitful in every way. They are “humble, hungry, and smart” (Lencioni). At the same time, they understand that to lead others, leaders must first lead themselves.

How: We aim to accomplish our goal by (1) centralizing the most effective, research-based tools and resources, and (2) decentralizing training and coaching at every level of the denomination—region, classis, and church.

Year Six Goals (June 2018 to June 2019)
- Launch 2 leadership collaborative cohorts.
- Launch 1 leadership development leadership community.

Progress
- 2 leadership collaboratives have launched: 1 in West Michigan, focused on leadership and preaching (launched in January 2018), and a second in the Classis of Queens, focused on developing elders and deacons (launched in May 2018).
- 6 RCA congregations are participating in a leadership community that is meeting in Grand Rapids, Michigan, from February 2018 through May 2019. Participating congregations are South Blendon Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Elevation Church in Wyoming, Comunidad Cristiana de Grand Rapids in Grand Rapids, My Father’s House Church in Holland, Comunidad Cristiana Internacional in Wyoming, and Nepali-Speaking Community Church in Grand Rapids.

Five-Year Goals (June 2018 to June 2023)
- Curate some of the world’s best leadership development resources to train 50 regional executives, classis leaders, and leadership coaches who will then train 5,000 leaders in 500 congregations in 4 major areas of leadership development:
  - **Micro** (personal leadership)
  - **Meso** (team leadership)
  - **Macro** (organizational leadership)
  - **Multi** (reproducing leadership)

These leaders and congregations will have a clear pathway to develop leaders that is unique to their local vision, calling, and context.
THRIVING LEADERS, THRIVING CHURCHES

Andy Bossardet has been leading this initiative as the coordinator for equipping thriving congregations since December 2016. Thriving Leaders, Thriving Churches is guided by a coalition of pastors, staff, and regional synod staff. The team’s focus is to empower leaders and congregations to take the next faithful step in their ministries, navigating the complexities of leading change. This empowerment is delivered through high-impact coaching, learning communities focused on personal and corporate transformation, support systems for pastors and congregations in transition, and equipping in vision discernment.

*Churches Learning Change*

Churches Learning Change (formerly Ridder Church Renewal) is a partnership of Western Theological Seminary, the RCA, and the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) that helps leaders develop the tools to confront unhealthy models that hinder personal and congregational growth. Churches Learning Change is comprised of two intensive 30-month modules; congregations commit to one module at a time. Each module consists of five retreats, each about six months apart, with coaching and homework between retreats. Participating congregations choose a leadership team of four to six congregants plus the pastor. There are six regional centers in Churches Learning Change supporting Modules 1 and 2 (Great Lakes, Mid-America, New York/New Jersey, Heartland, Eastern Canada, and Western Canada). With the end of the Lilly grant that funded the startup of Churches Learning Change, the process has morphed into more regionally contextual expressions. Each region has its own leadership team, faculty, and format. A central learning organization, supported by the Reformed Partnership for Church Renewal, collects learning from the regions and provides ongoing training and focus.

*Maximizing First-Call Potential*

To maximize their potential, pastors in their first call engage with a coach and a peer group in self-directed learning based on challenges and opportunities in the ministry context. Covenants of support and accountability between congregations and pastors are drawn up in order to empower the first-call pastors in their learning. The first-call process lays the foundation for thriving congregational and pastoral ministry through a combination of individual work with the pastors and a learning community involving a congregational team. This work is being done in partnership with the Lilly Endowment (Sustaining Pastoral Excellence grant). The Regional Synod of Albany has been an excellent partner, with the second round of their fellowship program cementing the relationship between these two programs.

*Pastors and Congregations in Transition*

The Thriving Leaders, Thriving Churches guiding coalition is developing new, more effective ways to serve churches and pastors that are in the midst of a ministry transition. This will include training mechanisms for transitional ministers and vocational assessment for pastors between ministries, as well as clarifying the role that each partner in the RCA plays in helping ministers and congregations through transitions. For now, the focus has been on classes and providing training and resources for classis supervision. This year, under the guidance of Molly Towne, the search team handbook is being updated, and there is an emerging partnership with Western Theological Seminary’s Formation for Ministry department. The first joint event was held on February 20, 2019, to help senior students navigate the call process.
Coaching

The initiative is developing a catalytic coaching network that will be made up of all the coaches who are working with the various learning community pilots. A catalog of best practices has been developed, and a small cadre of catalytic coaches has been formed.

The team also plans to maximize current content-neutral training through better tracking and assessment of coaches. By tracking relationships, we will be able to more easily assess coaches and provide ongoing training and accountability for desired ministry outcomes across the RCA. Salesforce (the RCA’s database system) will provide a great platform for helping coaches succeed through relationship tracking and feedback loops. This will also help as coaching is being decentralized. Initiative leaders will recruit coaches who are familiar with and passionate about their areas of expertise, while coaching excellence will still be centralized in a shared body of knowledge (the coaching catalog).

Congregational Vitality Pathways

Congregational Vitality Pathways (CVP) is a tool created by the Evangelical Covenant Church and utilized by the Synod of the Far West to help congregations discern and live into God’s vision for their church. Health and vitality are measured by ten markers. CVP uses assessment tools, events, and an empowered vitality team to help a congregation move toward its goals. RCA congregations engaging with CVP are intended to do so in a learning community format.

The Ezra Project

The Ezra Project is a learning community designed to empower and encourage African American pastors in the RCA. The learning community would involve five pastors who would spend time with African American pastors in thriving ministries, learning personal, organizational, and multiplying leadership content over the course of a year. The Ezra Project was co-led by Andy Bossardet and Tony Campbell. Following Tony Campbell’s passing, the Ezra Project is on hold.

Small Church Initiative

As a result of General Synod 2018, Thriving Leaders, Thriving Churches has begun to launch leadership collaboratives and learning communities around the unique contributions and challenges of small churches (fewer than 100 in worship). With the median worship attendance in North America hovering between 70 and 75 people, this is a crucial area of ministry, yet most leadership books focus on strategic planning and organization for congregations over 250 people. These leadership collaboratives and learning communities will be launched in concert with the Thriving Leaders, Thriving Churches guiding coalition.

Year Six Goals (June 2018 to June 2019)

- 150 churches will have engaged Churches Learning Change, either having completed both modules or actively engaging the process.
- A third first-call leadership collaborative will be launched.
- The first Specialized Transitional Minister leadership collaborative will be completed, and a second will be launched.
- An additional learning community focused on the Congregational Vitality Pathways will be launched (outside of the work being done in the Regional Synod of the Far West).
The original Ezra Project pastors will launch a second leadership collaborative.

The catalytic coaching network will be established and continue to provide support for ongoing learning communities.

20 congregations will have used the Transformational Church Assessment Tool as a connection event toward ongoing transformation.

**Added as a result of General Synod 2018:** Launch leadership collaboratives around small church leadership in three regional synods.

### Progress

- 140 congregations are engaging or have engaged Churches Learning Change.
- The first-call program now functions as a learning community, and the third round is now recruiting alongside the Albany Synod Fellowship Program.
- The first Specialized Transitional Minister leadership collaborative has been completed, and feedback from the first is being used to create an experience for a second.
- 1 learning community is launched in Lincoln, Nebraska, for Congregational Vitality Pathways, with recruitment happening in other regions.
- The Ezra Project is on hold, as per the previous summary of the program.
- The catalytic coaching network is being decentralized with training offered to coaches in a variety of initiatives.
- 13 congregations have used the Transformational Church Assessment Tool, and 2 more are in the queue.
- 1 leadership collaborative was launched in the Regional Synod of Mid-America by Thriving Leaders, Thriving Churches guiding coalition member Chad Schuitema, 1 is forming in the Regional Synod of New York, 1 is being promoted in the Regional Synod of Canada, and a full learning community will be launched in the Regional Synod of the Mid-Atlantics by General Synod 2019.

### Five-Year Goals (June 2018 to June 2023)

- Launch and sustain a second-generation coaching platform with an emphasis on online connection and collaboration; at least 20 coaches will be using this platform in an ongoing way.
- Complete 3 small church leadership collaboratives or learning communities.
- Launch and sustain the Reformed Partnership for Congregational Renewal with the CRCNA; the partnership will have served at least 40 congregations in discernment of their next step in vitality.
- Expand the first-call program into at least 1 other regional synod, serving at least 30 new pastors and their congregations.
- Expand the online capacities for the Office of Ministry Services.

### WOMEN’S TRANSFORMATION AND LEADERSHIP

Women’s Transformation and Leadership has been established as part of Transformed & Transforming to help the Reformed Church in America pursue a vision for the full inclusion of women’s gifts and influence in all areas of the church and beyond. Liz Testa leads the Women’s Transformation and Leadership team. Lorraine Parker serves as part-time administrative assistant, and Lesley Mazzotta is the Women’s Transformation and Leadership specialist, serving as an educational consultant and lead facilitator. A cross-sector group of RCA leaders serves as the guiding coalition and as regional facilitators for Women's Transformation and Leadership, helping to champion the mission, create and lead new processes, and provide critical insights and advisement.
We are committed to ensuring that women and girls of all generations and all geographical and cultural contexts are able to experience transformation, be raised up for leadership, and live vibrantly into their God-given potential. As we encourage, equip, and empower women to fully and freely use their gifts and be developed as leaders, we usher in a vision of God’s reign where brothers and sisters work together to build the body for mission in the world. An essential component of this mission is that we equip congregations to welcome the gifts that women bring and invest in healthy, flourishing ministry partnerships between men and women. We are better together.

Women’s Transformation and Leadership has the following components:

• A ministry initiative to help the RCA pursue the full inclusion of the gifts and influence of women in the life of the church and as an integral part of Transformed & Transforming.
• A hub for opportunities that encourage, equip, and empower all women in their callings and connect them more deeply with God, each other, and the church.
• A place for congregations to begin or continue a journey of welcoming and nurturing the gifts that women bring, designing ways to equip women for ministry and creating a healthy, thriving ministry environment where men and women can serve together.
• A catalyst for change, opening the RCA as a whole and people as individuals to the Holy Spirit’s movement in the lives and ministries of women and girls.

Women’s Transformation and Leadership lives out its vision by

• Ensuring all women have barrier-free access to RCA resources and opportunities.
• Celebrating the rich history of women in the RCA, past and present, through the “RCA Women: A Legacy of Leadership” booklet, women’s Sankofa journeys, and the She Is Called campaign.
• Being an innovation incubator for new ideas, such as the She Is Called social media campaign and the We Are Speaking call-to-action statement.
• Encouraging and equipping women through transformational connection events and the Honoring Our Stories story-sharing process.
• Equipping congregations and other contexts to welcome the gifts women bring and to nurture healthy, thriving ministry partnerships between men and women through our learning process, Building God’s Church Together.
• Supporting established and emerging female leaders through our She Is Called leadership collaboratives (currently available in English and Spanish), mentoring and clergy networks, and other opportunities to connect and collaborate.
• Offering an annual global experience for women. Trips to Oman, Israel/Palestine, Italy, and South Africa have been taken so far. She Is Called: Holy Land is scheduled for November 2019.
• Providing tuition assistance to female seminarians through the Beth E. Marcus Scholarship Fund.
• Connecting women virtually through Facebook groups and a quarterly enewsletter.
• Creating a dynamic web resource featuring blogs by women; historical, biblical, and theological support about women in ministry; and ways for congregations, classes, and synods to intentionally integrate women’s gifts, voices, and leadership and help congregations create healthy environments for men and women to thrive together in ministry.
• Collaborating with RCA seminaries, the Commission for Women and other commissions, other Transformed & Transforming initiatives, and other GSC
staff to empower women in ministry and intentionally include their gifts, influence, and leadership in our assemblies.

