Report of the Commission on History

The Commission on History was established in 1966 to advise the General Synod on the collection and preservation of official denominational records. In 1968, the commission was given oversight of The Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America (RCA), and the 2003 General Synod added the instruction that the commission “offer a historical perspective, either orally or in writing, on matters being presented to the General Synod” (MGS 2003, R-41, p. 159). The Book of Church Order (Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 5 [2018 edition, pp. 113–114]) further assigns the commission to “actively promote research on, interest in, and reflection on, the history and traditions of the RCA,” to “inform the RCA of the relevance of the denomination’s history and traditions to its program, and regularly review denominational resources that present the church’s history,” and to “provide a ‘history center’ by regularly reporting on the activities of the RCA’s educational institutions as these relate to the history and traditions of the denomination.” This is our 53rd report to General Synod.

The General Synod Council and its staff do their work and serve the synods, classes, and congregations informed by the Transformed & Transforming goals approved by the 2013 General Synod. This commission works to help the church look at those 15-year goals in the larger context of our history. The transformation commenced

- 1 year ago, when we installed our general secretary, Eddy Alemán, who is one of the first Latinos to lead a historic Protestant denomination in the United States,
- 21 years ago, when we installed the first woman professor of theology,
- 26 years ago, when the General Synod heard the report of its first woman president,
- 31 years ago, when we ordained the first woman of color,
- 41 years ago, when we expanded our polity’s definition of “persons,”
- 51 years ago, when we renewed our liturgies (and continue to do so today),
- 101 years ago, when Ida Scudder opened Vellore Woman’s Medical College,
- 136 years ago, when the Women’s Board of Foreign Missions established The Mission Gleaner to “keep the women of the Church at home informed of the progress of the work on the field,”
- 171 years ago, when a group of immigrant churches in western Michigan formed a classis,
- 206 years ago, when Elias Van Bunschoten set an example for stewardship that has educated hundreds of pastors and missionaries since,
- 245 years ago, when the Church in America wrote to the Classis of Amsterdam requesting a professor of theology, recommending the appointment of Dr. John Henry Livingston, their last student from America,
- 375 years ago, when dominie (pastor) Johannes Megapolensis, while serving as a missionary to the Mohawk and in the spirit of ecumenism, graciously befriended and assisted the French missionary to the Hurons, Father Isaac Jogues, who had been taken by the Mohawk,
- 391 years ago, when dominie Jonas Michaelius arrived in New Amsterdam and formed the first Reformed congregation in North America, a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual congregation open to everyone,

and countless other transformations have occurred before and since. The people of God have always emphasized the importance of memory, both individual and collective, to see God’s faithfulness and allow us to learn from the good and bad of the past as we seek to be faithful to God’s calling in the future. This commission reflects on the past, reacts to the present, and provides for the future, offering the whole church a perspective that is not
just a historical perspective, but a perspective informed by historical insight to create a common understanding on which transformation can be built.

To do this work, the commission met in Grand Rapids, Michigan, on October 18–20, 2018 (concurrently with the other commissions and the General Synod Council), and in New Brunswick, New Jersey, on January 28, 2019, as well as communicating regularly via email.

Chronicles of Transformation

The following books, all in production, have been approved to be added to the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America, now in its 51st year.

- *Before the Face of God: Essays in Honor of Dr. Tom Boogaart*, edited by Dustyn Keepers

Both of the above festschrifts were available at this synod, and free copies were given to all delegates as a gift from New Brunswick Theological Seminary, Western Theological Seminary, and the Historical Series. This practice was instituted by the series in 2014 to honor every General Synod professor who retires after serving ten years or more.

- *Hope College at 150*, edited by Jacob Nyenhuis
- *Liber F: Register of Marriages from 1783 to 1905 in the Collegiate Churches of New York*, by Francis Sypher
- *Constitutional Theology (revised edition)*, by Allan Janssen
- A supplement to the *Historical Directory of the Reformed Church in America*, by Russell Gasero

Beyond these projects that have been approved by the commission, your commission is looking forward to a story about the Global Grace Café at Reformed Church of Highland Park, New Jersey, by Elizabeth Estes, and a story about John Otte, medical missionary to China, by Linda Walvoord DeVelder.

The commission, working with the RCA Archives and GSC Communication and Production Services, continues publishing the series under Reformed Church Press, which allows us to explore more electronic and on-demand publishing, utilizing online platforms such as Amazon. James Hart Brumm, director of the Reformed Church Center at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, has been serving as general editor since July 1, 2018. Andrew Klumpp, currently a Ph.D. candidate at the Dedman College of Humanities and Sciences at Southern Methodist University and a member of the commission, serves as associate general editor. As of June 2018, Donald J. Bruggink serves as general editor emeritus. Matthew van Maastricht, pastor of Altamont Reformed Church in Altamont, New York, and an adjunct faculty member at New Brunswick Theological Seminary and Western Theological Seminary, continues as general editor of the Congregational History Series.
Remembering Our Transformations

In addition to the Historical Series, your commission works with RCA archivist Russell Gasero providing review and support of his work through the Archives Advisory Committee, formed of commission members, and through his regular reporting to the commission on the ongoing work of the Archives. He serves as production editor for the Historical Series and helps your commission to take note of various important anniversaries in the life of the denomination in ways that can illuminate our present ministries.

This year marks 41 years since the RCA first hired a professional archivist to look after the denomination’s collection. His offices are housed in Sage Library at New Brunswick Theological Seminary (NBTS), where a significant portion of the RCA Archives has been located since the library opened. The multicultural environment of the New York metropolitan area helps the archival collection be not just a Dutch-American history resource but a well of information for all of the cultural expressions that now make up the RCA. Over the years, in addition to keeping the General Synod informed of aspects of our history and providing resources to congregations, classes, synods, and researchers, Russell Gasero and the Archives have saved the denomination hundreds of thousands of dollars through careful records management; with over 400 years of manuscripts, it is through careful stewardship that the right paper can be found at the right time.

In October 2015, responding to the limits of archival finances and the changing, growing needs of the Archives as a resource for the church and the world, and seeking to affirm and strengthen the historic ties between seminary and archives, the trustees of NBTS pledged an annual grant of up to $10,000, to be matched by the General Synod Council (GSC), for each of ten years, to expand the work of the Archives, in partnership with the seminary and its Reformed Church Center, and give it a more stable and secure base into the future. This commission is grateful that the seminary, under its president, Micah McCreary, is continuing to honor that commitment.