- Helping to create lasting change via the We Are Speaking statement, a call to the church to end harassment, abuse, and sexual violence against women and girls (and others), in partnership with Local Missional Engagement.

**Year Six Goals (June 2018 to June 2019)**

1. Create 6 to 8 connection events in at least 2 new regions, encouraging, equipping, and empowering RCA women to honor their stories and explore their God-given gifts.

2. Pilot a 1-year congregational She Is Called (Ella Es Llamada) leadership collaborative process, equipping 30 English- and Spanish-speaking ministry leaders to facilitate in their faith communities in Arizona and Southern California, then expand to other regional hubs.

3. Continue to launch Building God’s Church Together, a congregational learning process for leaders and communities who seek to discover, embrace, and nurture women’s gifts for leadership and to create healthy environments where ministry partnerships between men and women can flourish.

4. Expand the reach and influence of the She Is Called campaign via social media, stories of past and present women’s callings in video and written form, “& Me” T-shirts, a new *Patterns and Portraits*–type book, General Synod, and collaborative regional and global opportunities.

5. Continue to expand the We Are Speaking call to action with educational and worship resources.

**Progress**

1. **Connection events (since March 2018)**
   - Crossroads Women’s Retreat (Mid-Atlantics), April 13–14, 2018, in Harvey Cedars, New Jersey.
   - All-Canada Learning Event (Canada), April 21–22, 2018, in Toronto, Ontario.
   - Women’s Connection Gathering, June 4, 2018, at Colonial Church of Bayside in Bayside, New York.
   - Annual Women’s Connection Dinner at General Synod (RCA/CRC), June 8, 2018, at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan.
   - Honoring Our Stories Women’s Retreat (Classis of Ontario), September 22, 2018, at New Hope Reformed Church in Mississauga, Ontario.
   - Women’s Guild Connection Lunch, October 3, 2018, at Old Paramus Reformed Church in Ridgewood, New Jersey.
   - Honoring Our Stories Women’s Retreat, October 21, 2018, at Midland Reformed Church in Midland, Michigan.

2. **One-year She Is Called/Ella Es Llamada leadership collaboratives**
   - Arizona/Southern California: 7 Spanish or English/Spanish cohorts, rolling launches from September 2018 to March 2019 (35 women)
   - New York City: Train the Trainer cohort launched March 2019 (12 women)
   - Canada: Train the Trainer cohort launched March 2019 (12 women)
   - Michigan: Congregational cohort launched February 2019 (12 women)
   - Other regions are in the exploration phase
Current regional facilitators are trained “graduates” of our pilot 18-month leadership collaboratives: Karla Camacho, Marilyn Correa, Jennifer Lucking, and Cheryl Heal. Lesley Mazzotta is our lead facilitator.

3. Building God’s Church Together, launched July 2018
   • Resources for equipping leaders and congregations
     o Online resource list featuring articles, websites, videos, and books, curated by RCA minister April Fiet.
     o 4-session Bible study, available in hard copy or as an online PDF, written by April Fiet with input from the Women’s Transformation and Leadership guiding coalition.
     o A mini leadership collaborative in the form of a 6-week virtual small group launched in March 2019.
   • Learning events (more than 25 congregations represented)
     o A Building God’s Church Together event (East Sioux and West Sioux Classes, Regional Synod of the Heartland) took place on July 7, 2018, at First Reformed Church in Orange City, Iowa.
     o A distance-learning seminarians’ connection lunch took place October 23, 2018, at Western Theological Seminary.
     o A Building God’s Church Together event (Central Iowa and Pleasant Prairie Classes, Regional Synod of the Heartland) took place on February 16, 2019, at ReNew Community Church in Ames, Iowa.
     o A Building God’s Church Together event is in the exploration phase for the Regional Synod of Albany.

4. She Is Called campaign expansion
   Ella Es Llamada (She Is Called in Spanish) officially launched at the Hispanic Council’s Asamblea in August 2018. “&Yo” T-shirts were designed, and a Spanish language video was created.

   An ongoing video stories project has drawn in diverse women from all over the RCA. These stories are edited and published weekly as “stand alone” videos on the She Is Called Facebook page, and they are also part of our longer-form videos.

   General Synod 2018 activities, correlating with the 40th anniversary celebration of women’s gifts and ordination as ministers of Word and sacrament
   • Leadership lounge with #sheiscalled selfie booth and T-shirts.
   • She Is Called videos premiered during plenary and at the Women’s Connection dinner for RCA and CRC leaders (200 registrants).
   • RCA/CRC workshop led by CRC minister Denise Posie and RCA minister Liz Testa.
   • “RCA Women: A Legacy of Leadership” booklets updated and given out. Also available online as a PDF.
   • Teal “&Me” T-shirts debuted with new biblical names in adult and child sizes.

   Connection and Equipping Events
   • The She Is Called/Ella Es Llamada retreat and leadership communities training gathered 50 women from churches in Arizona and Southern California, September 7–9 at the Spirit in the Desert retreat center in Carefree, Arizona.
   • The First Women of the RCA Women’s Stories Day gathered 60 attendees
on May 11 at New Brunswick Theological Seminary in New Jersey.

- 100 Women in White: She Is Called event took place on June 24 at Dewitt Reformed Church in New York City, New York.
- Taking a Stand Women’s Stories Day took place on February 2 at New Brunswick Theological Seminary in New Jersey.

Two Global Mission Experiences

- She Is Called: South Africa took place in August 2018 and piloted a new shared-leadership model with Women’s Transformation and Leadership trip planner Lesley Mazzotta, guiding coalition member Denise Kingdom Grier, and mission liaison Lois Wanyoike. Agenda included staff retreats, a parenting workshop, an art camp for children, and a She Is Called event celebrating South Africa’s national women’s day. The team included women and men of different races, generations, and callings from across the denomination.
- She Is Called: Holy Land is scheduled for November 6–17, 2019. This biblical and current women’s stories trip, in partnership with Sally and Josh Vis, is a “multiplier” experience for women and men, building on an initial 2016 trip with RCA ministers Dustyn Keepers and Megan Hodgin. It is a deeper dive to increase biblical and missional literacy, equipping travelers to bring their experiences back to enrich their own teaching and preaching.

An RCA women’s history book is in the exploration phase. Information-gathering meetings were held with Women’s Transformation and Leadership guiding coalition members, the Reformed Church Center at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, and members of various commissions (Women, History, and Race and Ethnicity) during the October 2018 meetings.

5. We Are Speaking educational and worship resources

- A Lunch and Learn Event, with speakers from across the RCA, took place at General Synod 2018 on June 11.
- A webinar titled Preventing Sexual Abuse in the Church (24 registrants) was facilitated by Rob Dixon and Lesley Mazzotta on December 12.
- A web-based worship resource, gathered from RCA pastors and leaders, curated by RCA pastor April Fiet, will be launching in spring 2019.
- A gender equity equipping event for pastors and ministry leaders is being proposed as a workshop for General Synod 2019 and beyond.

New Five-Year Goals (June 2018 to June 2023)

Women’s Transformation and Leadership has experienced Spirit-led innovation, growth, and culture shifts since June 2014, when our ministry initiative was launched. Our new goals are a continuation of this movement, and our delivery systems will be customized to meet the unique needs of each region.

- 25 to 30 connection events will continue to provide an empowering space for thousands of women and girls to share stories, build relationships, and experience transformation.
- Building God’s Church Together congregational learning processes will create a deep culture shift as 75 faith communities gather to explore how to more fully welcome the ministry gifts of women, create space for those gifts to be developed, and to invest in developing healthy, thriving ministry partnerships between men and women.
• Doing a New Thing congregational learning communities will help 25 churches discover the “new thing” God is calling them to, in and through their women leaders.
• Multi-language, long- and short-term leadership collaboratives will strengthen and equip hundreds of diverse women leaders in all regions through virtual sessions and train-the-trainer events for local facilitators to be equipped to lead in their context.
• 1 to 2 annual women’s global experiences will have transformational, leadership, and missional components that ensure that the 75 individual female travelers and their faith communities experience lasting impact.
• Attention to Spirit-led opportunities for healing and unifying the body and participation in God’s reconciling work in the world will be actively sought through projects such as We Are Speaking and the She Is Called campaign.

NEXT GENERATION ENGAGEMENT

The purpose of Next Generation Engagement is to empower young adults, ministry teams, and congregations to create a culture of intergenerational ministry—that is, all people of all ages serving in leadership positions at the church, classis, and denominational levels. The goal of intergenerational ministry is to reframe the mental model of young people in the church—we are no longer seeking to “keep” these young people in our congregations. Instead, this ministry seeks to empower young leaders and congregations to serve one another into future ministry endeavors. Anna Radcliffe is the coordinator of Next Generation Engagement. She has served in this role for just under a year.

Year Six Goals (June 2018 to June 2019)

• Host a pilot relational gathering of “35 and under” ministry leaders geared toward naming their belonging and identity within the RCA.
• Successfully recruit 20 congregations to participate in the Fuller Youth Institute (FYI) Grand Rapids cohort, ensuring these congregations have a multigenerational discipleship pathway at the conclusion of the cohort.
• Develop or identify a discipleship training process for youth pastors that includes missional focus and best discipleship practices.
• Create an online presence that resources, equips, and creates institutional trust for leaders 35 and under.

Progress

• The pilot gathering took place on October 25, 2018, at the RCA’s Michigan Regional Center in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Three additional gatherings have been scheduled for the spring, one each in Michigan, New York, and Iowa.
• In January 2019, 19 churches and more than 100 ministry leaders gathered in the DeWitt Ministry Center in Grand Rapids, Michigan, for the first in-person summit of the Growing Young Cohort. This is a year-long process that will conclude in December 2019.
• In partnership with Global Mission, Next Generation Engagement will send a pilot group of three churches to Cuba in summer 2019 to develop a student leadership model for their youth groups.
• In March 2019, Next Generation Engagement launched Next Wave, an online resource for youth pastors, leaders, and volunteers to hear about upcoming opportunities, to resource one another, and to stay connected to other happenings within the denomination.
Five-Year Goals (June 2018 to June 2023)

- Over the next 5 years, Next Generation Engagement will work to establish a joint denominational leadership team with the Christian Reformed Church in North America to create a regional, classis, and church-wide advocacy campaign around intergenerational ministry for the purpose of turning over leadership to future generations.

- Next Generation Engagement will establish a binational network of at least 1,000 leaders under 35 who are invested and championing the vitality of the RCA through generous support by giving financially, starting new churches, and fostering vocational ministry.

- Next Generation Engagement will raise up leaders who are diverse, thriving, and competent. This work will be accomplished through a network of collaboration between youth group development, camp ministry, college, and seminary education.

- Next Generation Engagement will mobilize youth pastors, leaders, volunteers, and those who work with children through an online learning platform. This platform will offer new discipleship strategies, leadership development guides, and other necessary resources by demand.
During 2018, 49 ministers of Word and sacrament retired from active service. Those who retired are being recognized by General Synod through its endorsement of appreciation for their years of faithful and dedicated ministry in the church.

L 19-1
To adopt the following resolution:

These individuals have loved Christ and fed his sheep. They have devoted themselves to spreading the Word and equipping the saints for the work of ministry.

Their contribution to a needy world is rich beyond measure; their record is on high.

The Reformed Church in America, with admiration, deep affection, and overflowing thanks to God, celebrates their lifelong service.

David Alexander
Holland, Michigan

Roberta Arden
New York, New York

Leroy Ausema
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Donald Baker
Kissimmee, Florida

Edward Baker
Hemet, California

Steven Bakker
Waldo, Wisconsin

Douglas Banks
Columbia, Maryland

George Beukema
Chicago, Illinois

Charles Blom
Taylorsville, California

Thomas Boogaart
Holland, Michigan

DeWayne Breen
Urbandale, Iowa
David Brower
Amherst, New Hampshire

Michael Brown
Winston-Salem, North Carolina

Stanley Craig
Schenectady, New York

Dwayne Decker
Jacksonville, Florida

Thomas Dekker
Hamilton, Michigan

Philip Doeschot
St. Louis, Missouri

Carl Gearhart
Pipestone, Minnesota

James Goldschmeding
Otsego, Michigan

Lynn Hanousek
Astoria, New York

Daniel Herrick
Chatham, New York

William Hill-Alto
Roswell, Georgia

Klaire Jameson
Yorktown, Virginia

Thomas Katsma
Boise, Idaho

John Koedyker
Grand Haven, Michigan

Larry LePoire
Hamilton, Michigan

Jonathan Mays
Charlevoix, Michigan

Gloria McCanna
Poughkeepsie, New York

Paul Bongwoo Nam
Ridgefield, New Jersey
Mark Poppen  
Holland, Michigan  

David Powers  
Waverly, Iowa  

Brian Randazzo  
Rock Tavern, New York  

Harlan Ratmeyer  
Slingerlands, New York  

Clyde Rensink  
St. Peters, Missouri  

Paul Ruter  
New Paltz, New York  

Douglas Scholten  
La Palma, California  

Sandra Sheppard  
Wanaque, New Jersey  

Patricia Singletary  
Springfield Gardens, New York  

Earl Slotman  
Hudsonville, Michigan  

E. Jay Sowers Jr.  
Grand Rapids, Michigan  

Kenneth Tenckinck  
Warwick, New York  

Mark Tjepkema  
Homer, Georgia  

Ciela Tonge  
Dayton, Ohio  

Michael Van Buren  
West Olive, Michigan  

James VanderMeiden  
Jenison, Michigan  

Donald Van Slyke  
Hudsonville, Michigan  

Robert Van Voorst  
Holland, Michigan
Harold Cupery

Harold Cupery was born on July 8, 1930, in Randolph, Wisconsin. He studied at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1952. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1955.

Mr. Cupery was licensed by the Classis of Wisconsin in 1955 and ordained by the Classis
of Pella the same year. He pastored the following congregations: First, Eddyville, Iowa, from 1955 to 1957; East Side Community, Sioux Falls, South Dakota, from 1958 to 1964; and Bethel, Kalamazoo, Michigan, from 1964 to 1992. He also served as the contract pastor at the latter from 1993 to 1999.

Mr. Cupery died on January 19, 2018, in Kalamazoo, Michigan. He was 87 years old.

**Paul A. Benes**

Paul A. Benes was born on April 15, 1937, in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He studied at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1959. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1962.

Mr. Benes was licensed by the Classis of South Grand Rapids in 1952 and ordained by the Classis of Passaic in 1962. He pastored the following congregations: Wanaque, New Jersey, from 1962 to 1968; Lisha’s Kill, Schenectady, New York, from 1968 to 1978; and First, Kingston, New York, from 1978 to 1998.

Mr. Benes died on January 30, 2018, in High Falls, New York. He was 80 years old.

**Harvey Thomas Hoekstra**

Harvey Thomas Hoekstra was born on November 20, 1920, in Maple Lake, Minnesota. He studied at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1944. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1947. He also studied at Peabody & Scarritt College in 1948, the summer institute of linguistics at the University of Oklahoma in 1984, Princeton Seminary in 1951, Hartford Theological Seminary in 1958, and Fuller Theological Seminary from 1974 to 1977.

Mr. Hoekstra was licensed and ordained by the Classis of West Sioux in 1948. His first parish experience was as the student pastor in a chapel during his seminary years. Following graduation and some additional study, he was sent by the RCA to serve in Africa, in the Sudan from 1948 to 1962, and then in Ethiopia from 1963 to 1977. He returned to the United States and served as a missionary for Portable Recording Ministries in Holland, Michigan, from 1977 to 1989 and then became the founder and president of Audio Scriptures International in Rancho Bernardo, California, in 1989. Mr. Hoekstra also served as the president of General Synod from 1978 to 1979.

Mr. Hoekstra died on February 10, 2018, in Escondido, California. He was ninety-seven years old.

**Arnold Slausen Kress**

Arnold Slausen Kress was born in Albany, New York, in 1934. His theological education was received at Westminster Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1958. He participated in a special program for ministerial candidacy at Calvin Theological Seminary in 1978.

Mr. Kress was ordained in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1959, serving congregations there and in the Christian Reformed Church. He also served as a missionary in Japan from 1966 to 1975 and 1978 to 1992. He served as stated supply at Hope, Clifton, New Jersey, from 1974 to 1978, and then returned to the mission field for the CRC. He was received by the Classis of Schenectady and pastored the Reformed Church in Buskirk, New York, from 1994 to 1996 as a contract minister.
Mr. Kress died on March 19, 2018, in Media, Pennsylvania. He was 83 years old.

Frank Boerema

Frank Boerema was born on March 3, 1948, in Sheldon, Iowa. He studied at Northwestern College, from which he graduated in 1970. His theological education was received at Dubuque Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1972.

Mr. Boerema was licensed and ordained by the Classis of East Sioux in 1973. He began his ministry as the stated supply for First, Litchville, North Dakota, and North Marion, Marion, North Dakota, in 1972, and then he pastored the following congregations: North Marion, Marion, North Dakota, from 1973 to 1976; First, Slayton, Minnesota, from 1976 to 1981; Faith, Brookings, South Dakota, from 1981 to 1988; First, Wilmar, Minnesota, from 1988 to 1994; and Dell Rapids, South Dakota, from 1994 to 2013.

Mr. Boerema died on March 25, 2018, in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. He was 70 years old.

William Kroon

William Kroon was born on June 25, 1923, in Sioux Center, Iowa. He began his undergraduate studies at Northwestern Junior College and completed them at Central College, from which he graduated in 1945. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1949.

Mr. Kroon was licensed by the Classis of West Sioux in 1949 and ordained by the Classis of Grand Rapids the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Casnovia, Michigan, from 1949 to 1951; Bethel, Lester, Iowa, from 1951 to 1956; Ramsey, Titonka, Iowa, from 1956 to 1961; First, Aplington, Iowa, from 1961 to 1969; First, Edgerton, Minnesota, from 1969 to 1978; and Immanuel, Belmond, Iowa, from 1978 to 1988.

Mr. Kroon died on March 27, 2018, in Mason City, Iowa. He was 94 years old.

Robert Arthur Otto

Robert Arthur Otto was born on May 20, 1930, in Chicago, Illinois. He began his undergraduate studies at the University of Denver and completed them at Wheaton College, from which he graduated in 1953. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1956.

Mr. Otto was licensed by the Classis of Chicago in 1956 and ordained by the Classis of Kalamazoo the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Hopkins, Michigan, from 1956 to 1960; Westwood Heights, Omaha, Nebraska, from 1960 to 1966; Ada, Michigan, from 1966 to 1968; Christ Community, Phoenix, Arizona, from 1968 to 1972; Miraloma, San Francisco, California, from 1972 to 1976; Bethany, Lynwood, Illinois, from 1976 to 1986; and Alto, Wisconsin, from 1986 to 1995.

Mr. Otto died on April 3, 2018, in Fort Wayne, Indiana. He was 87 years old.

Harris John Verkaik

Harris John Verkaik was born on October 10, 1933, in South Holland, Illinois. He studied at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1955. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1958. He also earned a
Mr. Verkaik was licensed by the Classis of California in 1958 and ordained by the Classis of North Grand Rapids the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Oakview, Grand Rapids, Michigan, from 1958 to 1961; Mount Greenwood, Chicago, Illinois, from 1961 to 1967; First, Sheldon, Iowa, from 1967 to 1974; Zion, Grandville, Michigan, from 1974 to 1987; Calvary, South Holland, Illinois, from 1987 to 1990; and Fellowship, Hudsonville, Michigan, from 1990 to 1997.

Mr. Verkaik died on April 5, 2018, in Hudsonville, Michigan. He was 84 years old.

R. James Bos

R. James Bos was born on April 26, 1925, in Muskegon, Michigan. He began his undergraduate studies at Dartmouth College and completed them at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1946. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1949.

Mr. Bos was licensed by the Classis of Muskegon in 1949 and ordained by the Classis of Kalamazoo the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Three Oaks, Michigan, from 1949 to 1956; Modesto, California, from 1956 to 1959; First, Hoppers, Iowa, from 1959 to 1963; Lucas, Michigan, from 1963 to 1974; Ebenezer, Morrison, Illinois, from 1974 to 1979; and Three Oaks, Michigan, from 1979 to 1987. In his retirement, he served at Unity, Muskegon, Michigan, and Words of Hope, Fruitport, Michigan.

Mr. Bos died on April 22, 2018, in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He was 92 years old.

Frank Vernon Love

Frank Vernon Love (Sau Su) was born on December 14, 1933, in Arkansas City, Kansas, a member of the Omaha tribe of Macy, Nebraska. He began his studies at Cook Christian Training School and completed them at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1961. He earned an M.A. at Western Theological Seminary in 1965.