Because of the limits on available resources for operations, the GSC has been unable to match these annual grants, so this commission has annually provided the matching funds from the Historical Series Revolving Fund. In just three years, this money has made possible these projects:

- New equipment has been added, allowing for the scanning of large documents, slides, video, and audio tapes.
- Staff has been added to aid in the digitization projects.
- With new staff and equipment, documents from the Amsterdam Correspondence—some of the earliest records of the RCA—have been scanned for a major retranslation project; records from the Regional Synod of Canada, recently moved to New Brunswick, have been digitized so that they may be kept in long-term storage, relieving space issues—more than 80 boxes of material were processed within two months; and a pilot project has begun to provide low-cost digitization of significant records to local congregations.
- Some of the costs of transferring records to underground storage have been underwritten.
- New displays in Sage Library have enhanced programs for both NBTS and the denomination and have helped publicize the Historical Series.

All of this has helped transform the scope of what the Archives can do, making our history more accessible to everyone as a tool for building our future. The Commission on History has voted to work with the RCA development office and the Archives to help secure a plan
for long-term funding beyond the ten-year scope of the grant.

Your commission acknowledges the significant extra demand this puts on the Historical Series Revolving Fund and also the significant commitment this represents on the part of NBTS. While there are virtues in thrift, this is an opportunity that has long-term benefits for the whole church, and your commission renews its call for the whole church, as represented by the GSC, to find ways to join in responding to this challenge.

**Being Informed by Past Transformations**

General Synod 2018 adopted TE 18-1, “To request the Commission on Church Order, Commission on History, and Commission on Theology to offer its interpretation of the word ‘bounds’ in the *Book of Church Order*, defining specifically its relationship to geographic boundaries and its implications for ethnic classes, for report back to the 2019 General Synod” (*MGS* 2018, p. 322). The three commissions met jointly on Thursday, October 18, 2018, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and entered conversation. The Commission on History deemed it appropriate to offer a paper to the synod and the church.

In addition, General Synod 2018 voted to fund a new position of coordinator of interreligious relations from reserves rather than through assessment. Because concerns were voiced about the level of assessment and the rate at which the assessment increases, the commission has included a paper, with recommendation, chronicling the history of funding for General Synod.

An overture was brought forth during last year’s General Synod that our churches “seek reconciliation with Anabaptist churches” (*MGS* 2018, pp. 148–189). The Advisory Committee on Church Order and Governance recommended that General Synod deny the overture primarily because delegates needed more information to help clarify the relationship between the RCA and the Anabaptists. The commission offers a paper, with recommendation, to the synod and the church.

**A LOOK AT THE HISTORY OF THE TERM “BOUNDS,” PARTICULARLY PERTAINING TO CLASSES**

The 2018 General Synod, in approving a recommendation from the professorate, voted,

> To request the Commission on Church Order, Commission on History, and Commission on Theology to offer its interpretation of the word “bounds” in the *Book of Church Order*, defining specifically its relationship to geographic boundaries and its implications for ethnic classes, for report back to the 2019 General Synod.

This request, of course, does not arise from a vacuum, but from the very real experiences not only of the Classis of the City, the first true non-geographic classis in the RCA, but even more significantly, to the creation of the Classis of the Americas, a classis that understands its bounds to be based primarily upon ethnicity.\(^1\) Certainly this is not the only time that classes based on ethnicity have been proposed, but it is the first time that it has been effected. Indeed, as we seek to lean into our future as a multiracial and multiethnic church communion, these are deep questions with which we must wrestle. These are theological questions and they are, truly, existential questions.

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\(^1\) *Minutes of General Synod (MGS)* 2018, p. 322.

\(^2\) *MGS* 2018, p. 321.
Each of the commissions looks with a different focus. There is what can be done and what ought to be done. The Commissions on Church Order and Theology have this as their charge. The Commission on History is called to chronicle and analyze the history of the use of the term “bounds” and the ways in which classes have been understood. It is to this end that the commission offers this paper.

Spiritual Geography in the Bible

Already in the beginning of the biblical narrative, we are able to gain a sense of the importance of place. Genesis tells us that God planted a garden, and the waters that watered the garden branched out into four rivers that gave life to the world that they knew. The narratives, particularly in the Old Testament, are replete with geographic references. God called Abram when he resided in Haran. Abram was told by God to walk the length and breadth of the land that God had promised to him and his descendants. The people of God were enslaved in Egypt (and Egypt was also the place to which the holy family fled Herod’s sword). Throughout the entire biblical narrative, there is the importance of the land and the Temple. These were not only locations on a map, places to perform rites or space on which to live. These were deeply imbedded into the spirituality of the ancient people. Even in the exile, we can see an intentionality of place, even (or perhaps especially) when it is hard to understand. “[S]eek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile,” we read in Jeremiah, “and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare” (Jeremiah 29:7). Even in exile, there is an importance of place, of geography, of locality.

The Reformed Church in the Netherlands

The Netherlands Reformed Church was formed, interestingly enough, not in the Netherlands but in Germany. It was in Emden that, in 1571, the first Dutch Reformed synod was convened, and this synod marks the beginning of a national Reformed church for the Dutch people. This synod was convened outside of the Lowlands precisely because the Reformed were persecuted and had to be underground. A synod could not be convened on Dutch soil, and so the East Frisian port city of Emden, across the Dollard Bay from the Province of Groningen, was chosen for this synod.

It was at this synod that all the various underground Reformed churches were to form themselves into classes, as described in the Acts of the Synod of Emden. These classes were geographical. Part of this was practicality: there were Dutch Reformed exile communities in both Germany and England, as well as the fact that proximity was important to be able to do the needed work of a classis in the time. This would be the framework from which the Dutch Reformed would structure the church.

Nearly 50 years later, another national synod was convened, this one in the Dutch city of Dordrecht, and, among other things, this synod prepared a new church order, of which our Book of Church Order is a direct descendant.