Mr. Love was licensed and ordained by the Classis of California in 1965. He began his ministry as an assistant pastor at Mescalero, New Mexico and then served in the following positions: pastor, Mescalero, New Mexico, from 1968 to 1969, and Macy, Nebraska, from 1969 to 1971; executive director, Indian Center, Omaha, Nebraska, from 1971 to 1972, and American Indian Ministry, 1972; director, Omaha Tribal Agency, from 1972 to 1973, and Nebraska Indian Economic Development Foundation, 1974; chaplain, Father Flanigan’s Boys Town, from 1974 to 1975; director, Indian Center of Topeka, Kansas, from 1978 to 1979; Heart of American Indian Center, Alcoholism Program; chaplain, Navajo United Methodist Mission School, from 1981 to 1984; representative, National Indian Youth Council, 1985; counselor, Shiprock Reservation Dormitory, from 1987 to 1991; and president, Motivational Service.

Mr. Love died on April 27, 2018 in Cheney, Washington. He was 84 years old.

Edwin George Mulder

Edwin George Mulder was born on March 25, 1929, in Raymond, Minnesota. He studied at Central College, from which he graduated in 1951. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1954. Mr. Mulder also received a D.Div. from Central College in 1979.
Mr. Mulder was licensed by the Classis of Pella in 1954 and ordained by the Classis of Bergen the same year. He pastored the following congregations: English Neighborhood, Ridgefield, New Jersey, from 1954 to 1957; Christ Memorial, Holland, Michigan, from 1957 to 1963; Marble Collegiate, New York City, New York, from 1968 to 1970; Second, Hackensack, New Jersey, from 1970 to 1979; and Christ Memorial, Holland, Michigan, from 1979 to 1983. He also served the RCA as minister of evangelism for the Board of North American Missions from 1964 to 1968, and as general secretary from 1983 to 1994. In his retirement, he served as an associate pastor at Marble Collegiate, New York City, New York, and as interim president at New Brunswick Theological Seminary. He was the president of the General Synod from 1979 to 1980.

Mr. Mulder died on May 1, 2018, in Holland, Michigan. He was 89 years old.

Andrew John Topp

Andrew John Topp was born in 1959. He studied at Rutgers University, from which he graduated in 1981. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1984.

Mr. Topp was ordained by the Classis of Paramus in 1984. He began his ministry as associate pastor at Old Paramus, Ridgewood, New Jersey, from 1984 to 1988, and then served as the minister of Christian education at Ponds, Oakland, New Jersey, from 1989 to 1993. He was youth pastor at West Side Presbyterian, Ridgewood, New Jersey, from 1994 to 1995, and then served as the contract pastor at First, Boonton, New Jersey, from 1996 until his death. He also ran a nonprofit, International Humanitarian Aid Foundation Inc., which he founded in 2007, and did extensive missionary and aid work in Haiti.

Mr. Topp, of North Haledon, New Jersey, died on May 2, 2018. He was 58 years old.

Ronald George Korver

Ronald George Korver was born on April 17, 1926, in Orange City, Iowa. He began his studies at Northwestern Junior College and completed them at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1948. He also earned an M.A. from New York University in 1960 and studied at Dubuque Theological Seminary from 1968 to 1969.

Mr. Korver served the RCA as a missionary in Japan from 1948 to 1992.

Mr. Korver died on May 8, 2018, in Green Bay, Wisconsin. He was 92 years old.

Adrian Clarence Gray

Adrian Clarence Gray was born on June 5, 1924, in Fort Plain, New York. He studied at Purdue University from 1942 to 1943 and received his B.M. from St. Louis Institute of Music in 1950. He undertook additional study at Rutgers University from 1955 to 1956. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1960.

Mr. Gray died on May 16, 2018. He was 93 years old.

**Harold Reginald Oppermann**

Harold Reginald Oppermann was born on March 20, 1930, in Chicago, Illinois. He studied at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1954. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1957.

Mr. Oppermann was licensed by the Classis of Muskegon in 1957 and ordained by the Classis of Cascades the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Monarch, Alberta, Canada, from 1957 to 1962; Nooksack, Washington, from 1962 to 1969; and First, Meservey, Iowa, from 1969 to 1976.

Mr. Oppermann died on June 22, 2018, in Mason City, Iowa. He was 88 years old.

**Raymond Ernest Weiss**

Raymond Ernest Weiss was born on January 7, 1928, in Santa Monica, California. He began his studies at George Pepperdine College and completed them at Central College, from which he graduated in 1950. His theological education began at Fuller Theological Seminary and was completed at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1954. He also earned an M.A. from the University of Michigan in 1957 and a Ph.D. from Fuller Theological Seminary in 1992.

Mr. Weiss was licensed and ordained by the Classis of California in 1954. He began his ministry as the field secretary for Christian Endeavor in Michigan from 1954 to 1956 and then served the RCA as a short-term missionary in Iraq from 1957 to 1959. He pastored University Reformed Church in Ann Arbor, Michigan, from 1959 to 1960, and then returned to the mission field to serve in Beirut, Lebanon, from 1960 to 1963, and at the National Evangelical Church in Bahrain from 1963 to 1970. He returned to the U.S. and served as a professor at Northwestern College, Orange City, Iowa, from 1970 to 1998, and then as vice president for academic affairs from 1999 to 2000.

Mr. Weiss died on June 23, 2018, in Orange City, Iowa. He was 90 years old.

**Thomas Arthur Kendall**

Thomas Arthur Kendall was born on August 13, 1923, in Syracuse, New York. He studied at Rutgers University, from which he graduated in 1963. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1966.

Mr. Kendall was licensed by the Classis of Montgomery in 1966 and ordained by the Classis of Albany the same year. He pastored the following congregations: New Salem, New York, and Unionville, New York, from 1966 to 1969; Claverack, New York, from 1969 to 1976; First, Athens, New York, from 1979 to 1983; Second, Rotterdam, New York, from 1983 to 1991; and Unionville, Delmar, New York, from 1991 to 2018. He served as a chaplain at the Rescue Mission (un-denominational) in Syracuse, New York, from 1976 to 1979, and was vice president of the Particular Synod of Albany in 1980 and president in 1981.

Mr. Kendall died on July 13, 2018, in Delmar, New York. He was 94 years old.
LaVerne Sikkema

LaVerne Sikkema was born on April 7, 1927, in Morrison, Illinois. He studied at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1951. He also received a B.S. from Cornell University in 1952.

Mr. Sikkema served the RCA as a missionary in Sudan and Ethiopia from 1952 to 1984 and in Kenya from 1984 to 1992.

Mr. Sikkema died on July 13, 2018, in Holland, Michigan. He was 91 years old.

Alan J. Schreuder

Alan J. Schreuder was born on September 13, 1948, in Kalamazoo, Michigan. He studied at Northern Michigan University, from which he graduated in 1971. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1978.

Mr. Schreuder was licensed and ordained by the Classis of Kalamazoo in 1978. He served as a missionary intern in Ethiopia from 1975 to 1977, during his student years at Western. He began his ministry as pastor of the Otley, Iowa, church from 1978 to 1980. He then served on the mission field in Chiapas, Mexico, from 1980 to 2015.

Mr. Schreuder died on July 31, 2018, in Pella, Iowa. He was 69 years old.

John Edward De Jong

John Edward De Jong was born on October 22, 1931, in Springfield, South Dakota. He studied at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1955. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1958.

Mr. De Jong was licensed by the Classis of California in 1958 and ordained by the Classis of West Central the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Prairie View, Kansas, from 1958 to 1962; Second, Lennox, South Dakota, from 1962 to 1966; Corona, California, from 1966 to 1972; Mayfair Community, Lakewood, California, from 1972 to 1982; Park Hills, Los Angeles, California, from 1980 to 1982; and Bethel, Bellflower, California, from 1982 to 2000.

Mr. De Jong died on August 25, 2018, in Bellflower, California. He was 86 years old.

Evert H. Fikse

Evert H. Fikse was born on December 21, 1937, in Hudsonville, Michigan. He studied at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1960. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1963.

Mr. Fikse was licensed by the Classis of Zeeland in 1963 and ordained by the Classis of Kalamazoo the same year. He pastored the following congregations: First, Allegan, Michigan, from 1963 to 1967; Ivanhoe, Chicago, Illinois, from 1967 to 1974; and Covenant, Downers Grove, Illinois, from 1974 to 1988. He also served as the minister for mission for the Regional Synod of Mid-America from 1988 to 1999.

Mr. Fikse died on August 28, 2018, in Jenison, Michigan. He was 80 years old.
David Murel Hensley

David Murel Hensley was born on March 10, 1944, in North Bend, Nebraska. He studied at Nebraska Wesleyan University and the University of Nebraska and graduated from Peru State College in 1966. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1971.

Mr. Hensley was licensed and ordained by the Classis of West Central in 1971. He pastored the following congregations: Prairie View, Kansas, from 1971 to 1974; Faith, Brookings, South Dakota, from 1975 to 1981; Community, Clinton, Iowa, from 1981 to 1986; First, Lynden, Washington, from 1986 to 1991; Otley, Iowa, from 1991 to 2001; and Chandler, Minnesota, from 2001 to 2003.

Mr. Hensley died on September 1, 2018, in Chandler, Minnesota. He was 74 years old.

Donald Boss

Donald Boss was born on August 6, 1926, in Charlevoix, Michigan. He studied at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1950. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1953.

Mr. Boss was licensed and ordained by the Classis of Muskegon in 1953. He pastored the following congregations: Rehoboth, Lucas, Michigan, from 1953 to 1956; Immanuel, Lansing, Michigan, from 1956 to 1964; Trinity, Fulton, Illinois, from 1964 to 1969; First, South Holland, Illinois, from 1969 to 1980; and American, De Motte, Indiana, from 1980 to 1987. He served as interim at First, Randolph, Wisconsin, from 1988 to 1989.

Mr. Boss died on September 7, 2018, in Waupun, Wisconsin. He was 92 years old.

Bob J. Myers

Bob J. Myers was born on January 27, 1940, in Brawley, California. He started his undergraduate studies at Imperial Valley College in 1960 and completed them at California State College, San Diego, from which he graduated in 1963. His theological education was received at Fuller Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1988. He also received an M.A. from California State University in Sacramento in 1969.


Mr. Myers died on September 7, 2018. He was 78 years old.

Sonny Lai

Sonny Lai was born on February 11, 1934.

Mr. Lai completed his theological education at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia. He completed additional study in the RCA and was installed as the pastor for Taiwanese Community Church in Lombard, Illinois, from 2001 until his retirement in 2009.
Mr. Lai died on September 10, 2018, in Park Ridge, Illinois. He was 84 years old.

**Grover Jerome Davis**

Grover Jerome Davis was born on February 17, 1933, in Pine Knot, Kentucky. He studied at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1956. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1961. He received an S.T.M. from McCormick Theological Seminary, Chicago, Illinois, in 1972, and a D.Min. from McCormick in 1988.

Mr. Davis was licensed by the Classis of Zeeland in 1961 and ordained by the Classis of Illinois the same year. He pastored the Raritan, Illinois, church from 1961 to 1966 and Faith Community Church, Berwyn, Illinois, from 1966 to 1975. In 1976, he founded the Christian Counseling Center in Chicago, Illinois, and remained there from 1976 to 1990 and then at the center in Palos Heights, Illinois, from 1990 until retirement.

Mr. Davis died on September 14, 2018, in Orland Park, Illinois. He was 85 years old.

**Howard “Howie” Gordon Vande Guchte**

Howard “Howie” Gordon Vande Guchte was born on May 15, 1932, in Sheboygan, Wisconsin. He studied at Wheaton College, from which he graduated in 1955. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1958.

Mr. Vande Guchte was licensed by the Classis of Wisconsin in 1958 and ordained by the Classis of Dakota the same year. He pastored Sandham Memorial Church in Monroe, South Dakota, from 1958 to 1961, and Grace Reformed Church in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, from 1961 to 1998.

Mr. Vande Guchte died on September 16, 2018, in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. He was 86 years old.

**Daniel Lawrence Ogden**

Daniel Lawrence Ogden was born on January 23, 1942, in Dumont, New Jersey. He studied at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1964. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1967. He also earned an S.T.M. in 1973 and a D.Min. in 1976, both from New York Theological Seminary.

Mr. Ogden was licensed by the Classis of Bergen in 1967 and ordained by the Classis of Mid-Hudson the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Port Ewen, New York, from 1967 to 1973; Massapequa, New York, from 1973 to 1980; Church-on-the-Green, Hackensack, New Jersey, from 1980 to 1981; Allwood Community, Clifton, New Jersey, from 1981 to 1988; Margate Community UCC, Margate, New Jersey, from 1989 to 1993; United UCC, Toms River, New Jersey, from 1994 to 1996; United, Plainfield, New Jersey, from 1997 to 1998; United, Somerville, New Jersey, in 1998; and Oradell, New Jersey, from 2001 to 2009.

Mr. Ogden died on September 17, 2018, in Phoenixville, Pennsylvania. He was 76 years old.
Charles Edward Doornbos

Charles Edward Doornbos was born on April 28, 1937, in Kalamazoo, Michigan. He began his undergraduate studies at Hope College and graduated from Western Michigan University in 1959. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1964.

Mr. Doornbos was licensed by the Classis of Holland in 1964 and ordained by the Classis of North Central the same year. He pastored the following congregations: First, Monroe, South Dakota, from 1964 to 1967; Community, Newton, Iowa, from 1967 to 1971; Olivet, Grandville, Michigan, from 1971 to 1978; Peace, Middleville, Michigan, from 1979 to 1983; Hudson, Florida, from 1983 to 1989; Ross, Gary, Indiana, from 1989 to 1996; and Coopersville, Michigan, from 1996 to 2000.

Mr. Doornbos died on September 29, 2018, in Douglas, Michigan. He was 81 years old.

Robert A. Nykamp

Robert A. Nykamp was born on January 15, 1933, in Hamilton, Michigan. He studied at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1955. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1958. He also earned an M.S. from the University of Pennsylvania in 1969.

Mr. Nykamp was licensed by the Classis of Holland in 1958 and ordained by the Classis of Illiana the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Ross, Gary, Indiana, from 1958 to 1963; Hope, Chicago, Illinois, from 1963 to 1964; and Bayshore Gardens, Bradenton, Florida, from 1977 to 1981. He also served as a professor at Western Theological Seminary from 1965 to 1977 and as chaplain at Pine Rest Christian Hospital in Grand Rapids, Michigan, from 1981 to 1996. Mr. Nykamp served as the vice president of the General Synod from 1990 to 1991.

Mr. Nykamp died on October 13, 2018, in Holland, Michigan. He was 85 years old.

Ira John Hesselink Jr.

Ira John Hesselink Jr. was born on March 21, 1928, in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He studied at Central College, from which he graduated in 1950. His theological education began at New Brunswick Theological Seminary and was completed at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1953. He earned his D.Theol. from the University of Basel, Switzerland, in 1961, and also studied at the University of Chicago Divinity School, the Free University of Amsterdam, and Oxford University.

Mr. Hesselink was licensed and ordained by the Classis of West Central in 1953. He entered the mission field and served in Japan from 1953 to 1973, during which time he taught at Tokyo Union Theological Seminary from 1961 to 1973 and Meiji Gakuin University from 1962 to 1966; he was also visiting professor at Western Theological Seminary from 1966 to 1967. He returned to the U.S. to serve as the president of Western Theological Seminary from 1973 to 1985. He returned to Japan to teach for a year as a visiting professor at Tokyo Union Seminary and then served as the A.C. Van Raalte Professor of Systematic Theology at Western from 1986 to 1992. Mr. Hesselink served as the president of General Synod from 1995 to 1996.

Mr. Hesselink died on October 28, 2018, in Holland, Michigan. He was 90 years old.
Solomon J. Tivade

Solomon J. Tivade was born on August 20, 1934, in Kothali, India. He studied at Ahmednager Christian College and then at the University of Poona and Karnataka University where he received a bachelor’s degree in education. His theological education started at Princeton Theological Seminary, where he received an M.C.E., and then an M.Div. and S.T.M. from Drew University. Mr. Tivade also received a Th.D. from Temple Baptist College.

Before coming to the United States, Mr. Tivade taught social studies and English in Belgaum, India, for 12 years and created a literary magazine designed to foster dialogue between Christian and Hindu intellectuals. Thereafter, he held the position of director of Christian education at a Christian high school for ten years. After settling in the United States, he began working at Market Street Mission in 1974 as a counselor and from 1978 until the early 1990s was chaplain and director of counseling. In 1991, Mr. Tivade founded National Association of Asian Indian Christians in the USA, a nonprofit organization.

Mr. Tivade was received by the Classis of Greater Palisades from the Church of North India in 1997. He pastored United Reformed Church in Jersey City, New Jersey, from 1997 to 2004.

Mr. Tivade died on October 31, 2018, in Chatham, New Jersey. He was 84 years old.

Cornelius A. Van Heest

Cornelius A. Van Heest was born on September 22, 1931, in Catskill, New York. He studied at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1952. His theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1955. He also earned an M.C.E. from Western in 1972.

Mr. Van Heest was licensed by the Classis of Lake Erie in 1955 and ordained by the Classis of Montgomery the same year. He pastored the following congregations: Randall Community, Fultonville, New York, and Fultonville, New York, from 1955 to 1958; Lisha’s Kill, Schenectady, New York, from 1958 to 1968; Faith, Portage, Michigan, from 1968 to 1971; Central Park, Holland, Michigan, from 1971 to 1977; Hope, Sheboygan, Wisconsin, from 1977 to 1982; and Aberdeen, Grand Rapids, Michigan, from 1982 to 1990. He served as interim pastor at: Rockford, Michigan, from 1990 to 1991; Peapack, Gladstone, New Jersey, from 1991 to 1992; Forest Grove, Hudsonville, from 1992 to 1994; and Southbridge, Portage, Michigan, from 1994 to 1995. He also served in specialized interim ministry and was a turn-around church consultant for Central Park, Holland, Michigan, from 1995 to 1997. In his retirement, he served at Fellowship, Muskegon, Michigan; Remembrance, Grand Rapids, Michigan; and Central Park, Holland, Michigan.

Mr. Van Heest died on November 23, 2018, in Holland, Michigan. He was 86 years old.

Sandra J. Elfring

Sandra J. Elfring was born on January 15, 1941, in Holland, Michigan. She studied at Western Michigan University, from which she graduated in 1966. Her theological education was received at Western Theological Seminary, from which she graduated in 1980. She also earned an M.A. from Western Michigan University in 1971 and her C.P.E. at Bronson Methodist Hospital in 1979.

Ms. Elfring was licensed and ordained by the Classis of Southwest Michigan in 1980.
She served as a chaplain at Bronson Methodist Hospital in Kalamazoo, Michigan, from 1980 to 1995 and 1997 to 1998. She served as the pastor for adult ministries at the United Methodist church in Kalamazoo, Michigan, from 1995 to 1997. She continued her ministry in United Methodist congregations.

Ms. Elfring died on December 2, 2018, in Kalamazoo, Michigan. She was 77 years old.

**Samuel Noordhoff**

Samuel Noordhoff was born on June 29, 1927, in Orange City, Iowa. He began his undergraduate studies at Northwestern Junior College and completed them at Hope College, from which he graduated in 1947. He received his M.D. from the University in Iowa in 1954 with certification in general surgery. He received his certification in plastic surgery in 1968.

Mr. Noordhoff served the RCA on the mission field in Taiwan from 1959 until his retirement from RCA mission work in 1992. He continued to work at Chang Gung Memorial Hospital (Taipei, Taiwan) until 1999, when he returned to the United States. Mr. Noordhoff was the founder of the Noordhoff Craniofacial Foundation in 1989. Among the awards he received were lifetime achievement awards from the American Society of Plastic Surgeons in 1994 and from the British Association of Plastic Reconstructive and Aesthetic Surgeons in 2012.

Mr. Noordhoff died on December 3, 2018, in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He was 91 years old.

**Mark Henry Vander Meer**

Mark Henry Vander Meer was born on May 25, 1953, in Kalamazoo, Michigan. He began his undergraduate studies at Hope College and completed them at Northwestern College, from which he graduated in 1977. His theological education was received at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1980.

Mr. Vander Meer was licensed and ordained by the Classis of Bergen in 1980. He pastored the following congregations: Ocean, Manahawkin, New Jersey, from 1980 to 1990, and Monocacy Valley, Frederick, Maryland, from 1990 to 2015.

Mr. Vander Meer died on December 22, 2018, in Mount Airy, Maryland. He was 65 years old.

POLICY WORDING

The RCA will engage, equip, and encourage congregations and missional communities to participate in Christ’s kingdom mission, both locally and globally.

GENERAL SECRETARY’S INTERPRETATION

“May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, that your way may be known upon earth, your saving power among all nations” (Psalm 67:1-2).

Mission becomes a way of life when we reach out to people with the gospel, meeting needs in neighborhoods, in cities, and throughout the world. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we boldly give witness to the hope within us and willingly serve others by becoming the hands and feet of Christ in every corner of the world. The RCA commitment is to respond with God’s love to meet spiritual and individual needs around the globe. It is envisioning the people of the RCA as faithful followers who live and love like Jesus as they radically follow Christ in mission together.

Individuals and churches experience transformation as they open themselves to be used by God and reach out in giving and receiving, learning and sharing, and extending the kingdom of God through missional engagement. It means bringing the good news of God’s grace in Jesus Christ to those who have never heard the message; mobilizing RCA congregations to connect with global partners for greater kingdom impact; helping resource volunteers for expanding involvement in mission efforts; and extending compassion, mercy, and justice in places of discrimination, poverty, famine, disaster, and injustice. In a world of brokenness and need, we offer help, hope, and tangible expressions of God’s love.

OVERVIEW

Four initiative teams work within the Engaging in Christ’s Kingdom Mission strategic priority: Local Missional Engagement, which helps congregations express the gospel of Christ in transformational ways in their local community; Volunteer Engagement, which provides opportunities for volunteers of all ages to engage in service for Christ; Advocacy, focused on equipping congregations for cultural competency and empowering them to advocate on behalf of the marginalized; and Disability Concerns, which helps the RCA work toward being accessible, inclusive, and missional churches where everybody belongs and everybody serves.