The Dutch Reformed Come to the Americas

Not quite ten years later, the Dutch West India Company sent the first Dutch Reformed minister to the North American colonies. Immediately upon his arrival, he ordained an elder and a deacon, forming a complete consistory so that a church could be founded. For the first 154 years of the Reformed Church’s existence in North America, there

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3 Arts. 10-12.
were no classes, as it was an extension of the Classis of Amsterdam. This was a difficult arrangement, partly because of the distance and difficulty of communication, partly because ministers needed to be educated and licensed in the Netherlands, but also because the Classis of Amsterdam lived a very different contextual reality than the churches in North America. The drive for independence from the Classis of Amsterdam wasn’t solely about the education of ministers; it was largely about a church trying to find itself in a very different reality from the Netherlands. By the time what was to become the Reformed Church in America was made independent, New Netherland had been New York and New Jersey—and parts of Pennsylvania and Delaware—for a hundred years, the primary language spoken was English, as they lived not under the flag of the Dutch Republic but the Union Jack of Great Britain. Part of the deep and painful division in the years leading up to the Plan of Union was the growing autonomy of the colonial Reformed churches, and eventually the church split into two camps: those who advocated subordination to the Classis of Amsterdam and those who advocated for independence. While there were concessions made by both parties in the Plan of Union, it effected the independence of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church in North America, which could now govern itself within its own contextual reality.

**Neighboring, District, and Bounds**

This Church Order of Dort of 1619 does not speak of bounds, but it speaks of the classis as being “composed of neighbouring churches.” Additionally, the particular synods are composed of “four or more neighbouring Classes.” The word “neighbouring,” here, gives a clear implication of geography, that is, a classis is composed of churches that are close to one another, neighbors to one another, churches that share a similar contextual existence, churches that have been planted near one another.

After the conclusion of the Revolutionary War, the Reformed Church eventually adopted and published its Constitution. The Synod adopted the Church Order of Dort of 1619, but also appended the Explanatory Articles, which sought to help apply the Dortian order to the new context. Article XXXVIII of the Explanatory Articles defines the classis as “all the Ministers, with each an Elder, and one Elder from every vacant congregation within a particular district.”

The term “bounds” is, itself, somewhat peculiar. While it would be nice if the church order clearly defined the terms that it uses, this is not the case here. From the minutes of the General Synod in the years surrounding its introduction into the order, one can see many uses of the term “bounds” in various contexts. We may tend to think of “bounds” primarily in the context of classes or regional synods, but the use of the term “bounds” was quite liberal in the early nineteenth century. Indeed, local churches had bounds, classes had bounds, particular synods had bounds, and the general synod had bounds as well. Some instances more clearly refer, at least in the background, to geography. Indeed, in referring to the North Carolina Classis of the German Reformed Church in 1855, the minutes of the General Synod report: “its bounds extend one hundred and forty miles in one direction … ” This gives the impression that bounds has to do with a geographic existence, that is, its bounds expand over a geographic area which is served by churches, rather than churches which compose the bounds. Furthermore, in other contexts, “… the Classis within whose bounds it is located.” Again, the use of “located” gives a sense of geographic locality, as

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4 Church Order of Dort, 1619, Art. XLI, emphasis added.
5 Ibid. Art. XLVII, emphasis added.
6 Emphasis added.
7 *MGS 1855*, p. 535.
8 *MGS 1846*, p. 89.
if an academy could be located within the geographic area that is overseen by the classis.

**Long Island Appeal**

Of note, however, is a complaint by the Classis of Long Island against the Particular Synod of New York to the General Synod of 1830. The Bushwick church was transferred by the Particular Synod of New York from the Classis of Long Island to the South Classis of New York. The record shows that there was some displeasure on the part of the Bushwick church, and they requested the particular synod to transfer them, which was done. The Classis of Long Island complained and argued that,

> ... prejudices, preference, like or dislike, were never designed as a rule for the guidance of Particular Synod, in the organization or enlargement of these courts. But on the contrary, it is found in all such cases that no other rule has been recognized than geographical contiguity ... \(^9\)

The classis, in the complaint, goes on to cite the aforementioned articles from Dort and the Explanatory Articles and the words “neighboring” and “district.” Similarly, the argument given was that the action of the particular synod violated the understanding of bounds. “Providence seems to have fixed their natural bounds, and to have drawn a broad watery line [the East River] between them and the churches in the city.” \(^10\)

In the complaint, the classis also looked beyond.

> If the ecclesiastical relations of one, two, or three congregations can be changed at pleasure, or upon some fancied grievance, upon the same principle the relation of all the churches, throughout our whole connexion, may be immediately broken up, and our Classes become nothing more than mere voluntary associations. Every tie which now binds the Church in harmony together, and gives weight to her authority, will be completely severed; and every thing like order will soon come to an end. \(^11\)

We do not know the substance of the synod’s deliberation, nor can we know the exact reasons that the synod voted to sustain the complaint. However, it was presumably not disconnected from the classical argument in this case. While this one case does not constitute binding precedent (indeed, binding precedent is not something that exists in the RCA), it does provide an example of a strong assertion of the geography of classical bounds, and this case is worth considering when we speak of bounds.

**Classes of Pleasant Prairie and Germania**

There are two peculiar classes that are worth noting and briefly discussing, because they have bearing on the issues of bounds and ethnicity. The Classis of Germania is often cited as an example of an affinity, or even a non-geographic, classis in the history of the RCA. This analysis is not exactly wrong, but not quite right, either.

There is a strong German Reformed component to the RCA as well. Many of these Germans came from East Friesland—whose principal city is Emden—and two vestiges of this heritage are the Classes of Pleasant Prairie and Germania. The former still exists, the latter has since been disbanded. Neither truly non-geographic, nor necessarily affinity, they were linguistically-bound classes, at least in origin.

\(^9\) *MGS 1830*, p. 272.  
With the influx of German Reformed churches and the growing need for pastors for these churches, a German-language classis was formed: the Classis of Pleasant Prairie. This is not entirely without precedent. The Netherlands was a land of two languages: Dutch and Walloon (French). The early church orders allowed for separate consistories, classes, and particular synods for Dutch- and Walloon-speaking people. However, it also recommended that in cities where there are Dutch and Walloon churches the ministers and elders gather monthly to maintain unity and assist one another.\textsuperscript{12}

The Classis of Pleasant Prairie was formed in 1892 with several churches in Illinois and Iowa. The existing churches came from the Classis of Wisconsin and Iowa, and others were started after the establishment of the classis. While Pleasant Prairie was not strictly geographic, it was also not non-geographic, as all of these churches were in a similar geographic region. It was not so much an ethnic classis; it was a linguistic classis. That is, it was not a classis for ethnic Germans; it was a classis for German-speaking people. The differences seem small, but they are not insignificant.

The Classis of Germania came into existence in 1915 and was formed with 17 churches, all from the Classis of Pleasant Prairie. By this time, Pleasant Prairie was some 39 churches, covering an area of over 700 miles.\textsuperscript{13} The churches in the Classis of Germania were German-speaking congregations in the Iowa-Minnesota-South Dakota juncture. Like Pleasant Prairie, it was not truly non-geographic, because they were in the same geographic area; it was not necessarily an ethnic classis, but it was a linguistic one.

These two classes also had different life cycles. Pleasant Prairie remains a classis to this day, though they no longer speak German, nor do they necessarily identify as German. As the people, and the congregations, became more Americanized, they blended in with those in the region, the majority of whom descended from northern Europeans. While its origin was as a linguistically-bound classis, it did not remain one. The Classis of Germania no longer exists: its name was changed to the Classis of North Central in 1964, and it was dissolved by the Particular Synod of the West in 1969, its churches distributed among neighboring classes.

Conclusion

To be sure, there are many considerations and many angles from which to seek to understand the meaning of bounds, both what has been, what can be, and what ought to be. Historically speaking, the understanding of “bounds” has always included a geographic component. Some of this may be convenience, particularly without modern technologies that aid in communication. However, as the complaint of the Classis of Long Island displays, it is not simply a matter of convenience. There is also a sense of place as a theological concept, a type of spiritual geography.

The professorate identified two presenting concerns; namely, non-geographic classes based on some affinity and classes that are defined by race or ethnicity but where the churches are also geographically proximate.

Historically speaking, both of these are new developments for the RCA. Ethnic classes are not something that the denomination has embraced, though linguistic bounds are

\textsuperscript{12} For example, Church Order of Dort, 1619, Art. LI & LII.

something that reach to our earliest roots.

Ultimately, the question that we will have to face is this: Do we learn to live with each other because God has planted us together, or do we gather based on a particular affinity?

**HISTORY OF FUNDING FOR GENERAL SYNOD**

The General Synod of 2018 voted “[t]o direct the general secretary to authorize and fund” the new position of coordinator of interreligious relations.\(^\text{14}\) Further, this position is to be funded from reserves rather than through an assessment.\(^\text{15}\) In this discussion, several concerns were voiced about the level of assessment and the rate at which the assessment increases. Your commission thinks it beneficial to briefly chronicle the history of funding for the General Synod.

The purpose of this short paper is largely two-fold: to understand the variety of ways the General Synod and the denominational program has been funded and to understand the origin of assessments and the development thereof. Our current assessment process is a way that we have funded the denominational program, but it is certainly not the only way. And our assessment process was not so much a process that was designed but one that developed relatively organically.

**Colonial Funding Practices**

The traditional approach to funding the church in the Netherlands was that the support of the clergy was raised from the property that had belonged to the Catholic church with local government supplements. This practice transferred to New Amsterdam, as salaries were paid by the Dutch West India Company. When the English took over in 1664, they decreed that each parish should pay for the support of the minister, which was a difficult idea for the Dutch settlers to accept. Johannes Megapolensis, in a letter to the Classis of Amsterdam in 1669, remarked that,

> On Sundays we have many hearers. People crowd into the church, and apparently like the sermon; but most of the listeners are not inclined to contribute to the support and salary of the preacher. They seem to desire, that we should live upon air and not upon produce.\(^\text{16}\)

The early American practice of raising funds for the local church developed through the rental or sale of pews. This annual payment provided for the support of the minister and for the construction of the church building. Offerings were occasionally taken for the care of the poor in the community, but generally, these offerings were not the rule.

**Independence and New Responsibilities**

With independence from the Classis of Amsterdam, two main areas of fundraising arose: mission work and the professorate. With the growth and the projected growth of the new republic, new churches were needed in these new settlements and communities. As a result, the General Synod made the first denominational appeal for funds in 1788, when it requested the classes to make voluntary collections from their churches for the purposes of church extension.\(^\text{17}\) “With these moneys ministers were

\(\text{14} MGS 2018\), p. 97.
\(\text{15} MGS 2018\), pp. 65–66.
\(\text{16} \) Ecclesiastical Records of the State of New York (ERNY) vol. 1, p. 602.
\(\text{17} MGS 1788\), p. 181.
sent out on horseback tours, thro [sic] central and western New York and Canada.”

The General Synod continued to ask for funds through voluntary collections taken at the churches on particular Sundays throughout the year.

The Professorial Fund was established to attempt to raise sufficient funds for the theological professorate. Despite the good intentions, such a fund was never sufficient, nor was it able to adequately support the professorate, often causing hardship to the professors and embarrassment to the synod. Money was raised by subscriptions, though these were often not sufficient or went unpaid. As the General Synod was not yet incorporated, the funds were held by the trustees of Queens College. In 1815, the General Synod determined to hold its own money for the professorate and the establishment of the Permanent Fund, which was merged with the Professorial Fund in 1828.

Collection for denominational funds was increased in 1812 when the General Synod “enjoined” churches to make collections for theological education, one half of which was to support the professor, and the other half of which was to fund the procuring of a library and support students who lacked the necessary financial means to pay for their education. Congregations were encouraged to contribute to the Professorial Fund, although without universal success. The concern about this from the synod can be seen in the order for classes to publish the names of churches that had not contributed to the Professorial Fund. This continued through the 1820s as synod recommended other mission efforts for collections but had no power to force contributions. As early as 1830, the General Synod suggested a per-communicant-member offering of 25 cents for the support of the theological seminary.

Development of the Assessment Process

In 1818, the General Synod established a Contingent Fund to defray costs of the General Synod itself, such as, “the expenses of the stated and permanent Clerks, the expenses of stationery, the doorkeeper, &c. while the Synod is in session, and the expenses incurred by the Committees of Synod in the discharge of the duties of their commissions...” This Contingent Fund would repay money that was borrowed from the Missionary Fund to cover these expenses and to pay for these expenses in the future. This fund would be supplied by the “proceeds of the copy right [sic] of the Constitution” and “the profits arising from printing the minutes of Synod...” Additionally, the requests made to the churches for the support of mission work would also include financial support of the Contingent Fund, though later they would unlink these appeals.