LOCAL MISSIONAL ENGAGEMENT

Local Missional Engagement (LME) helps churches discern what God is doing in them and in their communities and helps explore ways to bring those things together. LME champions the work of reviving the church’s missional imagination. Local mission also seeks to equip the church to share the good news of the gospel, both as individuals and as a corporate body. The Local Missional Engagement initiative is led by Eliza Cortés Bast.

Year Six Goals (June 2018 to June 2019)

- To cultivate and create new partnerships—both internally and externally—in order to maximize the resourcing and initiation of LME work, equipping and networking for the RCA and for local congregations.
• To continue and complete high level learning through the Transformed & Transforming delivery systems, including learning communities, leadership collaboratives, and connection events. In addition, LME hopes to foster a spirit of collaboration among Transformed & Transforming initiatives, embedding missional practice in the equipping of leaders and the discipleship process.

• To create and develop new ways for congregations and members to be equipped for the practical sharing of the gospel that promote an incarnational practice that is rooted in both demonstration and proclamation.

The focus of this year was to continue collaboration by embedding local mission inside multiple initiatives. Collaborative efforts also include the development of platforms to help connect and support congregations and ministries. Additionally, the office is focusing on creating additional training and equipping around evangelism. LME is currently committed to five connection events, three learning communities, and an online training application for the 2018–2019 ministry year.

Progress

• Partnerships
  o In October 2018, members of the Transformed & Transforming staff met with key staff at New Brunswick Theological Seminary to begin exploring deeper collaboration with the seminary.
  o LME has created a partnership with Organic Outreach and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, crafting two learning communities that will launch in early summer 2019. Additional resourcing will be available to RCA churches from Organic Outreach.
  o LME, in connection with the Commission on Christian Action, will also contract with local, regional experts to develop resources for churches to address the rising opioid epidemic in communities where RCA churches are present.

• Delivery Systems
  o LME and Discipleship have continued their learning community with five churches in western Illinois.
  o LME and Church Multiplication completed the lakeshore Praxis Learning Community, providing support for church planters who desire a high local mission output.
  o LME has been spearheading efforts to create regional events that bring a more holistic presentation of Transformed & Transforming staff. Multiple staff presented at the first regional event in Central California in March 2019. This is a pilot to help integrate multiple initiatives in Transformed & Transforming in order to assist churches with high quality events combining multiple priority areas.
  o LME continues to assist in the We Are Speaking resources through Women’s Transformation and Leadership.
  o In March 2019, in cooperation with Earl James and the Advocacy initiative, LME began a pilot leadership collaborative with ministry leaders who want to pursue redemptive, social entrepreneurship practices in connection with ministry. This pilot is in conjunction with the African American Black Council. We hope to see how the denomination can resource and equip ministry leaders who choose to pursue unconventional forms of ministry and church.
  o LME will continue to support Disability Concerns in equipping and resourcing churches that wish to engage in further work around mental
health issues and the community, with a third annual “Bearing Hope” connection event hosted in fall 2019, along with partnership with “be nice,” a mental health awareness foundation in West Michigan.

- LME is working alongside Next Generation Engagement to test an experiential connection event in New York City for a youth-led worship and prayer night for the city. The purpose for this event is to create space for next generation leadership in local mission for their communities, as well as to convene multiple groups of young people through the banner of the RCA. Should this model work, Local Mission and Next Generation Engagement would like to host more events like this throughout the U.S. and Canada.

- LME also hosted a connection event in the Mohawk Valley (New York) for four churches to see where collaboration and deeper missional engagement and impact is possible. These types of hands-on visioning workshops with pastors and laity provide spaces for Transformed & Transforming staff to facilitate fruitful work as well as provide opportunities for ongoing relationships.

- LME partnered with Advocacy to host a mass incarceration event in August 2018, providing equipping and networking for churches throughout the denomination. This was in response to the request of General Synod 2018.

- LME also partnered with Advocacy to address the General Synod 2018 request to respond to the separation of families at the southern U.S. border. LME and Advocacy worked with the general secretary’s office to provide an open letter to the denomination and public offices, as well as to provide resources and next steps online.

- New Methods of Learning
  - In April 2019, Local Mission and Discipleship hosted their first four-week online class on evangelism and incarnational mission. This class provided a beta test for a new learning platform for churches to engage with Transformed & Transforming.
  - LME was also part of the design sprint and beta test of Faithward, the RCA communication department’s experiential communication platform.
  - LME is working with The Urban Ministry Institute (TUMI), the Billy Graham Center, and other learning institutions to create new pathways for learning around non-traditional expressions of church, specifically missional communities and outposts. LME’s hope is to provide networking, community, and learning processes that can benefit localized expressions of ministry around social entrepreneurship, bivocational practice, and non-traditional mission expressions. LME is on a faithful learning journey and in conversations with Church Multiplication, Global Mission, and Chad Farrand of Discipleship as we continue to explore how to plan for the church of tomorrow.

Five-Year Goals (June 2018 to June 2023)

- LME will identify a pre- and post-process for learning opportunities to allow participating churches to self-identify their current local impact.
- Each regional synod will have an identified and trained local missional engagement coach in its area who can help equip, resource, and coach the local work with a strong understanding of each region’s context.
- Local Missional Engagement will have a curated “toolbox” of resources that will be useful within all of the initiatives in the Mission strategic priority (all of the initiatives listed in this report). This toolbox will give RCA congregations
access to the content of the best contemporary resources for local mission.

- Local Missional Engagement will have a clearly identified and integrated strategy for local churches that provides learning around justice, compassion and aid, and evangelism.
- One hundred and fifty RCA congregations will be equipped for increased local mission engagement with tangible missional impact, sacrificial service, authentic relationships, spiritual transformation, and sustained community partnerships.

VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT

The Volunteer Engagement initiative is focused on empowering, equipping, and engaging RCA volunteers of all ages in service for Christ through mission volunteer opportunities that have a transforming impact on individuals, congregations, and the partner communities in which volunteers serve. We believe that as volunteers serve in the name of Christ, whether in their local community or around the world, that service can have long-term impact on all participants.

This team is focused on supporting congregations and equipping volunteers for service with RCA missionaries and mission partners. We work with volunteers throughout the planning process, provide support on the field, and help ensure effective debriefing and follow-through.

Volunteer Engagement is led by Stephanie Soderstrom.

Four Areas of Focus

1. Mission Trips
   Working with local, long-term ministries, mission teams can help meet needs, build relationships, and share the hope of Christ. Mission trips are available for teams of all ages.

2. Disaster Response
   When disaster strikes, RCA volunteers can help provide much-needed support in the months and years that follow. Individual and group opportunities are available.

3. Individual Volunteer Opportunities
   Opportunities are available for students and adults to serve for a few weeks or up to two years alongside RCA missionaries and partners. The Cultivate program, launched in 2018, provides individual opportunities for young people, ages 18–25, to serve alongside RCA missionaries and mission partners for either a summer or a year.

4. Church Equipping
   Working with RCA churches, we offer resources, training, and equipping processes to help them take their next step in volunteer engagement. These equipping resources are available to churches that serve through the RCA and those that do not.

Many RCA churches have been engaged in sending volunteers in mission for years. Our vision is to be a benefit for these churches and for churches that are new to engaging volunteers in mission. Additionally, we will seek to engage individuals, especially the next generation, in dynamic volunteer opportunities and internships that allow volunteers to utilize their unique gifts to contribute to the long-term goals of our mission partners.
Year Six Goals (June 2018 to June 2019)

- Engage 1,725 volunteers in service with RCA missionaries and mission partners.
- Serve 30 new churches through equipping processes or mission opportunities, while maintaining previously established church relationships.
- Recruit and send out 15 Cultivate participants.
- Gain accreditation in Standards of Excellence in Short-Term Mission.

Progress

- As of February 2019, 1,205 volunteers engaged in service with RCA missionaries and mission partners.
- 34 new churches were served through equipping processes or mission opportunities.
- As of February 2019, six Cultivate participants have been recruited and placed for the 2019–2020 service year.
- The Cultivate program received Standards of Excellence in Short-Term Mission accreditation.
- Additionally, in the 2018 calendar year, the Next Generation Missional Engagement Fund awarded 97 scholarships, totaling $164,522 and benefitting 940 young people.

Five-Year Goals (June 2018 to June 2023)

Engage 11,500 volunteers in service with RCA missionaries and mission partners.

ADVOCACY
(formerly called Cultural Agility and Advocacy)

Advocacy focuses on helping congregations and people live more fully into the biblical vision of shalom and the human hope of the beloved community. This initiative is led by Earl James.

The ancient Hebrews spoke the word shalom both at greeting and at parting. The word meant “peace” but conveyed more, including life with complete wholeness wherever one lived, worked, and worshiped.

The beloved community grows naturally out of Jesus’s own hunger for the felt unity of his followers, mirroring the unity he shared with the Father (John 17:20-23). That unity expresses a readiness to engage everyday life in close friendship and to actively take a stand when society and societal systems block access to the abundant life for people and places God created.

Advocacy offers congregations two pathways as they strive for shalom and the beloved community:

- Increase their cultural agility.
- Advocate by addressing societal patterns, including influencing public policy.

Cultural agility begins with whatever culturally rooted style of relationship-building a person or congregation has and focuses on adapting that style when communicating, negotiating, and building trust with other people, congregations, or groups whose cultures differ from one’s own.
As congregations increase in cultural agility, tangible, sustainable transformations can occur in leadership, outreach, discipleship, and worship.

In advocacy, congregations come to see and engage societal patterns and public policy matters and practices as simply a third expression of their shared compassion ministries.

Many congregations express compassion by “giving a fish.” They see a need and meet a need. Food pantries are excellent examples of “giving a fish” compassion ministry.

Congregations also express compassion by “teaching to fish.” By sharing any particular knowledge, skill, or ability, they assist a person or family in overcoming a particular life challenge that threatens them. Tutoring and financial stewardship ministries are excellent examples of “teaching to fish” ministries.

Not very many congregations ask, “Why do so many people and families need those fish to begin with?” Advocating by addressing underlying societal patterns and public policy results in partnering with others to make tangible differences in everyday life challenges, locally or globally, for hundreds or thousands of people, and to add greater liveliness and focus to the shared life of participating congregations and people themselves.

Late in 2018, GSC’s implementation strategy for cultural agility markedly changed. Originally, the initiative was led by a single staff person. Currently, the GSC staff is in process of embedding cultural agility within all the Transformed & Transforming initiatives.

The embedding learning process has three goals:

1. Increasing the Transformed & Transforming staff’s understanding of cultural agility and their ability to enfold cultural agility within each respective initiative.
2. Increasing the demographic diversity of the people deeply trusted by the Transformed & Transforming staff, assisting them to grow in cultural agility personally and in their ministries.
3. Assessing the distribution of Transformed & Transforming resources and opportunities to ensure racial-ethnic congregations equitably benefit from the RCA’s strategic ministry plan.