The fund did not receive overwhelming support, and the Minutes of General Synod are peppered with encouragements to classes to increase support for this fund. Despite this, though, this fund was able to meet the expenses that required payment from it. However,
through the 1840s, the General Synod was having difficulty supporting the professorate and in meeting the costs of running the synod (e.g., printing minutes, office supplies, etc.), and in 1847, it was noted that the synod had to resort to loans in order to meet its obligations. 27
In order to discharge the debt as well as support the expenses of the synod, it was proposed in 1848 to “assign each Classis a sum proportionate to the number and ability of its churches, to be paid by them ... to the Treasurer of the General Synod.” 28 Here is the first time that we see an assigning of a proportionate sum to classes.

By 1850, the matter became quite serious, and the issue of the synodal debt was again brought to the fore, reporting that the debt reported in the previous year still existed. The Board of Direction reported that although a request for a collection was made, as was the custom, it had been “almost entirely overlooked by the churches.” Again the board recalled the plan to proportionally distribute the financial burden among the classes. 29 The report of the professorate also addressed the dire financial straits.

The debt of the Synod, it is noticed with regret, has not been paid, and this must become a more painful matter under the ordinary action of Synod. It is easy to vote in our annual sessions the payment of moneys, but if our plans for securing the necessary sums in the hands of the Treasurer are not carried out faithfully, it is plain our difficulties must increase...The debt is one of the whole church, and it is equitable and just that it should be parcelled among all sections, to be provided for according to their ability. 30

The General Synod voted to carry out the plan that was proposed in 1848 in order to eliminate the debt and provide sufficient funds for the General Synod.

Resolved, That a Committee, consisting of one from each Classis here represented, be appointed to assess upon each Classis a sum proportionate to the number and ability of the churches, and sufficient to meet the existing debt and the contingent expenses of the Synod. 31

In addition to this, the ministers and congregations were urged to take up collections to support the work of the mission boards, the education board, and the Sabbath School union. It was clear that this assessment was not to eliminate the usual manner of collections and subscriptions for the support of the mission of the broader church.

Beginning in 1857, the shortfalls in synodal revenue were assessed among the classes. This was met with payments, refusals to pay, and complaints. 32 In 1862, it was reported that the income was still insufficient to meet the financial obligations of the synod, primarily the salaries of the professorate and the contingent expenses of the synod. The classes were not contributing, and the synod noted the difficulties with determining a just distribution between the classes. To this end, the General Synod decided to assess the particular synods and allow the particular synods to determine the distribution. There were three particular synods at the time: Albany, New York, and Chicago. The Particular Synod of Chicago was not assessed, and the financial burden that they owed was divided between the Eastern synods, with New York bearing two-thirds of it and Albany bearing one-third. 33

27 MGS 1847, pp. 116–117.
28 MGS 1848, p. 277.
29 MGS 1850, p. 22.
30 MGS 1850, p. 91.
31 MGS 1850, p. 105.
32 MGS 1864, p. 474.
33 MGS 1862, pp. 189–190.
The process became more solidified in 1868, when an addition was made to the responsibilities of the Board of Direction so that they would, each year, propose financial measures as they deem necessary for the expenses of the church. It was in this year that the assessment began to look much closer to what we experience today.

These expenses are connected with the existence of the Synod. The Synod exists for the defence of ecclesiastical rights...The poorest farmer in the distant West is as certain of obtaining a candid hearing as the wealthiest Elder from the metropolis. Should not the farmer in return for this equal protection pay a full share of the trifling expense which arises from the existence of the judicatory. [sic] Two cents a member will secure the necessary amount.

And with this, there were two significant changes. The first is that the treasurer of the General Synod would assess classes rather than particular synods; and the second is that the number of communicant members would serve as the basis for this assessment.

It should also be noted that during this time, the General Synod had relatively few expenses. The delegates paid for their own travel expenses and requested reimbursement from their classes. An exception was the delegates from the Midwest, for whom the General Synod covered travel expenses. But apart from the expenses of the synod itself and the support of the professors, there were few program expenses that the General Synod itself generated.

Move Toward United Program and Funding Strategy

Over time, the denominational program grew. The program, however, was overseen by a federation of quasi-independent boards that raised their own funds and were not assessed. Toward the beginning of the twentieth century, there was a drive for efficiency to enhance effectiveness. All the boards, together, reported to the General Synod requesting there to be a, more or less, unified denominational program; together, more can be done in the service of Christ. But this united approach was not just in terms of the program itself, but also in terms of funding the denominational program. The Progress Campaign, as it was called, was to end after five years but was eventually continued by the General Synod as the Progress Council.

The Progress Council was discontinued after a new campaign was begun, and the synod felt that having a single campaign before the church was more beneficial. This also meant that the boards were often competing for resources. In order to avoid this, in 1946, the General Synod adopted a united appeal approach, that the boards would work together to raise funds—the United Advance. One might be able to see the United Advance as the next step from the Progress Council. What can be seen here, as well, is not only a desire for a more unified system of funding, but also a more structured and unified denominational program, a way to bring together and coordinate the program of the denomination. “The United Advance was the most comprehensive evangelism and stewardship program ever to be undertaken by the Reformed Church in America.”

34 MGS 1868, p. 411.
35 MGS 1868, p. 413.
36 MGS 1918, pp. 535–541.
37 MGS 1932, p. 187.
38 MGS 1937, p. 129.
40 Hoff, p. 83.
The United Advance presented its final report in 1949, noting that while it did not quite meet its goal, it was very successful. One of the recommendations was to consider a more permanent united approach to the denominational program. To this end, a committee was established and instructed to report back the following year.\textsuperscript{41} In 1950, the committee affirmed the importance of, among others, a “clearly defined, coordinated program.”\textsuperscript{42} To this end, the Stewardship Council was created to help with the coordination of the denominational program by gathering, among others, representatives from the several boards.\textsuperscript{43} This continued through the 1950s during a time of growth and expansion of services to local churches.

Finally, in 1968, the consolidation of the denominational program was completed when three boards merged with the Stewardship Council to create the General Program Council (GPC).\textsuperscript{44}

\textbf{Funding Church and Program}

As we have already mentioned, assessments were not the first denomination-wide fundraising efforts. The Reformed Church has had a long history of raising money for many purposes, particularly benevolent purposes. The raising of funds for benevolent purposes began to be more organized when, in 1867, the General Synod ordered the formation of a committee “to devise and report to General Synod ... some scheme for securing, if possible, generous and systematic contributions from all our Churches to all our Benevolent Boards.”\textsuperscript{45} The committee reported back the following year and recommended, among other things, that “it is the duty of every settled minister, and of every consistory where there is no settled minister, to see to it that the collections ordered by Synod are regularly taken up in the Churches under their care.”\textsuperscript{46} Additionally, a question was added to the annual constitutional inquiry to inquire into whether or not collections were taken for the boards of the General Synod. And so it is not only that churches themselves ought to support benevolent causes on their own, but that they are to join with other Reformed churches in unity of purpose and action for benevolent purposes, as well. Indeed, the denomination was urged to support denominational benevolent causes first.\textsuperscript{47}

Benevolent funds were gathered either in collections or in the form of what we might today call askings. The General Synod doesn’t tax for them, but expects churches to give generously, just as it asks people to do the same. While there has been some difficulty with a strict line between benevolence and administration,\textsuperscript{48} there has been a distinction between those things which are to be assessed, and those things which are to be solicited via special offerings or other forms of giving.

For most of the history of assessments, the General Synod assessed for church purposes, not program purposes. That is, the General Synod assessed classes for costs of the synod functioning as an assembly of the church. This meant that costs such as the stated clerk, commissions, contributions to ecumenical organizations, and the like were assessed,

\textsuperscript{41} MGS 1949, pp. 181–191.
\textsuperscript{42} MGS 1950, p. 182.
\textsuperscript{43} MGS 1952, p. 156.
\textsuperscript{44} MGS 1968, p. 141.
\textsuperscript{45} MGS 1867, p. 286.
\textsuperscript{46} MGS 1868, p. 504.
\textsuperscript{47} MGS 1936, pp. 548–549.
\textsuperscript{48} MGS 1968, p. 179.
because these were part of the General Synod as an assembly of the church. Much of the program, however, was undertaken by a federation of quasi-independent boards. These boards were subsidiary corporations of the General Synod, and they had their own staff and their own budgets and ran their own programs. The various assemblies of the church, then, could decide what programs to support and how.

At the same time that the denominational program was consolidating, the General Synod, in responding to calls throughout the church, sought to determine what were benevolent funds and what were operational funds—benevolent contributions being voluntary and operational funds being assessed. The problem that the synod noted, however, was that there is not a clear demarcation between benevolent and operational, since benevolent programs require operational support.49 In the State of Religion report in 1972, the president of General Synod called for a consultation that would, among other things, find a way to provide financial strength to the denominational program and to maintain the balance between assessment and benevolence.50 In 1973, definitions were offered for assessment, asking, and offering: Administrative costs (synodical staff salaries, travel and meeting expenses, office expenses, etc.) are assessed whereas denominational “programs of ministry and mission” are non-assessed, “including the costs of implementing such programs.” The funding of staff services was determined by the General Synod Executive Committee (GSEC) and the GPC for their respective costs.51

**Increasing Assessments and Growing**

Through the 1980s and 1990s, assessments increased as did the complaints, proposals of alternate strategies, and attempts to curb assessment increases. Between 1980 and 1994, there were no less than 27 overtures expressing concern over assessment increases—and several of these were sent by more than one classis. Following up on a referral from 1980 to consider additional funding strategies in addition to assessments (instead of assessing for program), the General Synod of 1981 established a program called “support share.” Support share was an attempt to encourage churches to give based upon income rather than membership. When it was first introduced, it was recommended to give three percent of income for congregational purposes which would be divided between Christian discipleship, church planting, and development. This was not an assessment, but rather, was an encouragement to the churches for their support.52

This was also a time in which the GPC was seeking to address funding problems and was running a deficit. The deficit led to a number of staff positions being eliminated from the budget, and it was noted that the GPC would require a ten percent increase in funds over the next year in order to eliminate further deficits, and support shares were again urged to the churches.53 The following year, the deficit was reversed and support shares did not make another appearance. However, in 1987, the General Synod voted to establish an assessment to maintain the staffing of the GPC.54 The following year, there were 11 overtures from a number of classes asking to rescind the assessment program, to consider alternatives to assessments, and to ask the General Synod to account for how assessment dollars are spent. The synod denied nearly all the overtures, but it did call for the GSEC to prepare a study on the strain of assessments on financially struggling churches.55

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50 *MGS 1972*, p. 279.
51 *MGS 1973*, p. 124.
54 *MGS 1987*, p. 265.
The reasons provided against assessments presented in the overtures during the 1980s fall into a few general arguments. The primary concern was for the traditional means of voluntary giving for benevolences. Assessments violated that tradition. Seen as a form of taxation, in fact a “regressive” tax, it was natural that human beings would rebel against being told what they must do. Such mandatory giving restricts congregational control and weakens the levels of accountability.\textsuperscript{56}

Related to this “traditional” argument was the argument that “forced” giving weakens us, while voluntary giving, cheerfully done, leads to a spiritual enthusiasm. A per capita tax makes for spiritual discomfort. Such a situation may cause giving not to be the result of a cheerful heart.

Finally, the third argument related to the power and control over the classes and congregations held by General Synod. Assessments would continue to grow as more “worthy” programs were added that were in financial trouble. Such a situation would mean that synod would have complete control over classes and congregations as congregations lost the freedom to contribute based on the merit and value of individual programs.\textsuperscript{57}

Each of these overtures was denied by the General Synod. Regularly arguments were presented that indicated the importance of the program for the church and the necessity for funding it. The overtures gradually shifted from an opposition to assessments to that of controlling the increase of assessments and providing assistance for economically troubled churches. As the RCA entered the 1990s and began to assess for \textit{The Church Herald}, and especially to send it to every household and fund it through assessments,\textsuperscript{58} the concern was not so much against assessments as it was for the rate of increase of assessments.

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{assessments.png}
\caption{Assessments per confessing member, 1940-2015}
\end{figure}

\textbf{Conclusion}

The General Synod had funding structures, plans, and strategies that adapted organically to the needs of the denomination. The General Synod has a long history of assessing the

\textsuperscript{56} MGS 1980, p. 225.
\textsuperscript{57} MGS 1988, pp. 345–353.
\textsuperscript{58} MGS 1992, p. 198–199.
narrower assemblies (synods and classes) for operational costs, though benevolence and program costs have long been supported by voluntary contributions. It is only recently that the General Synod has begun assessing for program purposes. It is because of the assessing for program purposes, and not simply operational purposes, that there has been such a significant increase in assessments. But, the General Synod began assessing for program because the churches and classes did not adequately fund the program aspects of the church that were, in appearances at least, desired by the church.