As cultural agility is being embedded in all the Transformed & Transforming ministries, the staff person previously dedicated to it has been reassigned to serve as coordinator for the African American/Black Council (AABC) and Advocacy. As with the other racial-ethnic councils, the AABC will also benefit from accessing Transformed & Transforming services.

Year Six Goals (June 2018 to June 2019)

- 2 cultural agility connection events
- 1 cultural agility learning community
- 2 connection events for the AABC
- 2 leadership collaboratives for the AABC (discipleship/leadership and mission)
- 4 advocacy connection events

NOTE: The original goals for 2018–2019 were deeply revised as the coordinator was reassigned from a stand-alone cultural agility initiative to serving the AABC.
Progress

- 2 cultural agility connection events
  - Each October for the last 10 years, a connection event on cultural agility and leadership has been provided for all new GSC members, commission members, and GSC staff. In 2018, approximately 25 people participated in this high-level training that both taught about cultural agility and helped participants prepare to implement learnings in their denominational leadership positions, in their home congregations, and in their personal lives.
  - We held an anti-racism/poverty simulation in Queens, New York, that explored the effects of systemic racism on the everyday lives of church neighbors and on church ministries intended to serve them.

- 1 cultural agility learning community
  - We completed a 2-year learning community with Meredith Drive Reformed Church and The Bridge (RCA) in Iowa. The focuses were on race/ethnicity, nationality, and generation. A result was the hiring of a next generation church staff person.

- 2 connection events for the AABC
  - 2 connection events were held on how to assist congregations, families, and individuals to identify and develop their own Transformed & Transforming focuses. The primary tools were the 2013 General Synod–approved document that authorized Transformed & Transforming, the Bible, and a guided group discussion format.

- 2 leadership collaboratives for the AABC
  - A discipleship/leadership collaborative called “Inward/Outward Journey” is currently underway. 10 participants from 5 small, declining churches are learning ways in which they as leaders can live into a vision that small churches can be extremely vital, are not merely under-performing “large-church-want-to-bes” that need fixing, and can foster both exciting inward relationships with God and impactful outreach ministries. Participants visited a vibrant network of small churches in Washington, D.C., and Baltimore, Maryland, as well as a deeply impactful small church in Queens, New York. Participants shared changes in their ministries and lives inspired by their visits to these churches. This leadership collaborative will complete its work in 2019. The participants will determine if they want to continue with another Inward/Outward leadership collaborative with more expansive goals of leading change in their churches.
  - On March 15, 2019, a leadership collaborative launched, focusing on developing nonprofit corporations through which outreach ministries can thrive and be resourced. The coordinator of AABC co-developed and co-leads this leadership collaborative with the coordinator for Local Missional Engagement. At least 10 participants from 4 congregations are part of this collaborative. This collaborative might be a model to be offered widely throughout the RCA.

- Four advocacy connection events
  - In February 2018, the Advocacy initiative launched a multi-year initiative on creation care. The ministry is based around Psalm 24:1 (“The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it.”) and Genesis 2:15 (“The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.”). The initiative links creation care to 1) increased awareness and discussions about caring for God’s world; 2) deepened worship and spiritual experiences; 3) greater church building and home energy
efficiency; and 4) widened outreach and advocacy, including addressing climate change. Additionally, conversations among the three RCA colleges about environmental stewardship education have been facilitated. Between February and October 2018, 138 people from 39 churches and additional organizations participated. Three of those engagements were connection events that occurred between June 2018 and June 2019. These occurred in Portage, Michigan, Orange City, Iowa, and online.

- In August 2018, one mass incarceration connection event was held in Detroit, Michigan, with participants from around the RCA. Focuses were on specific ministries in the RCA that address mass incarceration.

**Five-Year Goals (June 2018 to June 2023)**

- 5 cultural agility connection events
- 9 AABC connection events
- 10 AABC leadership collaboratives
- 8 advocacy connection events
- 3 advocacy leadership collaboratives

**DISABILITY CONCerns**

Scripture’s vision of the kingdom is a unifying embrace of the love and grace of Jesus Christ that reaches all people—every race, tribe, people, and language, every disability and special need. Raising awareness and making our churches accessible to people with disabilities establishes a needed foundation, but our own attitudes require even greater transformation so that ministries to and for people with disabilities grow into ministries with and by people with disabilities. The vision of Disability Concerns is to welcome and engage the gifts of all people in Christ’s ministry—becoming accessible, inclusive, missional churches where everybody belongs and everybody serves. A covenant with CRC Disability Concerns between the governing boards of the RCA and the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA)—in place since 2009—has demonstrated a track record of multiplied effectiveness and continues to deepen ministry impact in both denominations.

Of particular note within the past year—the tenth anniversary of the Disability Concerns partnership—the two staff leaders of RCA and CRC Disability Concerns have collaborated to do the following:

- Write a grant proposal to explore the potential of resiliency and adverse childhood experiences in the church’s youth ministry.
- Offer a third Bearing Hope learning event to assist churches in West Michigan seeking to support people living with mental health challenges.
- Present a paper at the Wheaton Symposium on Faith and Disability on themes of hospitality, mutuality, and interdependence that both undergird the partnership of RCA and CRC Disability Concerns and support effective ministry by and with people with disabilities.
- Lead a workshop, “Disability Ministry in the Third Space,” at the upcoming CRC Inspire 2019 gathering that explores how the complementary concepts of mutuality and hospitality offer a model for moving into the proposed “third space” between our two denominations.

The RCA’s Disability Concerns initiative is led by Terry DeYoung.
Year Six Goals (June 2018 to June 2019)

- Hold 5 to 6 connection events designed to raise awareness about advocacy with people with disabilities, provide equipping resources, and connect participants to learning communities.
  - At least 50 percent of the congregations involved in the connection events will appoint a church disability advocate.
- Launch 1 disability learning community focused on Disability Concerns initiatives in the local church (with CRC Disability Concerns).
  - By 2020, at least 50 percent of the congregations involved will appoint a church disability advocate, conduct an accessibility audit, adopt a church disability policy, launch a new disability ministry, develop a new strategic partnership, or make shifts in church staffing or budget.
- Through the leadership of church disability advocates, 10 churches will conduct an accessibility audit or adopt a church disability policy, with at least five removing barriers to full participation.
- Offer individualized onboarding and coaching to all church disability advocates and regional disability advocates.

Progress

- RCA-CRC Disability Concerns connection events have been or are scheduled to be held in Iowa, Michigan (two), New York, and Ontario.
- A yearlong mental health learning community with four West Michigan churches (two RCA and two CRC) seeking to improve their welcome and support of people living with mental health challenges was completed in February 2019. An RCA-CRC disability learning community for improving engagement of people with disabilities in northwest Iowa churches is anticipated to begin in fall 2019.
- All church disability advocates identified in the RCA database were encouraged to facilitate an accessibility audit (identifying and addressing barriers in attitude, communication, and facility design) and/or work with leaders to adopt a disability policy for their church. Typically these are lengthy undertakings, particularly an accessibility audit. Further, in November 2016, RCA Disability Concerns initiated a brief accessibility survey of all RCA churches to assist in evaluating physical barriers, communication barriers, and inclusive programming; more than 200 churches participated. This survey will be repeated in 2019, with results of the survey to be added to each participating church’s information in the RCA’s online church search—in part so that potential visitors with disabilities can anticipate if the church will be able to accommodate their needs.
- At least 90 churches have designated a church disability advocate who has submitted a signed covenant to RCA Disability Concerns so individual follow-up, resources, and support can be provided by Disability Concerns staff.
- In September 2018, RCA-CRC Disability Concerns hosted a three-day leadership conference in Grand Rapids, Michigan, that equipped 25 RCA disability advocates plus an equivalent number of CRC disability advocates. Much of the time was devoted to the theme of “Engaging Older Adults with Disabilities in Worship,” but advocates also engaged in networking, meeting with other advocates in their region, learning about opportunities and resources in their church and regional settings, and setting personal ministry goals for the coming year.
Five-Year Goals (June 2018 to June 2023*)

*Projections are inclusive of outcomes already reported for 2013 to 2018.

- 75 churches will have conducted an accessibility audit or adopted a church disability policy so that substantive changes are made in their welcome of people with disabilities.
- 200 churches will have identified a church disability advocate who is empowered to champion the full welcome and engagement of people with disabilities so that disability awareness is deepened and people with disabilities are engaged.
- 30 classes will have appointed a regional (classis) disability advocate.
- 40 churches will have engaged in local mission efforts, volunteer engagements, or public advocacy campaigns that address issues that are harmful in some way to people with disabilities so that people with disabilities can flourish as active community members.
- 200 churches will have participated in connection events designed to raise awareness about advocacy with people with disabilities, provide equipping, and connect participants to learning communities.
- 5 RCA-CRC learning communities focused on Disability Concerns initiatives in the local church will have been established.
- 10 disability leadership training events will have equipped, supported, and resourced church disability advocates and regional disability advocates for their local ministry contexts.

REPORT OF RCA CHURCH MULTIPLICATION

With the goal of planting 1,000 new churches in the next 20 years, the Church Multiplication team has focused this year on defining that goal, breaking it down, and building capacity to reach it.

Our real goal is to fulfill the Great Commission and make new disciples of Jesus Christ. Planting churches has proven to be the most effective, measurable vehicle to accomplish that. Planting 1,000 churches is therefore the means to our higher mission: to guide 100,000 new disciples into God’s kingdom.

We anticipate the plants falling into one of the following four categories:

- 500 will be classic plants, launched by a full-time pastor, eventually having a permanent facility and providing a range of ministries.
- 100 will be additional worship sites of existing churches that reach new population groups but are governed under one common consistory.
- 200 will be plants outside of North America. Collaborating with our Global Mission team, we will help facilitate new congregations that are being launched in places where the RCA is engaged around the world. This will also allow us to learn from other cultures where the gospel is spreading rapidly. In January 2020, we will host a summit of planters from multiple continents for mutual learning, inspiration, and listening for God’s direction.
- 200 will be prototypes of new models of church. For the immediate future, we are concentrating on micro churches. These smaller congregations will be nimble, simple and inexpensive, led by a volunteer or a bi-vocational pastor. They will be small enough to meet in borrowed spaces with little overhead. They will be especially effective in smaller, rural villages; under-resourced urban centers; and among pockets of immigrant populations. In August 2019, we will partner with the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) to convene a
group of practitioners to develop a strategy for advancing this model.

With this breadth of planting models, no longer can we prepare and support all our plants and planters in the same way. Therefore, different lanes are being developed for planter assessment, training, coaching, and funding that will be unique for each model of church plant.

In order to plant 50 churches per year, or one every week, we need to increase our capacity. We can no longer rely only on a staff of 2.5 multiplication catalysts in the field and 1.5 operational staff to reach these expanded expectations. Therefore, we are forming the following strategic partnerships.