H 19-1
To commend the paper “History of Funding for the General Synod,” to the executive committees or equivalent bodies in all regional synods and classes and to all consistories; and further,

To instruct all General Synod Council members, the general secretary, the treasurer, and any other staff whom the general secretary deems appropriate to read this paper and schedule time for discussion no later than October 2019. (ADOPTED)

Reasons:
1. The issue of funding and the stewardship of the church is a central concern to our Christian witness and discipleship—note the large number of times our Lord addresses the issue of money in the Gospels.

2. This is clearly a long-standing problem in the RCA. Together we have become ill, and only together can we truly be made well.

ANABAPTIST AND REFORMED RELATIONS: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

In the preface to its 1793 Constitution, the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church in North America recognized that the harsh language within our confessions could cause other Christians to take offense. It states:

In publishing the Articles of Faith, the Church determined to abide by the words adopted in the Synod of Dordrecht … in consequence of which, the terms alluded to could not be avoided. But she openly and candidly declares that she by no means thereby intended to refer to any denomination of Christians at present known, and would be grieved at giving offence, or unnecessarily hurting the feelings of any person.59

This disclaimer refers to the strong denunciations of some other Christian groups within our confessions, specifically the Anabaptists in the Belgic Confession. Articles 18, 34, and 36 of the Belgic Confession condemn Anabaptists by name, rejecting and, at times, mischaracterizing their views of the incarnation, baptism, and the church’s relationship to civil governments.

Today, 226 years after the publication of this original disclaimer and 458 years after the Belgic Confession was penned, the Reformed tradition’s understanding of these key theological tenets still differs from the Anabaptists; however, the use of terms including “heresy,” “condemn,” and “reject” no longer reflect the spirit of ecumenical partnership

that now exists between our traditions. Because our confessions are “historical and faithful witnesses” to our faith, we cannot simply revise our confessions, omitting difficult passages. Instead, the church must appreciate what they signified at the time and wrestle with how we might reconcile ourselves to groups that are condemned within them today. This paper attempts to address these themes, offering a brief overview of relations between Reformed and Anabaptist Christians in both sixteenth-century and modern-day contexts. Key to this study are the following questions: Who are the Anabaptists? What is their legacy? Why is reconciliation important? How might Reformed Christians relate to them today?

Who are the Anabaptists?

Anabaptist—which means “rebaptizer”—is a pejorative label that was given to Anabaptists by their disapproving Catholic and Protestant neighbors during the Reformation era. As historians have noted, there are several problems with this title. For one, Anabaptists do not believe in re-baptizing, but in adult baptism; for them, infant baptism is not a legitimate baptism since it is not explicitly commanded in Scripture. Second, the title suggests that baptism was the most important issue for the Anabaptists. In fact, baptism was an incidental doctrine. What was most important for the Anabaptist movement was their doctrine of the church (ecclesiology) and accompanying theology of discipleship, both of which focused on what it meant to be a community that lived in active obedience to the Scriptures. Third, the name seems to suggest that theirs was a unified movement. In actuality, several Anabaptist movements emerged almost simultaneously and independently in Switzerland, different parts of Germany, Austria, Moravia, and the Netherlands. While there were significant differences of theology and practice among the movements that developed in these locations, some core beliefs can be identified among the Anabaptist groups. These include pacifism, separation of church and government, voluntary church membership, separation from worldly corruption, and church discipline.

The pursuit of peace is one of the central tenets of the Anabaptist tradition. This manifests most obviously through Anabaptists’ rejection of violence in any form and the high premium they place on peace. Anabaptists adopted the Reformation principle of sola scriptura, a mantra meaning Christians should base their beliefs solely on the words contained in Scripture. Unlike other Protestant traditions springing up during this era, Anabaptists interpreted Scripture to place a clear prohibition on violence and to elevate the pursuit of peace. The Anabaptist tradition, therefore, traditionally avoids war and violence and even in the face of persecution tends to choose non-violent resistance. This pursuit of peace extends to the Anabaptist belief in seeking harmony and unity with other Christians and within their own communion as well. Peaceful coexistence with other Christians became a key belief of the Anabaptist tradition, particularly in the centuries following its establishment in the sixteenth century. This hallmark of the tradition remains with the Anabaptists today, offering an example of how to pursue peace in even the most divisive times.

Anabaptists also have a distinctive interpretation of the relationship between the church and state, being pioneers in arguing for a strict separation between the church and the state.

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60 Denis R. Janz, A Reformation Reader (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 183.
They made this argument on the basis of their belief that state meddling in the church represents a significant threat to the purity of the church. Conversely, they feared that when the church got involved in politics, it would inevitably lead to external influences on the life of the church. Any engagement between the church and the state had the potential to taint the witness of the church. They took this possibility extremely seriously. For centuries, Anabaptists held this position, often placing themselves in peril due to persecution from governments controlled by Reformed, Lutheran, Anglican, and Catholic traditions. Even today, most Anabaptists strenuously guard against any entanglement with politics in an effort to protect the integrity of their faith. In the name of preserving the purity of the gospel, most Anabaptists do not run for elected office or attend political rallies.

What Is the History of Reformed–Anabaptist Engagement?

A common misconception concerning the religious history of the sixteenth century is that there was a single European reformation, which began with Martin Luther and continued through his successors, branching off into other evangelical (later called Protestant) churches, beginning with the reforms of Huldrych Zwingli. Today, scholars of the Early Modern period largely agree that there was not one but multiple reformations, some of which began before Luther, such as Wycliffe’s reforms in England, and at least two others that began in the sixteenth century but are not considered part of the Protestant Reformation. These are the Catholic and Radical reformations. The magisterial (Protestant) reformers, including John Calvin, Luther, and Zwingli, understood their own theological situation in opposition to both of these other parties. On the one hand, they set out to reform the Roman Catholic Church to more faithfully reflect the apostolic church that Christ founded. On the other hand, they sought to distance themselves from the Anabaptists of their time, who they perceived as “radical” in their sacramental theology, ecclesiology, eschatology, and practices. In 1539, Calvin protested in his letter to Cardinal Sadoletto, “Two parties militate against us; they are as different as they possibly can be. Because what does the party of the Pope have in common with the Anabaptists?” Despite the diverse beliefs of the Reformation movements that emerged during this era, Catholics and nearly all Protestant groups agreed in their condemnation of Anabaptist theology and viewed it as a threat to the delicate social order in a season of tremendous instability.

The rejection of the Anabaptists extended far beyond denunciations within Reformed confessions. Rather, the violent persecution brought upon the Anabaptists in the sixteenth century was often at the behest of Reformed Christians, particularly those living in Zurich under the direction of Zwingli. Among the many Anabaptists who were persecuted was Felix Manz, a former student of Zwingli, who was sentenced to death by drowning in the Limmat River on the orders of the Zurich city council. Making a mockery of his convictions on adult baptism, the city council ordered Manz’s hands tied behind his back and executed him by plunging him into the icy river. A Hutterite chronicle from 1542 details several other inhumane acts against Anabaptists, including the burning of Wolfgang Ullmann in Waltzra, Switzerland, and the beheading of ten men and drowning of their wives in Swabia, Germany. The chronicle recounts that the persecution of Anabaptists in the area finally reached the point that over twenty men, widows, pregnant wives, and maidens were cast miserably into dark towers, sentenced never again to see either sun or moon as long as they lived, to end their days on bread and water, and thus in the dark towers to remains [sic.] together, the living and the dead, until none

64 McGrath, 129.
remained alive… There was issued a stern mandate at the instigation of Zwingli that if any more people in the canton of Zurich should be rebaptized, they should immediately, without further trial, hearing, or sentence, be cast into the water and drowned.\(^6^5\)

These types of persecutions continued until the end of the eighteenth century.\(^6^6\)

Movement toward Reformed–Anabaptist Cooperation

In the last century, great strides have been made toward healing the divisions that were created in the sixteenth century between the Reformed and Catholic churches. For example, the RCA has participated in a national dialogue between Reformed churches and the Roman Catholic Church for the last five decades. Through this dialogue, participating churches continue to move toward reconciliation as they now formally recognize each other’s baptisms and acknowledge each other’s churches as those in which the body of Christ is truly present. But while significant attention has been given to repairing the rift between Catholics and Reformed Christians, there has been no formal process in place for seeking reconciliation with our Anabaptist brothers and sisters.

Today, three major groups of Anabaptists trace their lineage to their sixteenth-century predecessors: the Mennonites, the Amish, and the Hutterites. Related groups emerged in later centuries that bear a similar theology and practice, such as the Bruderhof communities and the Schwarzenau Brethren (or German Baptist Brethren). While some Anabaptist views have become more “mainstream”—it has been suggested that a diffuse Neo-Anabaptist movement is emerging in the U.S., represented by theologians and church leaders such as Stanley Hauerwas, Ron Sider, and Brian McLaren, whose core beliefs include pacifism and social justice—traditional Anabaptists (Mennonites, Amish, and the Hutterites) are still marginalized in American Christianity. Much of this is due to a lack of understanding and familiarity with Anabaptist beliefs and practices. But such intolerance also demonstrates the tenacious hold that the Reformation perspective still has on the Reformed imagination. For centuries, our churches have defined their identity in their opposition to other churches. Like the reformers, Reformed Christians today continue to identify themselves in negative disassociation from “radical” groups like the Anabaptists.

While there has been a noticeable absence of attempts to formally pursue reconciliation in the U.S., important initiatives have been taken at the international level to heal historic wounds. In 1983, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches hosted a Day of Encounter, celebrating a decade-long dialogue with the Baptist World Alliance. Alongside Baptist and Reformed delegates, Mennonites were invited as well. The service ended in a common celebration of the Lord’s Supper. The hopes for reconciliation that were sparked at the conference were fanned into a more robust flame through an international dialogue between the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Mennonite World Conference. These moments of communion remind us of the bonds we already share with Anabaptists through ecumenical bodies such as Christian Churches Together, the National Council of Churches, and the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

In 2004, the Church of Zurich also took a powerful step toward rapprochement, hosting


\(^{66}\) Peter Dettwiler, “Mennonites and Reformed—A Process of Reconciliation,” in Michael Baumann, ed., *Steps to Reconciliation: Reformed and Anabaptist Churches in Dialogue* (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2007), 20. John Calvin also wrote much about his opposition to Anabaptism in general and Menno Simons (the Dutch leader of the Mennonites) in particular.
a conference titled “The Reformation and the Anabaptists—Steps to Reconciliation.” Mennonite and Reformed Christians worshiped together in a service of reconciliation that included the confession of sins against Anabaptists and a petition for healing and unity. But the major contribution of the occasion was the presentation of a tablet that commemorated the execution of Felix Manz and other Anabaptists and was dedicated on the site of Manz’s death.

During the 2004 event, Reformed Christians in Zurich declared that, “It is time to accept the history of the Anabaptist movement as part of our own, to learn from the Anabaptist tradition, and to strengthen our mutual testimony through dialogue.”

The clarion call of the Zurich Christians is one that goes out to the RCA to consider as well: It is time to underscore our common heritage in Christ, to learn from each other, and to strengthen our witness through our pursuit of unity. As stated at the beginning of this paper, there were indeed many reformations during the sixteenth century. That said, the many sixteenth-century reforms shared a common goal—to more faithfully reflect Christ’s intentions for the church. According to 1 Corinthians 12, the church that Christ calls us to and into which we are baptized—as infants or as adults—is one body in Christ. There is “no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.”

The acknowledgment that the RCA is only one part of the larger body of Christ, which also contains the Anabaptists, frees us to learn from our Anabaptist brothers and sisters, to hear and honor their stories of persecution, to listen to their views on pacifism, to glean from their robust theology of discipleship, and to be shaped by their rich sense of community. They teach us compelling lessons about the pursuit of peace, wariness about comingling between the church and politics, and the virtues of a robust theology of discipleship.

What Might Future Reconciliation Look Like?

What might reconciliation between Anabaptist and Reformed Christians look like in our own context, initiated by our own communion, and at this time? This history reveals a need to lament that we have not lived into Christ’s prayer for unity, to acknowledge the fracture between our two communions, and to repent of our role in forming this division. If we begin with repentance, might we ask Anabaptists what reconciliation should look like, being responsive to the aggrieved party, allowing Anabaptists to inform us about how we might begin the process of reconciliation?

In light of this history and the need for lamenting, repenting, and seeking reconciliation, the commission offers the following recommendation:

**H 19-2**

To instruct the Commission on Christian Unity to explore possibilities for repentance and reconciliation, being particularly attentive to the ways in which our ecumenical partners have pursued rapprochement with Anabaptists, and report back to General Synod 2021. (ADOPTED)

Respectfully submitted,
Steven D. Pierce, moderator

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