- For classes that are willing and ready to become reproductive, our staff is coming alongside to help develop vision, resources, strategy, systems, and training. Grants are available to help a classis create this infrastructure and equip a champion to lead the local efforts.
- With the CRCNA, we are not only exploring micro churches and international planting, but also improving care for planters, spouses, and families on the front lines of planting, which is often a lonely, risky, isolating experience.
- We have formed an agreement with Stadia, a church planting organization in the U.S., to provide planter assessments, training, project management, and bookkeeping for those plants that have a high potential to start large or multiply rapidly.
- A partnership with Generosity by Lifeway has also been established to provide plants with training around stewardship as well as a powerful, inexpensive online giving platform.

While working on building capacity for future planting, God has already been blessing us during this current year, sometimes in surprising ways, as we take our first steps toward planting 1,000 churches. As of the writing of this report, 16 new congregation plans have been approved since last year’s General Synod. They range geographically from Edmonton to Montreal, Washington to Florida, and points in between, including South Dakota, California, Wisconsin, Michigan, Ohio, and New Jersey. They also represent a vast ethnic diversity, including Korean, Portuguese, Hispanic, Kenyan, and Vietnamese congregations.

Unforeseen has been the sudden interest of independent plants and some established congregations in joining the RCA. Approximately 20 such conversations are ongoing. In particular, there has been so much movement in the southeast U.S. that there is a proposal to reestablish the former Florida Classis as the Classis of the Nations.

We also celebrate this year the organizations of CenterPoint Hillard (Ohio), City Church Compton (California), and Light for the Nations (Quebec).

All of our goals are mere human designs if not empowered by the Lord of the church through the power of the Holy Spirit. To help nurture the prayer life of the denomination, Jim Harrison joined the GSC staff in March as the part-time coordinator of prayer mobilization. Jim joins us after 25 years on the mission field with his wife, Beth, in Estonia and Bahrain. He is available to train, resource, and inspire intercessors.

Please pray for
- Workers for the harvest (Matthew 9:37-38). Our greatest need will be an adequate number of church planters to launch these new congregations. Help us identify disciples who are visionary, are self-starters, empower others, connect with people far from God, build relationships, and have the support of their spouse, if married.
• The Church Multiplication staff: catalysts Mike Hayes, Tim Vink, and Randy Weener and operational assistants Eduardo Rodriguez and Dawn Muller.

REPORT OF RCA GLOBAL MISSION

Working together to share God's love with the world

RCA Global Mission exists to strengthen and grow the global church by supporting ministries of compassion, developing leaders, and sharing the good news. Our goal is to provide engagement opportunities for RCA churches to partner with global churches in ways that are collaborative and mutually meaningful that help us all to live and love like Jesus.

Partnership in Mission Shares

The mission personnel and staff of RCA Global Mission would like to express appreciation to the churches and individuals of the RCA who so generously support our mission programs. RCA mission is supported almost entirely by contributions and Partnership in Mission (PIM) shares; without you, there would be no RCA Global Mission.

The RCA has 89 active partnerships in 44 countries around the world. There are 45 mission personnel and 44 partner personnel (who are employed by the partner but supported through RCA PIM shares). These mission personnel are supported by 447 churches through PIM shares. There are more than 118 active projects, including disaster response and projects of compassion. In the past year, these projects were supported by gifts from 521 churches and 1,766 individual donors.

Global Mission is proposing that the value of a full Partnership in Mission share be raised from $6,700 to $6,800 in 2020. We are also asking that every RCA congregation that does not currently support an RCA missionary with a PIM share consider taking on a full or partial share of support.

GM 19-1
To increase the value of a Partnership in Mission (PIM) share to $6,800 for 2020. (ADOPTED)

Transitions in Mission Personnel

David and Char Alexander began working in Taiwan as RCA missionaries in 1982. Dave taught practical theology and ministry skills to ministerial trainees at Tainan Theological College and Seminary. Char taught English at Chang Jung Christian University. Both schools are associated with the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan. When they retired and left Taiwan, Dave and Char were awarded citizenship of that country by the government of Taiwan in gratitude for their years of service to the Taiwanese people.

Jim and Beth Harrison began mission service as RCA missionaries in Estonia, serving from 1995 to 2008. They left Estonia to serve the National Evangelical Church in Bahrain, where Jim was senior pastor. Jim left mission service to become the coordinator for prayer mobilization for the RCA in March 2019.

Jeffery and Chelsea Lampen served in Romania as a program/curriculum developer and intern supervisor with the New Horizons Foundation. Jeff and Chelsea have moved into full-time pastoral ministry in Illinois.
Harry and Pat Miersma served RCA Global Mission in Ethiopia starting in 1972. In 1980, they were seconded to Wycliffe. They used their gifts to counsel and support Wycliffe Bible translators around the world. Their work was aimed at encouraging and supporting those involved in Bible translation in more than 75 countries in the midst of highly stressful situations. Pat co-authored *Healing the Wounds of Trauma: How the Church Can Help, along with three Wycliffe colleagues*. This practical Scripture engagement tool has now been translated into more than 150 languages and is being used in more than 50 countries around the world. Harry and Pat are now retired.

GM 19-2

Let it be resolved that the 213th session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting on the campus of Hope College in Holland, Michigan, from June 6 through June 11, 2019, gives glory to God for the life and witness of David and Charlene Alexander, James and Beth Harrison, Jeffery and Chelsea Lampen, Harry and Pat Miersma, and Karen Bogerd, and offers a prayer of thanksgiving for their service to RCA Global Mission. (ADOPTED)

Deaths*

Harvey Hoekstra, who, along with his wife, Lavina, served the Reformed Church in America for 40 years in Sudan, Ethiopia, India, and Asia, died on February 10, 2018. While serving in Africa, Hoekstra translated the New Testament into the Anuak language. He made significant advancements of the gospel through Bible translation and the production of audio Bibles.

Raymond Weiss passed away on June 23, 2018. In 1957, Ray and his wife, Dorothy, became missionaries to the Middle East, living in Iraq, Beirut, Lebanon, and Manama, Bahrain. Ray was a teacher in Lebanon. In Bahrain, he served as pastor of the Arabic-speaking congregation as well as assisting with the English-language and several Indian-language congregations.

LaVerne Sikkema passed away on July 13, 2018. Verne and his wife, Lorraine, served in Kenya, Ethiopia, and Sudan for 40 years. Verne served as a pilot, working alongside Mission Aviation Fellowship to bring missionaries and needed supplies to remote mission sites. Lorraine assisted with radio stand-by work that connected the pilots while in the air.

Al Schreuder passed away on July 31, 2018. He, along with his wife, Sue, served in Chiapas, Mexico, from 1980 to 2015. Serving among the Tzotzil people, Al and Sue were involved in leadership training and development and women’s empowerment in partnership with the National Presbyterian Church of Mexico.

Sam Noordhoff passed away on December 3, 2018. Sam and his wife, Lucille, served in Taiwan from 1959 through 1992. During his service, Noordhoff laid the foundation of many forms of medical treatment, while serving successively as the president of Mackay Memorial Hospital and Chang Gung Memorial Hospital. He not only worked in treating patients with cleft lips and palates, but also created many “firsts” in Taiwan, including the first polio rehabilitation center, the first suicide prevention center, the first burn center, the first intensive care unit, and the first craniofacial treatment center in the country.

*RCA Global Mission apologizes if other deceased missionaries are not included in this list. Any omissions are inadvertent.*
Report of Words of Hope

Words of Hope is an international media ministry founded by supporting classes of the Reformed Church in America. Words of Hope’s mission is to build the church in the hard places by equipping indigenous Christian churches and ministries to proclaim the gospel, especially through the use of media.

The areas where Words of Hope does ministry are difficult to reach with the gospel, either because of poverty, geography, persecution, or social antagonism toward Christianity. Words of Hope partners with existing Christian organizations in these hard-to-reach countries and equips them to more effectively minister in their own language and context, among their own people.

Currently, Words of Hope’s regions of ministry include Albania, Bhutan, Canada, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Iran, Nepal, Niger, South Sudan, Tibet, Turkey, Uganda, and the United States. Each ministry field requires its own unique media outreach approach. Depending on the variety of resources and preferences in a given region, an assortment of radio programs, CDs, DVDs, text messages, Internet, Skype, Facebook, print materials, and satellite television are used to proclaim the gospel.

Some notable highlights from Words of Hope’s ministry in the past year include the development and launch of our audio devotional podcast, the continued expansion of digital media outreach in Iran, and exciting answers to prayer in Uganda.

Last September, we launched the audio version of the Words of Hope daily devotional. In some ways, this new initiative was actually a return to our roots, as years ago, a two-minute version of the devotional was broadcast on several radio stations. By creating this new audio version as a podcast, however, we have been able to incorporate an introduction, the full Scripture text of the day, and prompts for prayer that help people engage with Scripture in our on-the-go society.

Adam Navis is the host and producer of this program. “People are listening to podcasts in their car, at the gym, when they are cooking dinner, or vacuuming the house,” explains Adam. “Why not offer a podcast that draws them deeper into Scripture? We believe there is shaping power in regular biblical engagement that goes beyond any single day’s wisdom or insight. This audio devotional will be successful if it helps people establish the habit of spending time in Scripture each and every day.”

In the first month, just over 2,000 listens were tallied as people tuned in to the program. Since then, we have grown to 3,500 listens. We hope to see this number double by 2020. To listen to the programs yourself, search for “Words of Hope Daily Devotional” on iTunes or Stitcher. Your listens, likes, and comments will help more people discover the devotional!

As we develop the ways we interact with our North American audience online, the Internet is continuing to help us reach more Iranians with the gospel as well. Internet radio broadcasts in Persian were launched last year. The online service allows Words of Hope to broadcast programming 24 hours per day, but even more importantly, it provides important listenership metrics. Currently, our Persian audience is approximately 14,000 listeners distributed across 33 different countries.

In addition to online radio, Words of Hope is actively expanding its presence on other social media networks to connect with Iranian listeners. New videos that Words of Hope
is creating for Iranians are being posted on apps like Telegram and are already getting as many as 2,700 views per video.

Words of Hope Uganda continues to reach new tribal languages and regions of the country. In one area where broadcasting has been active since 2015, the dangerous practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) was a known social problem. Local Words of Hope radio programming has focused on telling the stories of women who regret having undergone the procedure, as well as addressing other social changes that can help to protect young women. We are thankful to report that in the last 20 years, rates of FGM have dropped in Uganda from 71.4 percent down to 8 percent. More than 1,000 people have called the radio station since 2015, asking for counseling, prayers, and advice, and more than 100 of those people have made the decision to give their lives to Christ!

Words of Hope is deeply grateful for the support of RCA churches that continues to allow this outreach ministry to grow. In 2018, contributions from RCA congregations totaled $494,901. We celebrate this generosity, knowing that these dollars are allowing people to be introduced to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Thank you for proclaiming hope to the refugee, the orphan, the oppressed, the impoverished, and the imprisoned. Thank you for sending the gospel out to the ends of the earth.